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## Does successful governance require heroes? The case of Sergio Fajardo and the city of Medellín: A reform case for instruction

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WIDER Working Paper 2014/035

## **Does successful governance require heroes?**

The case of Sergio Fajardo and the city of Medellín: A reform case for instruction

Alejandro Fajardo and Matt Andrews\*

February 2014

**Abstract:**

The city of Medellín, Colombia was a cauldron of violence with 185 homicides per 100,000 people in 2002. By 2006, this rate had declined to 32.5. Such successful transformation was termed the ‘Medellín miracle’ and credited to policies of the city’s mayor, Sergio Fajardo. Fajardo came to office in 2004 and led a series of reforms that observers call visionary. The story of Medellín’s revival starts before Fajardo took office, however, and involved many more people than the mayor. This abridged version of the story offers instructors a classroom case to discuss leaders and leadership in governance reform.

**Keywords:** Medellín, Colombia, leadership, reform, governance

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## 1 Introduction: the hero story

This paper is about the role of leaders and leadership in governance and governance reform. There is a tendency to believe that heroic individuals or champions are the key to successful governance change (Brady and Spence 2010). However, recent work argues that this belief is limited (Andrews 2013a, 2013b). Outstanding individuals do matter, but typically as part of a larger group of agents who play different but important roles often over long periods to prepare a context for change, find and fit the content of change, and ensure that change is institutionalized (having a deep influence on organizations and reaching distributed agents at different levels of the system). The story here is of such change, involving one key individual who is often credited with being the hero. Instructors are encouraged to use the story to ask what role the hero did play and to acknowledge the roles played by others. If used in this way, the paper allows instructors to show how multi-agent leadership works and to illustrate the importance of teams, coalitions, and networks in governance reform. One can see how heroes emerge from such structures and how the heroic figures then use and benefit from these structures to effect and facilitate effective change (Andrews 2008; Andrews et al. 2010; Andrews et al. 2012).

The city of Medellín, Colombia was a cauldron of violence since the 1980s, when it was home to an internationally notorious drug cartel run by Pablo Escobar. Even though crime declined after the early 1990s when Escobar's cartel's activities were contained, there were still 185 homicides per 100,000 people in 2002 (nearly four times the rate in New Orleans, then the United States' murder capital) (Cerdá et al. 2012: 1046). Paramilitary groups and gangs now held sway, causing Robert Lamb to call the city 'Fallujah before Fallujah was Fallujah' (Lamb 2010: 1).

Things began changing in 2003, and by 2006, the city's murder rate was 32.5 per 100,000; lower than that in Washington, DC and Miami (Hylton 2007: 72). Such successful transformation was rapidly termed the 'Medellín miracle' and credited to policies of the city's mayor, Sergio Fajardo (Faiola 2008; Hylton 2007). Fajardo came to office in 2004 and led a series of urban transformation initiatives that observers call visionary. Fajardo finished his term in December 2007 with a 90 per cent approval rating (Builes 2006) and received major national and international recognition for his achievements: Francis Fukuyama wrote an article on Fajardo for *Foreign Policy* (Fukuyama 2011), and the *New York Times* was effusive about the way this former professor (called the Mathematician of Medellín) saved his city (Romero 2007).

In reality, the story of Medellín's revival begins before Fajardo took office, and involved many more people than the mayor. Please note i) how context created opportunities for the mayor's aggressive policy positions, and ii) which agents helped to facilitate the mayor's work, and what roles these other agents played.

## 2 A short background

It is tempting to start telling the story of Sergio Fajardo and Medellín's revival from 2004, when Fajardo took office. This is certainly the date most media reports have chosen as point zero. In reality, however, all stories like this usually start many years and decades earlier, and reflections of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are actually needed to understand the context. At the time, Medellín was a mining and agricultural town that attracted only the most determined adventurers and entrepreneurs willing to traverse hundreds of miles of forests and mountains. The region in which it is located, Antioquia, was isolated because of its geography, which meant that the needs

of new mining companies (and agricultural concerns attracted by the fertile soils) had to be met by local market actors. This captive demand caused Medellín to grow as an economy, and its business sector cocooned from the rest of Colombia.

By 1950, the region had a sizeable population, but there were various threats to the region's continued development. Unemployment in the country had grown, and there were a number of social revolutions in neighbouring states due to tensions between business and labour. Tensions were evident in Antioquia as well, where employees working in the burgeoning firms needed more services than the Catholic Church could provide. Families of the employees in these firms did not avail themselves of educational opportunities, for instance, because these were expensive and the opportunity cost of sending children to school was high. This led to high levels of illiteracy, especially amongst girls and women. Workers' families also lacked health care, recreation, and other services. There were no public sector organizations to fill the service delivery gaps, given that Colombia's government had not established itself as an administrative presence. In spite of this, Antioquia and especially Medellín had relatively well-established and influential educational centers such as the public Universidad de Antioquia with its School of Public Health and Faculty of Mines (where the best engineers of the country studied), would be crucial for the industrial development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The lack of strong public institutions led members of the nascent business class to seek their own local solutions to public services gaps, creating societies and associations that mobilized services for workers. First, there was a gradual strengthening of the Chamber of Commerce created at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Then, a process of engagement began between the Chamber of Commerce, the newly created National Business Association (ANDI), and the Antioquia Railroads Union. Through these organizations, employers and workers discussed minimum wage and health issues. After a year-long process, this interaction led to the creation of a family allowance policy where 43 regional companies contributed money to a common fund that would be used to provide benefits for their workers. The initial contributors were also mostly initial members of the Grupo Empresarial Antioqueño (GEA), which exists to this day, who created the Bureau of Social Policy and a service delivery agency called Comfama. At this time the mayoralty of Medellín, with support from the city's elite, created the Empresas Públicas de Medellín (EPM), which was the public organization that provided utilities. EPM remains a cornerstone of Medellín's and Antioquia's social and economic development.

The GEA, Comfama, and other entities like EPM carried on working throughout the 1970s. Local government was never as strong as it needed to be, partly because the state was highly centralized in Bogotá (running out of the capital Bogotá), and because the country was in constant civil war. This started changing in 1983, when President Belisario Betancur led a peace process with opposition guerrillas. One of the demands of the guerrillas was that the country would decentralize so citizens could vote for local mayors and governors (who were assigned by the president up to that time). Decentralization began from this period, suggesting a more representative future was in store for the country. However, the 1980s would also see the start of the most terrible nightmare Colombia would live through in the following decades: the emergence of drug trafficking in Medellín.

In 1986, the law regarding popular elections of mayors and governors was approved allowing local and regional representation. Medellín had its first mayoral election and local representation was given its birth—local city governance could now go side by side with the activities of private and social enterprises like the GEA and Comfama. As noted, the time was trying as it also saw the growth and consolidation of drug cartels. Pablo Escobar increased his cartel's power by managing an illegal business that, some said, was 'enough to pay Colombia's external debt'.

Politicians, especially in Medellín, struggled to address this. Luis Carlos Galán, for instance, was a dissident of the Liberal Party who tried to voice discontent as a presidential candidate in the 1990 elections. He was murdered in August 1989, apparently due to a plot by a macabre alliance between politicians of his own party, Pablo Escobar, and the ones responsible for his security.<sup>1</sup>

By the mid-1990s, the country was in the clutches of the cartels. Crime and death rates were at an all time high, and politics seemed to be kowtowing to the drug industry rather than serving citizens. For instance, the 1994 campaign of President Ernesto Samper is commonly understood to have been financed by the drug cartels (El cartel de Cali). The judiciary was influenced by cartels and drug money at the same time it was called upon to investigate and adjudicate politicians accused of taking drug money'. For example, the judiciary investigated allegations about drug financing in Samper's campaign (through a process popularly known as Proceso 8000). This process revealed many details in the intricate relationships between politicians and drug cartels.

In 1995, Antanas Mockus, the former principal of the National University (the largest public university in the country), was elected as the Mayor of Bogotá. Coming from a non-traditional background for a politician (a Professor of mathematics and philosophy) and without any experience in politics or the public sector, Mockus led a transformation of Bogotá with a programme called Citizens' Culture that searched to promote the intersection between the values associated with law, culture, and morality. Mockus' mayoralty was widely appreciated and was an important influence for other civic and independent political movements in Colombia<sup>2</sup>.

Enrique Peñalosa followed Mockus as the Mayor of Bogotá in 1998. He was one of the first politicians in Colombia to distribute political leaflets in the streets, buses, and parks. His three years in office saw the consolidation of Mockus' reforms with a distinct stamp: He built large public works systems, ranging from libraries to the well-known Transmilenio, a large Bus Rapid Transit system.

Whereas Bogotá was emerging as a robust democratic city with a growing economy, Medellín was still struggling with crime and violence. The drug cartels were less influential than they had been earlier in the decade, but paramilitary groups had filled the gap and the poorer barrios on the hills were home to gangs that reigned with impunity over the city.

The city's private sector community was still struggling, however, members of this community (especially the GEA as well as academic and civil society leaders) began discussing the need for change. The community promoted advances in science and technology in the region together with ProAntioquia, a non-profit, privately operated foundation. They invited Sergio Fajardo to lead the project. While he had deep roots in Medellín, Fajardo was at the time a Professor of mathematics in Bogotá in the Universidad de los Andes, living under the mayoral administrations of Mockus and Peñalosa. Through the invitation of ProAntioquia, Fajardo began participating part time in the Center for Science and Technology in Medellín. He also started to attend meetings of the Peace Commission led by the Governor of Antioquia, Alvaro Uribe (the future President of Colombia). Fajardo was able to gain a new perspective of the region while in the

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1 He was one of the five presidential candidates assassinated in the period from the mid-1980s to mid-1990s (Bernardo Jaramillo, Jaime Pardo Leal, and Carlos Pizarro from left parties and Alvaro Gómez Hurtado from the right oriented Conservative Party).

2 For a reflection of the long terms effects of Mockus in Bogotá and a brief comparison with Fajardo in Medellín, see: <http://whynationsfail.com/blog/2013/5/10/the-looting-of-bogota.html>

commission (especially influenced by Harvard Professor Roger Fisher) and through his work with ProAntioquia.

In 1999, a group of fifty persons (aptly called the ‘group of 50’) started to meet and discuss the political situation of the region. Most of them lacked experience in political world—they came from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social organizations, academia, arts, journalism, and private sector—and focused on how to translate their frustration with Medellín’s political class into action. The major outcome of the group’s meetings was a decision to promote the candidacy of Sergio Fajardo for Mayor of Medellín. This was a landmark decision in the city’s history, given that the group of ‘apolitical’ actors had, at most, participated in smaller elections for the city council<sup>3</sup> and Fajardo had limited experience in public policy discussions. The group of 50 developed a set of principles that united them together (including, ‘there is no single political idea that justifies the use of violence’) and worked on finding solutions to three problems they identified the most important in Medellín: inequality, corruption, and violence.

In his first attempt at becoming mayor (in 2000), Fajardo used innovative political methods searching to break the political power of the traditional political groups (Cervantes 2000). He walked the streets to meet people and his followers shared thousands of leaflets in the streets. The result was that the group led by Fajardo had the city in their ‘skins, minds and hearts’—meaning that they knew how the city looked and smelled, understood the social, political, and economic problems it faced, and grew more passionate about their cause as they progressed in the election. Fajardo obtained more than 60,000 votes and ended up third in the election, which caused a major national stir and raised a question: How could an independent candidate manage to participate with relative success in a city where elections had always been a game of the traditional parties playing traditional big money politics?

By 2002, the group of 50, formally called Civic Movement Compromiso Ciudadano, had grown significantly. It had continued its activities after the election, which was an important novelty: Usually, non-traditional political movements would dissolve after failed elections. Meeting constantly, particularly on weekends, the group kept discussing programmatic issues but also expanding its contacts and strategizing for the 2003 elections. At the time (2002), Alvaro Uribe Vélez, previously a Senator and Governor of Antioquia, won the Presidential elections. He was a long time opponent of the peace process with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People’s Army (FARC), and won the election largely because the majority of the country were tired of the constant attacks of the guerillas. Uribe Vélez governed under the premise that the country needed a new security policy that he called democratic security. As part of this, he adopted a mixed approach of force and negotiation to rid Medellín of its paramilitaries. This contributed quite significantly to the lowering rates of violence and deaths in the city in 2003, when Fajardo was preparing to run for mayor again.

### **3 Fajardo’s major moment and some key reform activities**

In 2003, Fajardo won the election for the mayorship of Medellín with more than 200,000 votes. He was more than 20 percentage points beyond all the other candidates representing traditional political parties, having led the independent civic movement created four years before and under the formal auspice<sup>4</sup> of an even broader group, the ASI (Indigenous Social Alliance).

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3 Some of these ‘non-standard’ candidates for Medellín’s council were part of the group of 50.

4 In Colombia, candidates need to be presented by a political party and Fajardo’s movement (Compromiso Ciudadano, there is no direct translation but it means citizens’ engagement) was not a political party. The ASI was a

Fajardo's first activity was largely symbolic, but gave a clear indication of how he wanted to run the city—and what he wanted the city to think about itself. On the day he entered office, he announced that all beauty contests financed with public resources were suspended. This included Miss Medellín contest, which was financed by the mayorship (which had also paid for Miss Medellín's and her companions' travel to Cartagena in the national contest for Miss Colombia). Fajardo noted that it would be replaced by a Women with Talent contest that would reward women in Medellín who did remarkable work in the fields of science, technology, entrepreneurship, culture, and arts. In line with this idea of empowering women on values different from their beauty, Fajardo's government created the Secretary of Women to be in charge of co-ordinating all the public policies with gender specificity. This was a novel and surprising move by a male political representative in Colombia, but reflected the strong roles played by many women in his election campaign.

The reform process then moved onto the approval of the Development Plan for Medellín 2004–07, which had emerged in the period after Fajardo was elected. The social organizations that emerged from the group of 50 had expanded and included more experts in different areas, who had been meeting in many small committees to identify the key problems in Medellín and identify different parts of a large plan to address them. Fajardo engaged in many of these conversations but the different committees were convened and managed by over twenty trusted individuals who had been engaged through the elections and would continue their work in the new administration (many as cabinet members). The focus was always around the diagnosis of the three major problems—inequality, violence, and corruption—that had initially brought the group of 50 together.

The committees focused on producing a development plan because mayors were required to present a four year plan identifying major initiatives within six months from taking office. The council of the city, composed of 21 councilors elected the same day as the mayor, had to approve the plan. Usually, councils have members of different parties and the mayor creates a coalition to ensure they have enough votes for the development plan and other initiatives to be approved. The coalition building process is associated with discussions on two levels: (i) formally, councilors discuss and help to improve the development plan, and (ii) informally, there is an exchange of posts in the administration for votes (what many would call 'clientelism')<sup>5</sup>.

Only two of the 21 members of the council had supported Fajardo in the campaign, which posed a serious challenge to the mayor: He had few informal avenues to pursue (getting supportive councilors to discuss the plan and endorse it). In response to this challenge, Fajardo made a formal pronouncement that he would not allocate posts in the administration nor give any public contracts without formal bidding processes, and would not be doing regular political coalition management. Instead, he and his team (including the cabinet members who had prepared the plan) forced debates on the issues and insisted that all opponents offer positive ideas whenever they had critiques (making the discussion about improving the plan instead of just resisting it). Fajardo would describe this transition as moving from the usual political transactions to a new form of leadership.

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party created originally to support candidates from indigenous communities but they decided to support also independent candidates. For example, Antanas Mockus arrived to the mayorship of Bogotá with the ASI support.

<sup>5</sup> This approach resembled that of Antanas Mockus who also did not enjoy much support from the council but started a process described as 'argument goes and argument comes'. This suggested that the only way he was willing to relate with the council was in programmatic and public discussions (he would have real policy discussion, not political debate).



In June 2004, the plan was approved with 21 votes in favour and 0 against. Fundamental to this process was Fajardo's, his team's, and supporters' willingness to recognize the ideas of any councilor who came up with a constructive view. Councilors who offered ideas received public recognition for their work, which was largely unknown in the city government (where mayors would traditionally take the credit for all ideas). Fajardo made it clear that many (or most) of the ideas in his plan were not his alone, and that the de facto engagement of the 21 councilors had created an effective and real policy coalition.

The six month process that ended with the council's approval of the development plan would set the tone of Fajardo's mayorship and confirmed that his team was committed to a new anti-clientelistic discourse. It also gave significant power inside the team to Federico Restrepo, the Director of the Planning Agency. Restrepo was an engineer coming from private sector and was relatively new to the team, but had been the one who co-ordinated the final version of the plan (bringing all the ideas together and drawing up the final product).

In parallel to writing this plan, the Fajardo administration was setting up its communications team. They called in a foreign consultant with expertise in political communications, to talk about strategies for communicating while in office. This was new for the team: During the campaign, only insiders of *Compromiso Ciudadano*<sup>6</sup> (engaging in very informal meetings) would decide what to do, what picture to use in communicating the Fajardo message, and what to write in the leaflets (which were an important element during the campaign). Fajardo usually was engaged in these meetings (sometimes as a convener and sometimes as a simple participant). The international consultant was thus a very new addition to the movement, and the meeting did not go well. It started with the consultant explaining how he suggested the team should frame Medellín to be sold internationally: Emphasizing flowers and nature, among other nice images. Fajardo quickly stopped the presentation and asserted that Medellín did not need to be sold internationally. It was already 'famous' because of drugs and violence and there was no need for a flowery message when the focus of the new administration would be pragmatic and real and local—emphasizing real solutions to the major problems faced by the city residents.

The international consultant was sent packing and for the next four years the communications team was managed by local journalists and publicists who could identify with and communicate about Medellín's problems and the process of finding solutions. They settled on a positive slogan identifying the administration's focus on 'Medellín, the most educated'. This slogan would become known by a huge majority of the citizens and it became a trademark of Fajardo and his team. This was partly because Fajardo held a weekly television show live every Thursday; always from a different neighbourhood, and usually from the poorer neighbourhoods called *comunas*, which are very similar to the Brazilian 'favelas'. In these shows, he was interviewed about his activities as a mayor and asked to explain what they were doing and what reasons lay behind the decisions the administration was taking. This, added to his constant presence in the streets, helped to build a strong relationship between Fajardo and the citizens.

The first year was slow, however. Publicly, a few voices would say that Fajardo and his team lacked experience in governing and that the result was weak execution of plans and policies. This was partially true: Fajardo's major working experience was in the university teaching mathematics. The lack of experience was somewhat generalizable to the rest of his team as well, especially at the secretary level where appointees came from different sectors but with little experience in the public sector. Some, like Restrepo, came from private sector and others, like

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<sup>6</sup> Particularly, Sergio Valencia, a journalist and well-known comedian, and part of the group of 50, often led discussions about communications.

Alonso Salazar, had managed the campaign (after coming from the NGO world). In addition, during the campaign, Salazar finished writing a well-known biography of Pablo Escobar,<sup>7</sup> the chief of the drug cartel of Medellín.

Significantly, other than lacking experience in the public sector, the team was also young. The Private Secretary, David Escobar, was around 30-years old and had enjoyed a remarkable but very short career in a private telecommunications firm in Medellín. What was less public was that the team did not find any type of information from the previous government: Most of the information of plans, contracts, debts, and so on was either absent or really obscure. This, of course, complicated the launch of any plans.

In spite of the slow start, the team would set the foundation for projects that would become the symbol of Medellín's transformation. The principle was that they were 'planning but not improvising'. Undoubtedly, they benefitted from a constitutional reform that changed the Mayor's term from three to four years. Particularly important was the crafting of a new strategy of an ongoing project: the Metrocable. Since 1995, the city of Medellín had enjoyed the only metroline in Colombia. The line traverses the city from north to south next to the river that divides the city in two parts, Orient and Occident. Nevertheless, the line was not enough to connect the poor comunas, which were extremely dense and steep. The Metrocable was designed to take the Metro system to the comunas and it became a central part of the reform story of Fajardo's administration.

Nevertheless, Fajardo was actually a critic of the project during the design stage. He insisted that the problem of the comunas was not a problem of transportation but a problem of poverty, violence, and very few opportunities to have a fulfilling life. Just putting the cableway above the comuna, as it was designed, was not going to solve any of the real problems. When Fajardo and his team gained power, they decided to create an integral development plan that would take all the tools needed for social and economic development at the same time and around the cableway. Eventually this would be known as Integral Urban Projects (PUI) and the one in the north-Oriental comuna with the first Metrocable would be the center of Medellín's transformation.<sup>8</sup>

The rationale behind these integral plans was to assure that real impact was achieved in a short time. Usually, well-intentioned projects would fail because the harsh context would dilute their impact. Bringing different elements of development together would counter this risk. These elements included education, health, transportation infrastructure, security, and so forth. Bringing these elements together was an effective method of regaining the citizens' confidence: The government was usually absent in these zones, but in Fajardo's term it would come to the citizens, explain and realize the different interventions in the time they were supposed to occur (there were none of the usual delays associated with corruption). This direct approach to the citizens was a natural continuation of the way the movement did the campaign, showing what they meant when they commonly said, 'the way you campaign determines the way you govern'. Fundamental among those projects, on the top of the hill of the comuna, was the terrain where a Park Library, eventually named Spain Park Library, was going to be built. It was just next to the final station of the cableway, which meant that people could get in and out easily from any part of the city.

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7 Alonso Salazar: 'La Parábola de Pablo' (2001).

8 For example, receiving the Curry Stone and the Veronica Rudge Green Prize in Urban Design. See the following for more information: <http://currystonedesignprize.com/#/winner/2009/alejandro-echeverri-and-sergio-fajardo> and <http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/#/projects/transformational-mobilities.html>

There were challenges to overcome in doing this. Initially some protests occurred, in a small part of the community, somewhat influenced by a priest of a local church who was against selling locals' houses and was skeptical of the whole idea. The new administration engaged in a careful process of buying the houses with a fair price and assuring the reallocation of the families affected in parts of the city with better conditions. There was also an intense process of visitation by social workers who explained the changes and gathered information of how the people imagined the Park Library. Eventually, it became a common dream: For Fajardo's team and for the community, the Park Library would be the symbol of the rebirth of the comuna. Aware of this, and trying to get the most attention as possible, Fajardo asked President Alvaro Uribe to invite the King of Spain to the inauguration (Spain was providing some funding for the Park). On 24 March 2007, the King and his wife used the cableway to go to the inauguration of the Spain Park Library. Few ever expected the King to go to Medellín, especially as it was one of the poorest and most violent neighbourhoods of the city. It was an important day for the community, given that the whole world was looking at them.

Importantly, Fajardo worked with Comfama (the service delivery agency created in the 1950s) to manage and administer many of his new projects (particularly the Spain Park Library and other new libraries built around this time). Comfama had administrative capabilities that were not evident in the city government and that made up for the limited administrative capabilities of Fajardo's new cabinet. Furthermore, the first year in office coincided with the energy producer EPM's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. As already stated, EPM is an important symbol in Medellín: It is one of the city's prides as the most valued public enterprise together with the Metro, and it is recognized for the quality of its service and the significance it has in being the only public utilities enterprise in the country. In addition, it provides a significant amount of money to the city from its profits.<sup>9</sup> In this anniversary, EPM's managers were thinking of giving the city a gift of public parks with games. Fajardo changed the plan and insisted that the gift should be related to the education project. This led to the creation of ten new schools that, with the Park Libraries, came to be the most tangible expression of Fajardo's team's repeated expression: 'The most beautiful for the humblest'.<sup>10</sup> Comfama manages some of these Park Libraries (showing again how the city's pre-existing capabilities allowed Fajardo to do some of his policy interventions).

The largest project that emerged from the first year was the renovation of the central sector delimited by the Botanical Garden, the University of Antioquia (the most important university of the city) and Moravia hill (a neighbourhood built over a garbage disposal). The Explora Park was created in this space, as an interactive museum of science with the largest aquarium in Colombia. It was built under the direction of Rafael Aubad (Fajardo's colleague) and designed by Alejandro Echeverri, chief architect of the team. In Moravia, they built a cultural center designed by Colombia's most famous architect Rogelio Salmona. Fajardo would say that: 'This is the reason why I entered politics: to have enough power in Medellín to decide we should build, near some of the poorest sectors, a center where the kids could learn and dream about science'.<sup>11</sup>

The administration had an additional goal with the material projects: 'changing the skin of the city'. The idea was that these new public spaces would help Medellín's society from the fear associated with the violent 1990s. Fajardo would insist: 'Fear encloses, we need to create space where we can meet again'.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the material projects, the administration also had to

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9 Around 25 per cent of the budget of the city comes from EPM transfers.

10 Personal correspondence with Sergio Fajardo, 12 January 2014.

11 Personal correspondence with Sergio Fajardo, 12 January 2014.

12 Personal correspondence with Sergio Fajardo, 12 January 2014.

deal with the fact that Medellín was coming out of a period of paramilitary engagement and violence. President Alvaro Uribe's administration had struck a vital blow to the paramilitary reign in 2003, during Fajardo's mayoral campaign, through both force and negotiation (which Fajardo was publicly against, arguing that guerrillas should be included in discussions that Uribe was holding). Medellín was the most important urban center of the paramilitary activities, mostly associated with drug trafficking, which led Fajardo to talk of the city as 'the Harvard University of drug traffic, all these armed groups come here to learn and commit crimes.'<sup>13</sup>

When Fajardo started his term in January 2004, Medellín had around 800 former paramilitaries in the streets, some of them had attacked Fajardo's campaign centers the year before. The paramilitaries had demobilized as part of the national peace process. Surprisingly, there was not a well-designed reintegration process: What were these individuals, previously 'soldiers', supposed to do? This was one of another type of the programmes that would lead to Medellín's transformation: The reintegration process. Alonso Salazar and Gustavo Villegas led a team of psychologists and social workers that would work on a one to one basis with the ex-paramilitaries; addressing their mental health problems, detecting their abilities and aspirations, and designing a new project of life (a process that took around eight months per individual). At the end of the four years of Fajardo's term, around 4,500 paramilitaries living in Medellín had demobilized (of which around ten per cent would do illegal activities again). This helped to diminish the traditionally high crime rate of the city.

This was not without a major problem. The previous paramilitaries were receiving a great deal of attention from the state, in particular providing decisive help to find a job. These individuals were mostly men around 20–30-years old who lived in Medellín, and many were delinquents. The paradox for the young men and women living in the same poor spaces was strong: They, who had never done anything illegal, were largely without opportunities and, more important, without any real support from the government. Put in simple words, the feeling was: 'So, I need to be a criminal to receive governmental attention'. To counteract this situation and have as broad support as possible from the communities affected by violence associated with paramilitary groups, the education team led by Horacio Arango designed a programme Young with Future. The programme provided scholarships and professional orientations, and was aimed at the population of the same age and similar background of the demobilized but who had never done anything illegal.

To bring citizens closer to government, the administration also implemented the concept of participatory budgeting (an approach originally created in Porto Alegre, Brazil). The idea was to bring the discussion of how the government should invest part of its budget, particularly at comuna level, directly to the citizens without any political intermediation (usually associated with corruption). This allowed Fajardo's team to get closer to the citizens and explain how their vision of the city's future could be improved by the assemblies occurring in different neighbourhoods. It was both an idea that had a technical objective (gathering information of what 'agents in the frontline' identified as the most pressing problems) and a political purpose (engaging with citizens that were usually apathetic about political processes allowed Fajardo to have a direct mandate on key issues, which helped manage the sometimes contentious political relationships in the city council).

Private sector played an important role in the reforms. First, they needed to be engaged in the reintegration process, as at the end a large part of the former paramilitaries would end up working for their enterprises. Second, the city needed their active engagement investing but also

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<sup>13</sup> Personal correspondence with Sergio Fajardo, 12 January 2014.

providing feedback to the government. Eventually a fluent relation of trust emerged with some important members of private sector. An anecdote illustrates this well. It involves the Fraternity of Medellín, which is a group of rich families that had been saving together for more than 50 years (associated with the long-standing GEA). It was engaged with the private school of San José, which was one of the best schools in the city and had decided to relocate its building from a zone that was increasingly urban to a place more distant from the urban center of the city. The building was well equipped for academia and well-situated on expensive land. It was the perfect place to locate a new technical institution that Fajardo's team had diagnosed was needed. The expense was not contemplated in the city's budget and the amount of money could not be spent without some lengthy approval of the City Council. The Fraternity of Medellín decided that they were going to give the city a donation: They were going to give the school land and infrastructure to the city so Fajardo's team could set there the institution they were planning. 'We trust you Mayor Fajardo' was the sentence that closed the deal. Today Medellín has the Fraternity Metropolitan Technological Institute as a result of this engagement.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4 A concluding note

During the years 2004–07, Medellín changed its relation to the world. Fajardo travelled around the globe presenting the projects occurring in Medellín. He managed to garner huge support from outside the country, which was welcome but not necessary as the city was prepared to advance its transformation regardless of who was willing to participate in it. Interestingly, some countries reacted by acknowledging that it was a serious process of transformation that was worth supporting. For example, like Spain, Japan ended up financing the design of another Park Library in Belén by architect Hiroshi Naito. This change in the tone of the relationship of Medellín with the world, building a respectful conversation between equals, was eventually fundamental for the future recognition of the city's value. It was also often seen as an endorsement of Fajardo, who finished his term with 90 per cent approval and went on to become Governor of Antioquia in 2011. More important for his movement and administration was the fact that his former Secretary of Government, Alonso Salazar, defeated Luis Pérez—a controversial politician who was the Mayor of Medellín from 2001–03—to become mayor after Fajardo. This was the first time in Colombia's history where an independent political movement managed to win two elections in a row, assuring continuity of the political project. The question is: was this a project driven by one hero at one point in time, or a project that emerged over a long period and involved distributed heroes?

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<sup>14</sup> Personal correspondence with Sergio Fajardo, 12 January 2014.

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