

Swimming Against The Tide: Youth policy and contexts of chronic violence in Medellin

Baird, A.

Author post-print (accepted) deposited in CURVE February 2016

Original citation & hyperlink:

Baird, A. (2015) 'Swimming Against The Tide: Youth policy and contexts of chronic violence in Medellin' in Peter Filzmaier, Peter Plaikner, Christina Hainzl, Karl A. Duffek and Daniela Ingruber (Eds). Jugend und Politik. Generationendialog oder Gesellschaftskonflikt. (pp: 77-91). Wien: Facultas-Verlag

<http://www.facultas.at/list?back=0f67ac1c019fd65c0c93ed502f56cc89&xid=7614872>

ISBN 978-3-7089-1037-6

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.

Swimming Against The Tide: Youth policy and contexts of chronic violence in Medellin

Adam BAIRD

Reference

BAIRD, A. (forthcoming) *Swimming Against The Tide: Youth policy and contexts of chronic violence in Medellin*, in Filzmaier P., Plaikner P., Hainzl C., Ingruber D., Duffek K.A. (Eds), *Jugend und Politik*. Wien: Facultas-Verlag (2015)

Abstract

The violence that erupted in Medellín in the late 1980s provoked a number of responses from the state and numerous civil society organisations. The 1990s saw a boom in civil society activism and municipal initiatives in response to this violence. Another response concerned punitive ‘securitisation’: the police and army - often in collusion with paramilitary groups - were deployed to pacify the most violent precincts of the city. These ‘securitisation’ processes have been counterproductive, compounding criminal structures and chronic violence in Medellín. In this context civil society organisations and the emergence of municipal youth policies have struggled to reduce youth violence or challenge the power of gangs in poor neighbourhoods, hence the title of this chapter *Swimming Against the Tide*.

· Adam BAIRD is a Visiting Professor at FLACSO, Quito, Ecuador; UN University for Peace, San Jose, Costa Rica, and; Universidad Pontificia Javeriana, Cali, Colombia. See: <https://upeace.academia.edu/AdamBaird> The research for this chapter was supported by the *Drugs Security and Democracy Program* at the Social Science Research Council, the Open Society Foundation (both USA) and the International Development Research Council (Canada).

Introduction

Medellín has been affected by urban violence since the 1950s, the rise of which was captured by the working class poet Helí Ramírez Gómez in the 1970s who spoke of the daily lives of *galladas* [gangs] of poor young men ‘many of whom were capable of killing’ (1979: 10). Violence intensified dramatically from the late 1980s onwards, the majority of which occurred in the city’s poor neighbourhoods, or *comunas populares* (Medina Franco, 2006). By 1991, Medellín had achieved the undistinguished record of the highest per capita homicide rate in history, at 381 per 100,000 inhabitants (Suárez Rodríguez, 2005: 203)¹. This violence was linked to the dynamics of the broader armed conflict in Colombia, brought about by a cocktail of gangs, youth assassins – *sicarios* –, drug cartel violence, urban militias linked to left-wing guerrillas groups, paramilitary and state violence.

The violence in Medellín has provoked a number of responses from the state and numerous civil society organisations. Despite significant levels of civil society activism in Medellín, few scholars however have focused on the progress made by such activism, or upon non-violent youths more generally. Rather - in keeping with the *violentología* tradition – they have focused instead upon belligerent groups (for example Amnesty International, September 2005; Hylton, 2007; Rozema, 2008; Bedoya, 2010). Such analyses frequently cite the repressive acts of the state, criticising ‘traditional politics’ and the role that neoliberal expansionism plays in exacerbating inequalities, whilst highlighting the shortcomings of the paramilitary demobilisation process in Medellín which began in 2004. Such analyses help us unpack the dynamics of violence in Medellín and in particular the abuses committed under the state’s securitisation doctrine, but little is said of the progress of civil society and state-led municipal youth work, and the challenges of working with youth in a context of ‘chronic violence’².

¹ In a city of 1.6 million in 1991, a staggering total of 6,349 homicides were recorded that year, and in total between 1986 and 1993 there were 33,546 homicides (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 14). For comparative purposes, Perlman refers to Rio de Janeiro being one of the most violent cities in the world in 2004. The homicide rate then was 37.7 per 100,000 (Perlman, 2008: 52), a tenth of the homicide rate in Medellín in 1991. In 2008 the rate in Medellín then began to climb again to 45.6.

² ‘Chronic violence’ is a concept put forward by Jenny Pearce (2006) where violence is understood

First, this chapter charts the lesser-told stories concerning the developments in the last two decades of civil society activism and the work of the Mayor's Office in youth work and violence intervention. Given the vast number of initiatives that have taken place, this account is indicative rather than exhaustive. A number of civil society organisations have written about their youth work experiences, often published as reports through the local organisation that frequently do not reach broader academic audiences³. Relatively little has been systematised about the development of youth work across Medellín, or the influence that civil society organisations have had in the development of municipal youth policy; nor has there been any significant evaluation of how such work has prevented youth's engagement with violence and armed groups, although one recent exception is the *Observatory for Human Security in Medellín* (see <http://www.repensandolaseguridad.org>)⁴. Given the lacunae in the literature, this chapter has been complimented by a number of interviews conducted between 2006-8 and 2011-13 with the pioneers of youth work in Medellín, to be able to effectively chart its development and limitations in the face of on-going urban violence.

Second, this chapter argues that from 2004, sectors of the Colombian state apparatus responded with dramatic, often 'spectacular' violence (also see Goldstein, 2004), such as the 'Orion Operation' helicopter gun-ship attack on the *Comuna 13* neighbourhood in October 2002. The police and army frequently combined with paramilitary groups in the most violent precincts of the city, rolling out previously rural counter-insurgency strategies into Medellín's poor neighbourhoods. This process contributed to a sharp short-term fall in homicide rates as paramilitary groups asserted a monopolistic control over violence in the

in some settings as three-dimensional; persisting over time, at high intensity, and in a given location. As such it reflects the dynamics of gang violence in Medellín. Chronic violence as a concept has recently gained traction in policy circles (see Adams, 2011).

³ For example *Corporación Picacho Con Futuro* (Jiménez Caballero, 2006), the *Instituto Popular de Capacitación* (Uran Arenas et al., 1996; Ruiz Botero and Hernández Martínez, 2008) or *Corporación Región* (Andrade, 1992; Pérez and Peláez, 1990; Marqués Valderrama and Ospina, 1999; Orozco and Morales, 1990; Salazar, 1990; Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990).

⁴ In general across Latin America and Caribbean there has been a lack of systematic evaluation of violence prevention work, although in recent years data collection and analysis has been improving. See (Baird, 2013b; Muggah & Aguirre, 2013; Muggah, 2012).

urban periphery⁵. However, these groups were intertwined with drug trafficking and organised crime and the logic of criminal violence quickly usurped any political motivations the paramilitaries may have had, thereby embedding the prospects for long-term urban insecurity.

The chapter concludes that the effectiveness of both civil society youth work and municipal policy to reduce crime and violence amongst the demographic between 15-24 years of age has been hampered by these processes. Youth work and youth policies are swimming against the tide of violence and criminal opportunities for Medellín's poor youth - hence the title of this chapter. Whilst youth work should be applauded for providing positive opportunities for a number of young people, it has not been able to challenge the power of gangs and organised crime nor break the cycles of youth-led urban violence that still dominate the *comunas populares* today.

The development of youth work in Medellin since 1990

Civil society organisations

Although many non-governmental, church, community, academic, trade union and other civil society organisations (collectively here CSOs) had been working with youth for a number of years, chronic levels of violence in the early 1990s provoked a dramatic increase in CSO activity in response to the 'new world of youth driven social violence' (Marquéz Valderrama and Ospina, 1999: 35; Interview, Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). Crucially, this response had the effect of opening up the state to change, allowing civil society activists to drive youth policy development. Medellín's violence uncovered the total absence of state policy towards youth (Interview, Cruz, 20/11/2007; Urán Arenas, 2000: 46); ironically the violence that blighted the poor also put them on the policy map. Where the 1980s in Colombia was know as the 'lost decade' in terms of worsening living conditions of youths, Medellín during the 1990s became the equivalent of a 'gold-rush' on the

⁵ Much has been debated about gangs as 'parallel' powers or 'perverse' powers in contexts of urban violence in Latin America. See Rodgers & Baird (2015).

development of youth policy from state and civil society sectors, including of course the academy, international aid agencies, and even multilateral organisations. The development of youth work in Medellín contrasted with other cities in the country; whilst youth policies in the 1990s weakened in general across the country, in Medellín they became stronger.

The initial responses from CSOs were assistance programs to intervene and treat violent groups by targeting ‘problem’ youth – principally gang members and militias⁶ directly involved in the conflict (Angarita Caña, 2000: 37; Arias, 20/11/2007; Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). CSO interventions with gang members and militias were problematic processes. Church groups in particular together with some CSOs, initiated pacts of non-aggression between rival gangs and militias from 1990-1994. Although these met with some punctual successes their overall impact was quickly lost beneath the swell of violence (Interviews, Marquez Valderama, 21/07/2006; Mosquera, 10/10/2007). Fulbia Marquéz Valderrama from NGO *Corporación Región* has worked with youth and violence in Medellín since the 1980s, including several demobilisation attempts with gang members. She argued that removing the ‘logic of conflict’ from a drug addicted young man who has killed several people, whilst violence continues to rage all around him is an extremely difficult task (Interview, Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). Marquéz recalled her mediation and reintegration experiences with gang members and militias between 1990 and 1994:

“We put in a tremendous amount of effort... but there were old vendettas between the youths and it was very difficult to resolve their issues whilst they were still killing each other. If they didn’t kill each other then the police would, saying ‘if you do the crime, you do the time’. Even if a youth had gone through the whole [reintegration] process to get out [of the gang] they killed him anyway. It was a tough period and we had to relocate lots of kids because they were killing them. If they went back the militias would kill them, or another gang or the police... very few survived” (Interview, Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006).

Such problems were common. NGO *Popular Institute for Education* or IPC, worked with the state on negotiation processes with left-wing urban militias but the

⁶ Militias were young men recruited by left-wing guerrillas from the broader armed conflict including the FARC, ELN and M-19, to ‘defend’ communities from gangs. This brought them into conflict with gangs and also state security forces.

militias ended up being sucked back into the conflict (Interview, Arias, 20/11/2007). Moments after a landmark agreement had been reached between gangs and militias at the *Media Luna* ceasefire process mediated by the church in September 1994, fighting erupted outside the negotiation room and several youths were killed (Interview, Marqu ez Valderrama, 21/07/2006).

Given the resource intensive needs and limited successes of these initiatives, many CSOs began to look for new approaches to youth work (Interview, Marqu ez Valderrama, 21/07/2006). Despite the stigmatisation of youth, particularly males from the *comunas populares*, progressive CSOs recognised that most of these youths were in fact *not* violent. Of some 509,000 youth in the city between the ages of 14-26 years old, only 8-12,000 had been directly involved in violence (Marqu ez Valderrama, Field Diary, 12/09/2007). Such organisations began to shift their focus towards youths that lived in contexts of violence and poverty that could be classified as ‘at risk’ of joining armed groups - youths living in socio-economically deprived contexts with abundant gang activity. Youth work began to shift towards the realm of *prevention*, focusing on youth development, livelihoods, training, education, cultural activities and the like. Some of these programs were oriented specifically to prevent youths from joining armed groups, such as campaigns against violence, whilst other approaches were indirect, focusing on providing alternative opportunities and livelihoods for youths so they would not opt to join violent groups.

Many CSOs had long been concerned with the political and social formation of youth, particularly those with left-wing ideologies, aiming to turn youths from poor parts of town into critical citizens that reclaimed their rights (Interview, Arias, 20/11/2007). Crucially, such organisations were beginning to equate youths’ quality of life with access to opportunities and livelihood choices as part of an emancipatory approach to prevent violence (Interview, Arias, 20/11/2007). Youth were to be ‘empowered’ to develop their own projects and made visible as positive, not dangerous or delinquent, individuals:

“This was one of the focuses that we pursued... participation, because we said that one of the most fundamental things that [youth] need is recognition and to be made visible in public, not as violent but as productive

individuals that support the development of the city... participating... constructing new knowledge” (Interview, Marqu ez Valderrama, 21/07/2006)

Academic studies of violence rose rapidly in Medell n throughout the 1990s (Jaramillo Giraldo and Buritica Londo o, 2000), and youth work from community organisations, NGOs, international aid agencies and even multilateral development banks expanded. In 1998 the Inter-American Development Bank funded the ‘Program for Citizenship’ to prevent youth violence, together with the Mayor’s Office (Interview, Ruiz Botero, 03/10/2007). Analysis of violence became more sophisticated. In a review of Colombian literature in the early 1990s Angarrita Ca a observed that Medell n’s violence emerged due to multi-social causes, namely; marginalisation, poverty, unemployment, family breakdown and domestic violence, poor socialization of values, and poor education (Angarita Ca a, 2000: 46). Today, urban violence is often referred to by scholars as ‘multi-causal’ and socially generated. However, two decades ago these sophisticated analyses were already emerging in Medell n. CSOs began to talk about ‘prevention programs’ linked to holistic development as early as 1990 to respond to violence, at a time when traditional securitisation approaches based on punitive crack-downs dominated policy discourse (Salazar 1990; Angarita Ca a, 2000). These were significant developments, considering that they emerged four years before the UNDP popularised the landmark term ‘human security’, marking a shift away from traditional understandings of ‘security’ (United Nations Development Programme, 1994).

The concept of ‘youth violence’ itself emerged in 1992 with a focus on a youth ‘subculture’ of violence and ‘micro-socialisation’ (Angarita Ca a, 2000: 302-303). In fact, by the mid-1990s there was so much analysis of the ‘youth condition’ that some said it was *sobre-diagnosticada* – over-diagnosed (de Dios Graciano, 1995: 420). Nevertheless, youth policy moved steadily towards more integral and innovative forms of development (Balbin Alvarez and Abad Gallardo, 1996).

Engaging the State and Developing Youth Policy

A key turning point in civil society engagement with the state occurred during a seminar on youth and violence in 1990, where community organisations recognised that the state had made no efforts to help the local population participate or organise itself (Pérez and Peláez, 1990). This was the genesis of a shift in civic culture where communities began to participate in the diagnosis and solutions to the conflict that affected them (Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990). Local organizations stated that the two principle problems that fuelled insecurity were a lack of local education and employment (Jaramillo Echeverri, 1990: 230-231). This was a telling disjuncture from the state's approach at the time, which was repressive policing while social abandonment continued. The local population wanted to participate in municipal decision-making; they came from a part of the city that the state had never paid any attention to, let alone designed policies for.

Certainly, a number of CSOs have generated significant positive developments in their communities, notably because of their resilience and perseverance in conditions of significant insecurity. For example, one community leader said: "I'm from Villa Guadalupe, the Paris of the [poor] north eastern precinct! We got this far because we fought tooth and nail for everything we have. We even took civil servants to court to get them to carry out their obligations (sic)"; another compared her battles with civil servants to obtain basic utilities, using a metaphor for making *sancocho* stew: "They won't just provide you with *sancocho*, you have to demand the potatoes, then go back and demand the meat, then the carrots, then the water, and so on, and cook it yourself (sic)" (Field Diary, 05/04/2008). Another leader, septuagenarian Rosalba Henao, spoke animatedly of her success in getting the state to put in sewage and transport systems in her neighbourhood, albeit after a 38 year struggle (Field Diary, 05/04/2008).

Of course, there is much debate in terms of *impact assessment* and the difficulties of measuring, either qualitatively or quantitatively, the impact of civil society activity on violence reduction in communities, which remains a challenge in such analyses of Medellín. As high levels of violence and the presence of illegal armed groups persist in Medellín, further research is needed to understand the

relationship between CSO strengthening and violence reduction in contexts of chronic violence (for example Pearce, 2006). As this chapter later argues, the impact of CSOs on violence reduction has been hindered by state securitisation policies that further embedded armed groups into peripheral communities. However, despite these caveats, without CSO intervention Medellín would surely be a *more* violent city.

Civil society influence, particularly from NGOs and academia has been pivotal in shaping municipal youth policy (Interview, Cruz, 20/11/2007). Since the early 1990s a number of CSOs tried to influence fledgling government policy on youth and, more broadly speaking, development, pushing for a focus on the most vulnerable populations (Balbin Alvarez and Abad Gallardo, 1996). From earnest beginnings, by 2004 CSOs were co-designing youth policy with the municipal administration (Interview, Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). This process can be traced back to 1988 when the inter-institutional Committee on Youth – PAISAJOVEN – was established, bringing together a range of CSOs and the business community to promote youth organization, education and vocational training and to counter the negative association of youth with rising violence (see Table 2 below). This in itself was a remarkable development given the mutual distrust between state institutions and CSOs, particularly given the high rates of human rights abuses in Medellín. Many CSO staff and activists, particularly those working in human rights, had been assassinated, ‘disappeared’ or abducted by state security forces and allied paramilitary groups. In 1999, for example, four researchers from the NGO IPC were kidnapped from their offices by a right-wing paramilitary group (CIDH, 1999).

Significant in these developments was the new Colombian Constitution in 1991, which led to the coding of rights into common law, paving the way for the *Ley de Juventud*, or Law on Youth in 1996 (Pérez, 1996: 22). “It now became a battle for rights based in the constitution... we took a few years to get round to it, to understand that we had an important tool, which from then on became fundamental for understanding public policies” (Interview, Marquéz Valderrama, 21/07/2006). As Urán Arenas notes, the 1990s marked “a certain coming

together... of proposals around human rights and political participation between NGOs and the state” (Urán Arenas, 2000). The development of governmental and non-governmental youth work helped the articulation of youth organisations in the violent periphery:

“There was a boom in cultural expressions which was very, very significant, very strong, in terms of their work, the groups, artistic expression, cultural expression, youth groups, lots... It’s one of those paradoxical things in Medellín: In the very same neighbourhoods where there is a high level of social exclusion and marginalisation, at the same time as all of this violence, youths have so many initiatives” (Interview, Ruiz Botero, 03/10/2007).

By 2007 there was vast range of organisations and institutions working with youth – see Table 1 below. In a generalised taxonomy here, these included; state institutions based at the municipal offices such as *Metrojuventud*; ‘corporate NGOs’, large and established organisations such as *Corporación Región* and IPC with full-time staff, having the capacity to produce research and fund their own youth projects; smaller NGOs carrying out work directly with youths; networks for youth education and training such as the *Alliance for Youth Mobilisation*; locally based community organisations such as *Con-Vivamos*; youth groups, organisations and networks such as *Red Juvenil* and *Picacho con Futuro*; political party youth groups such as *Jovenes Fajardistas*; industry funded ‘youth and family’ welfare programs known as *Cajas de Compensación Familiar*; and a number of church based outreach programs such as *Corporación Don Bosco* or the *Association of Christian Youth*.

Table 1 – Indicative Range of Organisations Working with Youth

Type of Organisation	Example
Municipal offices	<i>Metrojuventud</i> (formerly Youth Office)
'Corporate' NGOs	Established organisations; e.g. <i>Corporación Región</i> and IPC, produce research and capacity to fund youth projects
NGOs	Work directly with youths; e.g. theatre groups, sports initiatives, etc
Networks for youth education and training	e.g. <i>Alliance for Youth Mobilisation</i>
Local Community Organisations	e.g. <i>Corporación Con-Vivamos</i>
Youth groups, organisations and networks	e.g. <i>Red Juvenil, Corporación Picacho con Futuro</i>
Political party youth groups	e.g. <i>Jovenes Fajardistas</i>
Industry funded 'youth & family' welfare programs (<i>Cajas de Compensación Familiar</i>)	e.g. COFAMA, COMFENALCO – investing in health, education, recreation programs
Church based outreach	e.g. <i>Corporación Don Bosco, Association of Christian Youth</i>

There are numerous different programs working with youth in Medellín. In 2007 *Metrojuventud* alone was running ninety-eight youth programs simultaneously with municipal funding (Interview, Cruz, 20/11/2007). Table 2 below highlights the development of municipal youth policy. What this demonstrates is the significant, plural and innovative responses of many parts of society to working with vulnerable youth in the wake of the violence of the 1990s. These processes made Medellín stand out from other cities in the country, namely Bogotá, which did not achieve the same level of articulation amongst a diverse range of social actors.

However, developing youth policy was far from plain sailing. Luz Marina Cruz, the former director of the municipal Youth Office, and Edgar Arias from IPC agree that the struggle for civil society participation in public policy has been a long one (Interviews, Arias, 20/11/2007; Cruz, 20/11/2007). Arias noted the long ideological battle against traditional, top-down and anti-participatory attitudes in politics. There was also widespread ignorance amongst civil servants around youth issues. Youths were not seen as a demographic group that needed specific

attention even though they were the protagonists of city's violence (Interviews, Guisado, 29/11/2007; Cruz, 20/11/2007).

Table 2 - A Chronology of Youth Policy Development

1988 – Negative association of youth with rising violence	- Inter-institutional Youth Committee – PAISAJOVEN established
1991 - Intervention with a focus on assistance	- Presidential Envoy for 'Youth & Family' Maria Emma Mejía sent to Medellín - <i>Casas Juveniles</i> - Youth Houses established - Youth Round Table
1994 – Intervention with a focus on participation	- Mayor's Office on Youth - Municipal Youth Council (CMJ) established
1995	- Youth Clubs - Youth Development Plan tailored for each city precinct - Program 'Life for Everybody'
1996	- 'Law on Youth' coded from 1991 National Constitution
1998-2000 – Integral youth approach	- Program for Citizenship. Financed by Inter-American Development Bank, IDB and Mayor's office - Accord 02 in 2000 for Public Policy on Youth
2002-2003	- Creation of Sub-Secretariat <i>Metrojuventud</i> in municipal government - Youth Development Plan for Medellín and Antioquia region
2004-2007 – Youths as protagonists of city transformation	- Increased youth participation - Concretising of institutional youth policies

Adapted from presentation by *Metrojuventud* Director Luz Marina Cruz at the 'Review of Public Policy on Youth, 2007', Medellín (01/11/2007)

Initiatives started in earnest in the early 1990s, but by 1994 the Mayor's 'Office on Youth' was established with the input of NGO specialists, and even a demobilised militia commander (Interview, Cruz, 20/11/2007). The coming together of the state and CSO elements is still controversial in Medellín, particularly within the NGO community, however this process was a departure from the traditional antagonism of the past.

By 2002, the 'Office on Youth' had been upgraded to 'Sub-Secretariat' level at the Mayor's Office and became known as *Metrojuventud*. Since the municipal inter-institutional youth committee, PAISAJOVEN, was launched in 1988, the

development of youth policy though the 1990s slowly opened “the doors for the application of social policy” (Jimenez, 1996: 52), laying the foundations for unprecedented state / civil society cooperation.

Political and administrative tussles became easier over time as youth work within the municipal institutions became more recognised. Furthermore, it became easier to develop youth work under the Mayors Sergio Fajardo Valderrama (2004-7), then Alonso Salazar Jaramillo (2008-2011). Fajardo was the first Mayor who had not come from a traditional political party, demonstrating political innovation and a keenness to work directly with the city’s youth; he was succeeded by Alonso Salazar, a founder member of NGO *Corporación Región*. Only a few years earlier, it would have been unthinkable that someone from the ‘NGO sector’ would participate in a Mayoral election race, let alone win.

When Fajardo came into power a number of NGO members ‘moved over’ to work directly in municipal offices. As part of a concerted effort to work more closely with civil society stakeholders in general, projects were funded through CSOs who were also integral to the new municipal Participatory Budget implementation. Whilst, of course, interaction between the municipal offices which work on youth, and civil society stakeholders is far from perfect, this reflected a generalised ‘opening up’ of the state to civil society participation, beyond youth policy alone. Nowadays, staff mobility between CSO and municipal offices is vastly increased. For example, Yesid Henao, the former sub-secretary of *Metrojuventud* (2011) began at community youth organisation *Corporación Picacho con Futuro*.

Since the establishment of the Office on Youth in 1994, the municipal administration has undoubtedly come a long way. The development of youth policy demonstrates one face of the state’s response to violence. Whilst there are of course caveats and limitations, the progress and achievements of CSO working with the youth population are notable. This process is on-going as Guisado, one of the founders of municipal youth work through PAISAJOVEN reflected: “We have made significant progress in Medellín in last 15 years, but there is still a long way

to go” (Interview, Guisado, 29/11/2007). Therefore it is important to critically evaluate this progress.

Evaluating the impact of youth work in contexts of chronic urban violence

Certainly these initiatives have generated many positive opportunities for young people in Medellín (Baird, 2013a). However, methodologically it is complicated to quantify how this may have reduced levels of gang membership and violence in the city⁷. Lamentably, youth policy and youth work initiatives have been hampered in their capacity to provide livelihood options for youths and to dissuade them from engaging with gang life. Here there are three principle challenges: First, many CSOs are under-resourced and struggle for survival, and despite the rise to prominence of youth policy within municipal institutions, it is still a challenge to have youth projects prioritised and integrate their approaches with other government offices – such as health, education and particularly policing and traditional security provision (Cruz, 20/11/2007). Second, a number of community organisations have noted what they call the absence of an ‘integral state policy’ to target the structural causes of violence such as exclusion, inequality and poverty, arguing that previous programs such as *Fuerza Joven*, ‘Youth Strength’, only provide temporary respite where structural causes of violence are not tackled more effectively, and as such fail to interrupt the “vicious cycle of violence in the poorest neighbourhoods” (Con-Vivamos, 12/08/2010: 5). Contexts of exclusion have been extensively linked to gang, youth and urban violence in the literature (e.g. Rodgers & Baird, forthcoming 2015; Winton, 2004; Moser and Rodgers, 2005; Barker, 2005; Koonings and Kruijt, 2007; Koonings and Kruijt, 2009; Gutiérrez Sanín, 2009; Barker, 2005). From this perspective, youth gangs - paradigmatic of such violence - are actually dystopian epiphenomena of broader structural systems of exclusion embedded in the political economy of the city. Third, the continuing background of chronic violence

⁷ Measuring a negative phenomenon – violence *not* occurring – is difficult, particularly given the range of factors that can contribute both directly and indirectly to homicide rates dropping, such as; the domination of one criminal syndicate over the city, rising youth employment rates, rising levels of youths in full time education, improved policing, reduction in small arms and light weapons availability, demobilisation processes, et cetera. See also Baird, 2013b.

in Medellín has impeded the success of youth work and youth policies. This is complex and requires further explanation.

First of all, the state 'securitisation' response to urban violence has been counterproductive by actually fortifying organised crime with linkages to gang activity. When youth work was developing in Medellín and high rates of homicide persisted amongst the youth population, the state's securitisation response to gang and insurgent violence⁸ involved police and military crack-downs of the *mano dura* ilk, but with a Colombian twist - in the case of Medellín this involved collusion with paramilitary groups (Cívico, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2001; Llorente, 2009; Noche & Niebla, 2002; Rozema, 2008). Paramilitary groups 'took over' Medellín, coercing gangs and putting them on the payroll. One gang member was asked why he joined the paramilitaries, he replied matter-of-factly:

For security. Because in the neighbourhood where we lived there were a lot of wars... You have to go with the flow of your neighbourhood. How could we be against the neighbourhood? You had to join the paramilitaries when they took over (Carritas, 16/07/2008)

The alternatives to joining the paramilitaries for young gang members were to flee or be killed. Unsurprisingly most gang members joined up and inter-gang turf wars subsided temporarily leading to a drop-off in the homicide rate – Medellín's so-called 'miracle'⁹. The takeover of Medellín was led by the paramilitary group *Bloque Cacique Nutibarra*, headed by the crime-lord Diego Murillo a.k.a. *Don Berna*, which quickly absorbed rival paramilitary group *Bloque Metro*¹⁰. The supposed paramilitary takeover in the mid-2000s is actually a misnomer for what was the reconfiguration, and then assertion, of *Don Berna's* criminal control of the city's narcotics dominated underworld. Such was his control that the term *Don*

⁸ Left-wing urban militia groups linked to the broader armed conflict.

⁹ For debate see for example <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/apr/17/medellin-murder-capital-to-model-city-miracle-un-world-urban-forum> (cited 04/10/2014).

¹⁰ As stated by *InSight*: "After Operation Orion, paramilitary group Bloque Metro was absorbed by the Medellín crimelord Murillo and his paramilitary wing, Bloque Cacique Nutibarra. Murillo's control was total, even during a peace process between the government and the paramilitary groups. In 2003, for instance, in order to keep up the appearance that Murillo was collaborating with authorities during that process, he ordered the combos to keep murder rates low. The peace lasted until Murillo himself was extradited in 2008, and Vargas and Bonilla began battling for control of the city." Cited in <http://insightcrime.org/investigations/insight-exclusives/item/906-medellins-turbulent-comuna-13> (21/10/2011).

A conflict broke out for the domination of the city between the *Bloque Metro* and the *Bloque Cacique Nutibarra*, as portrayed in the *comuna 8* in Scott Dalton's documentary *La Sierra* (2005).

Bernabilidad emerged in the local slang, or *parlache*, as a play on words mixing his name with the Spanish word for governance (Llorente, 2009). Although the *Bloque Cacique Nutibarra* espoused political rhetoric in reality their political pretensions were nil; they acted as the preceding organised criminal syndicates or *oficinas* before them, using local gang members as foot-soldiers to control the city's lucrative retail drugs sales market. These 'grey' alliances between gangs and paramilitaries were fomented by state-led securitisation, leading gangs to become evermore 'structure like'¹¹ and embedded in communities. This increased their capacity to recruit vulnerable male youths into their ranks, strengthening the logic of criminal violence and continued insecurity in Medellín's peripheral *comunas populares*.

Don Bernabilidad was essentially the exertion of a criminal logic of violence over a political one. This logic of violence can also be understood using a typology of armed violence fatalities: those which occur in 'conflict' - political, guerrilla-paramilitary-state - versus those which are 'non-conflict' - criminal, social, economic, institutional (Moser and Rodgers, 2005; Small Arms Survey, 2013)¹². As noted by Daniel Peacut as far back as 1997, 85% of Colombia's lethal violence is not accounted for by combat deaths directly attributed to the armed conflict, but by criminal and social 'disorganised' violence (Pecaut). This is reflected in the dominance of organised crime and gangs in Medellín today. For example, for the research conducted for this chapter 40 life-history interviews were conducted with youths who sometimes called themselves gang members, and sometimes paramilitaries. However, not a single one claimed that they joined an armed group for political purposes. One example of this is Carritas who refers to his economic rational for joining the gang:

"It's Don Berna that ran everything, so the high command had to pay attention to what he said because he was the one who controlled the money... So like I'm telling you, the boss in the one with the money. If you've got a boss who can't buy you a drink, who can't hand you a bit of money, phsssh [whistles out air],

¹¹ For further debate on the concept of the gang or local armed group as a structured and structuring entity that generates violence see Baird (Chapter 3, 2011). Pearce has referred to the intergenerational transmission of violence (Pearce, 2006), and Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois (2004: 1) comment that 'reproduced' violence is increasingly referred to with a range of terms such as cyclical, mimetic, spirals, mirrors, et cetera.

¹² On definitions of 'conflict' and 'non-conflict' violence see Small Arms Survey, 2013. For a typeology of violence see Moser and Rodgers, 2005.

what sort of boss is that? That's no kind of boss! (Interview, Carritas, 16/07/2008).

In Medellín's *comunas* populares where gangs are ubiquitous, the 'relative riches' of gang membership (Pitts, 2008) are particularly seductive in a context where alternative and dignified livelihood opportunities are stymied. From a gendered perspective gangs provide young men with an attractive pathway to manhood in emasculating settings (Baird, 2012b, 2015; Barker, 2005). This is compounded by the fact that only a small minority of local male youths need join the gang – as low as 5% - to perpetuate its structure and to maintain high levels of violence and fear (Baird, 2012b). Under these conditions, preventing youths joining gangs and the subsequent perpetuation of their structures is extremely challenging.

The above analysis helps explain why youth work and youth policies have not been able to undermine or fundamentally subvert the control of local gangs in Medellín. Municipal offices of the state and civil society organisations *have* made progress with youths living in poor neighbourhoods by providing a range of alternatives to violence, but they have not been able to 'disembed' and uproot gang structures from local communities. Gang dominance was starkly apparent in 2013 when a women's rights activist and respected community leader from the notorious north-east corner of the city explained that, despite years of personal recognition for her work, she still had to pay extortion fees or *vacunas* to the local gang. When she confronted the local gang leader, bravely or naively, he promptly threatened to murder her family if she refused to pay (field diary, 27/07/2013). This reflects similar experiences of youth work by NGOs in Rio de Janeiro as Gay says, "few of them challenged the power of gangs, however, or could be considered transformative in the broader political sense of the word" (Gay, 2009). It is, understandably, very difficult for civil society organisations to oppose gang rule in such settings. This means the broader challenges of working in gang-controlled neighbourhoods remain. Keeping youths out of crime and violence when they are forced to negotiate the gangs in their daily lives is a hard task indeed.

Conclusions

There have been many successes of civil society activism in promoting human security, development, political participation, and bringing about social change in Medellín. They have also played a decisive role in bringing to power and influencing the policies of recent Mayors Sergio Fajardo (2004-7), Alonso Salazar (2008-11) and Aníbal Gaviria (20012-15). We need to flag up these successes, and in many ways, Medellín is a laboratory for civic responses to human insecurity, reflected by the *Observatory for Human Security in Medellín*, as much as it is an epicentre of urban violence. Medellín's civil society is undoubtedly a vibrant and wealthy source to learn from and co-construct knowledge around violence reduction. However, civic efforts including municipal work by youth offices such as *Metrojuventud* in violence prevention have been undermined by the state securitisation policies of the 2000s, which have contributed to the on-going criminal domination of the city. It would be unfair to say that youth work has *failed* to 'disembed' the power of gangs in Medellín's most vulnerable communities when state security forces have been complicit in promoting paramilitary groups that have added momentum to organised criminal violence and drug trafficking, leading to the strengthening of gang structures. This promotes the gang's capacity to self-perpetuate through the continued recruitment of poor young men into their ranks, driving Medellín's chronic violence. State policies in this sense are Janus faced: on the one hand 'securitisation' has compounded the criminal structures and gangs that draw youths into lives of violence; whilst on the other, municipal offices like *Metrojuventud* actively run programs to give youths positive alternatives to joining the gang. If youth policies are to reduce violence and if civil society organisations are to be more effective, integrated strategies are needed that combine their efforts with the legitimate the establishment of the Rule of Law in the *comunas populares*.

Interviews

- ARIAS, E. (20/11/2007) *Interview*. Instituto Popular de Capacitación. Medellín.
- CARITAS (16/07/2008) *Interview*. Medellín.
- CELIS, D. (28/04/2008) *Interview*. CEPAR. Medellín.
- CRUZ, L. M. (20/11/2007) *Interview*. Metrojuventud. Medellín.
- EL LOCO (03/06/2008) *Interview*. Medellín.
- EL PELUDO (03/06/2008) *Interview*. Medellín.
- GUISADO, C. (29/11/2007) *Personal Interview*.
- MARQUÉZ VALDERRAMA, F. (21/07/2006) *Interview*. Corporación Región. Medellín.
- MOSQUERA, L. (10/10/2007) *Interview*. Corporación Con-Vivamos. Medellín.
- RUIZ BOTERO, L. D. (03/10/2007) *Interview*. Instituto Popular de Capacitación, Medellín.
- TAMAYO, M. (03/04/2008) *Interview*. Corporación Con-Vivamos. Medellín.
- VELÁZQUEZ, M. (25/04/2007) *Interview*. CEPAR. Medellín.

Bibliography

- ADAMS, T. M. (2012) *Chronic Violence and its Reproduction: Perverse Trends in Social Relations, Citizenship, and Democracy in Latin America*. Citizen Security and Organized Crime. Washington, Woodrow Wilson Centre.
- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (September 2005) *The paramilitaries in Medellín: Demobilization or legalization?* London.
- ANDRADE, R. F. (Ed.) (1992) *Ser Joven en Medellín: Seis ensayos*, Medellín, Corporación Región.
- ANGARITA CAÑA, P. E. (Ed.) (2000) *Balance de los Estudios sobre la Violencia en Antioquia*, Medellín, Universidad de Antioquia.
- ARIAS, E. (20/11/2007) *Interview*, Medellín.
- ARICAPA ARDILA, R. (2005) *Comuna 13: Crónica de Un Guerra Urbana*, Medellín, Editorial Universidad de Antioquia.
- BAIRD, A. (2009) *Methodological Dilemmas: Researching Violent Young Men in Medellín, Colombia*. *IDS Bulletin. Violence, Social Action and Research*, 40, 72-77.
- BAIRD, A. (2012a). *Negotiating Pathways to Manhood: Rejecting gangs and violence in Medellín's periphery*. *Journal of Conflictology, UOC*, 3(1), 28-39.
- BAIRD, A. (2012b). *The Violent Gang and the Construction of Masculinity Amongst Socially Excluded Young Men*. *Safer Communities: A Journal of Practice, Opinion, Policy and Research*, 11(4).
- BAIRD, A., (2013a), *¿Héroes Olvidados? Activismo de la sociedad civil y las políticas de juventud en Medellín*, in BAIRD, A. & SERRANO, J. F. (Eds), *Paz Paso a Paso: Una mirada desde los Estudios de Paz a los Conflictos Colombianos*, Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad Javeriana.
- BAIRD, A. (2013b) *Analytical Report on Best Practices for Youth Engagement in the Caribbean to Promote a 'Shift to Better Citizen Security' Prevention, Participation and Potential*, UNDP.

- BAIRD, A. (2015). Duros & Gangland Girlfriends: Male Identity and Gang Socialisation in Medellín. In J. Auyero, P. Bourgois, & N. Scheper-Hughes (Eds.), *Violence at the Urban Margins in the Americas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- BALBIN ALVAREZ, J. & ABAD GALLARDO, J. M. (Eds.) (1996) *Juventud y Desarrollo: Una mirada a la propuesta del panl municipal de desarrollo juvenil en la ciudad de Medellín*, Medellín, IPC.
- BARKER, G. (2005) *Dying To Be Men: Youth, masculinity and social exclusion*, London, Routledge.
- BEDOYA, J. (2010) *La protección violenta en Colombia: El caso de Medellín desde los años noventa*, Medellín, Instituto Popular de Capacitación.
- CARRITAS (16/07/2008) *Interview*, Medellín.
- CARVAJAL, L. E. (Ed.) (2000) *Umbrales: Cambios culturales, desafíos nacionales y juventud*, Medellín, Corporación Región.
- CIDH (1999) MEDIDAS CAUTELARES 1999. Washington, Comision Interamericana de Derechos Humanos.
- CIVICO, A. (2012). "We are Illegal, but not Illegitimate." Modes of Policing in Medellín, Colombia. *PoLAR Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 35(1).
- CON-VIVAMOS, C. (12/08/2010) LA GRAVE CRISIS HUMANITARIA DE MEDELLÍN CONTRASTA CON EL BALANCE POSITIVO DE LA FERIA DE LAS FLORES. Medellín.
- DALTON, S. (2005) *La Sierra*, <http://www.lasierrafilm.com/aboutthefilm01.html>
- DE DIOS GRACIANO, J. (1995) IV Seminario: Mesa de Trabajo de la Juventud. Medellín.
- EL ESPECTADOR (02/03/2009) Don Berna' salpica al ex general Mario Montoya. Medellín, [Elespectador.com](http://elespectador.com).
- GAY, R. (2009). From popular movement to drug gangs to militias: An anatomy of violence Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro. In K. Koonings & D. Kruijt (Eds.), *Mega-Cities: The Politics of Urban Exclusion and Violence in the Global South*, London: Zed.
- GOLDSTEIN, D. M. (2004). *The Spectacular City: Violence and performance in urban Bolivia. Latin America otherwise* (p. xiii, 274 p.). Durham: Duke University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.loc.gov/catdir/toc/ecip0413/2004001305.html>
- GUTIÉRREZ SANÍN, F. (2009) Violence and Social Inequalities. *LASA Forum*, XL.
- HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (2001) *La Sexta División: Relaciones Militares-Paramilitares y La Política Estadounidense en Colombia*, Washington.
- HYLTON, F. (2007) Extreme Makeover: Medellín in the New Millennium. IN DAVIS, M. & BERTRAND MONK, D. (Eds.) *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*. London, The New Press.
- JARAMILLO ECHEVERRI, G. (1990) Una Mirada Cultural a la Violencia Juvenil en el Medellín de los Ochenta. *Violencia Juvenil: Diagnostico y Alternativas*. Medellín, Corporación Región.
- JARAMILLO GIRALDO, L. G. & BURITICA LONDOÑO, L. M. (2000) Estado de arte de las investigaciones sobre violencia juvenil en Antioquia. IN ANGARITA CAÑA, P. E. (Ed.) *Balance de los Estudios sobre Violencia en Antioquia*. Medellín, Universidad de Antioquia.
- JENSEN, S. & RODGERS, D. (2009) Revolutionaries, Barbarians or War Machines? Gangs in Nicaragua and South Africa. *Socialist Register*, 45.

- JIMÉNEZ CABALLERO, C. (2006) *Desobedecer para Convivir: Construcción de ciudadanía y campo psicosocial*. Medellín, Save the Children Canada & Corporación Picacho con Futuro.
- JIMENEZ, M. (1996) *Planes de Desarrollo Juvenil: ¿Una alternativa a la crisis juvenil?*, Medellín, Viceministerio de la Juventud.
- KOONINGS, K. & KRUIJT, D. (Eds.) (2007) *Fractured Cities: Social exclusion, urban violence and contested spaces in Latin America*, London, Zed Books.
- KOONINGS, K. & KRUIJT, D. (Eds.) (2009) *Mega-Cities: The politics of urban exclusion and violence in the global south*, London, Zed Books.
- LLORENTE, M. V. (2009) Los reinsertados de Medellín y la 'donbernabilidad'. Fundación Ideas Para La Paz.
- MARQUÉZ VALDERRAMA, F. & OSPINA, M. (1999) *Programa Casas Juveniles: Pensando a la juventud de una manera diferente*, Medellín, Corporación Región.
- MEDINA FRANCO, G. (2006) *Historia Sin Fin...: Las Milicias en Medellín en la década del noventa*.
- MOSER, C. & RODGERS, D. (2005) *Change, Violence and Insecurity in Non-Conflict Situations*. London, Overseas Development Institute.
- MOSQUERA, L. (10/10/2007) *Interview*, Medellín.
- MUGGAH, R. (2012) *Researching the Urban Dilemma: Urbanization, Poverty and Violence*
- MUGGAH, R. & AGUIRRE, K. (2013) *Assessing and responding to youth violence in Latin America: Surveying the evidence*,
- NOCHE & NIEBLA (2002) *Comuna 13, La Otra Versión*, Bogotá, CINEP & Justicia y Paz.
- OROZCO, J. C. & MORALES, A. L. (1990) La Organización Juvenil en la Zona Nororiental. IN REGIÓN, C. (Ed. *Violencia Juvenil: Diagnóstico y Alternativas*. Medellín, Corporación Región.
- PEARCE, J. (2006) *Violence, Power and Participation: Citizenship in contexts of chronic violence*. IDS Participation Group.
- PÉREZ, A. & PELÁEZ, J. (1990) La Violencia en la Comuna Nororiental de Medellín. *Violencia Juvenil: Diagnóstico y Alternativas*. Medellín, Corporación Región.
- PÉREZ, E. (1996) Evolucion de la Política de Juventud. IN BALBIN ALVAREZ, J. & ABAD GALLARDO, J. M. (Eds.) *Juventud y Desarrollo: Una mirada a la propuesta del panl municipal de desarrollo juvenil en la ciudad de Medellín*. Medellín, IPC.
- Pitts, J. (2008). *Reluctant Gangsters: the changing face of youth crime*. London: Willam Publishing.
- RAMÍREZ GÓMEZ, H. (1979) *En La Parte Alta Abajo*, Medellín, Editorial Lealon.
- RODGERS, D. (2010) Interview with Dennis Rodgers. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92, 313-328.
- RODGERS, D., & BAIRD, A. (forthcoming). Understanding Gangs in Contemporary Latin America. In S. DECKER & D. PYROOZ (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Gangs*. Oxford: John Wiley & Son (2015)
https://www.academia.edu/7754343/Rodgers_D._and_Baird_A._Understanding_gangs_in_contemporary_Latin_America
- ROZEMA, R. (2008) Urban DDR-processes: paramilitaries and criminal networks in Medellín, Colombia. *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Cambridge University Press, 40.

- RUIZ BOTERO, L. D. & HERNÁNDEZ MARTÍNEZ, M. (2008) *Nos pintaron pajaritos: El conflicto armado y sus implicaciones en la niñez colombiana*, Medellín, Instituto Popular de Capacitación.
- SALAZAR, A. (1990) *Las Bandas Juveniles en el Valle de Aburra: Una lectura desde la perspectiva cultural. Violencia Juvenil: Diagnóstico y Alternativas*. Medellín, Corporación Región.
- SMALL ARMS SURVEY, 2008 *Risk and Resilience*, Geneva, The Graduate Institute.
- SMALL ARMS SURVEY, 2013 *Everyday Violence*, Geneva, The Graduate Institute.
- UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (1994) Human Development Report. <http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1994/>
- URÁN ARENAS, O. A. (2000) *La juventud de movimiento social a conjuntos de acción juvenil diferenciados. La Ciudad en Movimiento: Movimientos sociales, democracia y cultura en Medellín y el área Metropolitana del Valle de Aburrá*. Medellín, IPC.
- URÁN ARENAS, O. A., VALENCIA, P. & MEDINA, G. (1996) *Medellin en Vivo: La historia del Rock*, Medellín, IPC, Corporación Región, Viceministerio de la Juventud.
- WILKINSON, R. (2004) Why is Violence More Common Where Inequality is Greater? *New York Academy of Sciences*, 1036: 1–12.
- WINTON, A. (2004) Urban Violence: A Guide to the Literature. *Environment and Urbanization*, 16, 165-184.