

TRANSFORMING MEDELLÍN: ARCHITECTURE AND URBAN DESIGN AS AGENTS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

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Abstract. This article examines the transformative impact of Sergio Fajardo's mayoral administration (2003–2007) in Medellín, Colombia, focusing on architecture and urban design projects that have promoted equity. Central to this urban renaissance was the Proyecto Urbano Integral (PUI) Nororiental, which revitalized informal settlements in the city's northeastern zone. The initiative leveraged financing from Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), a city-owned utility company, ensuring sustainable investment in public works without reliance on international loans. This financial model enabled the redistribution of funds to Medellín's poorest neighborhoods, fostering transparency and combating corruption. Key to this urban strategy was the involvement of the Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (EDU) which implemented the PUI with an intersectional planning approach combining public transit, education, culture, recreation, health, and safety initiatives. The PUI emphasized community participation through "Imaginary Workshops" promoting ownership and engagement among residents. The PUI Nororiental, enhanced by the Metrocable transit system and associated public spaces, has successfully integrated isolated neighborhoods while reducing violence and fostering social cohesion. Despite critiques of high costs, this article argues that quality public spaces and civic buildings promote community pride and destigmatization. Medellín's "social urbanism" serves as a model for addressing inequality in Latin America and the broader Global South, demonstrating how architecture and urban design can drive social change.

Keywords: Latin America, informal settlements, urban design, architecture, equity.

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1. Introduction

The transformation of Medellín under the municipal administration of Sergio Fajardo represents a pivotal case study at the nexus of urban design, architecture, and socio-economic development within Latin America's informal settlements. In his 2003 mayoral campaign, Fajardo foregrounded the challenges of violence, inequality, and corruption with a pronounced emphasis on spatial inequity. Medellín epitomized the longstanding economic and social disparities entrenched within the urban fabric of Latin American cities. The persistence of drug trafficking further complicated political and social dynamics, making any promise of improvement seem almost utopian. Yet, Fajardo's vision to enhance the quality of life in Medellín's poorest neighborhoods through coordinated infrastructural upgrades was both ambitious and essential. By introducing quality architecture and urban design, this initiative aimed to significantly reduce inequity.

Central to Fajardo's strategy was the Proyecto Urbano Integral (PUI) Nororiental, an urban upgrading initiative conceived and led by Alejandro Echeverri, director of the

restructured Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (EDU). Funded in part by Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), a city-owned utility company, the PUI leveraged local financial resources to circumvent the need for external loans or corruption-prone enterprises. The EPM's constitutional mandate to invest a significant portion of its profits into public works enabled successive administrations to consistently fund transformative projects. This unique financial model was instrumental in the city's urban renaissance. Fajardo's administration redirected EPM's funds from affluent neighborhoods to the impoverished sectors, demonstrating a radical shift in urban policy that prioritized equity and inclusivity.

The PUI Nororiental initiative was not merely an infrastructural endeavor but a comprehensive "social urbanism" project. Under the direction of Alejandro Echeverri, the PUI encompassed various dimensions of urban life, from transportation and public spaces to education and community participation. The project's methodology involved extensive community engagement through "Imaginary Workshops," where residents actively contributed to the planning process. This participatory approach ensured that

interventions addressed the genuine needs and aspirations of the community, fostering a sense of ownership and pride among residents. The PUI's multifaceted strategy, integrating physical, social, and economic components, set a precedent for urban interventions in informal settlements across Latin America, illustrating how responsive design can catalyze profound social change.

Today, the city is once again emerging as a strategic site for understanding some of the major new trends reconfiguring the global social order (Sassen, 2010). There has been growing awareness of the instrumentality of the built environment in diverse aspects of human life such as cognition, community, identity, politics, and power (Archer, 2005). This case study of Medellín underscores the ability of urban design and architecture to serve as tools for social transformation. The tangible improvements in infrastructure, public spaces, and civic amenities in the northeastern zone, particularly around the new Metrocable transit system, not only enhanced connectivity but also symbolized the city's commitment to bridging the gap between its formal and informal sectors. This research provides critical insights into the role of public investment, community participation, innovative planning, and high-quality architecture in addressing the deep-rooted challenge of marginalization in Latin American cities. As such, the Medellín model offers valuable lessons for planners, urban designers, architects, policymakers, and communities worldwide aiming to foster more inclusive and equitable urban environments.

2. Theoretical framework

This research examines the history and development of informal settlements through key historical moments in national and municipal development policies, and the specific context of the case studied. The political economy of space is analyzed by considering the collaborative interventions of various actors including municipal administrators, planners, architects, activists, and everyday residents. Additionally, the production, resistance, and reproduction of space are explored to understand how informal settlements serve as arenas for social struggle and reflect class dynamics in the city.

To contextualize the social production and consumption of space in informal settlements vis-à-vis the emerging discourse of social urbanism, this research employs two key theoretical frameworks. The first is Kim Dovey's social constructivism approach to sense of place, and the second is Setha Low's concept of the social production of space. These concepts provide a nuanced understanding of how urban territories are socio-culturally constructed and contested. The interplay between these frameworks illuminates the complex ways in which informal settlements are formed, maintained, and transformed, revealing how urban spaces are both products and producers of social relations, reflecting broader societal patterns of inclusion and exclusion. These approaches offer a lens through which to analyze the multifaceted nature of urban development and social equity in the context of informal

settlements and the broader discourse of social urbanism in Latin America.

On the one hand, Dovey's social constructivism approach to sense of place focuses on how people's experiences, perceptions, and cultural practices contribute to the creation and understanding of places (Dovey, 2010). This approach emphasizes the subjective and intersubjective dimensions of space, highlighting how individual and collective identities are constructed and expressed through spatial practices. On the other hand, Low's concept of the social production of space emphasizes the ways in which spaces are shaped by social processes, historical developments, and power dynamics (Low, 2017). It considers the interplay between various factors such as history, political economy, production, resistance, reproduction, and governance in shaping the city. These frameworks provide a comprehensive understanding of how informal settlements are both socially produced and consumed, illustrating the complex interactions between physical spaces, social processes, and human experiences. Together, these insights elucidate recent phenomena that have coalesced to create an emerging social urbanism in Medellín.

Employing aspects of both approaches, social urbanism is an emerging theoretical discourse rooted in Medellín which has gained international attention for its innovative approach to urban development. This concept emphasizes inclusive urban planning that prioritizes social equity, community participation, and the integration of marginalized populations into the socio-spatial fabric of the city. Key positions of social urbanism include the creation of public spaces that foster social interaction, the improvement of public transit to connect isolated neighborhoods, and the implementation of educational and cultural projects to enhance social cohesion. This approach also focuses on reducing violence and promoting civic engagement through targeted infrastructure investments and social programs. Prominent figures who have championed social urbanism include Sergio Fajardo, the former mayor of Medellín, who initiated many of the city's transformative projects, and architect Alejandro Echeverri, whose work has been instrumental in integrating architectural and social strategies. Their efforts have positioned Medellín as a model for how cities can address social inequalities through thoughtful and inclusive urban planning.

3. Towards a social urbanism

During the Medellín mayoral campaign of 2003, winning candidate Sergio Fajardo promised to focus on three central problems—violence, inequality, and corruption—issues that were deeply impacting Colombia. While he asserted that these challenges would need to be confronted simultaneously and in a coordinated manner, inequity is often the condition that manifests itself most clearly in the built environment. Like most cities in Latin America, Medellín mirrors the region's profound economic and social challenges. Furthermore, drug trafficking remains a powerful, toxic, and ever-present force in Colombia that continually

attempts to influence political developments throughout the country. While the notion of a politician promising to address drug trafficking and “reduce poverty” may sound naive, Fajardo insisted that improving the quality of life in Medellín’s poorest neighborhoods was not only necessary but possible. The first step in achieving urban change in Medellín was the transformation of its municipal bureaucracy. The resulting processes and outcomes of this municipally sponsored program, the Proyecto Urbano Integral (PUI) Nororiental, upgraded a formerly ungovernable informal settlement in Medellín. This groundbreaking project established an urban model that would help catalyze social change across the metropolitan area, and later, would become an effective strategy for informal settlements across Latin America.

A basic condition for any urban transformation is access to financial resources. Much of the financing for architectural and urban design improvements planned during the Fajardo administration was linked to funding from the EPM group, or Empresas Públicas de Medellín. Created in 1955, EPM is a utilities company owned by the City of Medellín which provides electricity, natural gas, water, sanitation, and telecommunications services in the city. EPM also provides services in other Latin American countries including Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Panama, and Chile (Finchelstein et al., 2021). According to its bylaws, at least 30% of EPM’s profits must be invested in public works (OECD, 2017). This financing mechanism is fundamental to understanding the urban transformation of Medellín. By guaranteeing in law the necessary funds for public works, successive municipal administrations avoided reliance on loans from international financial organizations or corrupt enterprises.

In 2012, architecture and urbanism critic Michael Kimmelman highlighted the social function of EPM and its importance to the resurgence of the city, “You can’t begin to grasp Medellín’s architectural renaissance without understanding the role of the Empresas Públicas de Medellín, (EPM) which supplies water, gas, sanitation, telecommunications, and electricity. It is constitutionally mandated to provide clean water and electricity even to houses in the city’s illegal slums, so unlike in Bogotá, where the worst barrios lack basic amenities, in Medellín, there’s a safety net (Kimmelman, 2012).” Kimmelman’s assessment underscores the importance of Medellín’s transformation vis-à-vis improvements to infrastructure in its informal settlements. The fact that the mayor’s office has been able to count on economic funds from EPM does not detract from the audacity of Fajardo and subsequent mayoral administrations. While, historically, the vast majority of EPM’s funds were destined to projects in the wealthiest neighborhoods, Fajardo reversed that paradigm and instead earmarked a high percentage of those revenues for initiatives in the city’s poorest neighborhoods. The constructive relationship between EPM and the City of Medellín demonstrates how unconventional alliances can challenge longstanding administrative inefficiencies and patterns of corruption.

Another central theme of the Fajardo administration was the fight against corruption. Like many cities in Latin

America, corruption remains a difficult challenge to confront. At the time of Fajardo’s inauguration, Medellín was considered the most politically corrupt city in Colombia (Devlin & Chaskel, 2010). Against this backdrop, Fajardo proposed a total transformation of the municipal administration; instead of hiding information, his government sought transparency through measures that involved legal reforms, accountability measures aimed at monitoring revenue flows in municipal agencies, and the overall strengthening of anti-corruption policies impacting multiple levels of government, civil society, and international organizations. Everything was transparent and it was very difficult to attempt any kind of extortion (Devlin & Chaskel, 2010). Transparency was achieved across various media platforms and municipal agencies whereby citizens could see the expenses and budgets related to governmental contracts. Within a few years, the anti-corruption policy began to exhibit positive results. Medellín has had a high-level of political transparency with almost no major corruption scandals compared to other Colombian cities (Werthmann, 2021).

By establishing this new administrative paradigm and civic transparency, the Fajardo administration was able to focus on one of its main campaign promises—social inequity. To this end, the administration commissioned new infrastructure, public spaces, and civic buildings to improve the living conditions of the most disadvantaged sectors of Medellín. The Fajardo government ushered in a new era of civic participation and sense of hope for marginalized communities affected by decades of urban violence and social stigmatization. This massive investment of economic and intellectual capital, later called “social urbanism,” represents the most successful urban upgrading program conceived to support the poorest sectors of the population in Latin America.

4. PUI: Towards a new intervention strategy in informal neighborhoods

At the beginning of the 21st century, Latin America began shifting its relationship with informal settlements. In Colombia and other countries, the issue of informal settlements was becoming an important topic of the urban, architectural, and landscape discourse. In 2004, when Alejandro Echeverri became director of the Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (EDU,) a decade had already passed since the Favela-Bairro informal settlement upgrading program in Rio de Janeiro. The experiences in both Colombia and Brazil had responded to their unique urban and cultural contexts, while at the same time, differing in their approaches to intervention projects in large-scale informal settlements. As the new director of the restructured EDU, architect Alejandro Echeverri had at his disposal formidable access to the significant monetary and financial funds needed to address the transformation of Medellín’s most vulnerable neighborhoods. This objective was one of Mayor Fajardo’s central campaign promises.

Considering this background, Echeverri's main challenge was to devise an implementation strategy that not only considered the physical (i.e., urban, landscape, and architectural) transformation of informal settlements, but also integrated all quality of life aspects. This intervention strategy was dubbed "PUI" (Proyecto Urbano Integral), and according to Echeverri, the PUI was conceived as an instrument for planning and physical intervention in areas characterized by high rates of marginality, segregation, poverty, and violence (Echeverri & Orsini, 2015).

The PUI program was developed with three fundamental strategies by creating safe environments, promoting community participation, resolving conflicts, and addressing problems on a territorial scale. It inaugurated a new and original urban improvement mechanism that engages the participation of multiple actors, including professional experts, municipal administrators, community leaders, and residents. The implementation of transformational urban improvements, according to the PUI, must be accompanied by initiatives that integrate public transportation, urban mobility, education, culture, health, safety, landscape design, architecture, and social services. The PUI, in turn, is part of a regional strategy, the Land Use Plan (POT), defined by the Mayor's Office of Medellín as a set of objectives, guidelines, policies, strategies, goals, programs, actions, and norms adopted to guide and manage the physical development of the territory (Muñoz Gielen & Krabben, 2023).

The PUI is achieved through a multiagency collaboration and interdisciplinary team under the EDU, whose task is to manage, coordinate, and support all actors associated with intervention projects in informal settlements. At both the time of project conception and execution, the EDU remains in charge of coordinating all agencies and disciplinary areas, thus achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness. For example, during the construction of a new school, the participation of all departments related to the undertaking, including education, transportation, security, landscaping, culture, water, electricity, and sewage services, is ordered. Throughout the process, consultation sessions are held with community members who express their needs and desires. This protocol creates channels of communication between the community and those parties who plan and implement the projects.

Although the implementation of a PUI is tailored to the specific conditions of an intervention zone, the analysis of projects carried out shows that there are four main stages: 1) Diagnostic Stage, when community discussions and territorial surveys occur; 2) Planning and Design Stage, a collaborative process of urban planners, architects, urban designers, and landscape architects; 3) Implementation Stage, the construction process; and 4) Animation Stage, when the newly completed works receive the necessary support and maintenance for their continuous development (Calderon Arcila, 2008).

Of the phases that synthesize the PUI urban transformation strategy, the most distinctive one which exemplifies the success of the Medellín experience is the Animation Stage. According to this premise, physical projects are not consid-

ered finished until after their construction is complete. They must work hand in hand with the proper maintenance of facilities, as well as with programs that foster community participation. This process includes activities that promote a greater sense of belonging and pride among residents, stakeholders, and professional practitioners.

Finally, an issue of vital importance for the development of the PUI is the permanent engagement and participation of the community. Rather than constituting a phase, community engagement is assumed as a "transversal" activity that accompanies all phases. Citizen participation in the elaboration of urban and architectural projects is among the premises that distinguish informal urbanism interventions in Latin America (Imparato & Ruster, 2003). Historically speaking, the planning and design disciplines have not fully worked through participatory practices in Medellín. With the PUI, however, residents were engaged by a diverse cohort of specialists including sociologists, social workers, psychologists, and community activists.

Here, such efforts coordinated the interests of many toward effective design and placemaking results. In the case of Medellín, the main consultation and participation mechanism was the "Imaginary Workshops," defined by the EDU as "participatory and consultative spaces that engage the collective imagination of the people." According to this premise, the realization of a park, school, or any upgrading project is pursued through a process of consultation and dialogue, where residents and other community stakeholders exchange ideas with officials and professionals involved in the project. The objective of the process is to encourage the community to take ownership of new projects.

5. Case study: PUI Nororiental

The first PUI, called PUI Nororiental, is concentrated in the northeastern zone of Medellín which includes the 'Popular' and 'Santa Cruz' communes. This district is divided into eleven neighborhoods including those adjacent to the Santo Domingo, Barrio Popular, and Andalucía stations of the Metrocable. When the northeastern zone was designated as a PUI, the area comprised approximately 347 hectares with 170,000 inhabitants. Among the poorest areas of Medellín, its unemployment rate was consistently around sixty percent (Echeverri & Orsini, 2015). For decades, the neighborhoods of Santo Domingo, Barrio Popular, and Andalucía were notorious for their high levels of violence, acting as urban refuges for drug traffickers, criminal gangs, and their sympathizers. Most of this territory occupies hillsides with many buildings located in areas prone to landslides and flooding. In addition, the area lacked quality civic buildings, with a percentage of public open space four times lower than the rest of the city (Werthmann, 2021). Given this context, it is important to note that the choice of the northeastern zone had a clear political intention: If the PUI could achieve good results in one of the most difficult and complex areas of Medellín, it would send a clear message to the rest of the city—that change is possible.

Another factor that influenced opting for the north-eastern zone was that when Sergio Fajardo's government took office in 2004, work on the new Metrocable public transit system was already well underway. Once complete, the new cable car connected the Acevedo station (part of the Medellín Metro network, the city's comprehensive public transport system) with the Santo Domingo, Barrio Popular, and Andalucía stations (Echeverri & Orsini, 2015). By optimizing the quality of public transit and appreciably reducing travel times, the Metrocable linked marginal neighborhoods with downtown by creating a fixed connection between the formal city and the informal city.

Aware of its immense physical and symbolic impact on the metropolitan area, the northeastern PUI established the Metrocable line as the central axis of the urban upgrading program (Figure 1). The infrastructure necessary to support its cable lines and stations was considered an



Figure 1. Redesign of sidewalks on 107th Street (source: Universidad EAFIT, 2013)



Figure 2. Public space next to a Metrocable station (source: authors)

opportunity to create new public spaces and service facilities. In the areas surrounding the cable lines, various improvements were introduced including linear walkways, playgrounds, sports fields, and public plazas. The stations, in turn, became new focal points that led to the emergence of civic buildings and retail activities in their surroundings (Figures 2, 3).

Another consequence of the PUI Nororiental was the integration of communities that were previously isolated. The lack of continuity of many streets, as well as the presence of boundaries or geographical features, added to old rivalries between neighborhoods. Previously, these issues led to segregation in which each neighborhood was independent from the others, and therefore, contributed to mutual distrust. According to Alejandro Echeverri and Francesco Orsini, the new Metrocable stations, public spaces, civic buildings, and infrastructural works generated a series of small civic-commercial districts. These conditions promoted the integration of the various communities that had, until then, been divided by both invisible and impassable boundaries (Echeverri & Orsini, 2015). Among these, the De la Paz y la Cultura pedestrian bridge linking the La Francia and Andalucía neighborhoods introduced a profoundly transformative new connection (Figure 4).



Figure 3. Sports fields next to a Metrocable station (source: authors)



Figure 4. The "De la Paz y la Cultura" pedestrian bridge linking the La Francia and Andalucía neighborhoods (source: Universidad EAFIT, 2013)



Figure 5. Stepped community garden (source: authors)



Figure 7. Sports field (source: authors)



Figure 6. Outdoor gym (source: authors)



Figure 8. Playground (source: authors)

The PUI Nororiental represents an extensive and compact urban fabric interrupted by a transversal axis—the Metrocable line—and several nodes dotting the various neighborhoods. The best way to appreciate the strategy is by using the Metrocable that connects the Acevedo and Santo Domingo stations. From the air, these neighborhoods appear as sprawling tapestries composed of multiple textures and colors. In many sectors, the very high urban density is crisscrossed by winding and irregular alleys. These vast informal territories are sporadically interrupted by islands of formality, moments of exception that denote the presence of a formal urban, landscape, or architectural project. Those distinctive islands—or nodes—represent recently completed projects, either new buildings or public spaces.

The PUI strategy was inspired by Aldo van Eyck’s urban acupuncture approach consisting of simultaneously developing multiple small-scale interventions (Corburn et al., 2019). Considering each intervention as an independent project, together they act as a network of complementary initiatives. In addition to the UVA Cordialidad, UVA La Esperanza, and Metrocable stations, various new schools, social centers, sports facilities, and CEDEZOs (Zonal Business Development Centers) have been introduced throughout the PUI Nororiental. At the same time, these new urban

design and landscape projects are notable for their quality and variety, including playgrounds, pocket parks, amphitheatres, skating rinks, outdoor gyms, and community gardens. Furthermore, the Quebrada Juan Bobo linear park and reconfiguration of a public space on 107th Street are impactful highlights of the district (Figures 5, 6, 7, 8).

6. Social urbanism: Critiques and recommendations

Some critics have questioned the need for new public spaces, landscape interventions, and civic buildings for impoverished communities as “beautiful but too costly” as many residents continue to live in precarious conditions, an issue that requires further discussion. While it is understandable to question the need for expensive parks and buildings in low-income neighborhoods, it is necessary to highlight the importance of building pride and self-esteem within a community that has been overlooked for generations. The Latin American mainstream media often equates informal settlements with crime and violence. The scarce news about favelas tends to focus on issues such as gang activities, drug trafficking, or episodes of violent repression by security forces trying to exert control over a certain area.



Figure 9. Mural in the Santo Domingo Savio neighborhood (source: authors)

Nevertheless, the “beautiful but too costly” criticisms are myopic perceptions of the role that urban design and architecture can play in the improvement of society writ large. For children living in an informal settlement in Medellín, the experience of playing in a well-designed playground or attending a state-of-the-art school offering natural light, proper ventilation, and computer technology is undoubtedly a transformative experience. Furthermore, access to carefully designed public parks, libraries, cultural centers, and sports facilities not only “beautifies” the urban environment, but also creates a sense of collective pride and identity. These interventions undeniably enhance everyday life for everyone in the neighborhood.

All citizens deserve the benefits of high-quality architecture and urban design as part of their right-to-the-city. A walk through Medellín’s informal neighborhoods provides vital corroboration of how its residents are undergoing an accelerated process of “de-stigmatization.” Decades of violence and abandonment contrast with new civic buildings and public spaces accessible to the entire population. Renewed community pride is evident in the sight of children playing in the streets, proudly wearing T-shirts with the names of their neighborhoods, and in the striking murals that adorn the walls of Medellín’s most disadvantaged areas. Some murals commemorate the victims of a violent past, while others symbolize hope for a brighter future (Figure 9).

Even so, the successful experience of Medellín must be viewed with caution as conditions of inequity and social injustice remain a grim reminder of work to be done, both in Medellín and throughout Latin America. Improvements in the quality of life for residents of Medellín’s informal neighborhoods, such as access to quality public

transportation, infrastructure networks, schools, health clinics, cultural centers, and recreation facilities demonstrate that these strategies yield an extremely positive balance.

7. Conclusions

The transformation of Medellín under Sergio Fajardo’s mayoral administration represents a paradigm shift in addressing inequity through innovative urban design and architectural interventions. The Proyecto Urbano Integral (PUI) Nororiental stands as a testament to the power of integrating infrastructural development with community engagement, showcasing the potential for urban planning to act as a catalyst for social change. Fajardo’s strategy of redirecting resources to the most impoverished sectors of Medellín highlights a strategic approach to urban governance. By leveraging the financial capabilities of Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), his administration ensured viable funding for transformative projects without succumbing to external financial dependencies or corruption-prone practices. This financial model not only facilitated the physical transformation of the city but also established a framework for equitable development, emphasizing inclusivity and long-term sustainability.

The PUI Nororiental initiative, characterized by its comprehensive “social urbanism” approach to urban regeneration, underscores the importance of community participation in planning. It addresses the inadequate use of space which afflicts most urban centers (Trancik, 1986). Through “Imaginary Workshops” and other participatory mechanisms, residents were actively involved in the planning process, ensuring that the interventions were responsive

to their needs and aspirations. This participatory methodology fostered a sense of ownership and pride among community members, which is crucial for the success and longevity of urban projects. The integration of transit, public space, education, and community facilities within the PUI framework exemplifies how multidimensional strategies can address complex urban challenges.

The introduction of the Metrocable system, as a central axis of the PUI Nororiental, not only enhanced physical connectivity but also symbolized a bridging of the socio-economic divide. The infrastructure surrounding the Metrocable stations facilitated the creation of new public spaces, playgrounds, and civic buildings, transforming previously isolated and stigmatized neighborhoods into vibrant, interconnected communities. This physical transformation was mirrored by a social transformation, as residents began to experience a renewed sense of pride and belonging. However, the success of Medellín's transformation must be critically examined within the broader context of persistent social inequities and challenges that remain. While the improvements in infrastructure and public amenities have undoubtedly enhanced the quality of life for many, issues of poverty and marginalization continue to pose significant challenges.

The criticism that these interventions are "beautiful but too costly" implies that residents in informal settlements are undeserving. We professionally assert, however, that everyone deserves a right-to-the-city enhanced by high-quality architecture and urban design. As such, the Medellín model offers valuable lessons for planners, urban designers, architects, and policymakers around the world. It demonstrates that thoughtful design, when coupled with proactive governance, financial innovation, and community participation, can serve as a powerful tool for social transformation. Yet, it also serves as a reminder that urban regeneration must be an ongoing process, continually adapting to challenges through equitably distributed programs.

Finally, this case study of Medellín illustrates the unique potential of social urbanism. It calls for reimagining urban planning practices to prioritize equity, inclusivity, and community engagement. As cities worldwide grapple with similar issues of marginalization, Medellín's experience offers a hopeful lesson from the Global South. It demonstrates what is possible when visionary leadership and communities collaborate to create more equitable cities through responsive architecture and urban design.

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