Educational Peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crises

Briefing Paper 2: Key Public policies for peacebuilding in Medellin

The Colombian city of Medellin has been heralded internationally for transforming the rates of violence and implementing a range of policies and strategies focussing on the development of social cohesion whilst tackling both inequality and crime in the city. The collaborative approach taken by policy makers, civic society, academics and investors from the private sector that allowed this transformation has also been praised. As pointed out in the previous briefing (Briefing paper 1, published online on September 20th, 2020.) the local administration's role, the strategic links established, and the educational and cultural public policies had a considerable impact on the success in reducing violence related to drug trafficking and other crime. This briefing highlights some of the more specific policy drivers that contributed to this process.

Medellin la más educada (Medellin, the most educated)

A substantial change in public policies occurred in 2004 when education and culture were put at the centre of government interventions. The motto of the city in the 2004-2007 in Sergio Fajardo's administration was *Medellin la más educada* (Medellin, the most educated). The plan aimed to reduce violence by using alternative educational initiatives as the vehicle of change and bring opportunities for the groups excluded from more formal processes. One of its main characteristics was that it funded programmes and projects that allowed the youth population the opportunity to redefine their identity, often portrayed in negative light. Local government also ensured youth participation in city activities such as planning, operationalizing and reviewing the outcomes of the programmes established. Other participatory interventions included the creation of youth clubs some of which specifically focused on displaced young people.

In order to provide a space to promote a cultural movement around artistic expression such as music, theatre, photography and literature, a series of arts-based programmes were developed to increase the cultural offer as well as the opportunities for the artistic projections of young people. This also included developing plans for training and promoting cultural expressions conducive to more positive image of the city's youth.

Another critical aspect of the Medellin's strategy focused on violence reduction. This involved identifying vulnerable youth populations affected by social inequality and

seeking to influence them through inclusive and comprehensive actions such as informal educational training that could lead to social reintegration.

As part of the youth involvement focus, the city actively engaged in implementing a four-year budget strategy participatory program. New pilot programmes and the three *Tomas* ("taking over" events) in library parks encouraged a sense of belonging and a focus on community interaction within these new spaces. As part of other non-formal educational activities, public policy focused on the environment, involving young people in training programmes and working with environmental groups in order to make Medellin a more environmentally viable city.

Some examples of these programmes were the following: *Semilleros de participación* (Seedbeds of participation) which promoted youth participation from eight *comunas* (neighbourhoods) to improve social leadership within the local communities; *Paz y reconciliacion* (Peace and reconciliation) which allowed young people to enter legal life and access training processes and resocialization; *Jóvenes con futuro* (Young people with future) which encouraged training and mentorship of young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and *Jóvenes aprendices (Young apprentices)* which connected educational practices and activities in companies and businesses within the city through the participation of the private sector.

These public policies were also included in administration areas such as sports and environment areas, developing local interventions and promoting informal educational activities as part of the general strategy. Successive government administrations continued with the general focus of these policies, incorporating some of these programmes and implementing new ones.

Medellín es solidaria y competitiva (Medellin is supportive and competitive)

From 2008 to 2011, under the government of Alonso Salazar, educational and cultural policies continued to be considered crucial at the local level and therefore programmes for educational coverage and investment in infrastructure continued. At the cultural level, the policies designed from this period expanded previous work and broadened the number of participants in an attempt to reduce lack of access and inequality. Again, the development of cultural networks and the promotion of arts and literacy across the city were at the core of the intervention.

While new policies included new technologies and more complex planning with local institutions and business involvement, the subsidizing of programmes was another feature that continued in this period. Examples of the policies developed under this administration included the creation of the *Centro de formación para la paz y la reconciliación-Cepar* (Training center for peace and reconciliation); the expansion of artistic and cultural training networks *across* the city and the development of networks such as the city museums network and a kindergartens network called *Buen comienzo* (A good start).

Medellín un hogar para la vida (Medellín a home for life)

The public policies for the period from 2012 to 2015, under the government of Anibal Gaviria, emphasized expanding higher education for internationalization and incorporating new technologies to improve competitiveness and research. The training of teachers in new skills in order to directly benefit the quality of education was also part of these programmes.

The investment in infrastructure continued during this period, where connections betwee programmes and organizations was a new feature added to physical infrastructure development. Some of the programmes that continued to tackle violence were *Unidad de Vida Articulada* (Articulated Life Unit)*,* which aimed to renovate the landscapes of both the neighborhoods and the city by offering the opportunity to citizen from different age and social status meet around culture, education, sport, and participation. The *Proyecto Icaro* (Icarus Project) was part of the *Jóvenes por la vida* (Young people for life) programme to support young people from 14 to 28 years from neighbourhoods with high levels of violence. Finally, *Ciudad-Escuela* (School-City) was a policy developed to train and support teachers as crucial players for the city's development.

Medellín cuenta con voz (Medellín has a voice)

The administration of 2016 – 2019 under Federico Gutiérrez kept its focus on public policies for young people but with an increasing use of higher education, technology, and research, as well as in the internationalization of education and coverage. At the cultural level, alliances were established between the library system and cultural networks were consolidated. In both the educational and cultural areas, the administration directed the development of plans and programmes so that they would have greater influence on the economic development of the city. One example is the *Red de Casas de Cultura* (Network of cultural spaces) intended to gather the cultural and artistic sector to create more cohesive and effective activities across the city. The *Plan Ciudadano de Lectura, Escritura y Oralidad* (Citizen plan for reading, writing, and orality) is also a part of these successful policies.

One of the reasons for Medellin's success in transforming itself and its image seems to be that, despite the changes in government administration and broad policies, there is consistency in many of the programmes established between 2004 to 2019 in both the cultural and educational fields. Our review has shown that the public policies that have positively influenced peace were based on a continuation of plans and interventions throughout the administrations and the consolidation and expansion of the related programmes. As a result, Medellin has developed cultural networks and established partnerships between public and private institutions and as well as higher education which have now been strongly embedded in the city. Youth participation was extended, giving a voice to disaffected groups which led to influence in decision making including, in some cases, for the planning and management of the budget for the activities. Education has been a major part of each step in transforming the city and has helped to connect different administrative public areas and promote both private investment and international resources for education and culture. This link between the private sector and the local government to create and promote education and culture can be considered a key feature

of this transformation and represent pathways which have already been adopted in other cities in Colombia and have the potential to be reproduced elsewhere in Latin America.

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https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/education-learning-in-crisespeacebuilding-medellin-acapulco/

Get in touch: evelyn.arizpe@glasgow.ac.uk; sinead.gormally@glasgow.ac.uk

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