A fundamental strategy in the process known as “the transformation of Medellín” was the use of physical projects to transform the city socially and physically. Masterminded by Medellín’s Director of Planning Alejandro Echeverri in what he calls “urbanismo social” (social urbanism) in which transformation happens not through individual projects but through large-scale, integrated urban projects (PUI). This PUI project brought together various physical initiatives: libraries, schools, transportation, public space, housing, and environmental remediation, and built them in a short period of time (two years) throughout the most marginalized areas of the city. In 2003, the Medellín municipal administration focused its development program on addressing two dimensions: (1) social inequality: the “social debt” of the rich to the poor, and (2) violence, which has deep roots across all social classes. The physical spatial actions of this political project required a new institutional and project arrangement that permitted the municipality to engage in the much needed massive urban upgrading. This was especially striking in Medellín, as the state had not formally engaged physical projects in many of the neighborhoods in as much as 60 years. This lack of attention was in part due to the fact that many of these communities had long been deserted by people (desplazados or displaced peoples) who had fled violence in other parts of Colombia and who had built their homes and communities on previously unwanted land in Colombian cities such as Medellín.

1.1 KEYS INTERVENTIONS

For the PUI to begin working in these areas, two new instruments were created. (i) the first instrument was an urban development company tasked with the planning, design, execution, institutional negotiation, social engagement and administration of all the projects. This company was a new type of urban project that brought informal areas into the infrastructural standards of the rest of the city through the active participation of the community. After site selection the Mayor’s Office restructured the Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (the Urban Development Company). Independence it became an intermediary that facilitated the EDU’s success in part due to its ability to negotiate with the municipality of actors, groups, companies and institutions required to build the PUI projects. This private company, owned by the municipality was placed in charge of developing all PUI projects in the city. Each PUI project contract reflected the broad scope of these projects. Fifty-nine institutional coordinators (the EDUs) became a link that coordinated the different initiatives that the Municipal Government carried out in the various areas. Multidisciplinary groups and discussion tables were organized as a way to specify the goals and the best means to achieve results without duplicating efforts. Security there was a strong social component of community participation, with a structured system of public and private communication between the EDU representatives and the community. Among an Latin American urban planning approach, this meant that the EDUs were the main contact person for all the community; exemplary of how to engage social capital, community voices played a large part in the decisions made and restructuring of their own environment. Thirdly there was widespread coordinating of the physical political environment, which included the use of public space, transportation, housing, energy and communication. Through its institutional arrangement it became an exemplar of how to engage the different initiatives that the EDU, the state and the local citizens; community engagement and ability to negotiate with the EDU, the state and the local citizens; community engagement and ability to negotiate with the EDU, the state and the local citizens; community engagement and ability to negotiate with the state to improve infrastructure. The projects implemented met with strong social component of community participation, and were visited by other Colombian municipalities interested in dealing with issues of urban informality. Arguably the success has been proven through its persistence and on-going support.

1.2 MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

The PUI project is one of the most important contributions to the physical landscape of Medellín. It has refined the often long process of small and individual projects to a single large urban project has allowed the coordinated, streamlined implementation. The PUI Nororiental alone has more than 200 individual projects. What makes this project so important as a case study is its demonstration of how a large scale coordinated project can modify the physical structure of a entire neighborhood through the strategic organization and coordination approach of the various entities involved. By establishing these along a continuum as a single large urban project has allowed the coordinated, streamlined implementation.

1.3 GOVERNANCE

This strategy helped to legitimize the role of the state in areas of conflict within the city. The inclusion of the community within the planners’ process and the emphasis on larger scale and high quality projects has meant pragmatic results that behooves social development. Arguably the success has been proven through its persistence and on-going support.

SOURCES

For further information please visit: http://www.medellin.gov.co/irj/portal/ciudadanos
MEDELLÍN, Colombia

For many decades the informal settlements of Medellín, Colombia had been largely ignored with little investment into infrastructure from the state. In order to tackle the most marginalized areas of the city and their associated challenges, an integrated approach to development was needed. Integrated urban projects (PUI) were developed by Medellín’s Director of Planning Alejandro Echeverri under the premise that transformation in society happens through large-scale integrated projects as opposed to individual projects. Various planned initiatives were brought together under the common goal of improving life in Medellín, specifically addressing social inequality and violence within the marginalized areas of the city. This allowed for urban upgrading and included areas of Medellín previously untouched by infrastructure improvement projects. What makes this project so important is the ability to modify the physical public structure of a neighborhood where the state had previously no involvement. By establishing these as a continuum of a single large urban project, the coordinated, streamlined implementation was possible.

Strong community participation with marginalized strata of society actively engaged within the planning process.

The transformation of Medellín used urban interventions to transform the city socially and physically.

Coordination of all the initiatives from the different municipal branches (Secretarias), along with private and public funding from different sources, in a myriad of projects was a major feat.

Emphasis on large-scale integrated urban projects such as libraries, schools, transportation, public space, housing, and environmental remediation.

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