

# SPATIAL JUSTICE AND INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Integral Urban Projects in the  
Comunas of Medellín

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Integral Urban Projects in the  
Comunas of Medellín

BY

**EVA SCHWAB**

*Institute of Landscape Architecture,  
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences,  
Vienna, Austria*



United Kingdom — North America — Japan  
India — Malaysia — China

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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EDU: Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano (Urban Development Enterprise)

EPM: Empresas Públicas de Medellín (Medellin's public utility company)

INDER: Instituto de Deportes y Recreación de Medellín (Institute of Sports and Recreation of Medellin)

JAC: Junta de Acción Comunal (Community Action Group)

Obras Públicas: Secretaría de Obras Públicas (Municipal Secretary for Public Infrastructure)

PD: Plan de Desarrollo (Urban Development Plan)

PDL: Plan de Desarrollo Local (Local Development Plan)

PP: Presupuesto Participativo (Participative Budgeting)

PRIMED: Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Informales (Integral program for the upgrading of informal settlements)

PUI: Proyecto Urbano Integral (Integral Urban Project)

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Eva Schwab** is Lecturer and Researcher at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna. Her research focuses on the politics of public space and socio-spatial urban research. She has been engaged in a number of inter- and transdisciplinary research projects in a national as well as international context. Her PhD won the Landscape Research Group's Dissertation Prize as well as her university's Talent Award.

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## INTRODUCTION

*This chapter presents the topic of the ‘new generation’ of upgrading initiatives in informal settlements in Latin America and the rationale for this book, its objectives and research questions, focusing on the issues of spatial justice and public open spaces in informal settlements. It also provides a short insight into the research setting, i.e. the social, economic and physical characteristics of the case study location, Comuna 13 in Medellín, including short descriptions about the three spaces that were investigated in detail. It also provides a brief overview of the research methodology applied.*

**Keywords:** Medellín; PUI; Comuna 13; informal settlement; upgrading

This publication brings together the discourses of informal urbanism and spatial justice; two topics, which independently of each other have gained immense academic interest and political relevance in recent years. However, despite the obvious connection between them and the fact that applied

research on spatial justice covers a great diversity of issues, there is little academic research focusing on spatial justice in informal settlements in the Global South.

The study presented in this book is about open spaces in informal settlements in Latin America and how they support spatial justice and people's quality of life. From a landscape architectural standpoint it enquires into their design, production, use and management in the context of a 'new generation' of governmental upgrading programmes which aim at reducing poverty in an integral manner (Riley, Ramirez, & Fiori, 2001). It thus provides in-depth information that is addressed mainly to (landscape) architects, planners and designers, but is also relevant for others conducting urban research such as ethnographers, political scientists or development specialists. This work contributes to a growing – but still scarce – body of literature about open spaces in informal settlements from a spatial justice perspective. It makes the rather elusive notion of spatial justice applicable to urban research from a design and planning point of view and contributes to a Global South perspective to it. It uses as a case study the city of Medellín, one of the recent success stories of integral urban transformation and provides arguments for a critical understanding of this development.

## SPATIAL JUSTICE

Spatial justice links social justice concerns to space; it is based on the understanding that both justice and injustice are visible in space as manifestations of the interaction between society and space. Formative conceptions of spatial justice revolve around distributional notions of justice with the goal of achieving equity, but also award a central position to procedural aspects of justice, aiming at people's empowerment.



A distributional understanding of justice strongly focuses on the material quality of spaces, i.e. the equitable distribution of resources, services and access and argues that an equal geographical distribution of the benefits of spatial resources and equal accessibility to them would establish a more just society. Procedural aspects of justice are concerned with fair decision-making processes in urban planning and development to foster empowerment. Opening planning and design processes for those concerned and – more generally – the distribution of authority are main goals. This encompasses questions of how groups of people and their social practices find representation in space as well as which agents influence these representations.

## SPATIAL JUSTICE IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Informal settlements in Latin America are developed through people's self-help and self-build initiatives but are also formed by public, i.e. state, intervention (Hataya, 2007; Hernández García, 2013) and thus are a combination of informal and formal socio-spatial strategies. Following this understanding, this book focuses the analysis on governmental upgrading initiatives as one of the ways in which informal settlements can reach improvement and consolidation, without neglecting the actors which develop space in an informal manner.

Governmental interventions into informal settlements have come a long way from neglect and eradication to the formulation of more integral approaches, which, since the 1980s, have recognised the importance of a multi-level in-situ approach to tackle poverty reduction and quality of life. Especially, integral neighbourhood policies such as *Mejoramiento Barrial y Urbano* (MBU) (Rojas, 2009; Torres-Tovar, Rincón-García, Vargas-Moreno, & Amaya-Medina, 2013) or *Programas de*

Mejoramiento de Barrios (PMB) (Bakarz, 2002) are aimed at providing social services and improved spatial infrastructure. They have shaped the Latin American approach to social and physical transformation, albeit always with a focus on housing issues. The new generation of programmes which have developed since the late 1990s and early 2000s follow the same logic, but are new in terms of their scale of interventions, the complexity of topics tackled as well as their link to changed notion of municipal governance. What also unites them is a focus on good design to establish public (open) space as a motor for social integration between the informal settlements and the city, thus to accomplish wider social change (Riley et al., 2001).

Equity, i.e. distributive spatial justice, is a frequently recurring argument in the governments' motivations and goals to intervene in informal settlements (EDU and Inter-American Development Bank, 2014). There is, however, an influential body of literature that raises serious doubts about whether claims for justice in these fragmented and unjust environments can be answered with arguments of distributive justice alone (Fainstein, 2010; Marcuse, 2009; Sen, 2009; Soja, 2010).

This research therefore questions how spatial justice can be conceived in the context of governmental upgrading initiatives in informal settlements in Latin America and presents an inquiry into how public open spaces serve the goal of increasing spatial justice and quality of life in informal settlements. It draws on a case study of one informal settlement in Medellín/Colombia as an example of the new generation upgrading programmes. There are various examples of the new generation upgrading programmes, in cities of different sizes, with different cultural, social and political contexts and in different regions of Latin America. Apart from Medellín's Urbanismo Social and the associated Integral Urban Projects (PUI for their Spanish name), Favela-Bairro in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil,

surely is one of the most recognised programmes (Fiori, Riley, & Ramirez, 2001; Peterson, 2008). It was highly influential on other programmes in other cities, and shares central components such as the improvement of public open space and other urban infrastructure or participatory practices for community development with programmes such as Barrio de Verdad in La Paz/Bolivia or Quiero mi Barrio in Santiago de Chile, Chile, Promeba in Argentina and Programa Habitat in Mexico (Rojas, 2009).

Medellín, in this context, offers an especially worthwhile research setting. The spatial and social transformation of the city since the beginning of this millennium, triggered by municipal governments with a new understanding of leadership, has turned it into a showcase for inclusive urban upgrading. The case of Medellín is widely publicised and proactively ‘exported’ by the city government as a globally applicable strategy. Also, it is recognised by institutions such as the UN or the Inter-American Development Bank for increasing spatial justice, and as such widely accepted as a ‘best practice’ example. This situation makes investigating the case of Medellín significant in a global context, with findings offering transferability to cities in a similar context.

This research is motivated by the urban and social realities of most cities in the Global South. The 21st century has been labelled the ‘Urban Age’ (Burdett & Sudjic, 2008); worldwide more people now live in cities than in rural areas. Urbanisation in the 21st century is taking place foremost in countries of the Global South. As cities in these countries grow at an ever faster pace, informal urbanism has become the primary mode of expansion in them (Burdett & Sudjic, 2008; Roy & AlSayyad, 2004). This situation confronts established notions of justice with new dimensions of inequality. It also challenges urban planners and designers to reconceptualise their professional contribution vis-a-vis urban

informality. Martin-Moreno (2008, p. 42) goes as far as to claim that in the face of self-build modes of urban space production professionals have lost their relevance; he invites architects, planners and urbanists to develop ‘new tools to find ways to participate in making the city’.

Looking at the Latin American context specifically, we see it is one of the most urbanised places on earth, with 83% of its national populations living in cities, a figure which will rise to 90% by 2050 (UN, 2014). Growth dynamics in informal settlements have become less accentuated in recent years, thus consolidation and upgrading of informal settlements are a central issue in Latin American cities. Work on improving informal settlement has thus become a task for planners and designers, who increasingly find themselves working in cities using ‘equity’ as a marketing tool to be competitive in the global economy (Brand, 2009) and not as an intrinsic value in planning. It is thus important to know on what values these upgrading initiatives are based on and how they can foster justice even better.

Past views on informality were characterised by an attitude of denigration of both the material qualities of informal settlements and the urban poor more generally and have centred around binary and marginalising discourses such as formal/informal, legal/illegal, and planned/unplanned. In more current literature, however, there is a tendency to counter these beliefs by portraying informal settlements as inspirational lessons for planners and designers around the world, as materialised cultural resistance or even as alternative ‘autonomous geographies’, able to inspire new urban paradigms which are based on the particular relationship between people and place, on alternative forms of social organisation and on the human scale of this form of urbanity (AlSayyad, 2004; Beardsley & Werthmann, 2008; Brillembourg & Klumpner, 2010; Brillembourg,

Klumpner, & Feireiss, 2005; Mehrotra, 2010; Pickerill & Chatterton, 2006). Geographer Ann Varley (2009) warns of 'these heroic narratives of informality', suggesting that they help to reproduce binary opposites between the formal and informal and 'sugarcoat' the deprivation and struggle in informal settlements. This is doubtlessly dangerous, especially as this puts 'a heavy theoretical responsibility' on the shoulders of settlers and implies a voluntariness in people's actions that neglects their disadvantaged position in society. Another problematic issue in this is the discursive 'favelatisation' of Latin America that only reports a certain image, thus neglecting not only the material diversity of informal settlements but also implying a homogeneity in people's life realities that stereotypes and neglects existing diversity. I would argue, however, that this view – even though it does show problematic aspects – has helped to overcome the 'natural' association of informality with poverty, marginality and crime, and has fostered an understanding of it as an alternative way of doing things in its own right (Hernandez & Kellett, 2010; Roy, 2009). Equally, it shows that informality can be seen as an alternative mode of production of space in which the people producing this space emerge as central. In this context, geographer Jennifer Robinson (2006) has developed a perspective which challenges the dichotomous mindset by advocating the notion of the 'ordinary city' to counter the restrictive effect of 'categorising and labelling cities'. She calls for the exploration of 'different tactics for promoting urban development. These would be tactics that release poor cities from the imaginative straightjacket of imitative urbanism and the regulating fiction of catching up to wealthier, Western cities' (Robinson, 2006, p. 11). This understanding, I claim, is the basis on which notions of spatial justice in informal settlements must be built.

## OPEN SPACES IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS

Public spaces, many of which are open spaces, are the key intervention sites of the new generation upgrading programmes, based on the idea that upgraded public space would trigger wider social and physical change. While this approach to public space as an agent of change has been developed and is widely used in the European context (Paravicini, 2002), there is little knowledge about the applicability of this approach in upgrading informal settlements. This paucity of information converges with the fact that open spaces – whether public or not – in informal settlement seldom are the focus of research from an urbanistic or design standpoint. The housing perspective to a large extent drives informal settlement research, mainly from a quantitative perspective. With some notable exceptions (Hernández García, 2013), this has led to lacking knowledge about the spatial configuration of open spaces in informal settlements and about the spatial practices the residents engage in. An investigation of open spaces in informal settlements, however, needs to be aware that public open spaces are not the only ones which receive public or community use and that thus conventional and idealistic understanding of space as state property accessible to ‘all’ (Carmona, 2010; Ivenson, 1998; Madanipour, 2003; Marcuse, 2003) cannot be applied to the open spaces available in them. Considerations of their usability and accessibility (Hernández García, 2013) suggest addressing them as communally or publicly usable open spaces, or just open spaces, thus including the use value aspects which are important in them.

## OBJECTIVES, THEMES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This book explores the material configuration, production, management and use of open spaces in informal settlements

in the context of in-situ governmental upgrading initiatives. It does so from a spatial justice standpoint which is based on valuing the social and material achievements of settlers as a contribution to urban life and culture (Samuels & Khosla, 2005) and the ‘design of cities’ (Tonkiss, 2013), seeing them as an alternative way of doing things in its own right (Hernandez & Kellett, 2010). In this way, this work aims to add to the discourse on informality and governmental upgrading initiatives.

The objectives of the study are:

- This work aims to broaden the knowledge about open spaces in informal settlements and people’s everyday practices of use.
- It intends to reflect critically on the relationship between public space policies, design and societal structures with regards to spatial justice.
- It seeks to identify how spatial (in)justice is understood by communities and authorities.
- It seeks to understand better the potential of formally produced public open spaces for a just city use in upgrading popular settlements.

Three main themes will be covered theoretically and empirically in order to pursue the objectives proposed: open spaces in informal settlements, governmental upgrading of informal settlements as well as notions and understandings of spatial justice applicable to informal settlements. While the latter is the guiding theme of this work, it is based on the analysis and discussion of the first two themes.

These themes are addressed by the following research questions. The first, the main research question, is detailed by

a variety of sub-questions enquiring into different aspects of open spaces and spatial justice in the upgrading initiative.

- Can formally produced public open space through governmental intervention act as an agent of change towards increased spatial justice in informal settlements?
  - How are contemporary public open spaces in informal and formal parts of the city constituted?
  - What activities do people perform in everyday open spaces in popular settlements?
  - Do formally produced public open spaces include people's everyday spaces and if so, which uses do they perform in them?
  - How do management and regulation of formally established open spaces in popular settlements influence their accessibility and usability?
  - What is the notion of spatial justice in the upgrading of popular settlements understood and employed by the different actors in the upgrading process?
  - How do the different actors in the upgrading process assess its effect?

#### THE RESEARCH SETTING: MEDELLÍN AND COMUNA 13, AN INFORMAL SETTLEMENT

This research is set in Medellín, Colombia. Colombia is one of the most urbanised countries in Latin America and one of its leading economies. Despite that, it is influenced by a highly unequal distribution of land, resources and opportunities. Medellín is no exception to this situation; in fact it is the most unequal city of Colombia with a GINI Index of



0.54; furthermore, unemployment and poverty rates are well above the national median (DANE, 2012). Inequality of distribution and opportunities affects especially the 50% of Medellín's 2.4 million inhabitants living in the peripheral informal settlements (DAP, 2011). Since the onset of industrialisation people have come to Medellín in search for better opportunities and emancipation, settling in the peripheral areas. In addition to rural poverty and lack of opportunities, the long-lasting armed conflict between guerrillas, paramilitary, military and drug traffickers in the country – lasting for over 60 years and causing massive forced displacement – was a major driver of continuing settlement dynamic at the city's periphery. The resulting informal settlements are characterised by high density and a lack of formal urban infrastructure and social services as well as, in many cases, precarious housing conditions and environmental hazards. Poverty and unemployment, educational shortcomings and health problems as well as limited political representation are recurring issues when considering the socio-economic situation of their inhabitants. Nevertheless, many of these settlements gradually move towards consolidation, either thanks to self-build and self-help practices or with the help of institutional actors.

Since the beginning of this millennium, an approach labelled as *Urbanismo Social* ('Social Urbanism') and its recent successors have defined Medellín's urban upgrading policy, both in the city centre and the peripheral neighbourhoods. Both the general approach and its specific measures, such as the PUI – *Proyecto Urbano Integral* (Integral Urban Project) discussed in this book, are taking place within a context of changing political agendas on the national and local level:

The new Colombian Constitution from 1991, for instance, has set the basis and possibilities of policies and programmes

related to upgrading of popular settlements and public open space on the local level. The 1991 Constitution emphasises citizens' participation and grants their co-governance in legislative, judicial, electoral and fiscal initiatives. At the same time, however, it created the setting for strict neoliberal policies and decentralisation (Hunt, 2009). Public open space became central in this context in as the necessary spatial infrastructure that would allow 'coexistence and the democratic exercise of citizenship' (*ibid.*, p. 333).

In the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, the local government put into practice a range of instruments that opened opportunities for citizen's participation and the enhancement of local civil society initiatives, the most important being *Presupuesto Participativo* (PP), Participative Budgeting, *Plan de Desarrollo Local* (PDL), Local Development Plan and *Junta de Acción Comunal* (JAC), Community Action Group. While these instruments are available to any citizen, they have especially impacted local development and participatory practices in the peripheral *barrios populares*, the popular settlements, of the city.

Based on these past experiences and developments, the turn of the millennium was characterised by an atmosphere of political change and innovation. This is also reflected in the Urban Development Plans 2004–2007 (established by mayor Sergio Fajardo for his term of office) and 2008–2011 (established by mayor Alonso Salazar), which have directly impacted and established upgrading programmes, even though they represent a political programme for the whole city.

They show the government's commitment to turn around Medellín's situation and fight the reasons for its enduring social inequality and lacking economic power by defining the integral human development of all the city's inhabitants as the plans' main goals. At the same time they put emphasis on

establishing Medellín as a global brand for urban upgrading (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2011a, 2011b, p. 13).

One of the programmes geared at reducing social inequality by providing and upgrading educational facilities, public open spaces and transport infrastructure, both in the poor peripheral *comunas* and the rundown city-centre, was the *Urbanismo Social* (Social Urbanism) programme, established in 2004 by then-mayor Sergio Fajardo. The subsequent mayors Alonso Salazar and Anibal Gaviria have continued this work, but have given the programme their personal spin and objectives (and names). The most renowned results of this programme are stunning educational facilities, like the *Parque Biblioteca Santo Domingo* or *Parque Explora*, as well as infrastructure like the *Metrocable* cable car connected to the public transport system, to help reinterpret public space positively and demonstrate Fajardo's slogan '*Para los más humildes, lo mejor: los espacios más dignos, los mejores materiales y las nuevas tecnologías*' (The best for the most humble: the most dignified spaces, the best materials and the new technologies).

To execute his plans, then-mayor Fajardo established *Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano* (EDU), the Urban Development Enterprise. EDU is a municipal entity for the development of urbanistic projects that do not fall within the remit of the Municipal Planning Department. It is endowed with administrative and financial independency and is subject to the mayor's range of functions. *Empresas Públicas de Medellín* (EPM), the city's public utility service company, plays a central role for EDU as a 30% of its surplus is destined to serve the government's city-wide upgrading initiative which so becomes independent from the city's normal budget (EDU, n.d.; EPM, n.d.). In addition, if EPM's financial development permits, 'extraordinary contributions' of EPM to the municipality can be decreed by the city council. Between 2008

and 2011, a total of 1.4 billion US dollars (exchange rate September 2011) were provided by EPM's ordinary and extraordinary contributions (EPM, n.d.). *Obras Públicas*, the municipal entity responsible for the design, construction and maintenance of public infrastructure, however, is responsible for the maintenance of the newly created spaces and is part of the city's normal budget (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2013).

Within the government's aim to upgrade informal settlements and EDU's responsibility, a *Proyecto Urbano Integral* (PUI), an Integral Urban Project, is the instrument that directly involves and works in an area which has shown especially low indices of human development. The municipality defines PUI as follows: 'An Integral Urban Project is an instrument of urban intervention which comprises the dimensions of the physical, the social and the institutional, with the aim to resolve specific problems of a defined area, employing all instruments of development simultaneously for the intervention in this said area' (Alcaldía de Medellín and EDU, 2007, p. 5, author's translation). Within a PUI, a group of architects, social workers and sociologist, technical and environmental engineers work on both urban and social interventions. PUIs aim to upgrade the area physically and to introduce initiatives for improved community leadership and social inclusion. In this context, the physical transformation of an area is understood as the necessary setting for the ensuing social transformation of a territory. Beyond its transformative quality for the city and the peripheral informal settlements, Medellín's *Urbanismo Social* plays a major role in making the city more competitive internationally. Especially public open spaces in the city centre and the north of the city have been established as tourist attractions and as 'special' sites, which contribute to the image-building of the city (Harvey, 1989; Hajer & Reijndorp; 2002; Swyngedouw, Moulaert, & Rodriguez, 2002). As observations show, they

serve as site for events and as a backdrop for TV interviews or commercials. This shows the ways these sites are used in the image-building of the city, be it through providing the spatial backdrop for commercials and TV shows or functioning as site for special events or simply as tourist attraction. This applies to the spaces in Comuna 13 to a much lesser extent and is not visible in the analysis of use. By account, the *Escaleras Electricas*, open air escalators connecting Parque 20 de Julio to the upper regions of *Las Independencias* neighbourhood, serve this function. Design analysis shows that generally projects in Comuna 13 show less high design, less variety in the materials and a more functional approach altogether. This challenges ex-mayor Fajardo's slogan 'The best for the most humble', which has become the leitmotiv of Medellín's upgrading programme. Arguably, this vision only applies to the more iconic projects and tends to ignore the spaces which form an important part of people's everyday routines but do not have touristic value, as is suggested by some of the inhabitants of Comuna 13. Either way, the notable differences between the central spaces and the ones in Comuna 13 indicate that there are spaces which are more iconic and important in the context of tourism and the competitive city than others. This may be pragmatic, but is still in contradiction to the way the upgrading programme and its interpretation of equity is presented by the government.

Comuna 13 (also called San Javier), where this research is set, is one of the 16 districts of Medellín and the second area of the city to be tackled by PUI at the end of 2006. It lies at the western periphery of the city, on sloping terrain. Comuna 13 is populated by 130,000 people approximately (5.7% of Medellín's total population) and is one of the least developed districts of Medellín (MCV, 2012, p. 10). It covers an area of 7 km<sup>2</sup>, corresponding to 6.2% of Medellín's total urban area and is densely populated, with nearly 20,000 residents

per km<sup>2</sup>. In its 20 *barrios* (neighbourhoods) it shows a variety of urban fabrics and states of consolidation. See Fig. 1 for an overview of Comuna 13.

The *comuna*'s topography is defined by ridges, canyons, rivers and streams, thus presenting a varied and small-scale landscape, in which the lines of rivers and streams often coincide with neighbourhood boundaries. Especially in the southern and northern part of the *comuna* the slopes show gradients between 40 and 60%. These slopes are highly prone to erosion and landslides, which is also due to deforestation accompanying the rapid urbanisation.

Comuna 13 represents structural evidence of different types of settlement activity throughout a timespan of over a century, beginning at the end of the 19th century. These diverse types of settlement, on soils of mixed quality, are the basis of the strong spatial and social segregation of the *comuna* as well as the strong and contrasting neighbourhood identities (Angarita Cañas et al., 2008, p. 32). *Loteo Pirata*, pirate urbanisations, and *invasiones*, land invasions, were the main forms of settlement activity on the slopes from the

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**Fig. 1. Impressions from Comuna 13.**



1950s on, whereas the more accessible parts of the district had already been developed in 1946 by the *Cooperativa de Vivienda*, a workers' housing cooperative (Universidad del Rosario, 2011). From the 1970s on, land invasion occurred in the most adverse areas due to massive rural immigration and from 1994 on, significant inter-urban migration led to the urbanisation of areas outside the city limits. In the same time span, however, also several *urbanizaciones*, gated communities, have been erected by private developers in more central and accessible locations of the *comuna*.

As of now, some of the self-built neighbourhoods have been consolidated and legalised, whereas others still lack infrastructure, improved housing conditions and in many cases land tenure (Alcaldía de Medellín and EDU, 2007, p. 18).

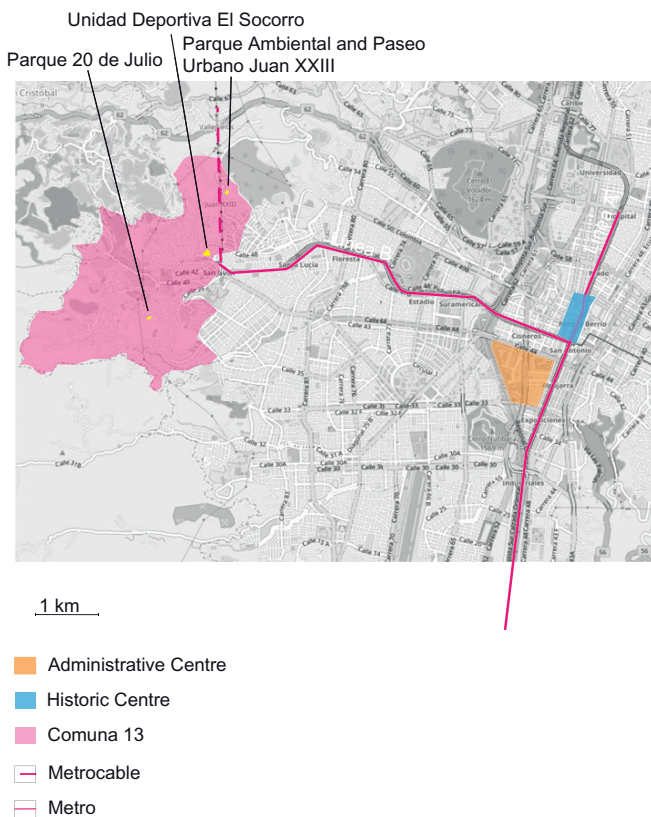
Comuna 13 has become stigmatised, both in national and international press and perception, as the spatial equivalent of drug related gang-violence, confrontations between guerrilla and paramilitary, as well as the government's clamp-down to exercise control in the area. But more so, the history of violence in the district has shaped people's lives and continues to do so. Thus, it needs to be taken into account in any attempt to understand the use of public open space in the community and their role in the process of community development (for a detailed description and analysis see Angarita Cañas et al., 2008).

## NOTES ON METHODOLOGY

Within this complex context, I investigated the variety of people's everyday spaces, people's assessment of the participatory process as well as the use in the three case study sites in field-work lasting for six months, from July 2011 to January 2012. My research focused on people's experiences of public

open spaces as well as the assessments, value judgements and interpretations they offer in regard to the upgrading process. It also incorporated investigations of people's spatial practices in three newly established public open spaces as well as their design and management (please refer to Fig. 2 for their location). I employed a mixed-method qualitative approach; however, some basic quantitative techniques were also used.

**Fig. 2. Location of Case Study Sites.**





Main methods for data generation included:

- (1) Community guided walkthroughs in Comuna 13 (Deinet, 2009) with six community leaders and three PUI staff.
- (2) Two mental maps workshops (Jung, 2014) with 17 adults and 9 children/teenagers.
- (3) Site and design analysis (Lička, 2012) of three sites in Comuna 13 (*Parque 20 de Julio*, *Unidad Deportiva El Socorro* and *Parque Ambiental y Paseo Juan XXIII*).
- (4) Participant observation (Burano-Gruppe, 2005; Kawulich, 2005) of the same three sites on seven occasions throughout the week and at different times during the day/night to get insights into daily/weekly dynamics and changing user groups.
- (5) Semi-structured interviews with community leaders, municipality officials (PUI staff) and independent experts (a total of 27 interviews were conducted with 46 people, lasting between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours) and unstructured discussions with residents (a total of 22 conversations were held, lasting from 10 to 30 minutes). Verbal consent has been obtained from all interviewees to record and use anonymised interview data.

In data analysis, I employed qualitative content analysis for the interview transcripts, graphic analytical tools such as typologies and charting for the data generated during the walkthroughs and the mapping workshops, layered mapping for the spatial analysis and the participant observation. In addition, observation data was analysed using basic statistical means.

To come to terms with how to best operationalise justice for this work I have developed a four-partite framework to investigate central aspects of the production and use of open

space found to be conducive for more spatial justice. It includes (1) the quality of the material space, that is, its functionality as well as its design language and the symbolic meaning it has for the users, (2) the process of its production, that is, how the design and building process was negotiated, (3) the way it is maintained, managed and regulated, and last, (4) the use a certain space receives and how this is linked to the everyday lives and practices of people living in informal settlements. This framework combines the distributive and procedural aspects of justice, the symbolic meaning of the design and the everyday practices that shape the (social) space and so transcends the antagonism between public space as a material site and a political sphere, as it locates the political *in* the material space.

### Unidad Deportiva El Socorro

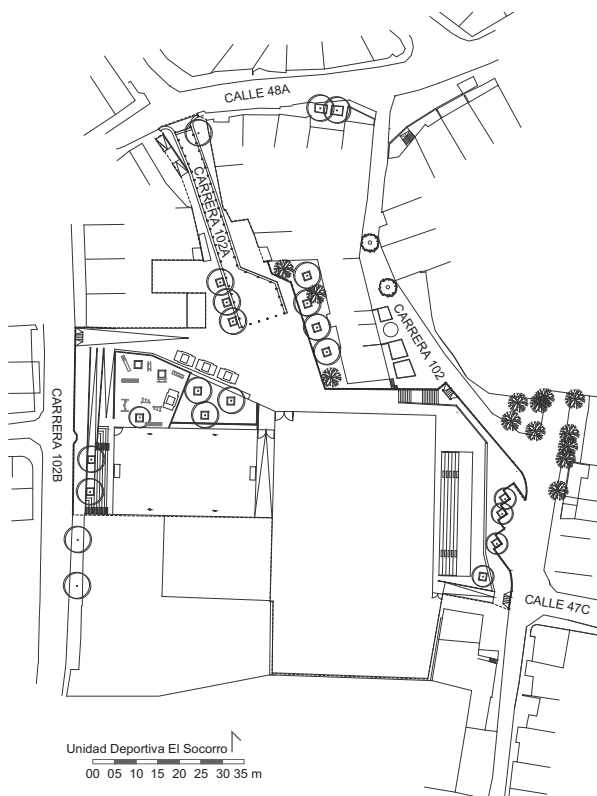
The *Unidad Deportiva El Socorro* has been established in the first phase of PUI in Comuna 13. It was a football pitch with a surface of compacted soil, the prototypical *cancha*, located close to the school and other important community infrastructure, such as shops, the church and the metro, thus fulfilling multiple important functions in the neighbourhood. PUI's initial point of departure for the intervention was the importance of the football field as central multifunctional space of the *barrio* and the site's strategic role for pedestrian traffic and public transport (Alcaldia de Medellín and EDU, 2007, p. 68ff).

Today, *Unidad Deportiva El Socorro* presents itself as a diverse public open space consisting of two main functional areas, the sports and play area and a central square that branches out into the connecting streets. Together with the related connecting streets and pavements, the area of *Unidad Deportiva El Socorro* covers 8818 m<sup>2</sup> (Figs. 3, 4 and 5).

**Figs. 3 and 4. Photo of Unidad Deportiva El Socorro.**



**Fig. 5. Layout Map of Unidad Deportiva El Socorro.**



## Parque 20 de Julio

Before the intervention, the area that now is covered by the Parque 20 de Julio was a two-lane connection road in the area. With *Parque 20 de Julio*, PUI intended to reorganise vehicular traffic and so create an opportunity for a public open space that serves pedestrian traffic equally as its 'recreational, cultural and ludic vocation' (op. cit., p. 87). Though the park is located in the *barrio* of *20 de Julio*, it is an important access point to the surrounding *barrios* of *Las Independencias* and *Nuevos Conquistadores*. The new public open space covers an area of 448 m<sup>2</sup>. It is called a 'park' but is actually a hard surface square (Figs. 6, 7 and 8).

Parque Ambiental y Paseo Urbano  
Juan XXIII

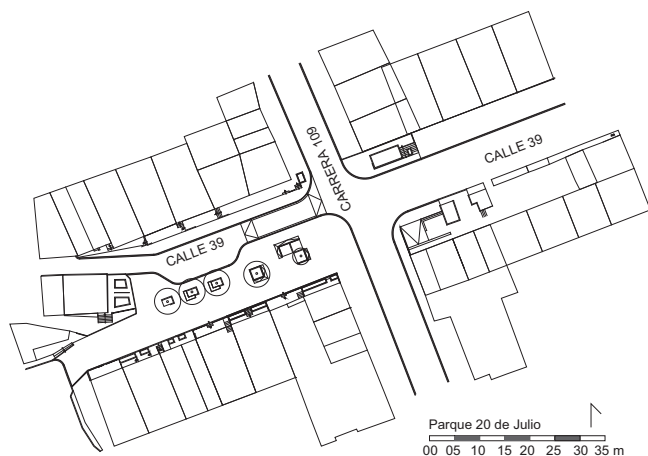
Both park and promenade were constructed in the first phase of PUI in Comuna 13, finished by the end of 2008. Their development is to be seen in connection with the *Metrocable* station that was opened in March 2008, creating a new central area in the neighbourhood of *Juan XXIII*. The

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**Figs. 6 and 7. Photo of Parque 20 de Julio.**



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**Fig. 8. Layout Map of Parque 20 de Julio.**

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development of the *Parque Ambiental* covers a surface of 1867 m<sup>2</sup> on both sides of a canyon, the promenade above it covers 1725 m<sup>2</sup>. The park was established to preserve the canyon as a recreational public space that would serve as example of how to appreciate the natural landscape (op. cit., p. 73), whereas the promenade's vocation was to improve the already existing street for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic (op. cit., p. 75) (Figs. 9, 10 and 11).

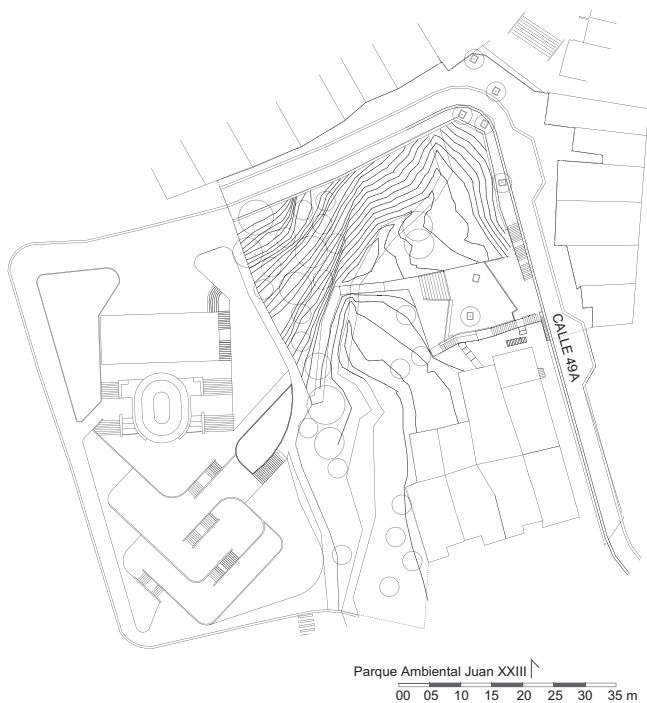
## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Chapter 1, 'Introduction', presents the topic of the 'new generation' of upgrading initiatives in informal settlements in Latin America and the rationale for this book, its objectives and research questions, focusing on the issues of spatial justice and public open spaces in informal settlements. It also provides a

**Figs. 9 and 10. Photo of Parque Ambiental Juan XXIII.**



**Fig. 11. Layout Map of Parque Ambiental and Paseo Urbano Juan XXIII.**



short insight into the research setting, i.e. the social, economic and physical characteristics of the case study location, Comuna 13 in Medellín, including short descriptions about the three spaces that were investigated in detail. It also provides a brief overview of the research methodology applied.

Chapter 2, 'Just Informal Settlements: Upgrading Informality and Spatial Justice', examines the notion of spatial justice and its applicability in the context of informality. In the first part it examines the concept of informal urbanism in the context of popular settlements and experiences with upgrading programmes. Drawing on critical evaluations of some of the most well-known upgrading programmes, the chapter in the second part then theorises the notion of spatial justice. I argue for a multidimensional, fragmentary, context- and culture-specific concept, which encompasses equity, empowerment and recognition. As an operationalisation of the notion of spatial justice developed in this chapter and a conclusion to it, a framework is proposed to underpin the assessment of spatial justice in public space—based upgrading programmes in informal settlements. It contains aspects regarding the quality of the material space, the integrity of its production process, issues of management and regulation as well as the use of space.

Chapter 3, 'Everyday Open Spaces', is the first of three analytical chapters which explore the research findings. Drawing on data gained through community-guided walks and mental maps workshops the chapter examines the diversity of everyday spaces in Comuna 13 and the practices of use the inhabitants develop in them. It establishes them as important social spaces, defined by their material configuration and the activities taking place in them. Streets, paths and stairs, front gardens, sports fields, play areas, squares, parks, green setbacks, leftover open spaces and leftover landscape are presented as

the main categories of open spaces – some of them developed formally, while others established informally through the residents of Comuna 13; some of them more publicly usable, others more privately. Additionally, other important community spaces mentioned in the data-gathering activities are portrayed.

Chapter 4, ‘PUI and the Production of Space’, presents an assessment of the participatory process during the upgrading initiative, drawing on extensive interview data with residents, experts and municipal staff, and highlights the potentials and limitations of participatory processes in upgrading informal settlements. Structured into three parts, focusing in the process, the products and the effects of the PUI, it discusses topics such as social and material sustainability, self-esteem, place attachment and use of space, formal and informal economic development, political image-making and more.

Chapter 5, ‘Upgrading through Public Open Space’, draws on analysis of the spatial and material configuration as well as analysis of use this chapter to establish whether and how open spaces contribute to an increased spatial justice in Comuna 13. Location, and visual and physical accessibility have been found to be limiting factors for the spaces’ usability by diverse user groups. Regulations and management issues have also been found to be highly influential on the sites’ usability, the diversity of its users or the regulation of behaviour deemed ‘inappropriate’, such as informal trade. On the other hand, design and spatial organisation into sub-spaces increased the spaces’ usability and accessibility for a diversity of user groups, thus increasing spatial justice. Analysis of use underlines the multi-functionality of people’s everyday spaces for pedestrian traffic, recreation and socialising as well as informal trade. It also shows that not all new spaces are



accepted equally, and that new spaces fall into disuse especially if they fail to provide a design and functionality that relates to people's everyday activities.

Finally, Chapter 6, 'Conclusions: Upgrading beyond Equity', presents the concluding arguments. It explores the implications of the analyses for understanding open spaces in informal settlements in the context of spatial justice by looking at their material configuration and design, the process that led to their establishment, the ways they are used and the rules and regulations affecting their use. This work has found evidence for the continued and structural denigration of informal settlements and their inhabitants, which influence the upgrading initiative. At the same time it has established the ways in which the new open spaces and the processes surrounding their establishment have improved the quality of life for *comuna* residents. It confirms the importance of combining equity, empowerment and recognition as equal goals into understandings of spatial justice and claims that the different aspects of justice are not interchangeable or hierarchical. This chapter draws on the empirical data presented in the preceding chapters to explore the potentials and limitations of the new generation of upgrading programmes in an abstract way, which makes the results of this study transferable and applicable to other cities.