



# DLP

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Leaders, Elites and Coalitions

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## The 'Medellín Miracle': The politics of crisis, elites and coalitions

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

This DLP research paper is about the politics involved in the coalitions, leaders and changes that can emerge in the wake of crises. It is well known that critical junctures are crucial political moments that can rupture the political fabric, and transform social relations. However, the way these junctures are used by political actors, and how the spaces that open up in the wake of crises function to facilitate change is underexplored. In analysing the case of violence reduction, urban peace-building and development in Medellín, Colombia, this study will use a political analysis to better understand how critical junctures can be used beneficially to advance democratic, peaceful and equitable socio-economic development in a conflict situation.

## Key findings

- **Understanding the structural context is crucial:** Long-term, high levels of violence are the result of a structural context in which violent actors are able to gain power and violence becomes part of the everyday political processes. These structural factors include inequality, exclusion, lack of state monopoly over legitimate use of force, and the blurring of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate political actors.
- **Specific factors turn critical junctures into opportunities:** Critical junctures can be used as progressive spaces and important factors that determine whether change will be progressive include the presence of external actors and funding, the range of political actors who all perceive that they would benefit from a reduction of the threat, and institutional changes at local, national and global level.
- **Understanding the agency of political actors is crucial:** Political actors can use the spaces created by critical junctures to influence the agenda, gain a seat at the table and collaborate with the 'powers-that-be' while also challenging the power dynamics that maintain them. New political actors can also emerge in these processes.
- **The position and motivation of elites is important politically:** Traditional elites can be involved in processes of change if they perceive that they would benefit from a reduction in the threat, if their agenda coincides to a certain extent with the agenda of those who want reform, and if change can be understood in certain senses as a reaffirmation of their power.
- **Change is a long-term process:** Tensions between those who want reform and traditional elites are generated in processes of change, and change has to be seen as a long-term process.

## Policy implications

- **External Actors:** External political actors, whether at national or international level, are crucial factors in processes of change.
- **Enacting the agenda:** Fora to discuss and develop agendas are vital, but not sufficient to implement change. Coalitions and compromise are crucial factors for policy implementation.
- **Elites are crucial in processes of change:** Forming coalitions with the powers-that-be is a necessary element of enacting change, but can also introduce tensions into the process.
- **Politics is as important as policy:** Political changes in who has the power to define an agenda, sit at the table and enact change are as important as the direct impact of certain projects and the policies themselves.

Medellín, Colombia, was once the most murderous city on earth. In the 1980s and 90s, the city became known as the epicentre of the global trade in cocaine, and Pablo Escobar's Medellín Cartel is largely seen as responsible for the astonishing increase in violence at this time. At its peak in 1991, there were 381 murders per 100,000 people in the city. This figure was almost 40 times the UN's definition of epidemic violence at 10 per 100,000, and even compares unfavourably with the Colombian average for that year of 90 per 100,000. In addition to the extreme levels of violence perpetrated and orchestrated by the Cartel, violence involving paramilitaries, urban militia and, indeed, the state became endemic in Medellín, and created a situation in which violence became 'banal'.

It would appear, however, that Medellín's darkest days have passed, and the city is now becoming known for the astonishing decline in violence that has occurred over the last 20 years. The statistics – although showing that Medellín still has some way to go – are now comparable with major cities in the US, and the murder rate in Medellín for 2011 was 31.4 per 100,000. This sharp decline, known as the 'Medellín Miracle' has become associated with the approach to urban development pioneered in the city known as 'social urbanism'. Social urbanism is an umbrella term for the policies enacted in Medellín in the late 1990s and early 2000s to address the 'historical social debt' owed by the city's elites to marginalised and poorer areas.

Investments in infrastructure, public transport and conspicuous architectural projects in the poorest areas of the city were designed to address the inequitable development of the past that had led to the outskirts of the city becoming neglected and excluded. This approach won Medellín the Urban Land Institute's award of 'Innovative City of the Year, 2013', sponsored by Citibank and the Wall Street Journal.

However, despite these successes, many fear that the focus has been on changing the city's image rather than the deep-rooted, political causes of the unrest, and that many of the policies associated with social urbanism re-affirm as much as challenge elite power and dominance.

## Political processes

This paper examines the political processes behind the 'Medellín Miracle', in particular the coalitions, political spaces, and compromises that were behind the diagnosis of the city's problems as being rooted in inequality and marginalisation, and the subsequent formulation of appropriate policies. When the violence in Medellín was recognised as a crisis in 1991, political spaces opened up in which community organisations and social movements had a seat at the table with the city's notoriously exclusive and protectionist elites. As a result of these political changes, a new political party, *Compromiso Ciudadano*, was formed and its leader, Sergio Fajardo, eventually took office as Mayor of the city in 2004.

The changes in the political fabric in Medellín and the transformations in its urban development policies were far more complex than the term 'miracle' suggests. They involved constitutional changes at national level, pressure from global economic forces, participation from a range of grassroots organisations and social movements, and, crucially in terms of being able to enact a new agenda, the collaboration of the city's business and political elites.

The discursive, institutional and political spaces which opened up in the wake of Medellín's crisis, and the broader, national and global transformations that were underway at this time, changed the way that power was gained and exercised in Medellín and arguably reduced the prominence of violence in power struggles there.

## Methodology

By focusing on the political processes behind the 'miracle', this paper is framed by the DLP's method of political analysis, which focuses on processes of structure and agency that brings out the power dynamics inherent in crisis and change. Based on interviews with leaders from the city's political and business elites, social movements and community organisations, this paper examines the power dynamics behind the violence, the politics of the transition in the early 90s, and how this crisis was marshalled by political actors from various perspectives to develop innovative approaches to urban violence.

The research questions framing this paper are:

- What structural and institutional factors contribute to long-term and high levels of violence?
- What structural and institutional factors enable critical junctures (CJs) to become progressive spaces?
- How do actors use these spaces?
- How do elites see their own involvement? What motivates them to take part in a process that almost by definition entails a redefinition of power dynamics that to date have favoured them?

- What tensions are generated by these processes of change?

The empirical research was conducted over several visits to Medellín in 2011 and 2012, with an extended visit in July/August 2012. Fieldwork comprised interviews and focus groups with leaders who were involved in the political changes instigated by the recognition that the violence was at crisis point in 1991. These leaders were drawn from the city's political and business elites, social movements and community organisations. Documents from the period, including reports generated by investigations into the violence at local, national and international level, as well as press coverage, were also analysed. The specific focus on Medellín and the political changes of the last twenty years is placed in political and historical context with reference to scholarly work on Colombia's history of violence, trajectory towards democracy, and political and constitutional changes of the late 20th Century.

## Structure of the paper

The introduction to this paper introduces the DLP's framework for analysis and how this relates to the research questions listed above and the specifics of the Medellín case. The main body of this paper has two parts.

**Part 1, 'Medellín: Conflict and Crisis'**, provides a political analysis of how endemic violence developed. The focus here is on the structures that frame the way power is attained and retained in Medellín in the broader context of Colombia's ongoing multi-dimensional conflicts between state, guerrilla, paramilitary and narcoterrorism elements.

Using the DLP's framework, we argue that vast inequality, the exclusivity of the city's elites, and the failure of formal powers to ensure citizens' security led to a situation in which violent actors were able to gain power and violence entered into the 'common sense' of how politics was conducted. A number of factors related to national level conflicts are involved in Medellín's troubles, including the exclusivity and lack of legitimacy of the political class, vast inequality and the inability of citizens to ensure their own security in such an endemically violent context.

The Cartel, urban militia, and paramilitary groups were able to gain power by promising work, upward mobility and security in a context where the state had failed in this duty. Populist politics blurred the line between formal and informal political actors, and violence became part of the political everyday.

These dynamics illustrate the importance of an analysis of violence as a political process. However, the structural factors in no way pre-determine the violence. They are co-constructed, negotiated and marshalled by political agents whose aims and motives have to be analysed for the crisis of violence and the miracle to be understood.

In **Part 2, 'The Miracle'**, we introduce the policies and projects that are most associated with the Medellín Miracle, before looking at the political coalitions and leaders that made these policies feasible.

The question framing the analysis of these policies here is in what ways do they represent a rupture or a continuity of the political dynamics – particularly the exclusivity of the city's elites, inequality, exclusion, lack of legitimacy and populism – that underpinned much of Medellín's violence. The argument here is that when Medellín's violence was recognised as a crisis, certain coalitions and political spaces were enabled that ultimately challenged some of the political underpinnings of the violence.

This is the focus of **Part 2, Section 1, 'Critical Junctures and Political Work'**. There were several key initiatives in the early 1990s that were produced by and enabled political changes in the city. These included the creation of a special Presidential Programme for Medellín in 1992, the subsequent development of International Seminars for Future Alternatives for Medellín, and numerous official Working Groups dedicated to developing specific policy initiatives. These new political spaces, energised by the recognition that the city was in crisis, enabled new coalitions to be formed and agendas to be developed.

In **Section 2 of Part 2, 'The rules of the game: formal and informal'**, we take a further step back and look at the long-term, national and global institutional changes and developments that also framed the miraculous decline in violence. The changes in Medellín include new coalitions, innovative approaches and policies, and the emergence of new political agents and agency. They have coincided with, resulted from and in some cases given rise to institutional processes that have changed the political landscape.

These processes have included formal legislative landmarks such as the new constitution; the popular election of mayors, and extradition agreements with the USA; and, crucially, changes in the 'informal rules of the game' – the social and cultural dynamics and changing politics that often elude analysis, but frame the way that coalitions and leaders are formed. However, we can also see the way in which values and politics associated with the status quo are recreated through these processes of change.



# Introduction: Crisis, Elites and Miracles

Crises and other 'critical junctures' are widely recognised to be crucial in politics and, indeed, to be potentially revolutionary. As Collier and Collier put it: 'critical junctures...[play] a central role in Max Weber's analysis of the cyclical interplay between periods of continuity and sharp disjunctures – inspired by charismatic leadership – that reshape social relations' (Collier and Collier, 1991: 28). However, in relation to progressive economic development and policy making, we seem to lack a deeper political understanding of the potentially progressive politics that can be achieved in the political spaces opened up by such crises. In analysing the case of violence reduction, urban peace-building and development in Medellín, Colombia, this study will use a structure-agency analysis to understand better how critical junctures can be used beneficially to advance democratic, peaceful and equitable socio-economic development in a conflict situation. The questions to be explored here are:

- What structural and institutional factors contribute to long-term and high levels of violence?
- What structural and institutional factors enable critical junctures to become progressive spaces?
- How do actors use these spaces?
- How do elites see their own involvement? What motivates them to take part in a process that, almost by definition, entails the reshaping of power dynamics that, to date, have favoured them?
- What tensions are generated by these processes of change?

The case study is the Colombian city of Medellín, once primarily known as the hometown of the notorious Pablo Escobar. In the early 1990s Medellín had the highest homicide rate of any city on earth, but this crisis also marked the start of a dramatic change in the approach to the problem of violence at both city and national level, and a remarkable decrease in the homicide rate, known as 'the Medellín Miracle'. This paper sets out to explain how and why the downturn in violence in Medellín over the past two decades was achieved, by focusing on how different agents – both individuals and groups – acted politically to re-shape the institutional and policy environment of the city. Using an overarching structure-agency framework, we identify a number of structural and contingent factors – external and internal to the city – that opened the political space and created opportunities for existing and new agents to achieve changes. Analysing formal and informal structures, the politics behind them and the political actors involved in Medellín will clarify the power relations and political spaces involved in the city's history over the last two decades, and inform the broader questions itemised above.

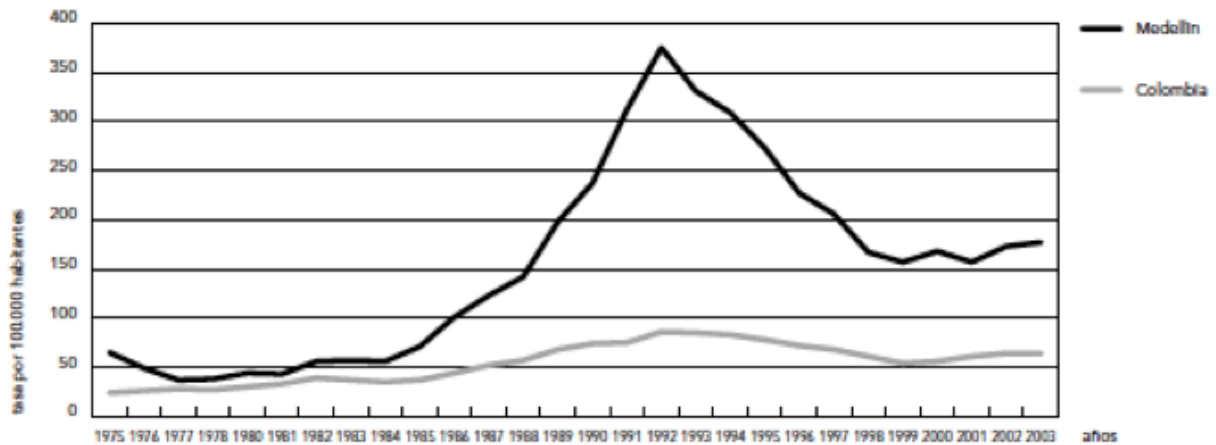
## Why Medellín?

The case of the Medellín miracle is a very good example of how moments of crisis can open fissures in formal and informal structures and institutions, and change the nature of how political actors gain and exercise power. Medellín, Colombia, is fast shedding its reputation as the most violent city on earth and becoming a reference point for socially informed, inclusive economic development. The dramatic fall in violence and insecurity in the city over the last two decades – 'the Medellín Miracle' – has been attributed to extensive social investment and the creation of public spaces that 'changed the skin' of the city – policies which are known collectively as 'social urbanism'. The policies associated with social urbanism include investment in infrastructure (particularly transport), conspicuous investment in poorer areas of the city, and iconic architectural projects. In a city that is renowned for its high levels of inequality and spatial exclusion of the poorest residents, the very fact that these policies were brought into effect is already remarkable, although their long-term impact is still to be determined.

The scale of the violence and the depth of the recovery in Medellín are demonstrated in Figure 1 below. Whilst Colombia has had a problem with violence throughout the 20th century, as can be seen from the grey line in the graph below, homicides in Medellín have far exceeded the national rate. The city-specific rise started in the 1980s and peaked in the early 1990s. The

decline in violence in Medellín has been dramatic – and that is part of the ‘miracle’ that will be examined. At its most extreme in 1991, the homicide rate in Medellín was at 381 per 100,000 inhabitants, while the national rate was at 86. To put this in perspective, the 2012 homicide rate per 100,000 per year in Baltimore, Maryland (considered one of the most violent in the US) was 35 and for the US as a whole was just five (Ditkoff, 2013). Medellín is much more than a microcosm of Colombia’s violence; the city led the way. Whilst the structural factors at national level that have underpinned Colombia’s violent history have been recreated in Medellín, there is more to the story of the city’s troubles than that.

Figure 1 Homicide rates in Colombia and Medellín 1975-2002

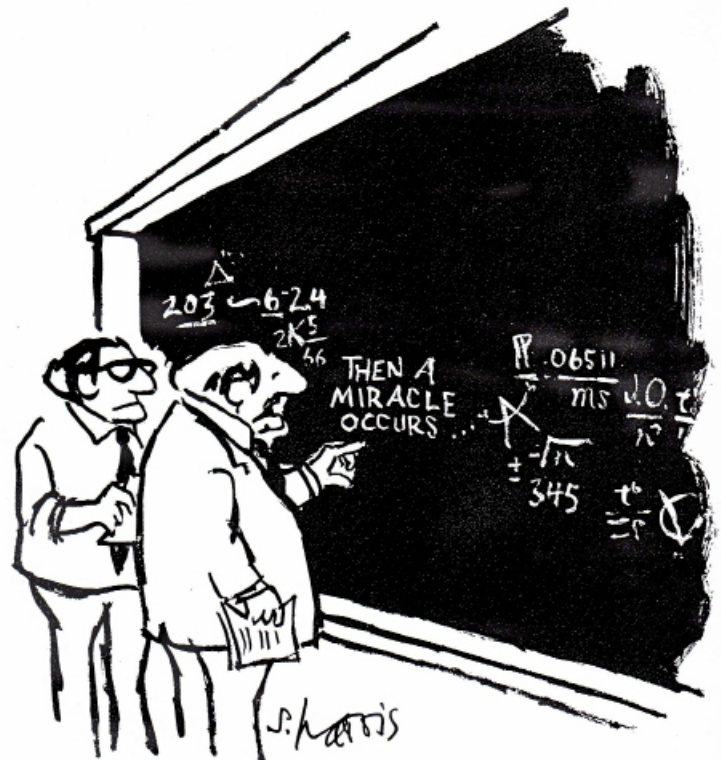


Source: Cardona *et al.*, 2005: 841

The focus of this paper is the critical juncture represented by the peak in the homicide rate, as illustrated in the graph above. This was a fascinating point in time, when long-term political processes, economic dynamics and immediate contingencies converged, and spaces were opened up in the social and political fabric of the city that allowed critical, progressive actors to make changes that would now appear to have had dramatic effects. A prominent narrative explaining these changes is that the commitment from elite actors in the city that was necessary for these changes to happen, was due to a recognition of the historical ‘social debt’ owed to marginalised areas of the city. However, an equally prominent counter narrative among community, autonomous groups and alternative actors is that the policies promoted can also be understood as continuing the paternalistic culture of elites and co-opting the participation of the populace with the aim of extending and legitimating elite power. These competing interpretations of the changes in Medellín discursively frame the present study. It is often said that the elite will change when it is in their (economic) interests to do so, but the Medellín case illustrates the importance of a more nuanced understanding of the politics involved in the reshaping of social relations that critical junctures can bring about. Furthermore, it is important to stress that ‘the elite’ is not a homogeneous unitary bloc that is without its own internal divisions, interests and ideas.

In this paper, we look at the politics behind the changes in Medellín and, using the DLP’s framework for political analysis, we analyse reasons for the increase in violence and the miracle itself – addressing the issue known more broadly in Development Studies as ‘The Step 2 Problem’ (Figure 2).

Figure 2: The 'Step 2 Problem'



"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT HERE IN STEP TWO."

Source: © Sidney Harris, [www.sciencecartoonsplus.com](http://www.sciencecartoonsplus.com)

The miracle in Medellín brings in a host of structural, agential and contingent factors that demonstrate that the improvements in the city have been anything but an overnight change. Changes in the national constitution, globalisation, NGO-isation and elections have all had a role in creating political spaces in which savvy, and in some cases radical, political actors have been able to conduct the 'political work' that has moved the city towards stability. This story of Medellín's violence and miracle is a story about power – the institutions that frame power and the ingenuity and agency of political actors who use it. What appears to have happened in Medellín is that people found spaces in the midst of a crisis to make a change for the better and interrupt the process and cycles of violence. Here we look at how this happened, the lessons for our broader understanding of politics and change, and how we can better grasp how people make their own history although not under circumstances of their own choosing.

### DLP's political analysis framework

At the heart of this analysis is the recognition of the iterative, dynamic interplay between structure and agency, and the importance of a political analysis of change. Whilst incentives are of course important, a political analysis foregrounds the way that structures and institutions are strategised and negotiated by political actors who, in turn, influence and change the context in which they work. The DLP approach is based on the idea that 'the drivers of change are to be found in the interaction between structures, formal and informal institutions and political actors' (Hudson and Leftwich, forthcoming: 28). This dynamic is represented in Figure 3 below.

Structures are dependent upon actors, but at the same time actors' conduct is framed by the structural context in which they operate. As Marx famously observed, people 'make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past' (Marx, 1979: 103). This dynamic between structure and agency frames a political theory of change, which 'revolves around the interaction of agents and the institutional or structural context they act within' (Hudson and Leftwich, forthcoming: 109). The focal point of this analysis is the series of critical junctures that formed the crisis of the early 1990s, leading to the 'miracle' of the early 21st century. However, it is impossible to understand the crisis, the miracle, or how it was achieved without an appreciation of the structural context.

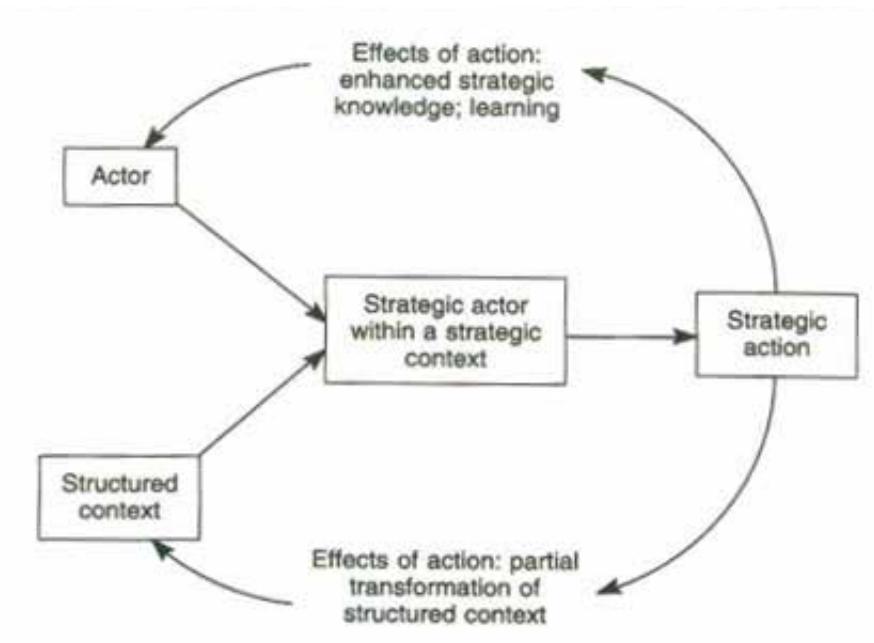
## Methodology

Exploring political change is complex – and more so given the breadth and complexity of the political analysis approach. Having conducted an appropriate literature review including local and international studies, one month's fieldwork was conducted in Medellín, Colombia in July/August 2012. Focus groups and in-depth interviews were conducted with business, political and civil society leaders identified on the basis of a review of relevant documents, and relevant actors were identified and 'snowballed' during the fieldwork process. These included current and former members of Medellín's municipal government, leaders involved in key organisations and events in Medellín to address the crisis, leaders and members of various business groupings including trades guilds and the chamber of commerce, and leaders of communities, civil society organisations and autonomous political movements. There were several aims of these interviews - to understand better:

- the sequence of events from crisis to miracle;
- who the salient actors were;
- how different actors interpreted these events;
- the tensions, dilemmas and resistance within the coalitions that were formed in response to the crises and subsequent events.

Given the breadth of the matter at hand and the importance of interpretation to the analysis, these interviews were semi-structured. A semi-structured interview has been described as a 'conversation with a purpose' (Mason, 2002: 62). Lying between a life history narrative and a structured survey, this kind of interview is guided by the focus of the study, but latitude is given at every opportunity to the interviewee to express views and to go into details that fall outside the originally conceived parameters of the study. The advantage of this approach is that it is exploratory and gives the interviewees space to narrate their interpretations of events – which is central to understanding their agency. This flexibility requires rigorous triangulating of events and understanding the position of interviewees, in order to develop a multi-dimensional picture of events that does not favour particular views. Interview data was triangulated with a thorough search of relevant documents, including local government reports, research from NGOs and international organisations and press articles. Interviews are anonymised, but sufficient detail is given to situate the perspective and relevance of the data.

Figure 3: The Structure-Agency Dynamic



Source: Hay 1995: 202

## Summary

This paper is divided into three parts. Part 1 explores the processes of structure and agency that led to Medellín, Colombia being the world's most violent city. We explore specifically what set Medellín apart in terms of the extreme levels of violence that were reached in that city. Throughout, the importance of seeing violence as a result of processes of structure and agency is highlighted.

Part 2 explores the 'miracle' – the rapid decline of violence experienced in Medellín from the early 1990s onward. The first section focuses on the city itself, and how the critical juncture was strategically negotiated by progressive political actors who recognised the importance of seeing violence as a political process and addressed these processes themselves, rather than focusing entirely on the perpetrators. There were specific, targeted programmes and urban policies, captured in the phrase 'social urbanism', that directly and explicitly attempted to repay the 'historical social debt' owed to poorer parts of the city. To understand how these changes were politically possible, the following sections will explain the changes that enabled the critical juncture of Medellín's peak violence to be negotiated in a progressive way, and argue that changes in the political and economic structures of the city were vital in these processes.

The concluding section draws from the Medellín case and explores broader applications of political analysis to conflict situations.

# 1.0

## Medellín: Conflict and Crisis

In Part I, political analysis is used to unpick what can be thought of – as is so often the case in conflict situations – as a vicious cycle of violence, in which increased incidence of violence seems to necessitate the increased use of violence on all sides. It responds to the first research question stated above - ***What structural and institutional factors contribute to long-term and high levels of violence?*** As such, Part I focuses on the historical period leading up to the peak in Medellín's violence.

Colombia has long been the theatre for long-term and multi-sided conflicts, and the structural reasons for this contribute to the peaks of violence experienced in Medellín. At national level, Colombia's conflicts have taken the form of *La Violencia* (The Violence), the explosion of violence across the country between 1948 and 1958, resulting from the long running feud between Liberal and Conservative parties; and the civil war, dating from the time of *La Violencia*, between Marxist guerrilla, paramilitary and state forces, that continues to this day. However, Medellín is not just a reflection of this violence – there are specific structures, dynamics and contingencies in that city that led to the explosion of conflict there. Most notable among these is the rise in the 1980s of the Medellín Cartel and its notorious leader Pablo Escobar.

Although the malevolence of certain individuals is, of course, a causal element in violent conflict, understanding the broader structural context that has enabled violent actors to amass power is vital to understanding violence and how to redress it (Moser and McIlwaine, 2005; Pearce, 2007). Agency in the context of conflict goes beyond people's roles in perpetrating the violence, to include people's roles in recreating the structures that underpin the violence. Contrary to what is commonly expressed, conflict is not a breakdown of social order – it can be a logical outcome of structures and interpretations of what constitutes 'acceptable' aims and behaviour (Jabri, 1996). Understanding the structure-agency dynamics that produce seemingly intractable violent situations entails a need for a *political* analysis that goes beyond an understanding of incentives to encompass the power dynamics that lead to cycles of societal violence.

Lack of legitimate powers to assure security and citizens' ability to fulfil their needs leads to violence. If the citizenry feel that their security (whether narrowly defined in terms of personal safety, or broadly defined in terms of basic needs and rights) is assured, they will not feel the need to take up arms. Enduring conflicts, with their complex dynamics of enmity and insecurity, give rise to situations in which violent repression is seen as a reasonable response towards violent actors in order to ensure their security. Distinguishing who has the right to use legitimate force is complicated in such a context, and shoring up formal political and state actors could be seen as extending the outreach of one of the sides in a complex war.

The example of Colombia's conflicts, and as we will see more specifically, Medellín's, is a clear case of violence becoming, in the views of many, a logical and justifiable form of behaviour. The aim of Part I of this paper is to analyse the structural reasons behind:

- the limited establishment of legitimate powers;
- the limited security provision, in terms of safety and basic needs;
- how certain actors interpret their situations in a way that seems to justify violence.

### 1.1 Introduction

Part I introduces Medellín, the city that has hosted so many 'theatres of violence' (Pécaut, 1999). Here the actors that perpetrated the violence, their different motivations for doing so and the different forms that this violence took will be analysed. The emphasis throughout is on how these actors acquired their power, and why it is that structural inequality, exclusion and the impermeability of the elite allowed the formation of various 'para-political' actors, and created a situation in which

violence became such a prominent part of everyday power struggles in Medellín. Colombia is known to be a violent country, and the conflicts in Medellín need to be seen in that context (Box 1). Nevertheless, the local specificities of the history, geography, culture, and, most importantly, politics of Medellín need to be analysed to understand why that city became the most violent in the world.

### Box 1: Insecurity, legitimacy and the cycle of violence

Medellín is a violent city in a country known for long-term, violent conflicts. The astronomical levels of violence experienced here cannot be entirely explained by the pathology of certain individuals. Violence on such a scale needs to be understood as a political process. Rather than being symptomatic of a break down in the social order, endemic violence is the result of social structures which mean that violent action becomes the logical next step. The structures that have been associated with high levels of violence are:

- high levels of exclusion and inequality;
- limited extension and/or legitimacy of the state;
- formal political forces lack a monopoly over the legitimate use of force.

High rates of inequality and exclusion contribute to a lack of legitimacy of formal political actors, which can allow informal actors to gain power. In Colombia, one of the most unequal countries in the world, with a GINI coefficient of 55.9 (UNDP, 2011), high rates of poverty and exclusion have been used by para-political actors, including the narco-cartels, paramilitary and Marxist guerrilla groups – most prominently the 'FARC' (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*), to legitimise and gain power in excluded areas. They are providing security and social rights in a way that the State has failed to do. In turn, formal State political actors lose the monopoly over the legitimate use of force. This gives rise to vigilantism and para-militarism, as informal political actors build up their power bases by ensuring citizens' security and protecting their people. This can lead to a vicious cycle of violence and conflict in which violent repression is seen as a reasonable response towards violent actors in order to ensure security. In Colombia, this has resulted in a complex, enduring and multi-dimensional conflict, which is further complicated by formal political powers' allegiances with paramilitary actors (which since the 1962 'Plan Lazo' formalising such alliances has had legal, if controversial foundations), as well as by the vast resources available via narco-traffic to fuel the conflict (NACLA 2009). For a timeline of Colombia's conflicts and Medellín's role within them see Appendix 1.

This part of the paper will explore the city-specific structural factors that shaped Medellín's violence:

- **Geography:** Medellín is in a strategic position for traffickers, Marxist guerrilla and paramilitary actors. The spatial distribution of poverty and inequality in the city has allowed these actors to gain power by providing security in areas 'forgotten' by formal political actors.
- **Elites and economic exclusion:** The elites in Medellín have steered the city's economic development, shored up their own power and excluded those on the periphery of the city. This has increased insecurity and undermined the legitimacy of formal political actors.
- **Formal politics, clientelism and corruption:** The approach to formal political power has been paternalist and aimed to shore up power, rather than distribute it. This has allowed formal and informal power to be confounded.

It will also look at the way that informal political actors gained power in this context.

- **Insecurity and lack of legitimacy:** In a context where formal powers could not guarantee security, other political actors could gain a foothold.
- **Inequality and exclusion:** The high rates of inequality and exclusion again demonstrated formal powers' failure to provide security (broadly defined) and allowed informal political powers to step in and provide social rights.
- **Lack of upward mobility:** Opportunities for resistance to poor economic conditions were provided by informal political actors either in terms of Marxist-based resistance or the wealth offered by narco-traffickers
- **Alliances between informal and formal political actors:** In the context of Colombia's complex conflict, various alliances of convenience between informal and formal actors allowed both to gain power.

This section demonstrates that processes of structure and agency in Medellín are crucial to understanding the violence in the city. The Medellín case demonstrates how structural factors underpinned two key developments.

- The emergence of informal political actors, whose power competed and colluded with that of formal actors;
- The emergence of violence as part of everyday power struggles, as paramilitary actors, para-state actors and narco-traffickers accumulated power in the name of 'security'.

A political understanding of structures and how actors recreate these structures is hence vital to an analysis of the conflict – itself an extension of politics by other means. In Part 2, we go on to explore how, when Medellín's violence reached its 'crisis point' in the early 1990s, political space opened up that could challenge the political processes that underpinned the violence.

## 1.2 Medellín

Medellín has been described as the home to many theatres of conflict to the point that violence has become 'banal' (Pécaut, 1999: 141). As we will see, the city's distinctive geographical, economic, political and social structures have underpinned the development of this violence. The following analysis will illustrate how these factors have allowed political actors – both formal and informal – to establish power that it has then seemed logical to abuse.

A particular characteristic of Medellín is the way inequality and poverty are distributed spatially in the city. Medellín is divided into 16 *comunas* (similar to a city 'borough' or 'district') that are known by their number as well as their names (see Figure 5). The wealthiest area of Poblado boasts enormous, hyper-modern shopping malls, and exclusive boutiques and restaurants, as well as the city's private university, EAFIT. Although officially Poblado is the 14th *Comuna* of Medellín, it is rarely referred to as a *comuna*, a word which tends to be associated with the poorer areas of the city. The other *comunas* are categorised into the North East and North West, the former being home to more rural immigrants and the latter being more associated with economic migration to the city. The two most notorious neighbourhoods are *Comuna* 13, San Javier; and *Comuna* 1, in which is found Barrio Santo Domingo, which remains one of the most dangerous areas of the city. These areas were, and in many ways continue to be, particularly marred by the narco, paramilitary and urban guerrilla violence in the city.

### Invisible borders

Not shown on the map above are the 'invisible borders', marking out the territory of the various factions that control security, moral order and traffic in these areas – the urban militia, paramilitary groups, criminal gangs and drug cartels or, according to some living in the *comunas*, 'kids with guns'. It is extraordinarily difficult to live in these areas without being in some sense aligned with one of these groups which, in effect, run the community. Suspected disloyalty, which could include everyday activities such as being on the wrong side of these invisible lines or being part of an NGO project, will result in threats of violence if the area is not abandoned within a specified time – often 24 hours. This is the phenomenon known as intra-urban displacement, of which Medellín has for the last three decades had the highest rate in Colombia (Carrillo 2009). The relevance of these borders in demarcating the violence has been a central to understanding and addressing the problems of violence.

### Scale of violence

Medellín's murder rate far exceeds the national average. The city-specific rise started in the 1980s and peaked in the early 1990s, reaching the extreme peak of 381 per 100,000 in 1991. The murder rate alone, whilst clearly indicative of the city's problems with conflict, does not fully capture the scale of the insecurity experienced in the city. The rate of kidnapping – vastly under-reported – reached extremely high levels, and was part of a landscape of bribery, extortion and protection rackets that took hold in the city (Pécaut, 1999). Violent assault rates are also extremely high, as are rates of gender-based violence, much of which takes place within the home. Whilst the structural factors at national level that have underpinned Colombia's violent history have been recreated in Medellín, there is more to the story of the city's troubles than that.

Medellín's violence is most commonly attributed to one person: Pablo Escobar. Whilst it is undeniable that the man's ruthlessness – and alleged psychosis – had a huge impact, it would be unrealistic (although often expedient) to blame him alone. The broader structures and city-specific structures provided an enabling environment for Escobar and other violent actors to establish the power base that enabled so many atrocities. Many actors were involved in perpetrating the violence – including rival cartels, smugglers, criminal gangs, urban militia and paramilitaries.



### Figure 4: Map of Medellín

Medellín is Colombia's second city, and is the capital of the department of Antioquia, a region known for its entrepreneurial spirit and strong economy. People from Antioquia are known as Paisas, and have a huge regional pride in paisa cooking, music, culture and entrepreneurship. There is fierce competition between Medellín, Colombia's second city, and the capital, Bogotá. It is known as the 'city of eternal spring' because of its temperate climate, particularly when compared to the altitudes of Colombia's capital. Medellín has been well placed geographically to lead the way in the exploitation and industrialisation of natural resources, and was a centre for gold mining and the industrialisation of the coffee trade as well as, more recently, the development of agri-businesses, particularly the banana trade. It is also home to one of the biggest energy companies in Latin America, Empresas Publicas de Medellín (EPM). The city, despite being second to Bogotá, is known as the industrial motor of Colombia because of its prominence in industrialisation.

Medellín has a population of 2.7 million and a metropolitan area that includes nine other cities with a total of 3.5 million people (Restrepo Santamaria, 2011). The municipality of Medellín is itself astonishingly varied; according to one senior politician interviewed in reference to the city's inequality and development challenges, Medellín 'is like Switzerland and Bangladesh' (Member of Fajardo Administration, Interview, 24 July 2012). The richer, more southern areas boast high-rise buildings, luxury hotels, country clubs and fine restaurants but, as the city extends up the slopes of the Aburrá Valley its acute urban poverty becomes increasingly evident. Further afield, there are five corregimientos, rural areas within the city limits but beyond the mountains that surround the centre.



Source: <http://poorbuthappy.com/colombia/post/safety-advice-for-Medellin-trip/>

## 1.3 Structural reasons for Medellín's crisis

As we have seen, Colombia as a whole was affected throughout the late twentieth century by *La Violencia* and the continued civil war between state, Marxist guerrilla, and paramilitary groups. The city of Medellín did not stand out as being particularly violent at this time. In fact, it was seen as relatively calm – although surrounding rural areas of Antioquia were very badly affected (Roldan, 1997). The civil war throughout Colombia is part of the reason why Medellín has been so violent, but there are specific aspects of Medellín's structural positioning in Colombia that have fomented the violence, and placed it at the forefront of the country's troubles. The key structural points that exacerbate the levels of violence in Medellín are:

- **Strategic position, migration and displacement:** Medellín's geographical position has made it a strategic location for the development of Marxist urban militia and the cartels, as well as the destination of many of Colombia's internally displaced people.
- **Elites and social/economic exclusion:** Medellín's development has been guided by elite actors who, whilst enabling the city to become the country's industrial centre, have not prioritised inclusion, and have protected their assets from take-over by other regional elites. This has led to exceptionally high levels of inequality and exclusion, even by Colombian standards.

- **Formal politics and corruption:** A clientelist style of politics has engendered a vertical, paternalist political culture that is riddled with accusations of corruption and complicity with informal political actors. This blurring of the lines between formal and informal power has added to the lack of legitimacy and security underpinning the violence.

There are several groups that have been seen as the sources of violence in Medellín: the drug cartels, the urban Marxist militia, the criminal gangs, the paramilitary and indeed the state. The nature, motivation and power base behind the violence of these groups is varied. The consistent factor is that they were all able to take advantage of the political and economic exclusion, disenfranchisement and lack of security that constituted the sense of alienation and purposelessness of some young people in the *comunas*.

## Strategic position, migration and displacement

Medellín is strategically positioned to make it a 'magnet' for immigration, a strategic location for drug traffickers and a logical place for the guerrilla to expand their operations from rural to urban areas. As the industrial centre of Colombia, for decades it has attracted economic migrants, as well as those displaced from the violence in rural areas. Medellín is also well positioned for those involved in narco-traffic. Its proximity to the Caribbean, as well as to Panama, allows access to established smuggling routes through the Caribbean to Miami or overland through Central America. The fertile lands of Urabá to the North of Antioquia have been described as 'very rich, and whoever controls it also gains revenue from the drugs, arms and contraband that pass through it,' (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2001). In the 1970s and 1980s it was a guerrilla stronghold, but was taken over in the 1990s by paramilitary forces, allegedly at the behest of large land owners and agri-businesses. In the 1980s, when the guerrillas decided to expand their operations to urban areas and form militias, Medellín, as Antioquia's capital and one of the most unequal cities in the country, suited the guerrilla's military and political aims.

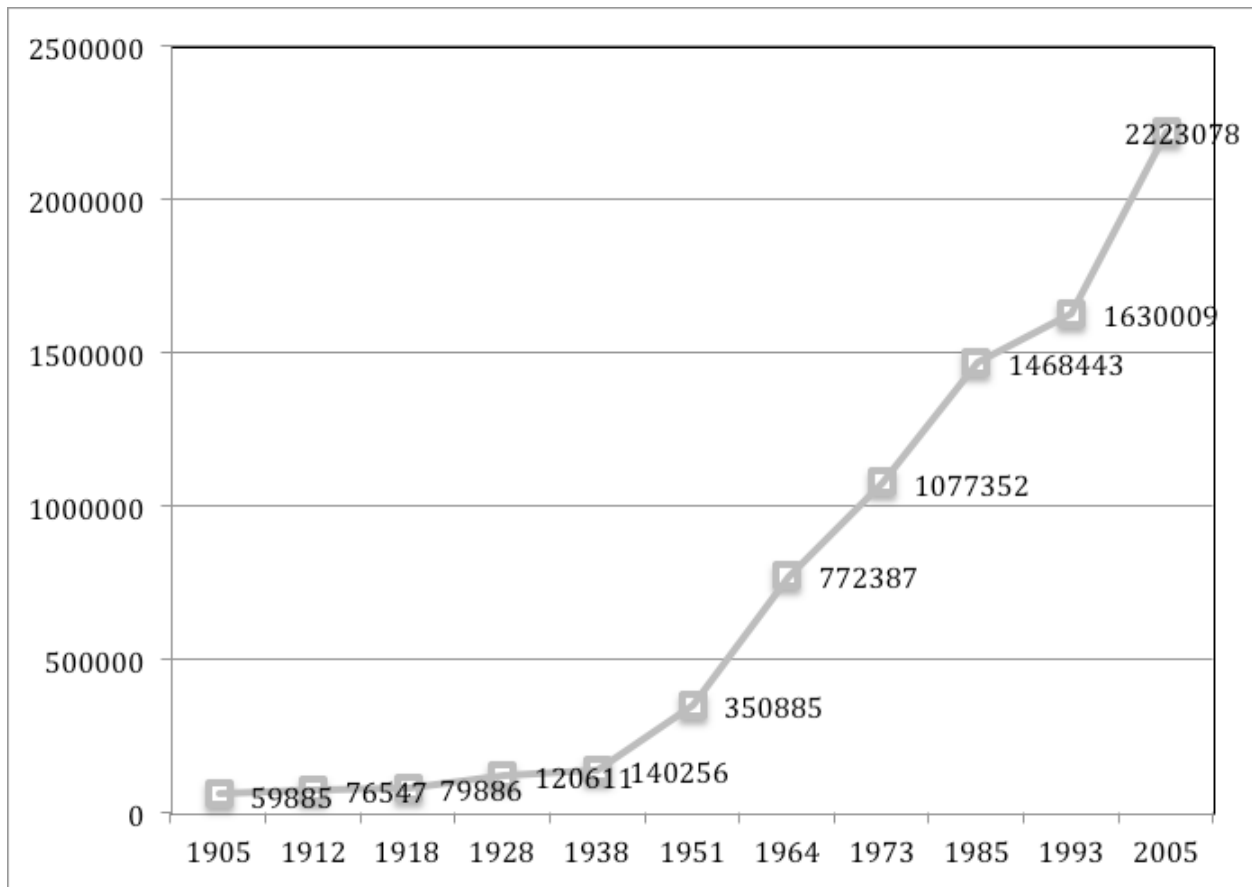
### Migration

The social geography of the city itself exacerbates the inequality and exclusion to be found there. The over-crowded, steep, lateral areas of the valley have poor access and infrastructure, and migrants to the city, including those displaced by rural violence, have been forced to take up residence in those areas. The geography of the area lent itself to the explicit exclusion of the working poor exercised by elites when economic and displaced migrants began to arrive in the city in the 1950s. Medellín has a high immigrant population due to its predominance as a centre for industry and Colombia's rural violence. Medellín grew exponentially in the 1950s due to immigrants fleeing the intense violence in rural areas, which will be discussed below. In the 1970s and 1980s, this continued as the industrial hub became a locus of economic migration from rural areas. The growth in Medellín's population can be seen in Figure 5 below.

Although a necessary condition for Medellín's industrial success, the newly arrived migrants, socially distanced from those who had controlled and lived in the city – by class, rural background and often politics – were seen as a threat. Planning decisions about how to cope with the influx of migrants in Medellín were predicated on security concerns rather than inclusion or integration. For example, highways were built that allowed those in the richer Southern areas to avoid the informal settlements of the north rather than connect with them. As we will see, the way the city has developed is now seen to have constituted a 'social debt' owed to poorer areas of the city by elites and formal powers. Migrants to the city have inhabited the steep slopes that surround it in formal and informal settlements of varying standards. This has exacerbated the inequalities between the affluent South of the city and the poorer lateral areas. In 1990, 30% of Medellín's housing was informal, and this figure has remained surprisingly constant since the start of the first waves of migration (Roldan, 1997).

Migration patterns linked to violence in rural areas are an issue throughout Colombia. However, the combination of Medellín's position close to the particularly conflict-ridden area of Urabá, and its prominence as the industrial motor of Colombia have combined to make migration a central feature of Medellín's social geography and its violence. It is the Colombian 'capital' of intra-urban displacement, a phenomenon that erodes community and trust, making co-operation even harder. This phenomenon is related to regional and political allegiances that are replicated in the informal and migrant areas of the city. Allegiance to the 'wrong' side of the political divide, or even the 'wrong' paramilitary, militia, criminal or drugs gang, can result in threats of severe violence and necessitate a move to another, possibly no less violent, area of the city. Migration is hence a cause and a consequence of inequality, exclusion, and violence in the city, as exclusion creates conflict which justifies further exclusion.

Figure 5: Population of Medellín, 1905-2005



Source: Global Cities Project (n.d.) Medellín <http://www.a0n.com/Medellin/slums.htm>

## Elites and social/economic exclusion

Although economic inequality is a problem throughout Colombia, Medellín has tended to have the highest rates of inequality. To illustrate, at the height of the violence in 1991, Medellín's inequality was rated at a Gini coefficient of 51, while the national average was 46, (Roldan, 1997). There are various reasons for this, including the indigency associated with displacement and intra-urban displacement. The tight-knit nature of the city's elites, although praised by some in terms of the investments they have made in the areas and their clear stewardship of the city's development (Restrepo Santamaria, 2011), has also been seen as particularly impenetrable, even in the Colombian context.

The power brokers in Medellín have traditionally been an economic bourgeoisie who have managed to keep wealth in their families for generations, and certain surnames recur throughout the region's political and economic history (Hylton, 2007; Restrepo Santamaria, 2011). These elite families also feature strongly among the public servants of the region. Political debate over the role of elites in the pre-conditions of the violence in Medellín is divided. While some see that they successfully protected their assets and companies from infiltration by the criminal or illegitimate elements, others see the mechanisms to achieve this as compounding the exclusion, which itself underpins the emergence of violence and criminality.

### Elite Leadership

Medellín's position as the centre of Colombia's industrialisation, particularly in textiles, was built upon the success of these entrepreneurial elite families in the mining and coffee booms. The development of factories did bring employment and a greater standard of living to many; a *paisa* value of which the city's elites are particularly proud is the importance of investing in one's people. There is a strong tradition of patronage in elite culture in Medellín, with business owners priding themselves in having good conditions, housing and schools for their workers and their families – values that are embedded in the elites' affiliations with Catholicism. It is often argued that this patronage is to affirm power relations rather than to extend social inclusion and address inequity, as is illustrated by the oft-quoted phrase '*la caridad consuena, pero no cuestiona*'.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Charity comforts, but does not challenge.

Patronage instigated a vertical method of social control, stemming from the bourgeoisie and loyalty to one's employer, which broke down when the city's industries were badly affected by the recession (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw, 2001: 113). On the one hand, it is argued that commitment from elites and the tradition of patronage encouraged by their strict Catholicism, allowed Antioquia to become one of the most inventive and economically effective areas of South America (Restrepo Santamaria, 2011). Without their vision, solidarity and sense of national pride the infrastructure and civil society of the area would not be developed in such a way as to facilitate industrial growth (Valenzuela Delgado, 1999). On the other hand, it is suggested that the exclusivity of elite families and the ferocious protection of their own interests is a strong causal factor in the area's inequality and violence (Roldan, 1997).

### Elite Protectionism

Particularly characteristic of Medellín's elites is their fear of take over from competitors in Bogota. This, coupled with a strong sense of regional identity and pride, led to the development of several corporations designed explicitly to ward off the threat of takeover from outsiders, including the powerful *Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño*, also known as the *Sindicato Antioqueño* (see Box 2). This dynamic underpins much of the exclusion that caused the crisis and the politics of the miracle. However, such protectionism can also be seen to have shored up the economic power of historic elites, to have limited social mobility, and exacerbated exclusion. Not only is this an historic theme among elites in Colombia more broadly, but the vital importance of this dynamic will become clear when we analyse the politics of the miracle.

### Box 2: Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño

The Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño (Group for Antioqueñan Enterprise - GEA) was formed in the 1970s when it was perceived that businesses from Bogota were taking over Antioqueñan companies by buying up a majority of the shares (Gallo Machado, 2011). When certain iconic Antioqueñan companies were bought up in this way – including the Medellín based textiles company Coltejer and the National Chocolate Company – Nacional de Chocolates – business leaders decided to form conglomerates to protect 'regional' businesses. This was done by certain key business leaders from Antioqueñan companies exchanging shares in order to keep out 'foreign' interests – a defensive business manoeuvre that became known as the *Enroque paisa*. This, literally translated, is 'Paisa Castling'. Castling is a protective move in chess where the rook and king exchange places, and Paisa is the adjective pertaining to someone or something from Antioquia. This is a clear example of the response of elites when faced with a critical juncture; the decision to form a coalition to achieve ends that would not be possible individually.

### Empresas Publicas de Medellín

Although there are high levels of social and economic exclusion and inequality in Medellín, it has also been pointed out that, unlike other Colombian and Latin American mega-cities, the poorer areas of Medellín on the hillsides are well served by infrastructure. This is largely attributed to the work of the publically owned company *Empresas Publicas de Medellín* (EPM) – the Public Companies of Medellín (Uran, 2010). EPM provides energy and water throughout Antioquia, and has investments in the Panama Canal. It was founded in 1958 and brought together companies that were working in energy, water supply and telephones. EPM is highly regarded for being an extremely well-managed company, and its vast assets, including interests in the Panama Canal, have brought the city considerable wealth.

The company is central to the way that Medellín operates. Heads of EPM have included several mayors, and the company is intimately wrapped up with the politics of the city. It is mandated to contribute 30% of its net annual profit to the city's budget (Bateman *et al.*, 2011), but at the same time EPM is, for many, a symbol of the extension of elite power, and it has remained in control of the city's elites.

### Exclusion

Medellín's ruling elite are proud of having created the country's foremost industrial city, and there is a palpable sense of pride in the stewardship exhibited by Antioquia's leading families. However, the way that Medellín has developed, often to reflect the priorities of the city's leaders, has not been conducive to inclusion and equality. Although economically powerful families in Antioquia are also characterised by a commitment to investing in their workers, it can be argued that this paternalist approach exacerbates exclusion (Hylton, 2007). As social rights, such as housing and education, were also dependent on employment, the effects of recession and de-industrialisation associated with the economic crisis of the 1980s, and felt

particularly harshly in industrial Medellín, were in some cases catastrophic. The unemployment rate in Medellín varied from 14%-17% from 1982 to 1988, but much more significant was the size of the informal economy, which was estimated to provide more than 50% of employment throughout the 1980s (Betancur, 2007). Migration from rural areas continued apace during the 1980s and 1990s, despite the growing rates of poverty and violence, and the poorer areas to the North and North East of the city were dominated by informality – from petty commerce to sex work and involvement in criminal gangs and cartels.

The sense of exclusion and the material realities of survival in these areas were central factors in how various armed groups gained de facto and ideological power in Medellín. Informal political actors such as the cartels, Marxist militia and the paramilitaries could offer security and hope of upward mobility in a way that formal actors had failed to do. While the cartels offered work, albeit informal, the militia offered Marxist-based resistance. This undermined the legitimacy and capacity of formal state actors and provided fertile ground for other political actors to gain power by offering security and a hope of upward mobility, blurring the line between formal and informal political actors.

## Formal politics and corruption

Medellín reflects the political structures of the rest of the country in many ways. There is not a clear distinction between the entrepreneurial and political class, and the country's two main political parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives, have until very recently, enjoyed a relatively stable hegemony (see Box 3 below). Formal politics in Medellín have two main characteristics: the pragmatism of its formal political leaders in terms of forming strategic alliances, and high levels of corruption. The pragmatism has perhaps shielded Medellín from certain kinds of political violence but, at the same time arguably, has contributed to the sense of exclusion. Corruption can be usefully categorised into two forms – the nepotism and patronage that ensured the continuity of patrimonial elites in power; and the bribery, corruption and influence from illegitimate political actors. There was no shortage of bribery and corruption in Medellín politics in the 1980s, due, not least, to the presence of 'narco-politics' and collusion with the Medellín cartel (Filippone, 1994). This was a clear source of power for informal political actors and also blurred the lines between legitimate and illegitimate politics. Nevertheless, the nepotism and pragmatism that formed part of formal political practice in the city also engendered power structures that were ripe for abuse.

### Box 3: The politics of Colombia's violence

Medellín's violence surpasses that of the broader conflict in Colombia with, as we have seen, homicide rates that have historically far outstripped national rates. It is, nevertheless, important to situate Medellín's conflict in the broader context of political strife in Colombia in order to understand how the city became host to so many 'theatres of violence'. The twentieth century in Colombia was dominated by conflict between elite groups who, although bitter and violent rivals, were capable of joining forces when faced with external threats. The Liberal and Conservative political parties in Colombia were, until recently, a duopoly which represented exclusive, colonial elites. These two parties have been fierce and violent rivals, plunging the country into two civil wars since the late 19th century; the Thousand Days War (1899-1903) and the undeclared civil war known as *La Violencia* [The Violence] (1948-1953) (Roldan, 1997). The latter continues to mark the Colombian political landscape. Triggered by the assassination of Liberal Presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in 1948, *La Violencia* spread from Bogotá to become a five-year conflict between Conservative and Liberal factions that was played out largely in rural areas of Colombia, during which people were killed because of their party allegiances (Carroll, 2011; LaRosa and Mejía, 2012).

It is a striking feature of Colombia's political history that the political elites, and the Liberal/Conservative duopoly, although warring among themselves, have been very effective in retaining power for themselves. The mechanism for doing this has been elite pacts, and it is characteristic of feuds between elite groups in Colombia that they combine together against external threats. In 1953 Colombia experienced its first military coup of the twentieth century, led by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, providing evidence of the Liberals' and Conservatives' inability to resolve the violence. The rise of the military also spurred these two parties into agreeing a pact that would bring a resolution to *La Violencia* (Roldan, 2002). They agreed that they would alternate in political office, an agreement known as *La Frente Nacional* [The National Front]. This lasted from 1958 to 1974, and effectively locked out any potential representation from other political affiliations or persuasions. The years following the signing of this pact saw the birth of various Marxist Guerrilla movements, including the FARC (1964), as well as the growth and legitimisation of paramilitary groups with the US sponsored 'Plan Lazo' (1964). Although it did stabilise the political and economic management of the country, in many senses it contributed to the exclusion and disenfranchisement that continues to underpin violence and conflict in Colombia today (Roldan, 1997).

## Political pragmatism

Politically, Antioquia and Medellín were marked, as was the rest of the country, by *La Violencia*. However, the pragmatism and tight-knit nature of the elites for which the region was known, meant that the department was not as affected as one might have expected from the conflict between Liberals and Conservatives (Roldan, 1997). Elites from Antioquia from both Liberal and Conservative persuasions were involved together in national-level trade associations, notably the *Federación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia*<sup>2</sup>, and these practical alliances stifled political conflict. This has also been used to explain why *La Violencia* tended to affect the outer regions of Antioquia more, as the period coincided with the expansion of traditional elites into agriculture, particularly banana production (Roldan 2002). Although this meant that Medellín was relatively sheltered during *La Violencia*, it also meant that the cohesion and exclusivity of the elites were even stronger.

## Nepotism and patronage

The stability and exclusivity of elite political leaders in Medellín, compounded by the national level duopoly of the Liberal and Conservative parties, led to the underdevelopment of structures that would have fomented political participation and deepened democracy. The vertical relationships of patronage seen in the industrial sphere also shape political representation in the city. Politicians are seen as bestowers of rights rather than representatives or leaders who support civic and political rights to critical participation. For example, politicians who held political rallies in the city would use their power to give gifts to the community or respond to individual necessities, in a style of representation that mirrors the vertical relationships of patronage and clientelism which are familiar aspects of the Latin American political landscape. Such paternalist methods are argued to undermine democracy and encourage a style of personal leadership known as '*caudillo*', in which authority is kept with one, often militaristic, leader. As a consequence, the development of democratic checks and balances and associated institutions is attenuated. This political culture allowed for a blurring of the lines between formal and informal political forces, and informal political actors were able to exploit the poverty and exclusion of the *comunas* in the same way as formal political powers, because of the lack of institutional structure to underpin legitimate political forces. Addressing this democratic deficit, as we will see, is a key part of the changes in Medellín.

## Summary

To conclude this section on the structural reasons for Medellín's crisis, we can see that there are various reasons that informal political actors were able to gain such power in this city. Its strategic position made it a target location for a number of groups. City elites associated migration to the city with a security threat, and Medellín's infrastructures developed in such a way as to exclude the poorest and protect the power of business and political leaders. The vertical relationships that characterised economics and politics in the city served to widen the breach between the elites and the *comunas*. The lack of institutional development to include the city's poor either economically or politically, meant, as will be argued in the following section, that informal political actors were able to gain power, compete at the same level as formal actors and challenge their very legitimacy.

## 1.4 Actors in Medellín's crisis: cartels, militias and paramilitaries

The actors in Medellín's crisis – the groups and individuals who were able to gain power in the city and not only perpetrate violence, but make it an inherent part of the city's politics – came from opposed political angles, often with opposing aims. What they all have in common however, was the ability to exploit the poverty and exclusion of the *comunas* by offering hopes for social mobility and being able to provide security in areas, which formal political actors had neglected. This section introduces the key political players in Medellín's crisis of violence. These are the cartels, criminal gangs, the urban militia associated with the rural guerrillas, the paramilitaries and the state. The ways, means and aims were distinct, but the power bases that all were able to establish depended on the structural exclusion of the *comunas*, the impermeability of elite positions and the insecurity that led to the situation in which violence was deemed to necessitate violence, in a context where the boundaries of 'legitimate' force were unclear. The key points in this section are:

- Certain *comunas* became power-bases for cartels, militia and paramilitaries due to their structural exclusion.
- The violence justified more violence.
- The lines around formal/informal forms of power and legitimacy were blurred.

## Cocaine, the cartels and 'narco-terrorism'

The violence in Medellín specifically is most closely associated with the Medellín cartel, and its leader Pablo Escobar. Escobar's ferocious violence was an element of how the cartel gained and maintained power; but its bases were much broader than

2 The Colombian National Coffee Federation.

that. Escobar had support in certain *comunas*, a barrio of which is named after him, as a leader who understood the poor and provided them with housing and security. His vast wealth made him, at one point, the seventh richest man on earth (Forbes, 2012), and allowed him to compete, in terms of weaponry and influence, on a level with the Colombian state. It is worth remembering that, despite his huge personal influence, Medellín's violence increased after Escobar's death. Of more pertinence in understanding the crisis is the process of how one man could have accumulated that much power to abuse, rather than the association of the problem entirely with one individual.

### The Medellín cartel

The Colombian drug cartels gained power in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Various cartels were formed at this time, and the main rival to the Medellín cartel was the Cali cartel, based in the city of the same name. The Medellín cartel (see Box 4) was by far the most profitable and the most violent, and, at its height controlled 60% of the world's cocaine (Filippone, 1994). There are several reasons – structural and contingent – why Medellín became the location of the world largest and most violent drug cartel. Firstly, Medellín's geographical position was perfect in terms of smuggling routes into the US. Medellín was well positioned to access routes across the Caribbean and overland via Mexico. Although it was not unique in this regard – the cities of Cali and Barranquilla also had geographical advantages – the structural inequality and exclusion that was so deep-rooted in Medellín allowed the cartel to gain more power there. Secondly, there was a history of smuggling in Medellín. In the 1960s the centres of drug smuggling were Cuba for cocaine and Mexico for marijuana. As these operations diminished, due to various political factors including successful operations by the US, both trades moved towards Colombia. Finally, it is alleged that the alliances that the cartel was able to build with paramilitary and formal political actors, crucially to protect and enable the routes used for transport, allowed the trade to flourish in Medellín.

#### Box 4: The leaders of the Medellín cartel

The main leaders of the cartel were Pablo Escobar, Carlos Lehder and the Ochoa brothers. Escobar was from a humble background and a small-time crook, stealing and re-selling gravestones, until he discovered the possibilities in smuggling cocaine. He joined forces with the three Ochoa brothers, sons of an affluent cattle-ranching family, the smuggler Carlos Lehder, and the assassin and emerald smuggler José Gonzalo Rodríguez Gachato to form the Medellín cartel. When Carlos Lehder met the smuggler George Jung, aka 'Boston George' in jail, they hatched a plan to bring cocaine over in plane loads rather than having 'mules' bring small amounts across the border. According to US Chief Attorney Robert Merckle, 'Lehder was to cocaine trafficking what Henry Ford was to automobiles', (Filippone, 1994: 325). This change in strategy revolutionised the cocaine industry and brought the people who controlled it unimaginable profits.

### Cultivation of inequality

Exclusion and inequality have underpinned the rise to power of informal political actors in Medellín, although these are characteristics by no means unique to this city. However, Medellín's excluded neighbourhoods, which were particularly expansive and unequal because of the structural reasons given above, became the power base of the Medellín cartel. There were various ways in which this power was established. Formal powers had neglected to invest in the security of citizens, particularly migrants, in the outskirts of the city to the North. By contrast, the cartel was able and willing to spend its wealth on the excluded in a way that the elites of the city had neglected. They built housing, and also invested in popular attractions such as football pitches, and sponsored one of Medellín's main football teams (Gugliotta and Leen, 2011; Skaperdas, 2001). These actions were taken to build up support and power in the neighbourhood, but the cartel's leaders, particularly Escobar, had a personal sense of exclusion from elite society in Medellín. By following the same patterns of clientelistic politics as the formal politicians, and by providing security where formal sources had omitted to do so, the cartel was able to establish a substantial, and enduring, power base.

Economically, the time that the cartel was gaining power co-incident with the time that industry was losing power. As factories and other sources of employment closed under the pressure of the global recession, the cartel cultivated the disenfranchised youth of Medellín's barrios as *sicarios* (young assassins). Employment by the cartel was seen as a way to achieve riches that would otherwise, in such an unequal city, be completely impossible.

### Strategic alliances

The Medellín Cartel built politically effective alliances that allowed it not only to succeed in the narco-traffic business but also to accumulate power in the city. One specific event provided the critical juncture from which these alliances sprang; the kidnapping of the Ochoa brothers' sister Marta Nieves by the Marxist guerrilla group M19. In response, the cartel formed the

group *Muerte a Secuestradores* ('death to kidnappers') and all but annihilated the members of M19, and Marta was returned to her family. 'Death to kidnappers' became a paramilitary group that was at the service of wealthy landowners, politicians, business owners, including international corporations, and others who felt at risk from various Marxist guerrilla groups. This was an early example of the collaboration between the cartels and others to form paramilitary groups (Human Rights Watch, 1996), and the indirect alliances that could be formed between informal political actors and those with more formal power. This was particularly significant as it set a precedent for collaboration between narco-traffickers, paramilitaries and formal political actors, so further blurring the lines between legitimate/ illegitimate, formal/ informal and political/criminal activity.

## Political aspirations

As has been argued throughout, the lines between formal and informal power in Colombia and Medellín have been blurred, due to the formal actors' inability to establish legitimacy by providing security to their citizens. Whereas alliances with certain informal actors, such as the paramilitaries, were tolerated and even encouraged by formal actors, the cartels were regarded as beyond the pale. Despite alliances of convenience being formed frequently, they were never accorded anything approaching a legitimate status, compared with alliances formed with paramilitaries. Cartel leaders nevertheless had political aspirations, and perceived their continued exclusion from formal political processes, despite frequent collusion with mainstream politicians, as hypocritical (see Box 5). Their successes and failures in becoming influential in mainstream, formal politics indicate the lack of legitimacy of formal actors and the lack of appropriate institutions to 'deepen democracy' in Medellín.

### Box 5: Pablo Escobar and the country club

Escobar himself continued to experience the mechanisms of exclusion employed by elites in Medellín, despite his wealth. The clearest example of this is a story that has entered into the lore of Medellín. At the height of Escobar's wealth, when he was trying to enter legitimate politics, he was turned away from the country club in the elite neighbourhood of *El Poblado*, because he 'wasn't the right sort'. His gauche manners and dress betrayed his lower class background and, although he was involved politically and economically with the city's powerbrokers at that time, he was not allowed to enter their cultural spaces. This moment illustrates how elites in Medellín were able to protect their interests from infiltration by the mafia, but it also illustrates the exclusionary dynamics that, in part, underpinned the cartel's rise to power.

Escobar and others in the cartel had various political successes in the formal arena. Escobar was elected to the House of Representatives in 1982, and many politicians elected that year were funded by 'narco-donations'. Similarly, Medellín cartel leader Carlos Lehder set up his own political party, the Latin Nationalist Movement in 1986, despite being a fugitive at the time. Despite this, they never succeeded in establishing a foothold in formal politics. This demonstrates the double-edged sword of the impenetrability of formal political elites in Medellín and Colombia as a whole. Whilst the tight-knit nature of political leaders denied access to the formal spaces of power to more nefarious political actors, the exclusion this entailed also underpinned the power of informal actors involved in the city's conflicts. What's more, the perceived hypocrisy of this exclusion, given the amount of collusion that was involved behind the scenes, was a motive for Escobar to declare war personally on the State.

## Pablo Escobar's war on the state

Escobar's failure to establish a formal political position was clear, and his reaction dramatic. Following his election to the House of Representatives in 1982, the future minister of Justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla, who had lost to Escobar, accused him of being a drug lord on national television. As a result of the ensuing scandal, Escobar resigned, but had Lara Bonilla assassinated in 1984. To avoid prosecution for trafficking and other offences, and to regain favour in the corridors of formal power, in 1984 Pablo offered to donate US\$3 billion to the national economy and, when that was refused, he offered to pay off the entire national debt of US\$10 billion (Filippone, 1994: 338). These offers were refused, but his political influence penetrated the highest offices, and, having taken offence at the refusal and determined to avoid an extradition treaty, Escobar declared war on the state. The theatre for this war was not uniquely, but predominantly, Medellín.

The war took the form of a bombing campaign, the assassination of presidential candidates, and an offer of over \$2,000 for any police officer killed in Medellín (Abadinsky, 2009). At the height of the violence, car bombs littered the city, partly as an instrument of gang warfare and partly as a weapon of war against the state. A '*plomo o plata*' ('lead or silver' – meaning bullets or money) approach to political influence was adopted. Politicians, ministers, human rights activists, union members, journalists and police were killed as the cartel, headed by Escobar, marshalled vast swathes of unemployed, disenfranchised youth to his cause and, in effect, created an army to do his bidding.



The *comunas* on the slopes of the city bore the brunt of this violence, but as it escalated, more central areas, including *El Poblado* were increasingly affected. The bombing of the Monaco Building in the *El Poblado* district of Medellín, in 1988, marked the start of bombing campaigns in more central areas and, in the words of one business leader interviewed, 'We realised that the people up there in the *comunas* could kill us all, even if they just came down armed with sticks'<sup>3</sup>. That it took four years for the city's elites to be directly affected by and react to the violence, testifies to the highly unequal geographical distribution of poverty and violence in the city.

In their ultimately failed aspirations to become formal political actors, we can see many of the exclusionary factors that have underpinned the rise to power of violent actors in Medellín. Cartel leaders themselves were excluded by the limited economic and political institutional development in Medellín. This allowed them to build up support in the *comunas* that gave them both informal and – as Escobar was elected to the House of Representatives – formal power. The lack of security in the *comunas* allowed them to step in and provide social rights such as housing, and so gain legitimacy. The exclusion that they were able to cultivate was caused by the impenetrable nature of elites in the city. However, this very impenetrability was also arguably what limited Pablo's power.

The acute and extreme levels of violence in Medellín are almost synonymous with Escobar himself in the popular imagination, but it is important to remember the long-term, deep rooted causes that gave rise to, and facilitated, his power. After his death in 1993, the violence did not disappear. The killing of the footballer Andres Escobar after Colombia's disappointing performance in the 1994 world cup and his disastrous own goal, drew the world's attention to the continuing violence in Medellín despite the death of Escobar the drug baron. The inequality, poverty and exclusion that drove the violence were still very much present (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw, 2001). After the demise of the cartel, it is argued that narco-traffic became a more 'horizontal' industry, with multiple small criminal groups rather than large, vertical organisations (Gutiérrez Sanin and Jaramillo, 2004). What can be seen in the cartel's rise to power is the importance of social and economic exclusion in the *comunas* in the way Escobar established a power base. It is also remarkable that he and the Medellín cartel were competing on a level with the State in terms of resources.

## Criminal gangs

Much of the insecurity and violence in the *comunas* was perpetrated by criminal gangs. These gangs were not affiliated with the political players – the cartel, the militia or the paramilitaries. The delinquency of petty criminals, however, lent legitimacy to the violence perpetrated by those political players in the name of security. Criminal gangs made no attempt to enter the para-political arena to provide security or public goods, unlike other informal political actors. They were part of the violent setting that lent legitimacy to the vigilante actions of narco-traffickers, the militia and paramilitaries.

Criminal gangs have been known in Medellín since the 1960s (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw, 2001). These gangs tended to be associated with smuggling, criminal activities and law enforcement and were the 'heavies' called in to do the dirty work. These groups have been contrasted with the organised structures of the criminal gangs that followed the economic recession in the 1980s and the transformative impact of the cartel, the Marxist militias and the paramilitaries. 'Most dangerous criminals of the era were still picturesque local figures, urban bandits who led criminal actions with several participants', (Ceballos, Melguizo and Cronshaw, 2001: 117). This changed in the 1980s when unemployment of up to 60% in the *comunas* (Filippone, 1994) coincided with the rise of narco-traffic, and the promise of enormous wealth that could be had by working with the charismatic, populist leaders of the cartels.

In the 1980s, a distinction developed between the youths who joined with the cartels, militia or paramilitaries, and street gangs who were perceived as delinquents who posed a danger to morality, security and order in the neighbourhoods. These gangs were called *chichipato* gangs, and their criminal activity was put down to their addiction to *bazuco* – a cheap derivative of coca paste used to make cocaine. They were involved in robberies and territorial conflicts and their 'Dante-esque' delinquency was often the target of the 'cleanings' and impositions of moral order from either left-wing militias, right-wing paramilitaries or the cartels (Filippone, 1994). The youth gangs of the barrios were a source of violence in two ways: they were themselves perpetrators of violence, and their actions also justified the use of violence by other actors to 'clean' the streets and provide security, as the state had been unable to do. Even the drug traffickers would claim that they were working for the good of the city by investing in these poorer areas, and they would take pains to point out that they never encouraged drug-use in Medellín itself, nor would they go near the toxic substance *bazuco* (Filippone, 1994).

The criminal gangs, and the disenfranchised youths that tend to populate them, are perpetrators of violence. They have no pretensions however of providing security, unlike the cartel, the militia and the paramilitaries. The violence of these delinquents is nowhere near the level of the systematised, political violence perpetrated by the other actors. However, in the popular imagination they are not only the main culprits, but they legitimise the other forms of violence and, in effect, empower informal actors who claim to provide security.

3 Business leader, focus group, 25 July 2012.

## The urban Marxist militia

The urban Marxist militias developed their power bases in much the same way as the rural Marxist guerrillas: they extended security to those who had been excluded from the development of the economy and political fabric of Colombia, with the aim of establishing themselves as para-state actors. The dynamics that we have seen throughout of exclusion, inequality, lack of security and lack of state legitimacy can be seen in the way the militia established their power base. Although ostensibly adopting populist politics of supporting the masses against the elite, the militia also had military aims and used violence to achieve their aims (see Box 6).

### Box 6: Urban militia in Medellín

In the mid-1980s, the Marxist guerrilla groups that were mainly active and concentrated in rural areas, expanded their operations into the city. This was a military decision, although urban areas remained peripheral to the general Marxist guerrilla cause. It was also part of the peace agreement between the government and the M19 rebels in 1984 that they would become legitimate political actors and build peace camps in major Colombian cities, including Medellín (Lamb, 2010). The main militia group was the *Milicia del Pueblo para el Pueblo* (militia of the people, for the people) led by the charismatic Pablo García. Other groups sprang up later, associated with the guerrilla groups M19 and the ELN, following the 'blueprint' established by *Milicia del Pueblo* (Gutiérrez Sanin and Jaramillo, 2004).

## Social work and military work

The militia gained power according to one leader because 'we do social work by day' and 'military work by night' (Gutiérrez Sanin and Jaramillo, 2004). The 'social work' refers to social cleansing of the criminal and delinquent elements in the neighbourhood – including drugs-related gangs. The militia started moving into Medellín in *Comuna 1* in the North East of the city. This lower class neighbourhood had had various problems of exclusion and criminality, and the militia's modus operandi of raising revolutionary consciousness and providing security from delinquency was a success. According to militia leaders, they were fulfilling the role of the state, which was consistently found to be complicit with other armed groups, and the militia's actions were popular with the official *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (Neighbourhood Community Actions groups).

The initial success of the militia indicates a continuous underlying problem in Medellín: the lack of security initially justifies violent intervention, but due to the lack of legitimacy of the actors who have intervened, their role is, in effect, perpetrating more illegitimate violence. The failure of the state to provide law, order and security is a fundamental part of this, and repeated attempts to make accords with armed factions in recognition of their 'security' role in the community have failed. This, in turn, indicates a further problematic political dynamic in Medellín: the proximity of criminal and political violence, embodied by paramilitary groups.

## Paramilitaries

As we have seen in the previous section, paramilitaries have a long history in Colombia and have gained power by providing security, predominantly against the Marxist guerrilla, where legitimate forces could not. Their main function officially has been to provide 'security' and combat the guerrilla left, but they have also been involved in various drugs organisations and criminal activities. They started gaining power in Medellín in the mid 1990s, filling the vacuum left by declining militias and the death of Escobar. Like the militia, they had focused on rural areas protecting landowners from guerrilla attack. With the formation of the paramilitary groups 'Death to Kidnappers' and the PEPEs - *Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar* (Persecuted by Pablo Escobar), paramilitaries began to gain power in urban areas. Medellín had particularly strong support for paramilitary groups because of the perceived need for security (see Box 7).

### Box 7: Paramilitaries in Medellín

There are a number of paramilitary organisations that have been operating in Medellín. One of the higher profile organisations is *Bloque Cacique Nutibara* run by the paramilitary head Don Berna. He was extradited to the US in 2008 and sentenced to life for smuggling cocaine, to which he pleaded guilty. La Terraza, an extremely feared criminal organisation was formed from the PEPEs, as was *Bloque Metro*, led by the paramilitary 'Doble Cero'. These different paramilitary units came together in the umbrella organisation the *Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia* (United Self Defence Forces of Colombia – AUC). Despite this unity, the different groups were rivals for territory within the city of Medellín, and disputes between paramilitary groups have been as fierce as those amongst the militia (Gutiérrez Sanin and Jaramillo, 2004).

Paramilitaries acquired a larger role in Medellín's politics after the demise of Pablo Escobar. Throughout their history, paramilitaries are often seen as a continuation of legitimate force, particularly by formal, more conservative, political actors. Their proximity to legitimate forces is argued to be an irresponsible blurring of the lines between politics, legitimacy and criminality. Their role within the changes in the levels of Colombian violence, as we will see in Part 2 of this paper, is one of the most controversial questions in contemporary Colombian politics.

## The state

Besides the overt military violence from the state, unclear lines between legitimate state actors and other forces, particularly when united in opposition to the guerrilla and militia, are a feature of the city's history. The paramilitary group MAS ('Death to Kidnappers') had support from politicians as well as landowners and drug traffickers. Bribes and other forms of illegitimate political influence have been rife and state actors, including the police, lack the trust of the communities. The clientelistic policies adopted by all actors, including the state, have exacerbated the difficulties in distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate political actors. The state's attempts to quell the violence with accords and peace talks with informal political actors, indicates how complex these relationships have been, and further underscores the importance of political alliances in the changes in Medellín.

There are several features to be noted about the state's dealings with informal political actors in the city:

- **The cartels were treated as outsiders to the formal political system.** Nevertheless, through their wealth and willingness to resort to violence, as well as their connections, they were able to use their informal power to infiltrate formal political spaces and build coalitions with formal political actors.
- **The militia were treated as a threat to the state.** However, their role in providing security and the legitimacy they had garnered through their 'social work' in the communities was recognised as part of a political solution to the violence.
- **The paramilitaries, in contrast, were treated as legitimate.** This has historical roots, and legal precedent, although the legitimacy of the state's use of paramilitaries has been questioned.

## Dealing with the cartels and Pablo Escobar

As we have seen, the cartels and their leaders, despite their political aspirations, were considered beyond the pale of possible formal political alliances, although there were many informal ones. They were hugely influential because of their own de facto power, and the state was forced into a compromise with the Medellín cartel and Pablo Escobar. In response to demands and threats from the cartel and other drugs traffickers, called *The Extraditables*, ministers voted against an extradition treaty to the United States. In return, Pablo agreed to surrender to his luxury, custom built jail 'La Catedral' (The Cathedral), situated on land which he himself had sold to the state.

At this point Escobar had many enemies, including the Cali Cartel who, along with Escobar's former colleagues the Castaño brothers, had set up the previously mentioned paramilitary group The PePEs. When Pablo 'escaped' his own prison, numerous parties put up funds for a reward for his capture, and international governments donated equipment and expertise that would eventually lead to his capture and death in December 1993. Although State forces did eventually kill Escobar, this was possible because he had lost his strategic alliances with other groups, and because the Colombian State had gained international support.

## The militia, the paramilitaries and 'security'

In contrast, para-state and paramilitary actors were recognised as having de facto legitimacy in the *comunas*, and a political solution, that recognised the bases of their power was deemed necessary in the early 1990s (Boudon, 1996). In both cases, formal political actors offered to recognise the militia and the paramilitaries by legitimising their security role. Whilst this is a recognition of the political processes behind the violence, it also blurs the lines between legitimate and illegitimate force, continuing some of the political underpinnings of the violence.

In 1991, the Municipality of Medellín, supported by the national government, entered into peace talks with the militia. The national government had sent resources to support this process after receiving a request from the Mayor of Medellín for assistance in dealing with the 'communist' threat. The arrangement was that former militia would come together to maintain security in the neighbourhood but in a formalised way. This organisation was called COOSERCOM<sup>4</sup>, and it involved some 800 militias being officially responsible for security in their neighbourhoods. It is widely held that this initiative failed, due to the disintegration of the militia and the proximity of COOSERCOM to criminal activity.

4 COOSERCOM – Cooperativa de Vigilancia y Servicio a la Comunidad The surveillance and community service co-operative.

In 1994 paramilitarism was legalised, using legislation passed in the 1960s that allowed for civilians to take up arms and be trained by the military in their own defence (Amnesty International, 2005). Paramilitary groups, formally known as *Servicios Especiales de Vigilancia y Seguridad Privada*<sup>5</sup> acquired the epithet *Las Convivir* (Live Together) and functioned as legitimate private security forces that could be contracted by vulnerable neighbourhoods, businesses or landowners. The formation of these groups was strongly criticised by liberal forces in Medellín and human rights organisations internationally, but they received strong support in the *comunas* of Medellín where the violence had reached astronomical proportions. In 1997 they were dismantled after a Constitutional Court hearing found them unconstitutional. Nevertheless, they remain a feature of life in Medellín and Colombia more broadly (Ceballos Melguizo and Cronshaw, 2001). This is another example of the narrow connection between legitimate and illegitimate use of force, and the role that the underlying need for security plays in perpetuating violence: it is said that Medellín is at once one of the most guarded and the most violent, cities in the world.

From this analysis of forces adopting violent means in Medellín, it is clear that the city's inequality, lack of security, and political and economic disenfranchisement in the communities has been a source of power for drug traffickers, militia and paramilitary actors. The neglect of parts of the city by the ruling elite, and various 'marriages of convenience' between state and other actors created a sense of exclusion that the militias addressed with its 'social work', raising revolutionary consciousness; the drugs lords addressed by providing employment and hope of riches; and the paramilitaries addressed by offering 'security'. The ensuing violence and viciousness have served only to give violent actors power and to perpetuate the need for continued violence in the name of security.

## 1.5 Conclusion

There are many reasons why Medellín became the most violent city on earth:

- The city's inequality, exclusion and social injustice undermined the legitimacy of the state and provided fertile ground for the development of clientelistic, vertical power relations with the *comunas*.
- The state's inability to provide security for its citizens has led to a multitude of violent groups competing with the state to gain legitimacy by providing security.
- The Medellín cartel was at war with the state and out-gunned it in terms of resources, and in some quarters, legitimacy. Although Pablo Escobar is internationally recognised as a villain, he remains a hero to those whom he housed, protected and provided with employment, and thousands attended his funeral.
- The militia, with both their social and military work, also offered hope for a more equitable society, as well as protection and moral order.
- Similarly, the paramilitaries fulfil the right of citizens to protect themselves.

The cycle of violence upon violence, albeit in the name of security, seemed intractable, but the crisis of the early 1990s, when the murder rate reached such astonishing levels, galvanised political actors at every level into establishing an effective diagnosis of the troubles and future alternatives for Medellín. As we will see, a recognition that violence is a process that depends not only on the individual perpetrators, but the dynamics of structure and agency, was at the heart of their approach.

As can be seen by the problematic attempts to incorporate para-state and paramilitary actors into the security machinery of the city, the political underpinnings of violence are difficult to address. What then, changed in Medellín to produce the dramatic reduction of violence? How did a city whose violence had become 'banal' and part of the everyday way of doing politics (Pécaut, 1999), become more associated with the word 'miracle' than 'crisis'?

In the next part of this paper, we argue that the critical juncture represented by the culmination of violence in the early 1990s enabled coalitions and leaders to come forth who broke with the prior political logic of the city. It is said that elites recognised the 'social debt' owed to the poorer parts of Medellín, but this was not done unilaterally. The 'rules of the game' of politics changed significantly enough for elites to have political incentives to address inequality and lack of security. What is more, institutional and structural changes allowed other progressive actors to gain traction in Medellín's politics.

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5 Special vigilance and private security services.

# 2.0

## The Miracle

### Introduction

Having set out the structural and historical context which framed the violence and conflict that erupted in Medellín through the 1980s, we now turn to an analysis of how political agents (individuals and groups) emerged or re-emerged to try to promote institutional and policy changes that would help to reduce the levels of violence – the so-called 'miracle'. In Part 2, our attention turns to the changes in political processes, framed by structures and enacted by agents, in the wake of the crisis of violence in 1991, that shaped the 'Miracle' itself. The 'Medellín Miracle' refers to the decline in violence experienced in the city since 1993 and certain policies that, it is claimed, have contributed to this decline. Most notable among these policies are:

- transport and infrastructure projects to address exclusion;
- conspicuous investment in the poorest areas of the city;
- creation of public spaces and parks;
- investment in education;
- an economic focus on solidarity and competitiveness;
- participation and community involvement in policy.

The analysis focuses on two points: firstly, how the crisis in the city was framed by political actors to enact these policies; and secondly the changes in structure/agency processes, produced in part by the crisis itself, that empowered new political actors to gain the power required to make these changes.

To address this, Part 2 is divided into two sections. *Section 1: Critical Junctures and Political Work* examines the reaction to the crisis of violence and the, not unrelated, crisis of the economy. We argue that these critical junctures produced fissures in the structure-agency processes that caused the violence and allowed new political actors and sources of power to develop. These changes not only pushed through progressive policies but, possibly more significantly, they themselves represent the overturning of some of the political dynamics that underpinned the violence, specifically exclusion, inequality and the impermeability of the city's elites. To support this argument, we analyse firstly the reaction to the critical junctures:

- the Presidential council to address the violence in Medellín;
- the Seminars for Future Alternatives for Medellín;
- working groups on policy alternatives;
- economic council and the monitor report.

Secondly we look at the new actors, coalitions and forms of leadership and power that emerged, such as:

- a 'reflexive middle class';
- social movements and NGOs;
- a new economic elite;
- a new political party - Compromiso Ciudadano;
- new political leaders.

This section concludes by demonstrating that the critical junctures of the crises of violence and economy experienced in Medellín in the early 1990s allowed the political processes that had underpinned the long-term and acute violence in the city to be addressed.

In Section 2 we take a broader view of the Medellín Miracle and look at *Changing Structures and Rules of the Game*. Significant changes at national and global level also shaped the forms of power that emerged in Medellín to produce the miracle.

Specifically these were **formal institutional changes**, such as:

- the Colombian Constitution of 1991;
- popular election of mayors;
- globalisation (global capital and global development industry);
- relationship with the USA;
- end of the Cold War.

There were also **informal institutional changes**, such as:

- styles of leadership;
- 'cultural capital';
- participation;
- corruption.

This section concludes that, for the policies associated with the Medellín Miracle to develop and be successfully implemented, the structures and institutions underpinning power also had to change to allow new political actors and different forms of power to emerge.

## 2.1

### Critical junctures and political work

#### 2.1.1 Introduction

The critical juncture in Medellín was the astronomical levels of violence of the early 1990s, and specifically 1991 when the city's murder rate peaked, when it was declared the most violent city on earth. As we will see, there are a number of long-term and short-term causes involved in the changing institutional context, but recognition that the violence had reached 'crisis point' catalysed people into action and represented a tear in the social and political fabric in Medellín's society; opening up space for political actors to work towards progressive political ends. The economic recession was also seen as a crisis in the early 1990s, and this too provoked specific reactions, which changed some of the power dynamics within the city. As we will see, crucial to the changes was the confluence of agendas between business leaders concerned about the economy and those prioritising the crisis of violence. There was a recognition that, in order to survive in a global economy and attract foreign investment, the city had to change. Before explaining how these critical junctures allowed new actors to emerge and coalitions to be formed, we will briefly look at the policies that have been most associated with the 'miracle of Medellín'.

#### 2.1.2 The Medellín Miracle: The policies

The policies that made the miracle have a history, and some have been planned since the 1960s. However, they began to come to fruition in the mid 1990s, thanks to the various political dynamics that were opened up by the critical junctures in Medellín at that time. These policies gained momentum and, in 2002 under the administration of Mayor Sergio Fajardo, became known under the umbrella term 'social urbanism'. What they have in common is a mission to reverse the 'historical debt' that the city's elites owe to the neglected areas, especially on the hillsides of Medellín, and to 'change the skin of the city' by addressing the spatialised exclusion that so graphically characterises the city's inequality (Echeverri and Orsini, 2012).

The strategies to achieve this can be characterised as i) infrastructure projects; ii) conspicuous investment in poorer areas; iii) development of public space; and iv) solidarity economy and participation. Before looking at the political alliances that made these policies possible, we will here outline the specifics of these policies and focus on how they were intended to overturn the 'historical debt' owed to poorer areas and change mobility and spatialised exclusion in the city. The focus of this paper is not the impact of the policies, but the politics - the coalitions, political work and power struggles, that made them happen. In the presentation of the policies most associated with the Medellín Miracle here, we focus on the political intentions behind these interventions and how they were formulated in order to redress the city's dual crises of violence and recession, in light of the structural factors discussed above.

These key policies are:

- transport and infrastructure projects to address spatialised exclusion;
- conspicuous investment in the poorest areas of the city;
- creation of public spaces and parks;
- investment in education;
- an economic focus on solidarity and competitiveness;
- participation and community involvement in policy.

## Infrastructure projects

The most iconic elements of social urbanism are the infrastructure projects, particularly the Metro and the Metro Cable – an Alpine cable car that is part of the public transport network. These projects were designed to address the way in which the city's infrastructure had developed to favour the priorities, patterns of mobility and aesthetic vision of the elites. By connecting the poorer areas on the hillsides, - dominated by migrants to the city, - with the centre of the city, the Metro and Metro Cable were intended to change the way that people and wealth circulate, hence improving the economy and visibly addressing the historical debt owed to the city by its leaders. By changing mobility around the city, there is potential to construct a more inclusive economy, as people on the periphery will be able to access wealthier markets in the centre. There is also an important political element of the symbolism of such investments in poorer, stigmatised areas: the Metro and the Metro Cable are signs of conspicuous investment in previously neglected and stigmatised areas (Brand and Davila 2011).

### The Metro

The Medellín Metro has a long history. It was inaugurated in 1994, but proposals had been made as early as 1968 to deal with the city's rapid expansion due to migration. The history of the struggles to obtain financing for the project and eventually bring it to completion is long and turbulent. It involved various political deals, allegations of corruption and foreign investment and contracts (Echavarría *et al.*, 2002). However, despite its turbulent history, Medellín's Metro is the only train-based public transit system in Colombia and compares favourably in terms of execution, efficiency and effectiveness with Bogotá's bus-based public transit system (Gilbert, 2006).

The Metro has two lines, one connecting the north with the south, and the other the centre with the west of the city. These lines were criticised initially for not reaching the poorest, and the metro as a whole has been criticised for not having the demand that was predicted (Brand and Davila, 2011). Nevertheless, despite the questionable economic impacts, the cultural and symbolic impact has been more profound. There is immense pride in Medellín's Metro, which many residents refer to as 'the best in the world'. Accompanying the launch of the Metro were public awareness adverts that emphasised 'Metro Culture', which has come to mean the importance of good behaviour once having entered the metro system. Whilst it is recognised that there is astonishingly little trouble in the Metro when compared to the rest of the city, critics observe that this is typical of the political dynamics of public investment in the city: the elite will invest, but this is as an extension of their ideas of appropriate behaviour, not as an inclusive strategy.

### The Metro Cable

Despite the debates, the improvements to transport infrastructure in Medellín have become symbolic of Medellín's 'social urbanism' policies that have helped to transform the city. Most remarked upon is the extension of the Metro in the early 2000s with two Alpine cable cars uniting the centre of the city with the once notoriously violent districts of San Javier and Santo Domingo. The two-hour long journey from the *comunas* on the hillsides of the city to the centre has now been reduced to 10 minutes. At a symbolic level, people from all over the city take the cable cars to these once ghetto neighbourhoods that are now tourist attractions.

The Metro Cable addresses the limitation of the metro in terms of accessing the poorest areas of the city. Although the impacts of this are debateable – it has been found, for example, that only 10% of residents of San Javier and Santo Domingo use the metro (Brand and Davila, 2011) – the Metro Cable is internationally recognised, not only for the feat of engineering which it required, but as a symbol of investment in the poorest areas of the city. A ride on the Metro Cable is a main part of the tour that official visitors – including former US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice – are given, and that has resulted in several very positive reports (BBC, 2010; Kimmelman, 2012; Trejos, 2010). The new cable car in Greenwich, London (inaugurated in 2012), is based on this one in Medellín.

The cable cars were not isolated investments, they have been part of broader regeneration processes and, crucially, have resulted from participatory processes with the affected *comunas*. Although inclusion in the economy may not have changed significantly as a direct result of these interventions, they represent a political change in how the city works.

### Library parks

There are five library parks built in the poorest neighbourhoods, as determined by development indicators, that were inaugurated between 2006 and 2008. They were part of the City's Development Plan for 2004-2007, in which it states that the aim was to 'strengthen the libraries as integral centres for development and culture' (Fajardo, 2004: 33). The library parks are so called because of their contribution to urban development and a more inclusive city, as well as the educational agenda. As such, they function as community centres, crèches, and training sessions as well as libraries. They are a key policy in the mission to reverse the 'historical social debt' owed to the poorer areas of the city by its leaders, and represent conspicuous investments. The library parks also contribute to a more inclusive economy as they address not only the educational needs, but also the information gaps that can impede accessing resources that are available.



### Box 8: The architecture of the libraries

The architecture of these buildings is remarkable in itself. The *Biblioteca de los Reyes de España* (The Library of the King and Queen of Spain) is designed to fit in with the surrounding mountainous rocks and consists of three large cube-like structures on the hillside. The idea behind these libraries is that they symbolise that the city's leaders are now recognising the importance of investment in the comunas, and the architects who designed them were chosen after a competitive international process (McGuirk, 2012).

The library parks are not without controversy. One comment frequently heard is that they are 'just blocks of concrete' and, although they are symbolically significant, they fail to address the roots of exclusion in the city. It has also been pointed out that they glorify the architects and the funders more than the people of the communities themselves. The architects have won prizes but, as one academic noted about the *Biblioteca de España* – 'Why on earth is it called after the king and queen of Spain if it's all meant to be about community and bottom up development?'<sup>6</sup>

It is characteristic of the policies that made the Medellín Miracle that there is a coincidence between the agenda for inclusion and social development and the economic needs of the city, as we will see in the next section. The library parks fulfil both of these agendas by creating new spaces that address exclusion in the city, representing an investment in education and 'human capital' that can contribute to economic development, and change the image of the city on the global stage. The politics behind how these agendas came to coincide effectively will be discussed in the next section.

### Public spaces

Before the 1990s there were no public spaces in Medellín. This fact was frequently highlighted in interviews and speaks to the awareness among leaders in the city that the area's development had not been inclusive. The investment in and creation of public spaces is a key pillar of social urbanism and the policies that are designed to change exclusion and mobility around the city and address the historical inequality. Like the library parks, these public spaces have also become icons of the city's changing image. The public parks include spaces for public art works, science and botanical gardens, but the intention behind them is to address geographical exclusion and change mobility within the city, and so diminish the segregation – both economically and socially - that the city's development had created.

### Box 9: Public Spaces in Medellín

There are numerous public spaces which have been created in Medellín in the last 20 years and have arguably contributed to the Medellín Miracle. The Botanical Gardens cover 40 acres of land in the centre of the city, with tropical plants and trees, an aviary and schools and workshops. The Botanical Gardens were originally opened in the 1800s, but became a neglected no-go area in the late 20th century. They were renovated in 2005 as part of Fajardo's urban renovation plan and are now part of an extensive area in the centre of the city that also includes a science park called the *Parque Explorador*, a Planetarium and an open park with fountains – the *Parque de los Deseos*. The Botero sculpture park dedicated to one of Colombia's most famous artists – Fernando Botero – is also in the city centre – an area that, although not the most dangerous – is associated with high rates of crime and informality.

The development of these public spaces is a conspicuous attempt to address the geographical exclusion that had been recognised as an element in the city's violence. As we will see, there is more to these policies than their iconic results - the libraries, parks and gardens that have won prizes for their designers. These investments are the result of political processes that have engaged politicians, businesses, communities and universities. These developments may not have healed Medellín themselves, but the political processes behind them will tell us something about how power can change in the face of a crisis.

## Economy: Competitiveness, solidarity and participation

Medellín has become known as a city of competitiveness and solidarity, '*Medellín: Ciudad competitiva y solidaria*', and as 'the educated city' - '*la mas educada*' (Fajardo, 2007). These slogans are visible on panels and posters throughout the city, and were created by Mayor Fajardo and his administration. The union of the words competitiveness and solidarity – in not only what is generally regarded to be the most individualist nation in Latin America, but its most individualistic city – are themselves

<sup>6</sup> Academic and activist, interview, 24 July 2012.

remarkable, and represent an astonishing consensus between business, the city and communities. The politics involved in this consensus is what will be discussed below but, in this section, we look at the policies associated with these aims and how they have been thought to address the causes of violence in the city.

These policies were implemented in reaction not only to the crisis of violence that hit Medellín – but the economic crisis as well. The principles behind them are to increase the production chains and value chains in the city and create more formal enterprises by encouraging associations within communities that can bid for public contracts, and have been inspired by the Northern Italian and Basque co-operative models (Bateman et al., 2010). In addition to support for community associations and micro-enterprises, there are larger scale initiatives to encourage inclusive economic development. Various business incubators – inspired again by Catalan, Basque and Northern Italian models have been set up with funds from local government and the GEA. These include the Medellín 'Cluster City' programme – an initiative of the local government and the Medellín Chamber of Commerce. The six strategic clusters have been defined as electric power; textile / apparel, fashion design, construction, business tourism, fairs and conventions, medical and dental services, technology, information and communication technologies (ICT). They have been chosen to build an inclusive city, whose development is for all its citizens, as well as enabling Medellín to promote itself on the global economic stage (Medellín Ciudad Cluster; n.d.). To illustrate the solidarity-competitiveness approach to economic development, we will look at two policy foci – small business support and participatory budget. There is also an extensive education and training programme targeted towards youth in the *comunas* who are deemed at risk of gang involvement.

### Small business support

Building an inclusive economy was, and continues to be seen as one of the main challenges in terms of building an inclusive economy. The city is polarised in terms of wealth inequality, and informal economic activities dominate the poorer areas of the city. Among the programmes to promote economic inclusion are the *Cedezos* – Centres of Zonal Development. These centres are located in the library parks and are information points to unite all the potential services that are available to support small and micro entrepreneurs in the *comunas*. They provide information about potential sources of credit, training and small business competitions that can result in contracts with the city's chain stores. The CEDEZOs address the information gaps and difficulties in accessing mainstream markets, and have been successful in identifying entrepreneurs who can make the crucial transition from a local, informal micro-enterprise to a small business capable of reaching the mainstream market (Bateman et al., 2011).

As part of the drive to encourage small businesses to link more with the mainstream, communities have been encouraged to build their own associations, so they can bid for contracts on public work. Examples of such associations include catering, child-care and building work. Approaching public works in this way facilitates local job creation and changes the perception of cronyism in the allocation of public works contracts. In addition, there is a high-profile campaign, including local government support and a public service television campaign, to encourage the formation of co-operatives, as opposed to individual, micro, informal enterprises.

The levels of continuing support for such projects varies. There is an acceptance of the need for continued training and support to address the barriers to accessing market opportunities in such an unequal city, but the resources available to do this, and the best way to achieve it, are in debate. Projects, such as those from the Sub-Secretariat for Women and Gender Equality, that have a political approach to addressing the barriers to women's participation in the market, tend to take a long-term approach to their projects. This includes training in group formation, leadership and continued support as the project develops over years. Private companies are encouraged to be involved in partnering schemes with smaller enterprises, on a voluntary basis.

### Participatory budget

The importance of participation is at the core of social urbanism. The Participatory Budget was first implemented by Mayor Juan Gómez Martínez in 1998. This was further developed by Fajardo into the Participatory Planning and Budgeting programme, which aimed to bring government and planning, in general, closer to the citizenry and civil society, as well as legitimating local government and promoting transparency. Some of the budget for each neighbourhood is allocated for organisations to bid for project contracts, and the decision about which contracts are awarded funds is taken by a panel that includes community members. The amounts involved in this process have almost doubled, from 59 million Colombian pesos in 2004 to more than 100 million in 2008 (Valencia et al., 2009).

Participatory budgeting is more than an economic initiative; it is a political initiative that is designed to empower communities to determine their own priorities and increase transparency of how funds are spent (Uran, 2010). The specific ways to implement the participatory budget and the kinds of programmes that it supports remain contentious. Nevertheless, this initiative overturns decades of development in which investment was steered by elites who did not understand the priorities of people in the *comunas*.

Examples of programmes funded by the participatory budget include art and theatre exhibitions dedicated to memory, community kitchens and football parks. Whilst this does, in a sense, include and support participation – and change the political subject into one that makes proposals rather than just demands, at the same time it does fundamentally change the dynamic between citizens and the state. Community leaders complained that it had turned them in to fund-raisers, saying that whereas before they did community work now they just fill out forms. One put it very clearly: 'If I get money from the local government who is my boss? I'm not working for the communities anymore, I'm working for the state'<sup>7</sup>. The participatory budget neatly illustrates the tensions between promoting inclusion, versus co-option by the state.

## Medellín: La Mas Educada

The other most prominent aspect of social urbanism and the policies which turned Medellín's fortunes around is the investment in education. Under the Fajardo administration unprecedented investment was made in education – including buildings, the number of schools and the quality of teaching. This would appear to be successful as, in 2009, 80% of those tested were at the level of the national average, compared with fewer than 20% in 2002, but the effect on violence is yet to be established (Kimmelman, 2012).

Under the Fajardo administration 10 colleges were built and 40% of the annual budget in 2007 went to education. The description of these policies indicates the centrality to the social urbanism programme of education:

'We are investing 40% of our budget on education and this year we built, among other things, 10 new schools for Medellín, really beautiful, well equipped buildings located in the most neglected areas of our city, and equipped with all the necessary tools for children and young people to see the world in a different way, many of these schools have similar standards or better than any private school in the city'.  
(Fajardo, 2007)

Education is seen as central to the inclusion of people in the *comunas*, both in terms of improving education and possibilities for upward mobility, but also in terms of raising political awareness. The emphasis on education has also extended to adult learning and NGOs, and there have also been several funded scholarships that allow students from the *comunas*, particularly community leaders, to get places at prestigious private universities.

Underpinning the increased investment in education is an agreement among the city's leaders that education is the most important investment that can be made. The GEA have supported university places, as have the universities themselves. Various NGOs have undertaken education projects that fall outside of the remit of the State, for example adult education projects and community learning projects. Whilst there is concern that this massive investment is yet to yield tangible results, the nature of the coalitions that made this investment possible is an extraordinary result in itself.

## Summary

We have here analysed the most prominent policies that are associated with the Medellín miracle. What they have in common is an aim to address the social debt owed to the poorer parts of the city by the elite, and an aim to change the spatial exclusion in the city – captured in the phrase 'changing the skin of the city'. They also speak to the changing economic priorities of business leaders in the city, which has been a crucial element in building the coalitions that made them possible. The implementation of these policies can be seen as an achievement in themselves, and, while the impact of these policies on the economy and any direct causal relationship with the decline in violence are in debate, what they clearly mark is a change in political processes in Medellín.

There are, of course, policies that are conspicuous by their absence from Medellín's Social Urbanism, and their omission is itself indicative of the nature of the coalitions and political spaces that were achieved in the 1990s. Most notably, anti-corruption measures and official policies on restorative and reparative justice are lacking, although these exist at national level. Corruption and bribery remain a feature of political life in Medellín, that, while the political changes may have attenuated this, many of those interviewed bemoaned the lack of direct representations on this issue: 'There have definitely been improvements in the standards of living in the communities thanks to social urbanism, but the real issue – justice – that's the real problem.'<sup>8</sup>

In the next section, we look at how these policies were made politically possible in the wake of Medellín's crisis in the early 1990s. The policies illustrated above are very important – but they do not themselves constitute the Miracle. Throughout this paper we have argued that the problem of Medellín's violence is a political one, that is, to do with the processes of structure and agency that allowed violence to become part of the common sense of the city and the main way in which power was accumulated and politics conducted. From this perspective, the extent to which these political processes have been changed

<sup>7</sup> Community activist, interview, 25 July 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Councillor, interview 16 July 2012.

by the crisis is the question, rather than how effective specific programmes are in reaching their targets, important though that is. This perspective is shared by key actors in Medellín's miracle, who throughout the city's transformation have emphasised the importance of participation and process, rather than the beauty of the buildings or the success of their architects.

### 2.1.3 The reaction to the critical junctures

The main 'critical juncture' that we shall argue galvanised people into action and opened up new political spaces and processes in Medellín was, of course, the extreme levels of violence. This provoked a reaction from the national government and the city itself that created the space for new political actors and coalitions to come to the fore. The reaction to the violence also meant the processes of structure and agency that allowed violence into the everyday politics of Medellín could be interrupted. Crucially, another crisis was also in motion – the economic crisis – which, as we have seen, is not unrelated to the violence, but nevertheless had dimensions of its own. The reaction of the elites to the economic crisis – the way they understood it, the disputes they had around it and the approaches, particularly on the need for foreign direct investment, that emerged – were crucial to the politics of the city and the way that coalitions between communities, radical actors and business elites were possible.

The peak in violence in Medellín in the early 1990s, and its status as the most violent city on earth, was the crisis point which galvanised political actors. The number of murders, as we have seen, was staggering, and people in Medellín can flesh out these figures with their memories of fear and defiance. This time had a clear effect on the politics of the city, and the willingness of the elites to negotiate with those they had excluded is, in part, due to the crisis of violence:

'For a brief period (between 1993 and 1995) violence rose to such unprecedented levels that Medellín's economic elite and the city authorities (with the support of the national government) agreed to negotiate with lower class dwellers on the latter's terms' (Roldan, 2002: 144).

As we will see, there was a number of structural processes involved that meant that this was possible, but there were – particularly in the early 1990s – a flurry of coalitions and new political actors that would not have emerged were it not for the violent crisis.

There are three specific interventions that enabled these new political processes:

- the Presidential Programme to address the violence in Medellín;
- the seminars for future alternatives for Medellín;
- the Monitor Report into the status of the economy in Medellín.

We will here analyse how these interventions changed the rules of the game and created institutions that allowed power to be attained in non-violent ways and created spaces in which new coalitions could be formed.

#### Presidential programme for Medellín

The Colombian President elect in 1990, Cesar Gaviria, identified the violence and mafia activity in Medellín as the country's biggest challenge. As Gaviria announced at a news conference shortly after returning from the US:

'The country's gravest problem now is violence in Medellín, and this will require special treatment from my government, a treatment that transcends just military, police and public order measures,' (APN, 1990).

Gaviria set up a *Consejería Presidencial* (Presidential Programme) for Medellín in the same year, that placed a special national government advisor, Maria Emma Mejía Vélez, in charge of developing solutions for the city with a substantial budget from the Bogota government (*Semana*, 1990). Another advantage of having a national programme was that, given the complexities of joint action within the city, it would create an external force that would be less directly implicated in the problems.

There were two immediate effects of the Presidential Programme. Firstly, 93,000 million Colombian pesos (about 155 million US\$) were assigned to the Presidential Programme for Medellín. This opened up new avenues of financial support for NGOs, universities and other non-traditional political actors. It changed the political landscape in Medellín at a moment when the powers-that-be were under direct national pressure to find alternatives. The Presidential Programme represented a decentralisation of power that created new spaces in civil society and new alliances that underpin the policies associated today with the 'Medellín miracle'. The form of this power was varied. The door had been opened to set a new agenda, for different actors to have a seat at the table, and, eventually, executive power in the formal political spaces of local government.

## Defining the crisis – Medellín: Re-encounter with the future

The other key intervention right at the beginning of the Presidential Programme was the report it commissioned on Medellín's future – *Medellín: Re-encounter with the Future* (1991). This report was written by a variety of non-traditional political actors, and so the fact that it was commissioned itself was politically significant in terms of empowering new people to set an agenda. It was written by academics from Medellín's public universities, (the University of Antioquia and the National University) various NGOs and the United Nations Development Programme. The commissioning of this report itself empowered these actors to suggest new ideas and influence politics directly.

The main findings of this 1991 report have defined the agenda since, they crucially point out the structural reasons that have underpinned the violence, as well as looking at the perpetrators. These structural reasons came to be known as the 'historical social debt' owed to the city. In particular, the report highlighted:

- poverty and inequality;
- joblessness, particularly among the young, and the particularly harsh effects of economic crisis in Medellín;
- low educational and health levels, compared with those of other cities;
- high levels of informal housing (30%) with many in areas of risk of disaster; and,
- a significant lack of public spaces.

With the Presidential Programme for Medellín, we can see new political actors having voice in the way that policy was framed. These actors, as we will see below, included community groups, social movements, NGOs and universities, who were able to bring political force to their agendas, enabled by the funding and direction given by the national government, and the recognition that a crisis point had been reached. The way these actors used this power and worked together will be discussed further below.

In the development of the Presidential Programme and the report on the future of Medellín we already see the potential politics of critical junctures coming through: in the wake of the crisis, exogenous actors at national and international level were able to interrupt some of the city-level politics, with the financial backing to go above the formal political actors who were implicated in the political dynamics underpinning the city's violence. This not only empowered people to take a critical angle on the structures of the conflict, but the formation of these alliances already, in itself, changed those structures.

## New political spaces

Being in a position to define the agenda is a power in itself. However, in order for that agenda to have traction and the potential to influence policy, coalitions need to be built. Again, facilitated by the Presidential Programme, the funding, newly defined priorities and new political actors created the political spaces in which coalitions could be formed. Examples of this included the *Foros Comunes* (community fora), and international seminars to develop 'alternatives for Medellín', that took place between 1991 and 1995, and included political, community and business leaders as well as international actors, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and KfW Development Bank (Echeverría and Bravo, 2009). The participation of international policy makers, development organisations and policy specialists allowed coalitions to form, and, crucially, financial support to be solicited from the international organisation (*El Tiempo*, 1991).

The recognition that the city's violence had reached a crisis point also enabled these coalitions to be built. After the first seminar, also in 1991, the national newspaper *El Tiempo* describes the seminar as drawing together:

'the proposals and points of view of citizens, the state, industry, media, universities, and the military. ... Although violence in the city persists, as does the scepticism, there is a commitment between many social, political and economic groups to drive this process of the reconstitution of the city forward, as a piece of work of citizens' leadership.' (*El Tiempo*, 1992)

In this quote we can see the commitment of various groups at the time, and the broad base of participation that the seminars created. Various reports were produced and policy working groups set up after the events of 1991, including the working groups on various key themes including youth, employment, nutrition and women's equality. Key policy programmes resulted from these fora that continue to frame policy today: *Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales*<sup>9</sup> and the *Programa de Núcleos de Vida Ciudadana*,<sup>10</sup> (Alcaldía de Medellín, 1996).

The policies, reports and expertise that were sparked by these experiences were vital in creating the miracle of Medellín. The *Strategic Plan for Medellín 1995-1998* lists many of the policy innovations that were to transform the city. It defined five

9 The Integral Program for the Betterment of Subnormal neighbourhoods.

10 The Cores of City Life Program.

strategic lines and 106 projects, 40 of which were deemed to be top priority. Of the remarkably wide range of organisations that participated in the seminars and discussions many went on to have a role in various working groups and workshops that were dedicated to formulating projects and policies that would render these strategies viable (Echeverria and Bravo, 2009).

The Cores of City Life programme represents a radical break with the way the city had previously been envisaged (Dapena Rivera, 2006). Its remit was to address directly the spatial distribution of poverty and underdevelopment in the city, which, as we have seen, has been the most prominent feature of policies associated with Medellín's miracle, and a theme that has continued throughout the two decades since the crisis. The working groups on economy, youth unemployment and women's equality generated innovative policies, based on international experiences for building a more inclusive, participatory economy. However, these policies would not have become politically possible – no matter how brilliant – without the political coalitions that were also developed in these new spaces, that, in their own development, changed the political landscape itself.

## The economic crisis

The crisis of violence was not the only crisis facing Medellín in the early 1990s. The economy was also in crisis, both from the global recession which had so affected Medellín as Colombia's industrial heartland, and the increasingly globalised nature of capital. This was perceived as both an opportunity and a threat, and divided the economic elites into a 'new' elite that wanted to engage with the opportunities brought by economic capital, and the 'old' elite who wanted to adopt more protectionist methods. There was a perception that attracting foreign direct investment to the city was essential in order to be able to compete on the global stage, but also a recognition that this would be substantially impeded by the high levels of violence in the city, as well as the high-profile nature of this violence and the city's reputation for crime, narco-trafficking and corruption.

The influential Monitor Report: *Competitive advantages for Medellín*, was commissioned by Medellín's Chamber of Commerce as part of a broader report on Colombia as a whole, and the results published in 1994 (Monitor, 1994). This report was remarkably candid in its conclusions that the economic leaders of the city had to change to deal with the opportunities and threats that come with globalisation:

'Stagnant and reactionary mindsets can never lead the firms that are demanded by the new world order. In fact, yesterday's men are not in a position to manage the complex realities of tomorrow. That is the great challenge that we are facing today: either we change or we disappear; obviously after our organizations have collapsed. (Camara de Comercio, n.d.).

The recommendations of this report coincide with the foci of the 1991 *Medellín: Re-encounter with the Future* report on the violence: that the city's inequality, limited development in certain areas and exclusionary cultural attitudes were the problem. It also concluded that making a world-class competitive city was everyone's business - 'government, business, workers, media and academics', and emphasised that business leaders needed a new sense of responsibility and commitment to the city - and more of a 'the buck stops here' attitude in terms of the state of Medellín. This report explicitly advised forming coalitions with other political actors in the city, in order to improve the economy and open more opportunities for business.

Specific recommendations to improve the global competitiveness of Medellín also aligned with the more socially focused agenda proposed by the reports from the Presidential Programme. The priorities were to invest in mass education, focus on clusters rather than specific industries – and build up Medellín's human resources. As the Chamber of Commerce of Medellín highlighted:

'develop advanced human resources, overcome the deficiencies in infrastructure, better the internal conditions for the attraction of foreign direct investment. But, perhaps the most important, will be the development of a more assertive attitude towards learning and institutional modernisation' (Camara de Comercio, n.d.: 10).

We can see here that the need to adapt to a new global economy aligned social and economic agendas in terms of what to do about Medellín's crisis. A central part of these agendas was the importance of coalitions across the city from various actors. These coalitions are what enabled the – often radical and innovative – policies that created Medellín's miracle. We will also see that the coalitions formed were not always harmonious, and that although the agendas coincided, very different visions, ideas and interests underpinned them. Nevertheless, the fact that these spaces opened at all shows the progressive political work that can be done in the face of a crisis.

In what follows we take a closer look at who these new political actors were, how the coalitions formed gained formal power and, crucially how the coalitions worked together, with a particular focus on how business leaders and radical social organisations negotiated their role in these coalitions from very different standpoints.

## 2.1.4 The new actors, coalitions and forms of leadership and power that emerged

In this section so far, we have detailed the specific interventions, and the way that anti-violence and economic agendas coincided, and produced the formulation of various innovative policy proposals that went on to form the policies associated with the Medellín Miracle. We have seen that, following from the recognition of the crises of violence and economy, spaces opened up in which political actors could define an agenda and gain a seat at the table with presidential backing. In what follows, we take a closer look at the political actors and coalitions that emerged during this process, which made the policies associated with the miracle politically feasible. Reports and policy innovations get generated all the time, but it is the political coalitions that shape the structures necessary to put these policies into practice. The political actors that managed to use the spaces that opened up in the crisis, change the political landscape in Medellín, and implement policies that are associated with the miracle can be categorised as:

- external actors;
- a 'Reflexive Middle Class'(Compromiso Ciudadano – Citizens' Commitment);
- radical actors (social movements and NGOs);
- a new economic elite (corporate social responsibility and global branding).

As we will see in the following section, the coalitions that were brought together had very different starting points and visions of what change in the city should imply – but the crisis enabled them to work together. This is a classic case of the role of critical junctures that are constituted by escalating threats that precipitate people to work together so that they all benefit from a reduction in the threat. These groups had very different starting points and aims, and while differences of opinion were suspended to some extent in order to deal with the crisis, the underlying distinctions remained. Nevertheless, the coalitions formed at this time represent new political powers coming to the fore, including radical autonomous actors that had previously been excluded from the formal political arena. In these processes new political actors had the power to define the agenda, take part in formal political fora and ultimately implement the agenda that they had defined.

### External actors

The externality of the actors was vital in terms of them being able to break with the structure-agency processes that had created the violence. But, at the same time, they needed to have purchase within the city itself, both in terms of their respect, power and legitimacy, and in terms of them being able to get stuff done. The key reaction to the crisis – the Presidential Programme - enabled actors that were external to Medellín's crisis to come become involved. The Presidential Programme empowered specific politicians from the national government to become involved in the politics of Medellín, and in turn, one of the remits of the Presidential Programme was to get international support for these processes.

This dynamic is most clearly illustrated in the person of Maria Emma Mejía Vélez, who was nominated as the Special Counsel to Medellín after being President Gaviria's chief of campaigns during the election. It was generally considered as a surprise that she was given this post, firstly because she could have expected higher office given her prominence during the campaign and, secondly, because 'it looked like he'd left a society girl in the middle of a breeding ground for hired guns' (*Semana*, 1993). Nevertheless, Vélez was born in Medellín and was the granddaughter of one of the region's 'patriarchs', Gonzalo Mejía Vélez hence had the external view point to be able to engage with multiple actors in Medellín without being directly implicated in the city's complex politics, but also was enough of an insider – coming herself from an elite Antioqueñan family – for her work to be held in high regard.

A major role of the Presidential Programme was to attract international attention and funding to the situation in Medellín. The Presidential Programme and national government secured funding from the European Economic Community (as it was then known) and the support of various intelligence services – including those of the US and France, to aid in the campaign against Escobar. There were also various international development agencies who were involved in the seminars and coalitions that came out of them, including The KfW Development Bank and the UNDP (Dapena Rivera, 2006). This was, in part, due to the scale of the crisis which drew international attention, and also the international nature of narco-traffic. International influence provided not only funding, but the scrutiny that allowed the political landscape to change. We will see in subsequent sections that there were broader structural patterns and shifts at play here, as the global economy opened up and 'NGO-isation' allowed for a greater role for international agendas. This is an important example of how external/internal pressure can shift the structure power by creating space for other agents to use and strategise to further shift power, policies and/or institutional arrangements.

## A 'reflexive middle class'

A crucial difference in Medellín since the crisis year of 1991 is an emergence of a reflexive middle class who were able to form coalitions and, crucially, gain political power. In the words of one NGO activist who was involved in these processes: 'In the process, a kind of reflexive middle class developed that was made up of universities, academic actors, NGOs and some of the social organisations'<sup>11</sup>. These organisations had been active in Medellín before – but the critical juncture opened up a space in which they could come together and have power. The 'Reflexive Middle Class', in the 1990s in Medellín, first gained the power to define an agenda, then to form coalitions, and ultimately to gain formal power, a process which is the subject of this section.

## Compromiso Ciudadano

*Compromiso Ciudadano* was a coalition formed of this 'reflexive middle class' that came from the seminar discussions and went on to become a political party that was the first to break with the Liberal Conservative hegemony in Colombia's history. This coalition was crucial in the political changes in Medellín. This movement developed in the fora and discussions that took place in the city since the establishment of the Presidential Programme. It brought together various academics, civil society and community leaders with the aim to find and implement alternatives for Medellín and to lead the transformation of the city. *Compromiso Ciudadano* is the fruit of various processes, and was crucial to the implementation of policies that were to become 'social urbanism'.

*Compromiso Ciudadano* developed in the 1990s as a civic movement, but what enabled it to have such an influence in the city was that it took a deliberate – and not uncontroversial – decision to become a political party. This is a clear example of how the critical juncture of the city's crisis opened up spaces for agents to take the initiative to change the political exclusion underpinning the violence. As we have seen, a key aspect in how violence entered Medellín's political landscape was the political culture of the city: the exclusive formation of formal political leaders and the populist approach to garnering votes. As a 'reflexive middle class' the members of *Compromiso Ciudadano* did not represent the city's elite and in themselves represented a challenge to Medellín's political landscape. By being made up of representatives of social movements, civil society, businesses and universities, but backed by the national and international power that had been invested in the Presidential Programme and the Seminars for Future Alternatives for Medellín, they were very well placed to challenge the city's power structures.

Francis Fukuyama describes *Compromiso Ciudadano's* success succinctly: 'The *Compromiso Ciudadano* was able to forge a partnership that defied the traditional political cleavages of the left and right' (Fukuyama and Colby, 2011: 6). The movement went far further than this in developing a coalition that was eventually to overthrow the Liberal/Conservative duopoly in Medellín and change the political elite.

'It included prominent NGOs (*Corporación Región, Instituto Popular de Capacitación*), trade union forces (*Escuela Nacional Sindical*), neighborhood associations (*Convivamos, CEDESI*), and expressions of the political left (some members of the *Polo Democrático*, the indigenous electoral force ASI). All these coexisted with centre and right wing leaders (members of the coalition of the president, *el Partido de la U*, and *el Nuevo Partido*)'. (Gutiérrez Sanin et al., 2009: 5)

As we will see, business leaders and coalitions, including Pro-Antioquia, were also involved. This was a remarkable coalition of groups of actors from a variety of perspectives, and an analysis of how they worked together sheds light on the political processes of change.

One activist who had been involved in *Compromiso Ciudadano* emphasised the importance of the crisis in enabling these coalitions.

'All of these years of forums and things, and the Strategic Plan brought together a very diverse group of people into civil society: academics, business people, NGOs, universities. This was a very important process that very few cities have had, but we had it because of the crisis, it was the crisis that brought us to this, to getting together.'<sup>12</sup>

The crisis allowed people to work together in *Compromiso Ciudadano* in several ways. Most of all, there was the recognition that something had to change in the city and the city was everyone's responsibility. This meant that political ideas, actors and agendas that had previously been excluded from debate came onto the political agenda. The Presidential Programme and subsequent reports had lifted the veil of automatic suspicion from community organisations with progressive, critical, or 'radical' agendas. Due to the strength of the FARC and the urban militia in the *comunas*, many community organisations had been excluded from public debate on suspicion that they associated with violent Marxist actors.

<sup>11</sup> NGO activist, interview, 7 August 2012.

<sup>12</sup> NGO activist, interview 7 August 2012.



Secondly, there was a recognition among many main political actors that they had a common enemy in corruption and narco-traffic. At national level a 'New Liberalism' (not to be confused with 'neoliberalism') had emerged within the Liberal Party. It was a group that wanted to focus on transparency and the fight against narco-traffic and, as such, felt it could collaborate with community organisations and more radical actors. As one sociologist and NGO worker who had been active in *Compromiso Ciudadano* said:

'In *Compromiso Ciudadano* you're going to meet these two groups: the people who come from the New Liberalism and the people who come from the left. The New Liberalism was about transparency and anti narco-traffic, and that's what enabled a coalition with more radical actors, but the new liberals were not anti-market or pro-democracy in the same way'.<sup>13</sup>

There were, of course, people who remained outside of the fora and coalitions that developed in the wake of the crisis. Conservatives and politicians who associated with the 'old school' elites in the city were not involved in these processes. They did not participate in the seminars nor did they sign up to the Strategic Plan produced in 1995 as a result of these discussions. Given the history of elite control of the city, this was seen as a serious attenuation of the potential to implement any of the policy ideas that had been developed. As a result, the *Compromiso Ciudadano* movement took the decision to enter formal politics and directly challenge the ruling political elites.

## Formal political power: *Compromiso Ciudadano*

*Compromiso Ciudadano's* move towards formal power came when the compromises between their agenda and that of the political elite, and their existence as a civil rather than a political entity, became crucial. In order to be able to implement the agenda, coalitions were not enough – they had to be able to harness the formal institutions of political power. This process is instructive in terms of how formal and informal 'rules of the game' that frame elite power continued in the city, despite the changes of the 1990s. The fact that these institutions were mutable, indicates that power was being reframed, and that actors were taking advantage of these spaces.

A key moment in *Compromiso Ciudadano's* development was when it decided to put forward a leader for political office. Until 1999, *Compromiso Ciudadano* was a horizontally structured organisation that identified as a civil society rather than political movement. There was however a realisation that to take real power and make real change they would have to take a more active role in politics. This decision – which was not without controversy and resistance, as many members preferred to stay outside formal politics and be active within civil society – enabled this movement to become a political party.

The mechanism for entering formal politics was the mayoral elections – and as we shall see in Section 2 there had been crucial changes in the formal electoral process to allow for the popular election of mayors that allowed this. To enter these elections, *Compromiso Ciudadano* had to adopt a formal party status and decide on a leader. The process of choosing a leader was complex, and the movement explicitly looked for someone outside its membership and outside traditional politics, but with the political clout within the city and the connections to be politically effective. This criteria itself demonstrates the balancing act that is often implicit in political change and characterises the tensions in bringing change out from a crisis. Although the crisis generated more room for radical political voices to come through, the 'powers that be' and the structures and institutions that uphold that power were still in existence. Influencing formal politics was a balancing act between the generation of new powers and respecting the continued importance of former power structures.

## The criteria for leadership

Several political leaders that could achieve this balance were considered by the members of *Compromiso Ciudadano* before they selected Sergio Fajardo, a mathematician from Medellín who was living in Bogotá. The criteria for choosing him as a candidate for Mayor of Medellín demonstrated the importance of a political understanding of Medellín in the movement's success. As one member of *Compromiso Ciudadano* said: 'He's a man who can move among the elites and is also capable of connecting with people in the communities'.<sup>14</sup> He was sufficiently an 'insider' to appeal to the powers that be. He had worked with the city's leaders, including the then governor of Antioquia, Alvaro Uribe, a central figure in Medellín's political elite, who was also a former mayor, a director of the Public Companies of Medellín (EPM) and future Colombian President. Fajardo had the appropriate background, coming from an upper class family and having been educated in the USA. However, he was also sufficiently an outsider to bring a new element to formal politics, as an academic and a resident of Bogotá.

The steps that Fajardo took in order to become a viable candidate illustrate the power structures in the city. After being identified by *Compromiso Ciudadano* as a possible candidate, he worked for a year as a journalist at the influential Medellín-based paper *El Colombiano*. The people he chose to work with him were 'trusted people' those whom, for example, he had

<sup>13</sup> NGO activist, interview 7 August 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Member of Fajardo administration, interview, 8 August 2012.

known at university, and who had elite careers but were outside the realm of politics. They included Frederico Restrepo who went on to run EPM, and the architect Carlos H. Jaramillo. As Frederico Restrepo says, they campaigned by putting on their sandals and going out into the barrios, and appealing to the more democratic potential of popular mayoral elections. But at the same time, it was seen by many that the elites had simply 'put in one of their own',<sup>15</sup> and that he had marshalled 'a group of 12 shining knights from the elite'<sup>16</sup> to work with him – indicating the power balance between the continuity of power structures and more progressive politics.

The criteria for leadership was based on a recognition of the need for change in the power dynamics of the city, but also an informed understanding of what those power dynamics were and how to work within them. This was due to, and enabled by, the kinds of actors that came together to form this coalition, and the way they were able to synthesise their various perspectives. *Compromiso Ciudadano* was remarkable in bringing together radical NGOs with business leaders and academics and, in the following subsections, we look more closely at how these movements were formed and their different perspectives, with a mind to understanding how this movement changed the rules of the game in Medellín politics. The focus on Medellín's Miracle is often Sergio Fajardo's mayoralship, but the build-up, formation and formalisation of *Compromiso Ciudadano* demonstrates the deep-rooted political causes that allowed these changes to happen. In the words of one *Compromiso* insider: 'He arrived to the mayoralship, in my opinion, as a result of the processes of the last 10 or 12 years'.<sup>17</sup>

We have seen in this section how the formation of *Compromiso Ciudadano* was able to gain power and change the political landscape of Medellín. The clearest symbol of this is the election of Sergio Fajardo - the mayor who was able to implement the policies associated with social urbanism. However, as is frequently stated by activists in the city, the real changes came with the formation of the coalition itself. In the following section, we unpick some of the politics of these actors, who they were and how they worked together.

## 2.1.5 The politics of coalitions: Who were they and how did they work together?

As we have seen, one of the most remarkable aspects of the political period after the 1991 crisis in Medellín was the ability of political actors from very different perspectives to work together. All of them had to compromise in some way and came together to face the threat of violence and an ailing economy. The crisis provided the political room to do this, and the reaction to that critical juncture allowed non-traditional political actors to acquire power. NGOs, particularly ones that were locally based but had international sources of funding, were able to gain power via the post-crisis political processes. They did, however, have to compromise some of their autonomy and work with the state, which for some was a sacrifice. Of the more radical actors, feminist movements were able to gain power, not only in being able to define the agenda, but also in formal political bodies, and in the City Hall itself. Business leaders were motivated by several factors. There was a clear need to see the threat of violence dealt with, but also the need to open up to the forces of globalisation and attract foreign direct investment. There was also the sense among many business leaders of responsibility towards their city and their region, a sense that was expressed in terms of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Broader lessons about the different kinds of power that different actors have and the need to find resonance, but retain dissonance, in forming coalitions can be drawn from these experiences in Medellín. The political processes as actors – organisations and people – make the transition from having the power to influence the agenda, to forming coalitions and leaders that are in a position to influence and even implement policy, necessarily involve compromise. In the Medellín example we see the particular importance of ideas, and finding a confluence of aims despite coming from very different perspectives.

### NGOs and social movements

Some of the NGOs and social movements that were involved in the seminars for alternative futures and *Compromiso Ciudadano* were long established, and committed to involvement in civil society. This underscores the idea that from the early 1990s these movements were able to acquire power in Medellín. The NGOs and social movements involved varied along the spectrum of political NGOs which had always tried to engage with formal politics, and radical, autonomous NGOs, which aimed to change society by creating new political spaces with radically different values. These radical NGOs aligned themselves with autonomous Marxist and feminist perspectives, and are often associated with the development of Liberation Theology. The fact that these organisations were able to come together, be heard and gain power in the political spaces that were opened up by the Presidential Programme, changed the political landscape of the city in a progressive way, and modified the rules of the political game.

<sup>15</sup> Medellín councillor; interview, 16 July 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Cultural worker; interview, 30 July 2012.

<sup>17</sup> NGO activist, 7 August 2012.

## Political NGOs

*Corporación Región*, which was to become one of the most powerful NGOs in Medellín, was one of the first to engage explicitly and directly with Medellín's formal political powers and enter into the formal political scene. *Región* was formed in 1989 by Alonso Salazar (who would later become mayor) and 18 other professionals with experience in the city's communities. Its aim is to 'contribute to building and strengthening a broad social and cultural critical consciousness, and creating transformation by achieving higher levels of social equity in the long term, as well as the radical democratization of society' (*Corporación Región*, n.d.). The emphasis is on education, which again draws on the Latin American tradition of participatory education and liberation theology.

In the early 90s, when many NGOs were reluctant to work with the state, *Corporación Región* was the first to start negotiating with formal politicians. As one member of the Fajardo administration commented:

'Back then, NGOs took the stance that they would absolutely not engage with the state – the state's over there and we're over here. Region on the other hand started the idea that it wasn't like that, that you had to work with the state to be able to get anything done'.<sup>18</sup>

This approach shaped and was shaped by the possibilities opened up by the Presidential Programme, but also by *Región's* polymath leader Alonso Salazar, who became mayor of Medellín after Fajardo, from 2007-2011. He is a sociologist who has written extensively about the situation in Medellín, as an academic, journalist and novelist. His novels *No Nacimos pa Semilla* and *La Parábola de Pablo* have come to exemplify the troubles in Medellín. As well as influencing the political agenda, the novels have also been turned into popular television miniseries.

### Box 10: Alonso Salazar and the mayorship of Medellín

Although the election to mayor of both *Compromiso Ciudadano* candidates – two 'illustrious outsiders' was seen as 'a slap in the face for the political parties that had historically wielded power' (Sanchez 2010). Salazar's mayorship can be usefully contrasted with Fajardo's in terms of the balance between change and continuity involved in the political processes behind the Medellín miracle. Whereas Fajardo was from an elite background, Salazar was from a more middle class family. The focus of Fajardo's administration was on infrastructure projects and education, as we have seen. By contrast Salazar prioritised the issue of justice and corruption and his success was much more limited. In one tale told about Salazar as mayor, he had become so frustrated at the imperviousness of authorities to patent corruption and abuses of power, and especially at the refusal to arrest one particular repeat offender, that he went round with his driver and arrested the man himself. As well as demonstrating Salazar's commitment to this issue, this also demonstrates the continuation of political structures that underpinned the violence, despite the processes of change in Medellín.

The evolution of 'political' NGOs who were willing to work with the State demonstrates various structural changes, as well as the changing vision of the NGOs involved. State institutions were changing to permit more 'bottom up', participatory democracy, most notably, as will be discussed below, with provisions made in the Colombian Constitution in 1991. International funding enabled NGOs to scale up, and justify their participation on a level with the state, indicating the importance of global forces in the Medellín story and changes of political balances in general. Nevertheless, many people involved in such NGOs emphasised the importance of the political moment when it was recognised that the city was in crisis in enabling the political elites to be challenged to form coalitions with NGOs.

## Radical/critical organisations

Although many organisations were 'political' in their relationships with the powers that be, and were willing to compromise their discourses and agendas to form the coalitions necessary to influence formal power, social movements that had been active in Medellín since before the violence also gained power, in some cases within the state legislature. Community organisations that were once dismissed as Marxist and seen as a threat, and feminist organisations who had campaigned for peace throughout the 1980s, have power; and in some cases ministerial power, that could not have been imagined before the ascendancy of *Compromiso Ciudadano*. Whilst this is in part due to the charisma and vision of the leaders of these organisations, it is also testament to the radical political changes that have taken place in Medellín.

<sup>18</sup> Member of Fajardo administration, interview, 8 August 2012.

## The left and political power in the 1990s

There were many reasons that, worldwide, the left did not have political voice in the early 1990s but, in Colombia, progressive political agendas had been silenced for a lot longer. Many of the people killed in the political conflicts throughout the country and particularly in Medellín were trade unionists, and Colombia remains the most dangerous country on earth to be engaged in unionism. As one activist from an International NGO explained: 'if you say anything that even remotely hints at redistribution in the States, you're a socialist; if you say it here you're a terrorist'.<sup>19</sup> The explanation for this is generally held to be the presence of the Marxist guerrillas. As a senior councillor (and former Maoist activist) from the current administration in Medellín made clear: 'As long as the FARC exist, the organised left do not have a political future in this country'.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, in the political spaces that opened up during, and after, the crisis we do see radical leftist political actors sitting down to talk with some of the city's conservative economic elites. The mechanism for achieving this was, in part, the formation of community organisations, which, as opposed to arguably the trade unions or the co-operative movement, have continued to gain power throughout the processes of change in Medellín.

One clear illustration of the way community organisations were able to gain traction in the wake of the crisis is the community organisation '*Corporación Convivamos*'<sup>21</sup> which was formed in 1990 in the North-East zone of the city. Its aims are to promote local development via education, community support and participatory action research. The organisation has its roots in Liberation Theology and the Cuban Revolution. The group of people who formed this organisation had been previously active in the community: 'We played football together' remembered one of the leaders. 'Football was one of the ways that you could group together in public without being suspected of being in the militia, or some gang'.<sup>22</sup> After the world events of 1989, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall and ensuing collapse of the Soviet Union, organisations such as *Convivamos* were well placed to build coalitions with the formal powers in Medellín. As a community organisation, *Convivamos* was not a threat to economic power in the way a trade union could be perceived to be. Liberation Theology is controversial, and often seen to be Marxist in Latin America, but it also has a focus on education, which resonated with the agendas of economic elites after the Monitor Report.

Power was delegated to *Convivamos*, and other similar organisations, giving them a place at Medellín's political table. One of the leaders of *Convivamos*, traces the changing dynamic between this community organisation and the State: 'We used to be a kind of charity case – left to the 'Gray Ladies' [women who volunteered for charity organisations]'. *Convivamos* was able to use the institutional changes of the early 1990s to work with the State but maintain autonomy, a value which remains very strongly in its mission statement.

The continued involvement of *Convivamos* is testament to the breadth of participation in the Strategic Plan for Medellín, and the continued commitment to the projects involved. The principle of participation was established in the processes and reports instigated by the Presidential Programme for Medellín, particularly the Strategic Plan for Medellín which continues to frame the agenda. This principle is also reinforced in the 1991 Constitution, discussed below. The dynamic between state policy makers and community organisations have hence changed – the state now seeks the collaboration of community organisations in its projects.

*Convivamos* and other community organisations have grown along with the participatory approach to development adopted in Medellín. The organisation defines these stages of development as moving from raising awareness of participatory processes in the community in the early 1990s, to training and educating community groups so that they can participate in the Participatory Budget.

The example of *Convivamos* is a testament to the importance of participation in changing power dynamics in Medellín. *Convivamos* gained voice, a 'seat at the table' and direct involvement in implementing projects that were part of the Strategic Plan for Medellín. This example also reminds us of some of the criticisms of participation in development (Dagnino, 2010; Williams, 2004). Participation can be itself 'tyrannical' if it involves the co-option of local groups to, in effect, provide their labour in the name of participation. In the processes that took place in Medellín in the early 1990s, there was a sense that participation brought with it genuine power to shape the agenda. As participation has become a 'buzz word' in development, there is a fear that community organisations such as *Convivamos* have left behind their political commitments and are working within frameworks that no longer provide them with the latitude for participation to be meaningful.

19 Informal communication, March 2012.

20 Councillor; interview, 1 August 2012.

21 The 'Let's live together' corporation.

22 NGO activist, interview 23 July 2012.

## Women's groups and feminist organisations

Whilst there are women's social movements worldwide, it remains relatively unusual that explicitly feminist political actors gain space in formal politics. Exceptions to this rule are often (although by no means exclusively) related to post-conflict situations: the country with the highest proportion of women in parliament is Rwanda, for example. The City Hall in Medellín has, since 2002, housed one of Colombia's six Sub-Secretariats for women. The process via which this sub-secretariat was developed, and how it has come to influence mainstream as well as 'women-targeted' policy, sheds light on the politics of women's participation in post-conflict situations and how this space has been used, not infrequently, for women to gain power in formal political spaces.

Many women's organisations in Medellín, and nationally, had formed to protest against the violence and campaign for peace (Murdock, 2008). There are also organisations that campaign for the rights of women specifically, for a recognition of violence within the home as part of the broader spectrum of conflict in Colombia and Medellín, and for women's economic rights and education. These organisations are inherently critical of the status quo in Medellín and the elite structures that have dominated society. Unlike leftist organisations, they are not associated with the Marxist discourses of the FARC. Women's organisations and organisations adopting an explicitly critical, feminist agenda also found space within the formal politics in the 1990s and 2000s in Medellín. That such radical agendas found a political voice within formal political settings is testament to the depth of the political changes that emerged after the crisis.

A number of women's organisations formed to campaign for peace, both nationally and in Medellín. These include *Ruta Pacífica de la Mujer*<sup>23</sup> whose mission is to bring awareness to the gender-based violence that is a systemic, and systematically overlooked, element of conflict. The organisations *Mujeres que Crean*<sup>24</sup> and *Vamos Mujer*<sup>25</sup> seek to support women who have been affected by the conflict. *Vamos Mujer* focuses on 'the overall development of women, looking for processes that encourage [their] assertiveness, self-awareness and self-management, to recognise their identity, all with the aim of contributing to their social positioning' (*Vamos Mujer*, n.d.). *Mujeres que Crean* works with women to 'develop proposals for life from, with, and for women in the context of death.' Dealing with violence directly and, from that perspective, looking for solutions to the violence perpetuated in the city is the starting point for many women's organisations. Focusing on the political, social and economic empowerment of women has yielded alternative approaches to development in the city that have strongly influenced the post-crisis policy agenda.

As well as participation in the political spaces associated with the Presidential Council for Medellín, national and international factors gave women's movements in Medellín the opportunity to secure a place in formal political spheres. Two crucial conferences in the mid-1990s, The International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo 1994, and the International Conference on Women in Beijing 1995, propelled the issue of women's equality to the forefront of the development agenda. At national level, during the early 1990s, the national government inaugurated a Presidential Programme for Women which, among other programmes, focused on social development. This increased the amount of funding available to women's movements, but at the same time arguably depoliticised the agenda of NGOs that sought to challenge the conservative agenda of the international development community (Londoño, n.d.).

There are several ways in which women's organisations were able to establish power in the 1990s. Principal among these was the development of the Working Group for Women. This was established, among working groups on other themes related to socio-economic development in the city, as a consequence of the Seminars for Future Alternatives in Medellín. The Working Group for Women was the mechanism via which local government could consult with women's community organisations. Many, particularly those concerned with livelihoods, sustainability and family well being – were able to use this space to establish lasting relations with local administrations (Gobernación de Antioquia, 2003). This group is consulted on issues of economic development as well as more narrowly defined issues of gender equality. Established women's organisations, as well as participating directly, provided training to community women's groups on how to participate in the working group, present their agenda and, crucially, how to monitor and follow up on agreements (Correa, 2013).

The most remarkable achievement of the women's movement was the establishment of the Sub-Secretariat for Women in the Municipal Government, in 2002. Sergio Fajardo's wife, an active feminist, was instrumental in promoting and lobbying for a women's secretary – an issue which has been referred to as 'her theme' – spearheading this with a campaign against City Hall-sponsored beauty contests (*Concejo de Medellín*, 2007). These have been replaced with 'Young women with talent' contests that are held annually. International, national and departmental backing also supported this process, and international documents citing the importance of equitable social development, rather than economic growth, were cited in support of an inclusive strategy in the City Hall.

23 Women's peaceful way.

24 Women who create.

25 Let's go women.

The advances that the women's movement was able to make after the crisis, including the way that established political actors were able to gain power and that new organisations such as the Sub-Secretariat were able to form, demonstrate the drastic political changes that have taken place. While the key themes of education and economic empowerment are central to the city's approach in general, the people involved have also been active in reproductive rights and, most controversially, abortion. Several women now working in the sub-secretariat had been forced to leave the city or, in some cases, Colombia, because of threats from armed groups from all sides of the political spectrum.

Furthermore, the gendered nature of politics itself has proved problematic. A number of women emphasised that men in Medellín 'hated women with power', and that they had been judged harshly as women who worked rather than dedicating themselves to children – either by not having any or by leaving them at home with childcare while they worked. As we will see in the following section, that women have managed to be so influential in mainstream Medellín politics despite these barriers demonstrate very real changes in the gendered 'rules of the game'. The individualistic, brutal style of leadership that was characteristic of and, arguably, a causal factor in the violence, was challenged by an expanded role for the women's movement in formal politics. As one activist put it 'if it wasn't for the women's movement, we'd have ended up with the same machos as before'.<sup>26</sup>

## Radical education organisations

One of the main themes that brought together economic and progressive political agendas in Medellín in the 1990s was education. As we have seen, the Monitor Report referred explicitly to the importance of mass education in order to develop a service economy. Many of the NGOs involved in the discussions after the crisis and in the *Compromiso Ciudadano* also prioritised education and had this as an explicit part of their respective missions. There can be very different perspectives on education, but they became aligned in the discussions following the reports that defined the crises: The Future Alternatives for Medellín and the Monitor Report. Whilst economists tend to see education as human capital that can improve economic performance, there is a tradition of critical education that is particularly strong in Latin America, strongly influenced by Liberation Theology and the work of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire.

Examples of organisations that adopt such an approach include The *Instituto Popular de Capacitación*,<sup>27</sup> which 'is part of the currents of critical thinking in Latin America that emphasise the importance of inclusion, and aims to develop education and research programmes that create social transformation' (*Instituto Popular de Capacitación*, n.d.). The IPC, along with *Región*, was a central actor in the development of the Seminars for Future Alternatives and *Compromiso Ciudadano*. A further example is the work that has been enabled via the Sub-Secretariat of Women, including adult education programmes for mothers that would perhaps be overlooked in an approach to education focused on human capital.

### Box 11: Radical education programmes

One pioneering and unique education programme is at the National School, run by the women's ministry and Marta Celia Hoyos – a career teacher who developed this feminist approach to education herself. The programme is for women who take turns running crèches in the community and the teaching alternates between theory and practice; work in the classroom and work in the crèche. The students talk about the difficulties they have had to overcome to attend the class, including threats from family members who think that a woman should be in the home, as well extortion, intra-urban displacement and even kidnappings. According to the school, the vast majority of students have lost an immediate family member to the violence.

This style of education can be contrasted with forms of education narrowly focused on skills needed for the labour market – although this programme also addresses work needs.

The agendas of these organisations coincided with the focus on education for the sake of the economy to make radical programmes in Medellín politically possible. As well as large-scale sponsorship of mainstream education by business, this has led to the creation of numerous projects of radical education throughout the city. In turn, the focus on education was also key to developing the power base of radical – leftist and feminist – organisations that had previously been banished from the political agenda in the city.

<sup>26</sup> NGO Activist, Interview, 15th December 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Popular Training Institute.

## Universities and the academy

Universities have a curious position in terms of both the establishment of, and resistance to, elite power. They are at once home to the reproduction of elite values and expertise, and to radical discussion, rebellion. They also provide a way to gain the technical know-how and the kudos needed for upward mobility. In the mafia epoch, and the time of the violence, universities in Medellín and Colombia more broadly were sites of resistance to state intervention, corruption and threats. University professors and students have been murdered on university campuses in Medellín for their commitment to challenging power in the city, most notoriously Hernan Hanao, a professor of anthropology at the University of Antioquia, who was killed during a faculty meeting, allegedly at the behest of paramilitary leader Carlos Castaño. He had written about human rights and the displaced in Colombia and, at the time of his murder, was working on the environmental impacts of development in the city (Rohter, 1999).

Universities in Medellín have never been ivory towers. There is a deep history of commitment of academics to the city's development and politics. Individual academics were involved in *Compromiso Ciudadano* and some, particularly architects, went on to have a role in the Fajardo administration. The role of universities has also changed to include an explicit commitment in their constitution to development in the city according to the national reforms of 1992 – specifically Law 30 (OECD, 2012).

Individual academics who have been prominent in *Compromiso Ciudadano* and policy since Fajardo's election include anthropologists, sociologists and, most notably, architects. The Universidad Nacional's habitat department was involved in *Compromiso Ciudadano* from the beginning and has developed a particular participatory approach to urban development in the city. Many civil society organisations have overlapping links with universities, and prominent actors in community organisations and NGOs also work as academics in universities. During the 1990s, academic fora were central to the Presidential Programme, Seminars and *Compromiso Ciudadano* in developing progressive civil society.

Several members of Sergio Fajardo's administration were also from the academy. Fajardo himself has a PhD in maths, Alfonso Salazar is a sociologist and there are numerous architects in the administration who also have a role in the universities. As well as the technical expertise that enabled the architecturally driven attempts to change the skin of the city and the way that public space was conceived, universities and academics brought with them international networks, particularly in Spain, Italy and the UK.

Private universities have a distinctive role within the city. The university of EAFIT<sup>28</sup> was established in 1960 and its constitution contains an explicit commitment to development in the city. Its programme, EAFIT Social, works with governmental and non-governmental bodies to deliver training programmes and events to promote inclusive development, and one of the architects of social urbanism, Alejandro Echeverri, runs EAFIT's Centre for Urban and Environmental Studies (URBAM).

## Economic actors

We have seen in the previous section that Medellín's business elites and entrepreneurial culture were part of the structural underpinnings of the exclusion, inequality and violence in Medellín, although it is strongly argued by many that businesses in Medellín were not infiltrated by narco-traffic and corruption to the same extent as business in other cities. At the same time, we have seen that there is a strong regional commitment from business leaders in Medellín, and a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards Antioquia. Crucially, business leaders were being made aware of the need for Medellín's economy to change structurally in the face of globalisation. These factors came together to enable business leaders to participate in the fora that opened up after the crisis, and contribute to the policies that made the miracle. However, the extent to which there has been a genuine change in the agenda of elite actors has led some to question whether the economic structures of the city really have opened up. This process has demonstrated that business interests are multiple, and encompass social as well as economic concerns. That political actors could find resonance with this agenda is central to the processes of change in Medellín.

The motives for businesses to be involved in solving the crisis in Medellín are multiple. Business owners, whether of big industrial companies or the local shop, are vulnerable to infiltration and exploitation by, as well as threats from, mafia, guerrilla and paramilitary violence. A more pacific environment is clearly of benefit, and, although it is perhaps initially surprising to find that the most powerful business leaders in Colombia took their place at the table with community organisations with very distinct views, it clearly came to be in their interests to do so.

28 Escuela de Administración y Finanzas e Instituto Tecnológico School of Administration and Finances and Institute of Technology.

## Philanthropy and regional stewardship

As we have seen, there has been a history in Antioquia of businesses forming regionally defined associations to protect themselves from external threats and to demonstrate their commitment to their region. Two of these are the *Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño* (also known as the Antioqueñan Syndicate) and its philanthropic wing Pro-Antioquia. As has already been mentioned, both of these organisations formed in the 1970s, in part as a result of the threat of external take over from businesses from Bogota. Both organisations were involved in *Compromiso Ciudadano* and have financed education programmes, business incubators and other interventions associated with the Medellín Miracle. According to Carlos Enrique Piedrahita, head of the Nutresa Group, formerly Nacional de Chocolates, the Sindicato Antioqueño does not exist as a structured organisation. He has been quoted as saying:

'It is more of a philosophical construction; when we meet, we meet for coffee as friends and share ideas on how the business should be run. [...] What we have in common is a philosophy of austere business ethics. [...] It is absolutely not a lobbying organisation – which changes it politically' (The Financial Times, 2010).

The political change that was crucial to the Medellín Miracle was that these organisations were interested in the development of their region rather than just their narrowly defined business interests. This meant that, although from very different perspectives, resonance could be found between various agendas.

Part of the involvement of the GEA and Pro-Antioquia in these processes stems from a commitment to the development of Antioqueña as a region, and a sense of stewardship that the elites there have. In the 1990s, this sense resonated with the growing global concern that corporations should demonstrate social responsibility. This resonance between business and social agendas is exemplified in Pro-Antioquia's mission statement: 'to help in the construction of a more economically competitive and socially equitable region, in order to have an integrated and peaceful society with opportunities for everyone' (Pro-Antioquia, 2011).

There was also a sense among business leaders involved in the changing processes in Medellín that this was an opportunity to return to old values. Another prominent business association is the *Comité Intergremial de Antioquia*,<sup>29</sup> which primarily lobbies on behalf of its members, but is also involved in philanthropic activity. Its mission statement highlights that it is 'committed to the integral development of Antioquia' and, much like Pro-Antioquia and the GEA, it is founded on traditional Antioqueñan values. In discussion with members of its executive committee, there was an insistence that the popular representation of business in Medellín as being associated with the mafia was not appropriate and that, in fact, the commitment shown to the city by businesses during the 'miracle' was 'who we are.... this is a place where your word counted, and there has always been a pride in investing in Antioquia and your workers.'<sup>30</sup>

We can see in the involvement of business organisations here that there were various over-lapping motives: there was a commitment to the region's development that could be understood as stemming from a reaction to the crisis; a recognition that the economic structures of the city needed to change; and a re-assertion of elite and, it is often argued, paternalist values. In response to the economic developments however, a divide emerged in the city's economic elites. We have seen how the influential Monitor Report specified that business leaders would have to open up to global forces, and that subsequent developments, including the Economic Council for Medellín in 1995, in response to this report, supported its conclusions that the economy had to change fundamentally. In 1997 there was a rupture within the Economic Council between the traditional elite which wanted to remain in Antioquia and keep power, and a newer type of entrepreneur who wanted to open up to globalisation. Despite this split, there was enough resonance between the agenda set out in the Monitor Report about the need to open up and structurally change the economy and, crucially, invest in education, to enable political actors from different perspectives to work together and find common aims.

## Shoring up economic power and different perspectives

The presence of strong business associations that are dedicated to the region has been one of the necessary conditions of the Medellín miracle. The investment in terms of money, time and expertise from the business sector is a key characteristic of the city's 'solidarity economy'. But in the foundation of these organisations we can also see that the business interests – that have always aimed to protect elite control over assets as well as invest in the region – are being shored up. For example, although Pro-Antioquia was involved in the *Compromiso Ciudadano*, the *Instituto Popular de Capacitación* did a study of the business incubators that they sponsored and argued that they were primarily using them to continue capturing private enterprise in the region. As the report states:

29 Inter-Trades Guilds Committee.

30 Focus group of business leaders, 25 July 2012.



'The increased participation in the social sphere by the business sector is in stark contrast to the central momentum of labour policies which are based on reducing labour costs via flexibility and vertical integration of small and medium-sized production units with very little involvement in defining strategies at the level of their production networks' (*Instituto Popular de Capacitación, 2001*).

It has been concluded by many that, while the interests of business when faced with the threats and opportunities posed by globalisation coincided with the agenda that had been generated by the Presidential Programme, the Seminars for Future Alternatives and *Compromiso Ciudadano*, the consensus generated also allowed the recreation and reinforcing of power structures underpinning economic exclusion.

## Public Companies: EPM

The organisation that was frequently referred to as making the biggest difference in Medellín is *Empresas Públicas de Medellín* (EPM – Public Companies of Medellín). EPM is one of the biggest and most powerful companies in Latin America. EPM gives far more than its 30% to the city – it is the pride of Antioquia and is hugely politically significant. The resources that were made available to the municipality by EPM allowed the city to make the investments in infrastructure, including the metro, metro cable, libraries and parks, as well as educational investments, that came to define the miracle, and was, according to all of the members of the Fajardo administration interviewed, the 'without which not' of social urbanism.

However, there is also an element of protectionism that shows that investment in Antioquia and inclusive policies are also long-term strategies to reinforce elite control over resources. The vociferous maintenance of EPM as a public company, and the close connection it has with the political class, is an example of this dynamic. The directorship of EPM is part of the portfolio of roles that define elite control of the city. Mayors of Medellín, governors of Antioquia and their colleagues have frequently also been involved in the stewardship of EPM, most notably Alvaro Uribe who has been all three.

### Box 12: Privatising EPM

In 1995, under the mayorship of Sergio Naranjo, the possibility of privatising EPM was raised in a report from the ministry of planning. This was discussed over the following two years, and, as well as resistance from the workers' union, this possibility provoked a massive mobilisation by the political class in Medellín. As one focus group participant commented, 'You should have seen El Poblado swing into action when that happened – they took to the streets!' (Business leader, Focus Group, 25 July 2012).

## Globalisation and foreign direct investment

There are various associations that aim to attract investment to Medellín. The ACI, *Asociación de cooperación e inversión en Medellín y área Metropolitana*<sup>31</sup> was set up in 2002 to attract investment and establish and fortify international networks, with the ultimate aim of improving life in the city. The *Comité Universidad-Empresa-Estado*<sup>32</sup> also started in 2003 with the aim of mending the 'divorce' between business and the academy and attracting industry to the city on the basis of appropriate skills, research and development (*El Colombiano, 2007; OECD, 2012*). Its latest achievement is bringing the pharmaceutical company, Kimberly Clark, to Medellín, among others (Hylton, 2007).

We have seen that globalisation encouraged elites to question the economic structures of the city in a way which allowed opportunities of restructuring and investment in the social sphere. However, it also generated other political agendas for anti-left, paramilitary actors. An Amnesty International report on the decommissioning of paramilitary actors in the mid 1990s indicated that *Bloque Cacique Nutibara*, one of the city's most prominent paramilitary groups, 'stated that they had partly been responsible for a fall in homicides in Medellín' and quoted the group as saying that this ensured 'the necessary climate so that investment, particularly foreign, which is fundamental if we do not want to be left behind by the engine of globalisation, returns, is encouraged, and productive and long-term employment can be generated' (Amnesty International, 2005).

31 Association of cooperation and investment in Medellín and the metropolitan area.

32 University-Firm-State Committee.

## 2.1.6 Conclusion

We can see from this political history behind the miracle that the reaction to the crisis of violence and the economic troubles of the early 1990s opened up the space that led to real changes in the politics of Medellín. The decentralisation of power from the national level was crucial in empowering new actors and introducing external actors – although they still had political clout at city level – to change the power dynamics within the city. The most significant development here was the ‘reflexive middle class’ who were able to form a coalition – to be known as the political party *Compromiso Ciudadano* that was eventually able to directly challenge the political elite of the city, with the support of some of the most powerful business organisations. It is significant that this coalition brought together different perspectives on the crisis, and united actors who were all threatened by the situation, but in different ways and who had different concepts of the problem. This demonstrates how critical junctures work at the level of politics – that a ‘collective action problem’ can be faced by people who all stand to benefit from the threat (Booth, 2012). However, the differences of opinion have remained significant, and questions arise about how much the politics of the city – and crucially the dynamics of exclusion, lack of legitimacy and security – have really changed there.

In order to be politically effective, the ‘reflexive middle class’ of NGOs, civil society activists and academics, had to enter the political arena. Their choice of leader demonstrates that, although the crisis had changed many of the rules of the game, the importance of affiliation in some sense to elite actors was still important. Although economic elites were active participants in the policies that allegedly made the miracle, at the same time their actions coincided with the traditional interests that have come to identify them. Corporate Social Responsibility has developed from the sense of regional stewardship that always defined Antioqueñan elites, and allowed them to protect their power. Although there has been real investment in education and production chains, critical organisations do indicate the continuing levels of inequality and exclusion as a sign that, perhaps, the power structures of the city have not changed so much.

Nevertheless, non-traditional, radical political actors have gained formal power due to the political circumstances around the crisis. This applies to critical NGOs who had a long history on the margins of the city’s power dynamics before the crisis, and radical Marxist and feminist organisations who now have formal power within the administration. This was due, in part, to the delegation of power from national level and the fora that opened up consequently, but it also reflects a pattern of broader political change and modifications of ‘the rules of the game’ in Colombia at the time.

In the next section we will analyse the broader institutional changes that framed the development of Medellín’s miracle – that clearly was anything but overnight. In doing so, it is important not to underestimate the influence of the crisis, whether seen as a catalyst or necessary condition for the changes in Medellín. As one politician of the era commented: ‘I’m quite pessimistic in general terms about the development of humanity, because I see that societies only take significant decisions in moments of crisis.’<sup>33</sup>

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33 Member of the Fajardo administration, interview, 17 July 2012.

## 2.2

### The rules of the game: Formal and informal

#### 2.2.1 Introduction

The changes in Medellín – the coalitions, innovative approaches and policies, and emergence of new political agents and agency – have coincided with, resulted from and in some cases given rise to, institutional processes that have changed the political landscape. These processes have included formal legislative landmarks, for example the new constitution; the popular election of mayors and extradition agreements with the USA. In addition, and crucially, changes in the ‘informal rules of the game’ have also taken place – the social and cultural dynamics and changing politics that often elude analysis, but frame the way that coalitions and leaders are formed.

The crisis of violence in Medellín constituted a rupture in the social fabric of the city and a direct challenge to elite power in the city. However, surrounding this crisis and the reaction to it in Medellín were processes at national level to address the power struggles behind the country’s ongoing violence. There were also global political developments that influenced how power was constructed and used within Colombia. There are three key points here:

The first is **formal institutional changes**, such as:

- the new constitution of 1991;
- electoral reform including the popular election of mayors.

The second is **global forces**, such as:

- globalisation;
- international development;
- extradition treaties;
- the war on terror.

The third is **changes in the informal ‘rules of the game’**, such as:

- violence as part of the ‘common sense’ of politics;
- leadership;
- elite ‘cultural capital’;
- corruption and ‘easy money’.

We will see that these developments in the ‘rules of the game’, be they formal or informal, at national and global level, affected power dynamics in Medellín in such a way that new political actors were empowered and the structures of power changed. These changes opened up spaces that allowed new actors to participate in defining the agenda, as well as formulating and implementing policy. However, we can also see the way that values and politics associated with the status quo are recreated through these processes of change.

The formal institutional changes at national level explicitly aimed to address the democratic deficit left from the period of violence between Liberals and Conservatives and the National Front elite power-sharing pact. As well as ensuring rights of minorities and decentralising power, these changes also promoted reforms that allowed Colombia to react to the growing importance of globalisation. The political spaces that opened up after the constitution are part of the Medellín miracle and the coincidence of agendas that permitted the coalitions there in the 1990s.

International institutions have been vitally important in modifying the power structures underpinning the violence in Medellín. At a global level, the increasing prominence of globalisation, both in terms of capital and the international development agenda, were crucial, as we have seen, in changing the approach of economic elites and empowering social movements. Although there was a coincidence in agendas that enabled and empowered certain coalitions between business and civil society, there were also great tensions, and the extent to which the constitution achieved its aims is questionable.

The 1990s and early 2000s also saw increased political co-operation between the US and Colombia in the 'war on drugs', extradition treaties, and the 'war on terror'. This was most notable during the ascendancy and presidency of Alvaro Uribe, whose famed 'big heart, heavy hand' approach to violence in Colombia has been argued to have quelled the violence, but also recreated the power dynamics that underpin it, hence falling short of a long-term solution. Nevertheless, the way that political process changed with increased participation of the US and, crucially, the related increased funding to the Colombian military, changed the landscape of the conflict.

The informal 'rules of the game' – the ideas of what behaviour is acceptable, what kind of person makes a leader, and who should have power – have been crucial elements in the violence and the miracle in Medellín, and in Colombia more broadly. Although these informal rules have been modified, violence, corruption and 'caudillo' style leadership persists in the sense of how politics is practised. Nevertheless, important changes demonstrate how modifications in these informal institutions are a crucial element of conflict reduction.

## 2.2.2 Formal institutional changes

There were two formal institutional changes that have been identified as crucial in shaping the politics of the Medellín miracle, opening out spaces in which political actors could themselves re-shape the 'rules of the game' and gain power on different terms:

- the 1991 constitution;
- the popular election of mayors, 1988.

Both of these reforms were part of a momentum towards more inclusive democracy, and were themselves the product of actors and coalitions seizing the political possibilities to achieve these changes. They are also the result of political negotiations that demonstrate the continuation of some of the exclusive and unequal political dynamics that, as we have argued here, underpin the violence, as well as progressive, inclusive change.

### The Colombian Constitution of 1991

The new constitution of 1991 was a milestone in terms of democratic development in Colombia. It redistributed power between the executive and the judiciary, guaranteed social rights to minority groups and encouraged participatory democracy and social inclusion (Palacios, 2006). This redistribution of power changed the way politics was constructed, thus giving space for new or different forms of agency to use that new power.

After decades of the *Frente Nacional* that saw power alternate between the Liberal and Conservative party, the constitution of 1991 was designed explicitly to limit elite power and promote participation. Key changes included decentralisation of powers to states within Colombia, the establishment of a Constitutional Court, the popular elections of state governors and the establishment of a protection action through which citizens could make claims based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights. The constitution helped to break down the political monopoly at the top, and strengthened congress and the constitutional court – although the President remains very powerful. Initially, presidential re-election was banned, as was extradition, but these items were later overturned. In the strengthening of the judiciary, changes to elections and increase in citizens' legal recourse to defend their rights, the redistribution of power in the constitution was marked (Bejarano and Pizarro Leongómez, 2002).

That this constitution was possible is, itself, a result of a long-term process of negotiation, coalition, crisis and political agency. Following several demands led by President Barco (1986-1990) for a new constitution in Colombia, which were all blocked by the supreme court, constitutional reform was eventually achieved as a result of citizen mobilisation against the influence of violence on the political processes and widespread political corruption. In 1989 three presidential candidates were assassinated, including the former journalist and liberal politician Luis Carlos Galán. Galán had declared himself an enemy of the cartels, and it is widely alleged that Pablo Escobar ordered his assassination. Among the many citizen mobilisations that followed these deaths was a student movement that lobbied for a vote to be on the ballot paper to provide for the formation of a constitutional assembly to reform Colombian politics for the upcoming legislative elections. This so-called '*Séptima Papel*' (seventh ballot paper) was not officially accepted, but garnered around two million 'unofficial' votes. This informal support led to the formation of a Constitutional Assembly in December 1990 and the formalisation of the new constitution in 1991 (García-Herreros 2012).

The new constitution enshrined progressive, participatory changes – and hence a redistribution in power and power relations – that have framed the political processes in Medellín since 1990. The main change was the unshackling of formal politics from the Liberal/Conservative hegemony. The elected members of the constituent assembly represented a much broader spectrum of political interests, and this can be considered a success, in itself, given the momentum to loosen the two main parties' grip on power since the *Frente Nacional*. While the Liberal Party held 34% of these seats, the Conservative party only polled 7%, and 'new' parties gained ground – notably the left wing M-19 party (27%) and the right wing MSN party (16%). This indicates an opening up of formal political space, bringing into lawful politics forces that had been active in informal politics, although the main parties did regain control in subsequent elections to government and congress (García-Herreros, 2012: 239).

## Rights and the new constitution

The constitution broadened the definition of rights recognised in Colombia to include social, economic rights and community rights. The Colombian constitution also explicitly recognises the role of NGOs and the duty of the state to recognise their political legitimacy (Flórez, 1997). This provides civil society organisations and NGOs with a legal framework in which they can gain support for the inclusion of marginalised groups, in particular Afro Colombians, indigenous people and displaced persons. Along with the political and economic decentralisation represented by the constitution, this has allowed such organisations to flourish and has changed the political landscape of Colombia. It has been argued that the Constitutional Court which was established in 1991, has, unlike its predecessor, taken into account demands for rights and inclusion from marginalised groups. The constitution guarantees human rights, and writs of protection can be ordered if these are being violated (García-Herreros, 2012: 240).

## Continuing power structures

The constitution of 1991 has been described as one of many attempts by the 'oligarchy to forge a stable modern nation-state without undermining their dominant position in the Colombian polity' (Browitt, 2001: 1063). It has also been argued that the multiplication of political representation, whilst breaking the duopoly of power that was a principal cause of the violence, also increased political violence (Bejarano, 2011). These contradictory patterns reflect the situation in Medellín, in which an historically exclusionary elite recognised the need to adopt more inclusive policies to deal with a context of extraordinary levels of violence and civil unrest, which at the same time was directly threatening its elite power and also seemed to justify the use of elite forces to quell the insecurity. Nevertheless, the constitutional changes, crucially in political participation and rights, enabled new agents – individuals, groups, coalitions – to come to the fore and challenge these very dynamics.

## Popular election of mayors

Since the end of the *Frente Nacional* in 1978, Colombia had been on a trajectory towards a more inclusive politics. In 1988, mayors were elected for the first time by popular vote rather than being appointed, as previously, by department governors (Davila, 2009). This, along with the decentralised economic and fiscal responsibilities stemming from the 1991 constitution, meant that mayors had more autonomy and power. They were able to raise taxes and institute institutional and budgetary reforms. It also changed the nature of campaigns and leadership, arguably giving rise to more populist politics that could exacerbate violence in the context of fierce competition between political factions eager to control municipal budgets. Although it is powerfully argued that this was a democratic advance, it is worth noting that in the last municipal elections in Colombia (2011) 41 candidates were killed (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Ortegón Preciado, 2010). This marks a slight increase after a long decreasing trend, but also illustrates the astonishing levels of risk and danger associated with running for political office.

Nevertheless, in the Medellín context the popular election of mayors was a necessary condition for the emergence of social urbanism. Sergio Fajardo ran as an independent candidate, and many of the people who worked with him did not have prior affiliation to either of the two main parties. Fajardo's campaign prioritised communication with communities, an element conspicuous in its absence when mayors were appointed by governors. This imperative to reach out to communities can be seen as part of a trajectory towards democracy which resulted in the Liberal-Conservative duopoly being broken, and to a certain extent, the breach between those in political power and citizens to be crossed. Fajardo's campaigners distinguished themselves from the populism of their predecessors, and it is a leitmotif of his campaign and mayorship that investment decisions were taken on technical rather than clientelistic grounds. However, another motivation for mainstream politicians to 'put on their sandals and go up to the communities'<sup>34</sup> was to counter the populist measures of narco-gangs in the barrios. Although initially popular elections fomented populist and clientelistic politics, other changes in the political landscape tempered this. A number of NGOs working for social inclusion and participatory democracy had, and continue to have, projects to raise awareness of voters and inculcate the responsibilities and duties that come with citizenship rights.

34 Member of Fajardo administration, interview, 24 July 2012

## Global forces

Global forces have played complex and controversial roles in Colombian politics over the last three decades. This is a good example of how external 'structures' of power (international capital) and agents (such as the companies and corporations) also acted to shift the political and economic space, interests and incentives, thereby in turn stimulating local agents to act in ways that they might not have acted otherwise.

The Colombian Constitution of 1991 included provision to facilitate the attraction of foreign direct investment, reducing import tariffs, reducing the public sector, privatising national industries and opening 'free commerce' zones (Browitt, 2001). The effect of these changes on inequality and exclusion in Colombia has been widely documented. In terms of elite actors, in particular economic elites, the rising importance of global capital is at once an opportunity and a threat, which, as we have seen, shaped the way that economic leaders in Medellín reacted to the crisis. The importance of forging alliances with global actors became an important part of economic elite strategies to shore up their power, and at the same time attracting foreign capital became an indispensable factor in development. The rebranding of Colombia, particularly since the turn of the present century has been motivated by the need to attract FDI and tourists, and publicity campaigns captured in the slogan '*Colombia: the risk is you'll want to stay*' have been successful in changing the image of the nation. The need to rebrand is also felt at municipal level, and, as we have seen above, Medellín-based organisations like the ACI and University-Firm-State Committee, are designed to promote the city to foreign investors. It has also been argued that the recent changes in policy direction in Medellín have been primarily motivated by the desire to improve the city's image rather than dealing with the inherent inequalities, many of which are exacerbated by neoliberal reforms (Hylton, 2007).

## Global institutional factors

### The war on drugs and war on terror

The US' wars on drugs and terror both had an impact on Colombian politics. The war on drugs targeted the production of coca and cocaine in Colombia, and diverted military and cash resources to the national government to help deal with the cartels. Similarly, after 9/11 the declaration of the war on terror allowed the Colombian government to gain support in its conflict with the FARC, who were identified as terrorists. The extra-input of funds and political support strengthened the Colombian government – a clear example of the influence of global politics on internal conflicts. However, it is worth remembering that the state is one player in a complex war, and its very lack of legitimacy has been part of the cause of the politics of the conflict. It is unclear whether strengthening the state is a long-term political solution.

These agreements with the US also had a direct effect on politics in Medellín. In 2002, there were a number of military strikes on civilian areas of the city, particularly the militia-controlled San Javier, ordered by newly elected President Uribe. The most well known and 'effective', but notorious, of these operations was Operation Orion in October 2002. This operation was made possible with funds from the USA's Plan Colombia and the reinvigorated approach to terrorism after 9/11. The operation consisted of military assaults, including tanks and military helicopters and strafing with automatic weapons. Several targets were killed and, after Operation Orion, San Javier was said to be under State control. Opinion on these events is divided. Many in the city argue that without Operation Orion and the military defeat inflicted on the militia, violence would not have been quelled. Others – including Amnesty International – point to the extra-judicial killings, disappearances, un-investigated mass graves and collusion of the paramilitaries in these events (Amnesty International, 2005).

The long-term effect of these strikes is unclear. Violence in these areas was quelled, which arguably permitted the construction of transport connections between these areas and the city. A prominent economic actor in Medellín said: 'What Uribe did was necessary – you couldn't have built those connections with the most dangerous barrios if he hadn't held the battles that he had'<sup>35</sup>. However, the use of military force against a civilian area has arguably further undermined the legitimacy of the state.

### Extradition

Extradition treaties with the US have been crucial to political dynamics in Colombia, given the immense political and economic power of those involved in narco-traffic and associated armed groups. After high-profile extraditions in the 1980s, the extradition treaty was declared unconstitutional in 1987 by the Colombian Supreme Court. This decision was allegedly influenced by the group '*Los Extraditables*' (the 'extraditables') whose membership included Pablo Escobar. Their aim was to object to any extradition treaty with the US, under the slogan 'we prefer a tomb in Colombia to prison in the USA'. The 1991 Constitution initially banned extradition to the US, but this was reversed in 1997.

All institutions – their formation, implementation and change – need to be understood politically, not technically, and the oscillations over extradition with the US indicate that it was a political as much as a judicial matter. Lack of extradition to

35 Business leader, interview 8 August 2012.

the US in a sense appeased *Los Extraditables*, but as the US became more important to Colombian development, with Plan Colombia, free trade agreements and the additional support that came with Uribe's relationship with Bush and the war on terror; more and more people were extradited to the US. Although it has been alleged that Uribe's government was more 'flexible' in its extradition of paramilitary actors (Forero, 2004), the number of key players extradited has changed the Colombian political territory, reduced the power of armed actors and indicates the growing independence of the judiciary (Browitt, 2001).

### 2.2.3 Informal rules of the game

The processes that have been experienced in Medellín over the last two decades would not have been possible without the formal institutional changes described above; but the picture is decidedly incomplete until the 'informal' institutions are taken into account. Violence, corruption and para-politics continue to be so entangled with the formal system that the processes of transition that Colombia and Medellín are going through are incomprehensible if they are not taken into account. Changes in cultural norms and ideas of leadership, although difficult to pin down, have been crucial in opening up the spaces for new political actors and coalitions to emerge. Equally, traditional notions of Antioqueñan, 'paisa' identity, citizenship and patrimony have been conservative elements in these processes.

#### Leadership

Although, as illustrated above, violence remains an important part of the configuration of relations of power, Medellín's transformation over the last 20 years has dramatically changed the nature of leadership, authority and legitimacy in the city. Underpinned by changes in the political structures – in the constitution, elections and civil society – leadership is no longer limited to traditional elites. There are clear examples of what Weber would call 'rational-legal authority': the replacement of the traditional authority of economic elites, with authority gained via technical expertise, qualification and institutional authority.

#### Box 13: Creative leadership in Colombia

Medellín was not the first city in Colombia to break with the duopoly of party control at Mayoral level. Bogota's Mayor Antanas Mockus was elected in 1995, after resigning his post as a professor of maths at the National University of Colombia. He was known for his creativity and unorthodox approach to politics. This included appearing in a shower in a commercial about the importance of conserving water and dressing up in a cape as a super hero and roaming the streets as a 'Super Citizen'. Not only was he an extraordinary personality, but this led to institutions opening up to allow charisma to be a way to obtain power.

With the change in regulations to allow the popular election of mayors, the importance of charismatic leadership, although sometimes in the form of populism, is also crucial to understanding the Medellín story. Sergio Fajardo is known for his charisma and wit. Another insider in his government talked about the energy that was created around him and the atmosphere, particularly at the beginning of his administration, that this government was really going to change something. 'It was incredible to work with him – the speed at which ideas came out of the meetings that we had, and really creative discourses that really caught on. 'Social urbanism' is an obvious example, but he came up with them at a rate of knots'.<sup>36</sup>

#### 'Technical' leadership

Sergio Fajardo personifies technical leadership. With a PhD in maths, Fajardo was known for using clear numerical justifications for his policies. The decisions on where to focus architectural projects and investment in education were based entirely on development indicators. In response to my question about how Fajardo was able to persuade such a range of people to invest in these areas, one former secretary of his government said: 'Fajardo did not negotiate. Never. He had the figures, he didn't need to. If people objected he would present the numbers as a technical issue'.<sup>37</sup> Compared with the traditional leadership style of the patrimonial elites in the city, the fact that Fajardo was able to gain authority through his technical expertise indicates the radical change that the coalition behind his leadership meant for political culture and leadership in the city. To illustrate further this shift towards a more rational, technical form of leadership, the Fajardo administration based their

36 Member of Fajardo administration, interview, 8 August 2012.

37 Member of Fajardo administration, interview 17 July 2012.

interventions on data from the Human Development Index (HDI) – the areas with the lowest development indicators were the ones that would receive investment. This is a radical change from the more populist system which was about investing in areas in order to get votes. It also illustrates the processes of individual actors using spaces created by structural changes to, in turn, modify ideas of behaviour and agency.

## Participatory leadership

The strengthening of NGOs that occurred in the 1990s and the inclusion of community organisations in *Compromiso Ciudadano* and the fora for discussion of alternative futures for Medellín have provided a depth to the new policies and political leadership. NGOs and departments within the Town Hall have programmes designed to encourage communities to make suggestions and participate directly in governance:

'It's about making suggestions, not just demands. We have a history of populism in this city and that has been a cause of the violence, the *caudillo* style leadership and the exclusion. The participatory budget and the educational programmes are about creating a different kind of political subject – not just one that makes demands on their own behalf, but one that makes suggestions.'<sup>38</sup>

The emphasis on participation allowed different people to be involved in setting the agenda, but it also challenged the very nature of leadership, which had tended to be more along the lines of a *caudillo* (war-lord) style, individualist, vertical structure. The more horizontal structure necessitated by participatory leadership was itself a challenge to the image of the paternalist, vertical leadership, the lack of checks against which had been a factor in allowing violent actors to gain power.

## Gender and leadership

The gendered nature of leadership in the city has changed. Women's organisations and the women's ministry have been prominent in policy making in the city as we have seen, and their participation has changed the style of leadership that is recognised as authoritative. It is often argued that having women in leadership is important for peace. This has been seen most recently in Liberia, where the three female winners of the 2011 Nobel Prize have been recognised as taking a more co-operative, collaborative and less competitive approach to leadership. With the recognition of the importance of women's role in peace comes a danger of an 'add women and stir' approach to post conflict situations. There is also a danger of defining women as inherently more peaceful by their very nature – a generalisation that is very difficult to maintain empirically. It is, however, argued that women are under less pressure to conform to competitive and, indeed, aggressive styles of leadership and authority, and do not lose face when adopting a more collaborative approach. The actions of men on the other hand are judged in terms of their conformity to hegemonic masculinity – culturally situated constructions of the type of man who can become 'the alpha male'. In the context of decades of violence and renowned 'macho' constructions of male power in Colombia, the fact that women have had a prominent place in Medellín's recent history itself marks a radical change in leadership and authority in the city.

## Elite cultural capital

There have undoubtedly been changes in the leadership and political culture of Medellín. Nevertheless, a reinforcement or even an extension of the elites is a recurrent theme in the city's changes. A major element in how elites retain power is their 'cultural capital' – the mastery of etiquette, cultural knowledge and taste that underpins control of certain spaces and powers – exemplified in the anecdote of Pablo Escobar being turned away from the Country Club. These dynamics are part of the explanation as to why the Medellín cartel did not penetrate the economic bases in Medellín. One business leader said, 'I insist, although there are cases where people did work with the mafia – and given their economic and financial power it was hard to avoid them completely - the cartel did not penetrate the basis of our industry'.<sup>39</sup> It is telling, that the opposite is generally held to be the case in Cali, where more mainstream, established businesses did fall in to the hands of the Cali cartel. While the Medellín cartel was run by the gauche Escobar and had its basis in the most excluded and poorest districts of the city, the Cali cartel was nicknamed the 'Gentlemen of Cali' (Rempel, 2011). One of the leaders of Medellín's cultural industries affirmed the way that the city's elites excluded the Medellín cartel. He said, 'At the time they [business elites] were desperate to get in with the mafia - they were the ones with the money! If you had your house for sale, the ideal was if someone came to look at it from the cartel – they'd offer you triple the asking price on the spot. I tell you, the only reason that lot were excluded was their bad taste'.<sup>40</sup>

38 Focus group, sub-secretariat for participation, 17 July 2012.

39 Business leader, interview, 2 August 2012.

40 Focus group of business leaders, 25 July 2012.



## Art and culture

For the policies in Medellín to be acceptable and supported by the elites, they had to appeal to elite sensibilities. Art has been an important part of the policies to 'change the skin' of the city and conspicuously invest in poorer areas. The architects interviewed were passionate about this. 'This is what it should be like,' said one. 'Look at these buildings we've made – they're beautiful. And poorer people should have beautiful things too.'<sup>41</sup> The Botero Park and the dramatically urbane and avant-garde architecture that has been brought to erstwhile no-go areas are the most visible changes in the city. However, cultural workers are sceptical of this: 'They're extending their power, and their right to define what art is', said one theatre director.<sup>42</sup> He continued: 'Do you really think people from *las comunas* are going to go to the international tango festival?'

Although the grand infrastructural investments do reflect the classical tastes that would be associated with the elites, there are also a number of NGO and participatory cultural projects that perhaps belie this characterisation of Medellín's transformation. The prize-winning libraries that were designed by world-leading architects also house exhibitions of art projects dedicated to the memory of the violence, for example a photo exhibition by teenagers to represent their emotions and reactions to living with violence. The local television station *Tele Medellín* also show-cases community artists and its slogan '*aquí te ves*' ('this is where you see yourself') clearly articulates its mission to reflect real life across the city.

The investment in infrastructure and education resonates with the sense of civic responsibility that economic elites have traditionally held in Antioquia. In one focus group of business leaders this was made clear: 'this is what we're like', said a head of an architecture firm. 'For years we have been associated with drugs and mafiosos, but the elites in this city have always invested in the poor. This is a place where someone's word was trusted, and where you looked after your workers – provided them with housing and good schools – we've always been like this'.<sup>43</sup>

This comment stands up – there has been a tradition of patronage by economic elites in Medellín, although in the face of the manifest inequality in the city it is easily argued that it has had limited coverage. The progressive policies of Social Urbanism have been successful in garnering support from traditional elites because of this resonance. It could also be argued that these policies are being seen as a reaffirmation of elites and elite culture rather than a direct political challenge to hierarchies in the city. Nevertheless, accompanied by participatory approaches to development and changes in power structures, framing policies in terms of a reaffirmation of elite identity enabled the political support needed from the city's leaders.

## Corruption and 'easy money'

Colombia ranks joint 80th in the Transparency International Corruption Index, along with El Salvador, Thailand, Greece, Peru and Morocco. The Colombian corruption index has steadily improved over the last 20 years, and Colombia is particularly known for having strict intellectual property rights and civic protection laws. Nevertheless, corruption in terms of nepotism, extortion and bribery are still part of economic life in Colombia. The recent lawsuit against Chiquita Brand International, an American producer and distributor of bananas and other produce, quotes executives of the company as claiming that, in effect, financing paramilitary activity was just 'part of doing business in Colombia' (Anderson, 2011). Medellín businessmen are on record as justifying the financing of paramilitaries in their legal manifestation as '*las convivir*' (*El Tiempo*, 2012). Political corruption and nepotism has not been eradicated, and there are frequent accusations on this basis (Begg, 2009).

Despite economic advances, almost 60% of Medellín's economy is estimated to be made up of informal economic activities, including narco-traffic (BBC, 2012). The perception of involvement in narco-traffic and related criminal gangs is still that it is the easiest way to upward mobility, and the culture glorifying gang membership and the riches that can be won is visible throughout popular culture in Medellín. The economic investment and political projects falling under the social urbanism umbrella have attempted to change this perception and wean people off what is perceived to be 'easy money' – a phrase that perhaps misrepresents the risks involved. Understanding the informal economy remains a challenge, and the blurring of lines between informality and illegality continues to pathologise certain areas in the eyes of some.

The economic drivers of exclusion are widely misunderstood among business leaders. The phrase 'the poor are poor because they want to be', is heard frequently, particularly in reference to people who, for example, refuse to leave their land on request from a large company in order to take up the offer of an apartment in the city. The blame for delinquency is placed upon single mothers or working mothers in many sectors of society, despite widespread recognition of the historical debt owed to poorer areas and economic hardships. Investment in poorer areas is also justified in terms of maintaining the distance between rich and poor, as much as addressing it. For example, investment in rural areas of the Medellín metropolitan area and the state of Antioquia is justified in terms of stemming the flow of economic migration to the 'magnet' of Medellín.

41 Architect, interview 31 July 2012.

42 Cultural worker and activist, interview, 30 July 2012.

43 Focus group of business leaders, 25 July 2012.

Although the need for investment is recognised, the terms of its justification reflect a conservative attitude to elite power and maintaining the city's hierarchies as much as addressing them. This indicates to many in Medellín's civil society that the confluence of agendas between business and social organisations may be at risk.

Medellín's informal economy is extremely complex and inevitably bound up with violence, urban guerrillas, paramilitaries and narco-traffic. It is said that kidnapping and extortion is an under-reported entrepreneurial activity. Current figures suggest that 25,000 businesses are subject to extortion in Medellín, and paying '*vacunas*' (vaccines) referring to protection money to paramilitary/ urban guerrilla or criminal gangs is a frequent practice (Snyder and Duran Martinez, 2009).

## 2.2.4 Conclusion

The situation in Medellín has vastly improved since its darkest days, but understanding these dynamics is an essential part of healing the city, and the real achievement of social urbanism is introducing processes that allow a recognition of the barriers faced by different people. As informal coalitions come together they are better able to identify common problems and decide which they can and cannot realistically deal with and then 'frame' how to do it. The director of a training programme for community mothers held in one of Medellín's private universities explained this dynamic when two women attending the course had had to drop out because of threats from the guerrillas. 'Have you heard of intra-urban displacement? That's what happened to them. The guerrilla arrived, knocked on the door and said 'you have 24 hours'. And that's it, they have to move. It's because they're participating in this programme. The state's not a neutral actor here, I'm taking away kids away from their war.'

## 3.0

# Conclusion: Medellín in Global Context

This paper set out to analyse the following questions, using DLP's framework for political analysis and the case study of the dramatic reduction in violence known as the 'Medellín Miracle':

- What structural and institutional factors contribute to long-term and high levels of violence?
- What structural and institutional factors enable critical junctures to become progressive spaces?
- How do actors use these spaces?
- How do elites see their own involvement? What motivates them to take part in a process that almost by definition entails a redefinition of power dynamics that to date have favoured them?
- What tensions are generated by these processes of change?

We have seen that structure-agency dynamics are central to the way violence enters the political scene, and becomes a prominent part of how people acquire power; as well as an 'extension of politics by other means.' We have also seen that when violence reaches a crisis point, a political 'critical juncture' can come about to galvanise people into action, open up new spaces and empower different actors. Crisis points, devastating though they are, can be strategised to change the political dynamics that underpinned them.

In this brief conclusion we summarise this paper's insights by revisiting these research questions in turn to extrapolate the global lessons from the Medellín experience.

### 3.1 What structural and institutional factors contribute to long-term and high levels of violence?

Exploring the historical context, in terms of structure and agency, of the conflicts in Colombia and Medellín has provided us with an example of how high levels of violence result from political processes and power struggles – indicating that such crises need to be resolved politically. Clear themes emerged from this case study:

- the ability of violent actors to gain power where security is not provided by legitimate forces;
- the tendency for violence to become part of political process as the violent repression of violence to attain security becomes, in itself, a means to acquire power;
- the pernicious effects of the blurring of the line between legitimate and illegitimate political actors.

We have seen throughout this analysis how underlying political structures contributed to the violence in Colombia and specifically Medellín. Inequality – although it would be an over-simplification to say that this was a direct cause of the violence – contributed to a situation in which violent actors could gain power by offering hopes of upward mobility that were otherwise absent. We have also seen that when inequality and poverty reach certain proportions and, crucially, when they are compounded by geographical exclusion, as is so manifestly the case in Medellín, insecurity can become such that the legitimacy of mainstream political actors is undermined.

The violence in Medellín is graphically embodied in the notorious character of Pablo Escobar. However, as this political analysis has demonstrated, violent actors such as Escobar do not exist in a vacuum. The structures of inequality, insecurity and geographical exclusion in the city, compounded by the economic crisis which put pay to any hopes of upward mobility,

allowed him to gain power. What's more, the background of insecurity which had its roots in the national conflict between Marxist guerrilla, paramilitary and state actors, as well as the period of *La Violencia* between the main parties meant that violence had already become part of the 'common sense' of how power could be exercised.

The way Medellín's elites were structured can be seen as part of the problem, as well as a contribution to the solution. Their historical exclusivity and domination of the formal structures of power meant that alternative political actors who could reach beyond the limited extension – both geographically and socially – of formal politics, had opened other informal terrain upon which to cultivate power. This in itself can be seen as a progressive step, necessary for representative democracy and the redistribution of power in a country still dominated by colonial power structures. However, given the already present conflict and the absence of security, it also allowed violent actors to gain, and abuse, power. Although it is argued that this very exclusivity protected power structures from infiltration by nefarious forces, the astonishing levels of inequality and exclusion have been broadly recognised as constituting a historical debt to the city that had to be redressed as part of the efforts to quell the violence.

The nature of leadership - both in terms of formal structures and processes and informal, cultural elements of political leadership – have also allowed violent actors to gain power. The specifics in Medellín had deep historical roots – stemming from the duopoly of power between Liberals and Conservatives and, until 1988, the closed election of mayors. The absence of democratic checks and balances to ensure legitimacy allowed other actors to gain legitimacy by adopting populist methods, seen in for example Escobar's building of housing and football fields to gain votes and support in deprived areas.

The global lesson here is that violence always happens in a structural context, and the way to examine violent actors is by finding how they have been able to accumulate power and why violence has entered into the 'common sense' of how politics gets done.

### 3.2 What structural and institutional factors enable critical junctures to become progressive spaces?

The Medellín case study provides us with an example of how a crisis was defined by progressive political actors to address the political processes that underpinned the violence. There were specific factors that meant that, in this case, the crisis faced by Medellín was able to be used constructively, such as:

- the presence of external actors and funding;
- the range of political actors who all perceived that they would benefit from a reduction in the threat;
- the confluence of agendas between these political actors;
- the importance of national-level constitutional changes.

Actors external to Medellín were crucial in turning the crisis into an (alleged) miracle. The actions set in motion by President Gaviria in 1991 with the Presidential Programme for Medellín empowered actors – both in the appointment of certain people, and indirectly via the funding involved – that changed the political scene. The influence of the internationalisation of the development agenda was evident too, with the participation of the UNDP and KfW bank, as well as the increased scrutiny from human rights organisations.

A key factor in this change was global capital – the opportunities and threats for Medellín's business class were clearly stated in the Monitor Report, which was itself necessitated by the economic crisis coinciding with the crisis point in the violence. Globalisation has changed the structure of economic elites across the world, for better or worse, and the crucial point in this story was that the city's elites had a clear motive for changing the way that they maintained their power, even if they did not agree with the analysis that elitism and exclusion were elements in the ongoing violence.

This recognition is crucial. There are other cases (Phillips, 2011) in which a crisis has not led to more progressive outcomes precisely because ruling elites did not perceive that it was a crisis *for them*. Many political and economic leaders did embrace the idea that politics, inequality and lack of security had to change for the good of all. For those that did not agree with this analysis, it was clear that they would not be able to take advantage of the opportunities of globalisation and the potential of foreign direct investment if the violence and the city's image were not addressed.

Crucially, we also see that the spaces that opened up in the wake of the crisis; although both the crisis of violence and that of the economy were clearly the immediate causes of the transformations in Medellín, changes in political structures in Colombia had been a long time coming. Since the National Front elite pact between the two ruling parties, Colombia as a

whole had moved steadily towards more democratic institutions. Crucially, the constitution, the constitutional court and the popular election of mayors changed the way that formal power was structured and could be wielded. The lesson here is that the Medellín Miracle can be seen as part of a momentum of change, and the political opportunities represented by the crisis cannot be understood without taking the trajectory of structural change into account.

### 3.3 How do actors use these spaces?

Different actors were empowered by these processes and we have seen the political work that went into setting an agenda, building coalitions and formulating and implementing policy in formal political arenas. This involves:

- enabling new and different actors to gain power;
- setting the agenda;
- gaining the power to implement the agenda;
- collaborating with the 'powers that be' at the same time as challenging the power dynamics that maintain them.

The most remarkable element of the Medellín case study is how these new political spaces were used, allowing new agendas to come forward and new actors to be empowered. Space was deliberately created for a new agenda to emerge, and a frequently heard comment from those involved was that the willingness to participate in these spaces was because of the threat felt by the entire city from the crisis of violence. This is a key finding from this study that supports the idea that crises change political landscapes and dynamics.

A number of new actors emerged and were able to gain power in the wake of the crisis, given the explicit creation of fora for discussion, and commissioning of reports into the crisis. In a sense these actors were not new – the members of the reflexive middle class that emerged included universities and established civil society organisations – but they had previously been unable to get the attention of the formal ruling elites.

We can see from the Medellín example that there are various ways that the spaces that emerge in a crisis can be used: to formulate new agendas, build coalitions and implement change. These stages are inter-related but very different, involve different types of 'political work' and do not necessarily lead one from the other. With *Compromiso Ciudadano* we see these processes happening in two distinct phases. With the support of the Presidential Programme, an agenda was formulated that has defined the processes of the miracle. This is remarkable because this agenda questioned the bases of elite power – defining the 'historical social debt' as part of the problem. Setting the agenda is a hugely important part of the political process. However, in Medellín, we see that to have this agenda implemented, new actors had to gain power in the formal political scene, involving a balancing act between continuity and change.

Implementing this agenda involved a different set of political work and getting the powers that be to cede some of their power. The agenda set by the coalitions that formed in the mid-nineties resonated with other concerns among the New Liberals and a new generation of business leaders. But it initially failed to influence the established leaders in the city – even given its resonance with the recommendations of the Monitor Report. This highlights one of the crucial lessons in how crises can influence politics: to change a crisis into an opportunity for progressive change necessarily implies a change in the power dynamics that have allowed elites to gain power; which may not be in their best interests to support.

To be successful and be able to implement their agenda, the new actors that emerged had to enter formal politics. There are several lessons that can be taken from this. Firstly it illustrates the enduring divide between the formal and the informal and the importance of the powers that are situated with the former. As a civil society organisation, *Compromiso Ciudadano* was not able to enter formal politics or use the functions that come with a formal political role, despite the fact that the movement's formation had been sponsored by the national government. The moves that it took to enter formal politics – crucially finding a leader who could play the elite game – indicate the importance of the continuation of power structures underpinning the elites.

Fajardo's leadership demonstrates one of the tensions inherent in political change – that the rules of the game have to be changed within the structures set by the winners of that game – the incumbent ruling elites. The balancing act of change and appeal to elite values was a crucial part of the successes that *Compromiso Ciudadano* achieved. This involved a deep and nuanced understanding of how the incumbent political leaders in the city saw their role.

### 3.4 How do elites see their own involvement? What motivates them to take part in a process that entails a redefinition of power dynamics that to date have favoured them?

We have seen in this Colombian example that the 'elites' are by no means homogenous. Party politics in Colombia have been marked by ferocious, violent wars between the Liberals and Conservatives, both of whom represent the country's elites. Elites have different motivations, understandings, ideologies and sources of power. What is remarkable about the process in Medellín is that elite actors supported the notion that there was an 'historical social debt' owed to the poorer areas of the city. Processes of progressive change will always, by definition, involve a weakening of elite power, but this can be implicit in, for example, constitutional changes. In the case of Medellín we see elite actors apparently supporting the notion that their exclusivity was a cause of the crisis.

However, this agenda resonated with one of the ideas that maintained elite power in the city and, many argue, the processes of change have been as much about recreating this power as challenging it. Elites, and particularly conservative elites in Medellín, had understood their role in the area's development as being one of stewardship – and that it was the responsibility of the elites to lead. The historical social debt can be understood not in terms of a challenge to elite power, but a recreation of an identity that has been interrupted by the processes that led to the crisis – in the case of Medellín, narco-traffic and violence.

There are many broader lessons that can be drawn from this. Firstly, there is the importance of ideas, so often overlooked in mainstream, economic analyses of people's motivations. In this case, we can see that the historical social debt came to define an agenda because it could be interpreted on terms that resonated and arguably recreated elite power. Secondly, the Medellín example shed light on the dynamics of change towards a more equitable, inclusive society. These changes have modified elite power – the most tangible example of this being when *Compromiso Ciudadano* managed to break the Liberal/Conservative duopoly of power when it won office. But this cannot be done without appealing to elite sources of power.

The structures of elite control hold the power necessary to implement change. In Medellín the crucial institution in the changes was EPM – *Empresas Públicas de Medellín*. As a public institution the company is intimately involved in the political as well as the economic power structures in Medellín, and the resources that it gave the city were the 'without which not' of the city being able to implement such an ambitious infrastructural agenda. This is an interesting example of how public companies can be used to finance democratic change. However, recalling the vociferousness with which EPM was defended from privatisation by the city's elites, it also indicates that the institutions of the state are important to the way elites maintain control.

The other way in which elite actors understood the threat of violence in Medellín was in relation to another 'crisis' – that of the economy. The introduction of the forces of global capital, a world-wide phenomenon in the early 1990s, represented opportunities and threats to the business elites of Medellín. For some members of the elite, this threat was perhaps seen as even greater than the crisis of violence in the *barrios* and from which they had the resources to protect themselves. The agenda defined by the Monitor Report and the agenda defined by the discussion fora coming from the Presidential Programme resonated substantially. The focus on infrastructure, investment in poorer areas, education and a loosening of elite grip on power, was common to both. However, while these coinciding agendas allowed changes to be implemented, the different priorities and visions behind them have caused tension.

### 3.5 What tensions are generated by these processes of change?

The coincidence of agendas, and the post-crisis context in which coalition building became possible in the ways described above, made the policies associated with the miracle possible. There were however clear tensions in these processes. It is clear from the discussion above that there were different motivations and ideas that underpinned participation in these processes. The themes on which there was difference of interpretation include, education, participation, solidarity economy and security, where the agendas coincided but the ultimate aims differed radically. Nevertheless, the Medellín example demonstrates that crises can be used to bring these agendas together to be politically effective.

It has been beyond the scope of this paper to assess the impact of the 'Miracle' – and research on this subject is only just emerging (for example, Brand and Davila, 2011). However, the political processes of the 'Miracle' have, without a doubt, generated changes, and tensions, in the political fabric of Medellín. At the time of writing, Medellín is at a cross roads. In March 2013 it won the Citi Award for Most Innovative City, having fought off competition from Tel Aviv and New York. Amidst the celebrations, there is concern that the importance of process and coalitions to the Medellín Miracle is being forgotten, and that the rates of violence are showing an increase.

The award for Most Innovative City focused on the infrastructural developments in the city that were perceived to have contributed to the rapid decline in violence:

'Few cities have transformed the way that Medellín...has in the past 20 years. The city built public libraries, parks, and schools in poor hillside neighbourhoods and constructed a series of transportation links from there to its commercial and industrial centres' (Urban Land Institute, n.d.).

The summary of their reasons for giving the award to Medellín goes on to specify the importance of the politics behind the change, emphasising that 'a change in the institutional fabric of the city may be as important as the tangible infrastructure projects.' Examples cited of this include the collaborations between local government, businesses, community organisations, and universities to fight violence and to modernize Medellín, and the participatory politics which included the communities, via for example the participatory budget and support of community organisations.

The reasons for giving Medellín this prize reflect feelings within the city, that predominantly sense that politics and process are more important than the new buildings and structures themselves. However, the fact that the prize was given by Citi bank has been extremely controversial and shed light on the fragility of the political coalitions that were achieved in the 1990s. In response to the celebrations at the Citi prize, the Archbishop of Medellín, in an article in the Medellín based Newspaper *El Colombiano*, reminded his fellow citizens that Medellín continues to be the most violent city in the country, and that many questions around justice, narco-traffic, and continued violence remain unanswered (*El Colombiano*, 2013). Similarly, the IPC issued a press statement in which it highlighted that the other report to be released that week on human rights in Medellín was less complimentary, and 'revealed much about a reality which cannot be hidden, despite the efforts to make over an image to sell to foreigners, but not believable for those who daily see themselves impeded from their right to move, by barriers that are getting bigger and bigger' (IPC, 2013).

The focus of this paper has been the political processes and institutional changes that were part of the reason that Medellín won the Citi award. The focus of many explorations of the miracle are the iconic projects – the metro cable, library parks and other infrastructural projects – that have come to identify the city. The contention of this paper is that, if the politics that made them possible are not understood, and the power relations and processes that can lead to violence are not made the focus of any attempt to achieve peace then these iconic projects are, to repeat the words of one community activist, 'just blocks of concrete'.

## Appendix 1: Timeline

- 1948 Assassination of Liberal Presidential candidate Jorge Eliecer Gaitan
- 1948 Start of La Violencia
- 1953 Colombia's first military coup of the twentieth century occurred, led by General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla
- 1958 Start of the power-sharing pact between the Liberal and Conservative parties to alternate in political office, an agreement known as La Frente Nacional (The National Front)
- 1962 Plan Lazo is set up, a state counter-insurgency programme that facilitated the provision of armaments to paramilitary 'civilian defence' groups
- 1964 FARC established as military wing of the Colombian Communist Party
- 1974 End of National Front
- 1975 Formation of Pro-Antioquia 1982. Alvaro Uribe became mayor of Medellín
- 1988 Change of constitution to allow the popular election of mayors
- 1989 Colombian drug lords declared 'total war' on the government; the M-19 rebel group agreed to disarm
- 1989-1990 Extreme violence shook Colombia when guerrillas and drug traffickers mounted a brutal anti-government campaign known as narco-terrorism. Three presidential candidates were killed, including the popular Luis Carlos Galan.
- 1990 Colombia's Presidential Programme for Reinsertion was founded by the government to help an estimated 7,500 former rebels integrate into society with a variety of assistance programs; US CIA and military strategists were sent to Colombia to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of local military intelligence.
- 1990-1993 María Emma Mejía Vélez was named Special Counsel (*Consejería Presidencial*) for Medellín.
- 1991 New Political Constitution of Colombia
- 1991 Pablo Escobar, head of Colombia's Medellín drug cartel, surrendered to authorities and was 'imprisoned' in his luxury, custom-made jail 'La Catedral' (the cathedral); Colombia's government halted extradition of drug traffickers to the US following a wave of bombings and assassinations
- 1992 Pablo Escobar escaped from his luxury prison
- 1992-1995 Seminars for Future Alternatives for Medellín and its Metropolitan Area (*Seminarios Alternativas de Futuro para Medellín su Area Metropolitana*) were held.
- 1993 Pablo Escobar killed by police in Medellín
- 1994 Colombian soccer player Andres Escobar was shot dead in Medellín, ten days after accidentally scoring an own goal in the World Cup
- 1995 Various coalitions were formalised and plans for the city were produced, stemming from the seminars, including the Strategic Plan for Medellín and the Augura Valley (*Plan estrategico para Medellín y el Valle Augura*) and the various Citizens 'Working Groups' (*Mesas de trabajo*).
- 1995 The activist group Compromiso Ciudadano (Citizens' Commitment) was formed with the aims of reducing political corruption and promoting inclusive, participatory development
- 1996 Work on the Medellín metro and its network was completed. 1997 The Convivir associations, right wing vigilante groups promoting security, were ruled as legal; there were an estimated 5,500 employees and 300,000 volunteers nationwide. Colombia's congress reinstated extradition with the US under intense US pressure, but the law was not to be applied retroactively.
- 1997 FARC commanders began an urban extortion program. The payments they demanded from businessmen was called la vacuna (vaccine).
- 1997 Chiquita Brand International, an American producer and distributor of bananas and other produce, began paying the paramilitaries of the United Self Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) after they threatened attacks. In 2001 the US designated the AUC a foreign terrorist organisation. In 2003 Chiquita reported illegal payments to the AUC to the Justice department, but continued payments until Feb, 2004.
- 1998 Feb 26: The US waived the two-year-old sanctions against Colombia. Military and economic aid were expected to follow.



- 1998** Strikes and protests against the government's planned austerity programme
- 1999** The Plan Colombia programme began as the US, under President Clinton deployed a small air force to Colombia to spray coca plants, help Colombia fight insurgents and shut down cocaine processing plants.
- 2002** President Andrés Pastrana in peace talks with the FARC, conceded territory the size of Switzerland to FARC jurisdiction.
- 2002** *May*: President Alvaro Uribe elected president. Plan Colombia renewed.
- 2002** *June*: The mayors in the western Colombian state of Antioquia resigned en masse after receiving threats from FARC rebels that they would be killed if they did not quit.
- 2002** *October*: Uribe ordered a military strike ('Operation Orion') on notorious San Javier neighbourhood of Medellín
- 2003** Sergio Farjado elected mayor. The Plan for Medellín, 2003-2007, published
- 2003** The Colombian government and right-wing paramilitary fighters agreed to begin peace talks.
- 2006-2008** Library Parks completed
- 2007** Alonso Salazar elected mayor
- 2012** Anibal Gaviria elected mayor

## Appendix 2: Prominent Political Actors in Medellín

### Formal politics

#### Political Parties

The Liberal Party  
 The Conservative Party  
 Compromiso Ciudadano  
 Mayors of Medellín  
 Juan Gomez Martinez 1988-1990  
 Omar Flórez Vélez 1990-1992  
 Luis Alfredo Ramos Botero 1992-1994  
 Sergio Gabriel Naranjo Pérez 1995-1997  
 Juan Gómez Martínez 1997-2000  
 Luis Perez 2001-2003  
 Sergio Fajardo Valderrama 2003-2007  
 Alonso Salazar 2007-2011  
 Anibal Gaviria 2011-

#### NGOs

Corporación Región  
 Corporación Convivamos  
 Instituto Popular de Capacitación  
 Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres  
 Vamos Mujer

### Informal political actors

#### Marxist Guerrilla Groups

Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN – National Liberation Army)  
 Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia).  
 Movimiento 19 de Abril (19 April Movement)

#### Paramilitary Groups

Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC - United Self Defence Forces of Colombia)  
 Bloque Cacique Nutibara, led by 'Don Berna'  
 Bloque Metro, led by 'Doble Cero'.  
 Las Convivir  
 Muerte a Secuestradores (Death to Kidnappers)  
 Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar (Los 'PEPES' - Persecuted by Pablo Escobar)

#### Narco-Traffic and Criminal organisations/ gangs

Chichipato gangs  
 The Medellín cartel  
 The Cali cartel  
 La Terraza

### Formal Economic actors

Grupo Empresarial Antioqueno, also known as the Sindicato Antioqueno  
 Pro-Antioquia  
 Empresas Publicas de Medellín

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The Developmental Leadership Program (DLP) addresses an important gap in international thinking and policy about the critical role played by leaders, elites and coalitions in the politics of development. This growing program brings together government, academic and civil society partners from around the world to explore the role of human agency in the processes of development. DLP will address the policy, strategic and operational implications of 'thinking and working politically' - for example, about how to help key players solve collective action problems, forge developmental coalitions, negotiate effective institutions and build stable states.

The Developmental Leadership Program

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