



The city of Medellín has undergone a remarkable transformation over the past three decades, going from a city best known for its high rate of violent crime and control by narco traffickers to one which now stands high in international rankings on livability, competitiveness and innovation. In achieving this transformation, the city has managed to overcome very different challenges. Several stakeholders and a varied set of interventions have played a key role in the transformation process. However, there is not a single model or a unique way of doing things, a so-called "Medellín's recipe." But it is possible to identify some ingredients of the city's social and political economy and which are manifested in practices or characteristics which make it possible to understand the basis for Medellín's strength and ability. And which allow the city to generate development processes with significant impact.

These ingredients have been used, to a lesser or greater extent, in different circumstances and constitute what will be henceforth called "the Medellín DNA." In this sense, if another city wants to learn from the experience of Medellín and put into practice some of its innovations and interventions, it is certainly advisable to take these elements as a basis to review their own situations.

The elements that make up the Medellín DNA are described below. Different elements have been preeminent depending on the aspect of urban transformation being examined.

Sense of belonging: There is a strong sense of pride towards the region. It converges origins, history and territory generating a very high sense of belonging and identity. It is known as "paisa culture." Being part of it fills people with pride. Many practices and decisions are associated with this reference.

Shared leadership: traditionally, Medellín has had a diversity of leaders which emerge organically. The leadership is not centralized in a person or an organization. But it has been distributed through alliances between political leaders, guilds, academia, civil organizations, the Church, among others. This dynamic has worked out well for the city, dampening polarization stemming from the political sphere.



Public-private partnerships: Alliances between public and private actors are natural and are generated spontaneously. Companies, universities, NGOs, associations and cultural and artistic groups are the private actors with the greatest presence in city initiatives.

Participation: The city's political leaders have placed major emphasis, on involve citizens in various decisions and planning processes relating to the shape of the city and to the design and delivery of infrastructure and services. This is especially true, when it comes to projects that directly impact vulnerable populations. In these cases, decisions and designs are articulated with extensive consultations and strong participation of the involved community.

Innovation: Innovation and creativity are inscribed in the Medellín DNA. They are used to achieve significant effects, both in the design of infrastructure and in coming up with solutions to complex challenges such as escalators, as well as for large-scale interventions like MOVA, and even, for purely formal questions such as choosing a name.

Resilience: the inhabitants of Medellín can recover from adversity, to overcome obstacles despite the complexities of their history and daily difficulties. We could say this capacity is inherent to the Paisa culture and emerges spontaneously.

Continuity: although each mayor and city administration arrives with a style and an agenda of his own, Medellín has a development program which contains core elements that have remained constant. They must be respected and maintained beyond the leader in turn. This has made possible the creation of processes that are extended and maintained over time and which have become references. A clear and visible example of this is the "Metro Culture."

Public management with a private essence: in Medellín, public entities are managed under private sector principles. It means, maximizing resources and profits, but with a sense of the public. This has allowed citizens to reflect and express a high sense of ownership, affection and pride towards their companies and privilege them when making market decisions.

Aesthetics and beauty: For the people of Medellín "doing it is not enough, it has to be beautiful." Beauty is an important dimension in the physical interventions of the city. The care of the aesthetic is expressed in the designs and the forms, but also in the practices.

Planning tradition: planning processes and city projection are a tradition in Medellín. The city has thought the territory in the future with a social vision. The guild leaders, private organizations and academia have played a prominent role in these processes.

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