

Public Security in Medellín

Building Human Security through Social Transformation of the Youth



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Cover photo: The outdoor escalators linking up lower and higher parts of the Comuna 13. In a way, these escalators are symbolic for the huge challenge the municipality of Medellín faces to reach the youth population in neighbourhoods higher up the mountains (photo Jorrit Kamminga).

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1. Introduction

This report summarizes the conclusions, main findings and learning of the “Public Security in Medellín: Building Human Security through Social Transformation of the Youth” project. This project was initiated by the University of Valencia in Spain in 2011, and received funding from the *Gerda Henkel Stiftung* in November 2012 under their Special Programme ‘Security, Society and the State’. Prof. Dr. Carlos Flores Juberías has managed this project and coordinated the research on behalf of the University of Valencia. Dr. Jorrit Kamminga has acted as the local field research and event coordinator in Medellín, supported by two Colombian lead researchers, Carlos Andrés Zapata Cardona and Luz Nely Osorno Ospina.

The project activities undertaken in 2013, the first full project year, were mainly limited to developing the field research methodology, exploratory meetings in Colombia and administrative requirements related to building a consortium with the municipality of Medellín’s Department of Youth and the University of Antioquia’s Institute of Political Studies. This took a long time, not in the least because between 2012 and the end of the project, the municipality of Medellín had three different Secretaries for youth policy.

Especially in November 2012, when Secretary Yomar Andrés Benítez took over (from Yesid Henao Salazar) the political leadership of the municipality’s youth programme, and again in October 2013 when Valeria Mejía Echeverría replaced him, the project’s activities were necessarily postponed for months. Every time, the successor had new ideas on how best to partner with this project and on what the main focus should be. The involvement of the Department of Youth was regarded as essential for maximising the project’s impact, but it was also the main reason why the project’s core activities could only take place in 2014.

Once committed however, the municipality of Medellín contributed significantly to this project. Financially, the Department of Youth invested around 120 million Colombian pesos (around 38,000 euro – almost matching the Gerda Henkel Stiftung grant) through a separate contract with the University of Antioquia’s Institute of Political Studies, which managed to provide a boost to the local research capacity and in-depth analysis of the information systems and methodological approach.

The table below shows the final time table of the project's core activities.

Core project activity	Dates
Survey development	January – February 2014
Survey implementation	March – May 2014
Focal group <i>Comuna</i> 3 and 8	8 March 2014
Focal group <i>Comuna</i> 8	21 March 2014
Focal group <i>Comuna</i> 3	3 April 2014
Focal group <i>Comuna</i> 1	8 April 2014
Seminar <i>Comuna</i> 8	11 September 2014
Seminar <i>Comuna</i> 1	12 December 2014
Seminar <i>Comuna</i> 3	13 December 2014

The project was finalised at the end of December 2014. As previous activities and meetings were reported on in earlier status reports, the present report, and its support documents, will only provide an overview of the outcomes of the core activities undertaken in 2014.

This report is accompanied by three central documents in Spanish that are available on request:

- ❖ Full Field Research Report – 210 pages (July 2015);
- ❖ Analysis of Information Systems Report – 94 pages (July 2015);
- ❖ Survey Findings Report – 144 pages (June 2014).

These documents have so far been kept in Spanish because of a) their considerable length and b) because the primary target audience of these documents is the Colombian government and specifically the local institutions involved in urban development and the situation of Medellín's youth.

However, given the richness of the data collected and the availability of quite detailed findings and area-specific recommendations documented in these three reports, it is essential to consider them as part as core parts of the research outputs. The Colombian lead researchers involved in the project, Carlos Zapata and Nely Osorno, have done an excellent job conducting the research at the local level and facilitating the project's focus groups and seminars. Subsequently, they both continued to work on a follow up project with the Municipality – [a great project outcome](#) in terms of 1) clear commitment of the local authorities

to continue the work started under the Gerda Henkel Stiftung-sponsored project and 2) sustainability, as the current phase of the project is not supported by international funds.

Box 1: Summary of follow up project in the *Comuna 13* (*San Javier*)

Building on – and locally also presented as a follow up to – the Gerda Henkel Stiftung sponsored project, a next phase was started in the *Comuna 13* to continue the development of a single information system to better track the human security situation of the youth in Medellín. From the first project, it used: 1) the combined focus on human security/access to rights established; 2) the instrument of the survey and 3) the system of indicators that were developed. The survey was further fine-tuned, six additional focus groups were organised (one with only women to deepen the understanding of gender-related challenges) and a social mapping was conducted using the ARGIS geo-referential software (see the maps in the folder of electronic documents provided with this report).

All other project documents (photos, recordings, meeting minutes, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) are also available on request.

While (unfortunately) in many ways a ‘PhD’ in Medellín’s city bureaucracy, the project proved to be a very rewarding experience. The project’s added value was also increased because of a **partial shift of focus** that had not been foreseen when first planning this project in Valencia. Instead of placing the emphasis of the research on the youth itself (and their human security conditions and prospects), the project shifted significantly towards the local government as the primary entity responsible for the protection and development of the youth.

Some of the **most interesting outcomes** of this project are all related to a huge gap between local governance (the supply side of youth policies, programmes and services) and the youth as beneficiaries (the demand side of these policies, programmes and services). Even where supply intends to meet demand, this supply (e.g. cultural activities, projects and programmes earmarked for the youth) is not demand-driven: It either does not take into account what the youth of Medellín need or would like to see or do in their city; or it starts with the ideas and initiatives of the youth, but turns these into something else.

“The city of Medellín has an offer of and investment in meetings and spaces for the youth, such as courses, concerts, exhibitions, theatre and other types of infrastructure that are intended for them. However, this population has other interests, dynamics, different channels of information and other conditions that are at odds with the direction the current offer is taking. There is a big gap between the supply and demand, that is one of the biggest challenges we need to address in the youth ecosystems of the future.”

Valeria Mejía Echeverría, Secretary for Youth of the municipality of Medellín during the last stage of this project (27 November 2014)

This structural problem also translates into a challenge of measuring youth programmes and policies. The extraordinary number of different information systems and evaluation tools that were discovered in this research (253 in total), are all operating in function of the supply side (e.g. measuring the attendance of programmes run by the municipality) instead of focusing on whether the demand of the city's youth is met. This research has provided a first step towards connecting all these information systems and working towards a single information system measuring the human security situation of the youth of Medellín.

The University of Valencia would like to thank the Gerda Henkel Stiftung for its generous support. It hopes that there are ways to continue supporting the local partner organizations involved after this initial, but very important, first piece of research. Despite the challenges involved, this research has directly contributed to increasing the political will of the current Secretary of Youth, Valeria Mejía Echeverría, to work towards a single information instrument that can connect all the different information systems that at present measure parts of the conditions and protection mechanisms of youth in Medellín. As mentioned above, the follow up research, that will build on the findings summarized in this document, has already been set in motion and will hopefully provide the next steps towards this single information system.

“La fundación es alemana. No sé como pronunciar el nombre, es algo como Garta... Garda...” [The foundation is German. I don't know how to pronounce its name, it is something like Garta... Garda...].

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)



The neighbourhood of Carambolas

2. Research findings

2.1 Research background

This proposal fell within the Gerda Henkel Stiftung's 'Public Administration and Human Security' research field of the Special Programme Security, Society and the State. It started from the idea that the municipal government in Medellín was faced with a daunting task of providing sufficient meaningful social and cultural activities for the youth in order to match the city's advances in urban development. The project's assumption was that the city's administration is only able to boost the youth's human security if it manages to combine prospects of a better physical city (through urban development and transformation) with prospects of a better life for the youth within the urban territory (through effective social and cultural development).

The latter includes providing alternatives to what young gangs, drug trafficking factions and other illegal armed groups have to offer for the youth population of Medellín. The local governments needs to offer both a convincing alternative or counter-narrative as well as concrete and convincing social, educational and cultural programmes. The research has aimed to deconstruct the notion of human security in useful elements that together give a good overview of the current situation of the youth in some of the more disadvantaged areas of the city. Afterwards, it has intended to put these individual parts back together again and come up with a modest, but solid first step towards better public policies (and better ways to measure their impact) that target or otherwise affect the Medellín's youth population.

The research project focused specifically on twelve, relatively disadvantaged, neighbourhoods, divided over three *comunas*¹, *Comuna 1* (Popular), *Comuna 2* (Manrique) and the *Comuna 3* (Villa Hermosa), that are located on the north-eastern periphery of Medellín. The following map shows the project area (the black rectangle). The green parts on the right of the project area are the mountainous rural areas of Medellín. This shows that substantial parts of the neighbourhoods included in this research are also situated on the higher, more isolated (or at least less accessible) parts of the city.

¹ The city of Medellín is divided into six zones, which are subdivided into 16 so-called *comunas*. These large *comunas* are subsequently again divided into neighbourhoods. The *Comunas* 1, 3 and 8 respectively consist of 11, 15 and 18 neighbourhoods.

The map illustrates the project area in the Department of Boyacá, Colombia, showing the distribution of 13 communities across four comunas. The map includes a detailed view of the project area and a list of communities for each comuna.

COMUNA 1: POPULAR

- Santo Domingo Savio No.
- La Avanzada
- Esperanza No. 2
- Carpinelo
- Maria Cano Carambolas

COMUNA 3: MANRIQUE

- Bello Oriente
- La Cruz
- La Honda

COMUNA 8: VILLA HERMOSA

- Llanaditas
- 13 de Noviembre
- Villa Liliam
- La Sierra

2.2 General project outcomes

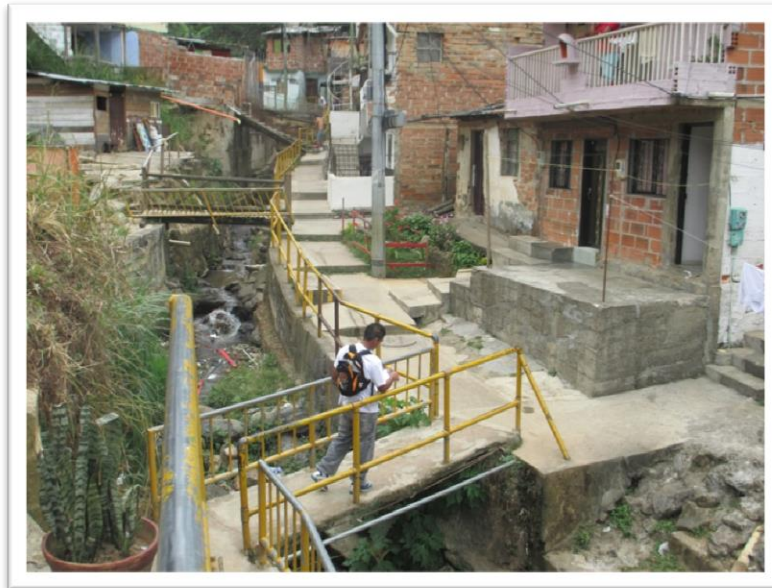
This section contains the general project outcomes. Where relevant, direct quotes are used from the focus group meetings (in purple) or from the seminars (in blue). The first outcome of this project is immediately the most important one in terms of continuity and sustainability. Through the project, the University of Valencia, has managed to establish a **consortium** of, especially local partners: the Department of Youth of the municipality of Medellín, the Institute of Political Studies of the University of Antioquia, the International Cooperation Agency of Medellín (ACI) and the surveying company Consenso S.A. In addition, the support of ICOS (the former employer of the project's field research coordinator) in terms of assisting the development of the survey and preparations for the focus groups and seminars was very important.

Establishing this consortium has almost been a project in itself, given the large number of meetings that this effort has required, but it has resulted in a very successful collaboration, not in the least because the municipality of Medellín and the Institute of Political Studies have agreed to continue this project. A follow up research project was started in the *Comuna* 13 of Medellín, which aims to take the findings of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung-sponsored project further.

In methodological terms, the research has been successful in establishing an **interesting combination of two complementary approaches**: First, a human rights approach that offers a legal framework for the protection of youth in Medellín; and second, a human security approach that offers an instrument for the planning and implementation of public policies, and as such an instrument for analysis of policies centred on the youth. While the University of Valencia started this project focusing on human security, the local partners, including the municipality of Medellín and the University of Antioquia, had so far only worked with a right-based approach. A first result of the project, therefore, was the successful synthesis of both approaches which effectively translated each category of human security (e.g. political security, food security, economic security, etc.) into a set of concrete rights that the youth need access to.

"I think it is very important that this research tries to deconstruct the idea of security. That has been very difficult. Normally it is all about the police or about the youth themselves being dangerous. I think young people need to know that security has a lot to do with the development of the youth in all its dimensions."

Young women, seminar of the *Comuna* 1 (12 December 2014)



A field researcher in the sector of 'Chocosito', neighbourhood of Villa Liliam

Taking this synergy as a starting point, the research subsequently established a matrix of indicators that formed the analytical basis for the survey that was implemented in 12 neighbourhoods of Medellín, as well as for the research into the current information systems covering the situation of youth in the city. The matrix of indicators is an additional output of this project, that can be used to monitor and measure the effective enjoyment of rights by the youth of Medellín in the various categories of human security.

The **implementation of the survey**, a key component of this project, proved to be difficult, especially in neighbourhoods of the *Comuna 8*, Villa Hermosa, where there were considerable security problems at the time of implementation. A general problem was the use of the word 'security' in the survey. While testing the survey, some questions needed to be taken out or rephrased and there was a debate about whether T-shirts for the interviewers (provided by the municipality and, in the end, used in the territory) would actually decrease or increase the risk while working in these neighbourhoods. There was also severe tension in some areas, such as the neighbourhood of La Sierra (*Comuna 8*) because of the presence and activities of armed groups, which meant that the survey team needed to be accompanied by community leaders in order for them to do their job. In some neighbourhoods, the survey team could only consist of women, in others it could only operate at certain hours and in specific areas given the existence of the so-called '**fronteras invisibles**', the invisible borders that separate neighbourhoods into areas controlled by different gangs and armed groups.

In themselves, these challenges already show how conditions of **personal insecurity** affect the youth living in these neighbourhoods in a significant way, intimidated by the control and permanent presence of illegal armed groups close to their houses. The omnipresent threat of

insecurity was one of the main reasons why the dimensions of personal security and community security had to be tackled more in the focus groups and seminars rather than in the survey. Examples of questions that were taken out of the survey for security reasons, involved the presence of *combos* (gangs), the consumption of drugs and alcohol, as well as the issue of human trafficking.

Traditionally, the focus of youth policies in Medellín has considered youth as a particular group versus other groups (e.g. the adult population). As such, there has not really been a **differential focus on sub-groups** within the youth population, such as a focus on gender. This research has attempted to establish such a focus. Instead of treating gender as an 'eight' dimensions of human security (an approach taken by Medellín's Human Security Observatory), the research has attempted to treat gender as a cross-cutting issue in the analysis of the various dimensions. As such, it was possible to find differences and gaps in the access and enjoyment of certain rights between young men and women. It is clear from the research that the situation of women is much more complex and challenging in terms of the exercise of their rights. There is a wide gap between men and women in terms of, for example, the right to work, access to social security, a decent income, and the level of discrimination.



Implementing the survey in the neighbourhood of 13 de Noviembre

2.3 Specific project outcomes

This section contains the specific project outcomes.

- ❖ In the existing **information systems**, there is no information available on the youth at the level of neighbourhoods; only at the broader *comuna* level. This produces highly distorted and aggregated data, for example, because of the huge differences between higher (generally more problematic and isolated) and lower parts of the *comuna* (generally more integrated and better connected to the rest of the city);

“When we are meeting with the municipality, they say that the youth development indices are improving in the Comuna 3. But that picture is highly distorted. You cannot equate developments in the overall Comuna of Manrique with developments in these peripheral neighbourhoods. That is why one of our recommendations to the municipality is to start measuring youth development at the level of the neighbourhoods.”

Luz Nely Osorno Ospina, lead research, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

- ❖ The ranges of age groups vary significantly from one information system to the next, which means they cannot be compared or cross-referenced;
- ❖ While **gender** is included in studies; and mainstreaming gender is part of the Municipality’s strategy, there seems to be very little implementation of this;

“I think the gender focus is key. But it should not only be about women. When you look, for example, at who should take care of the household, it is also the responsibility of the husband and children. Such a broader gender focus can really help to mitigate some of the problems that stem from the patriarchal culture in our neighbourhoods.”

Young man, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)



The neighbourhood of La Avanzada with the centre of Medellín in the background

- ❖ When it comes to work, from the total of 1,200 youth surveyed, a third works, a third studies and the final third neither works nor studies. There is great concern about the situation of the latter group, the so-called '*ni-ni's*' ("neither-nor" in Spanish). Many youth in this group are unprotected, turning them into a population that needs more attention from youth policies. Even worse off is the group of young adults (18-28) with an unemployed/not studying rate of 40 per cent. This means that two out of every five young adults neither work nor study. Faced with "interesting offers of illegality", such as those coming from illegal armed actors or drug trafficking factions, this huge risk group should become the first priority of Medellín's youth policy;
- ❖ In terms of the right to **education**, viewed from human development indicators, the neighbourhoods included in the research face a huge problem of limited access to technological and university education. For example, only 12.6 per cent have had the opportunity to start with technical programmes that are part of the formal educational system. Although women are more likely to not abandon basic and technical education, their level of access to higher education is much more limited than men (for those few cases where this access is guaranteed at all);
- ❖ In general, the supply of the educational systems seems to be disconnected from the effective demand of the job market. There are not enough incentives for the youth to continue (higher) education as there is no direct correlation with either a higher salary or a better, more qualified position. What is even worse is that the youth from these neighbourhoods suffer discrimination on the basis of coming from more disadvantaged (and highly stigmatised) sectors of the city;
- ❖ While the 12 neighbourhoods chosen for this research are all located along the periphery of the city, the supply of energy (especially electricity) and garbage collection were found to function relatively well. However, when it comes to the supply of quality potable water and gas, as well as the connections to a sewer, the situation is perceived as much worse;
- ❖ When it comes to (access to) **public spaces** such as parks, green zones and sport facilities, the youth generally have a positive perception. Both the availability and quality of these spaces are generally perceived as high. Less than a third of the youth think access to such spaces is difficult. The barriers mostly mentioned are traffic congestion, insufficient funds or security problems, as some of these public places are often used for alcohol or drug consumption.



A small playground in the neighbourhood of Carpinelo



A playground in the neighbourhood of 13 de Noviembre



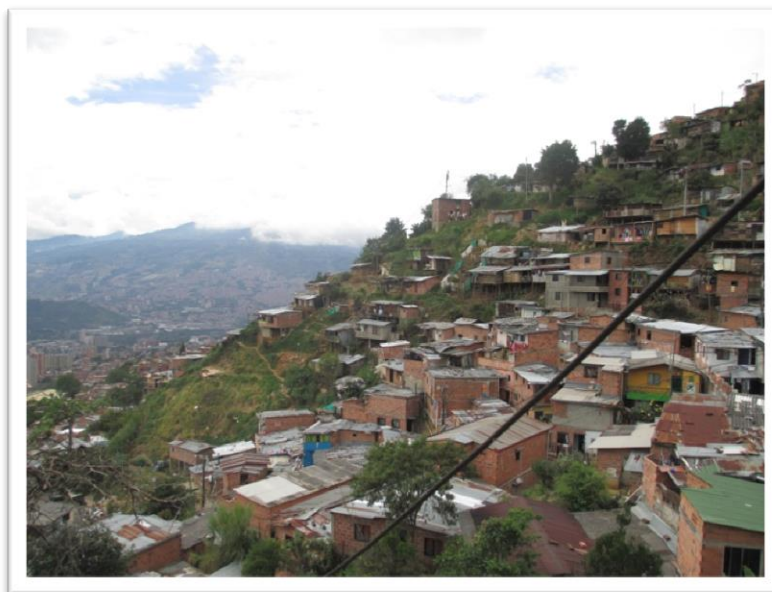
A bigger playground in the neighbourhood of La Avanzada

2.4 Main survey findings

A survey was developed and implemented between January and May 2014. It targeted 100 young men and women between 14 and 28 years-old in each of the twelve neighbourhoods included in this research project. The full findings of the survey are included (in Spanish) as document D (Survey Findings Report). These full findings can be translated on request. In this section, the main findings will be summarized for each category of human security. Again, some direct quotes are used from the focus group meetings (in purple) to support some findings with interesting observations from the youth that participated in the project.

Personal security:

- ❖ At the time of surveying, **armed actors** were present in all three *comunas*; this has complicated considerably the process of surveying; In some areas, interviewers were monitored or controlled; in others they were even vetted;
- ❖ 43 per cent of interviewees come from families that are or have been **displaced**. That means that almost half of those interviewed come from families that are or have been **victims of conflict**. In 63.8 per cent of these cases, the displaced families have come from other towns of the region; in 54.7 per cent from rural areas; and in 16.1 per cent from other neighbourhoods in Medellín. In the *Comuna 3* (Manrique), the history of displacement is even higher at 56 per cent of interviewees. Although the survey did not address the issue, many families seem to have been displaced several times. That suggests that some of the families who were displaced from other areas of the city, may actually have been displaced from rural areas prior to that;



A higher parts of the neighbourhood of 13 de Noviembre

- ❖ In the seminar of the *Comuna 3*, forced displacement was not only reported because of violence and conflict, but also as driven by EPM, Medellín's public service company, particularly in the municipalities of Guatapé and El Peñol, where the company has a large water reservoir;
- ❖ A lot of the violence reported seems to take place within the family;
- ❖ However, in general, very few interviewees (around 5 per cent) report that they face(d) direct threats of violence. Also, the percentages of people being taken hostage, suffering from sexual aggression or attacks are quite low. However, it is assumed that this apparent 'positive' picture is (at least) somewhat distorted given the sensitive nature of interviewing the youth about issues of personal and community security. This is at least partly confirmed by the conversations with the youth in the focus groups and seminars;

"Some of these issues were hard to raise in the survey. Questions about whether there is territorial control by illegal armed groups or whether they have to pay bribes, were almost always answered with no. The same goes for questions about intra-family violence or sexual harassment. You have to understand that the interviews often had to take place with family members, husbands or mothers listening along."

Young woman, part of the survey team, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

"The survey seems to indicate that few youth are paying bribes. But I don't think that is true. Most people pay them, and there are a lot of different bribes we have to pay."

Young women, seminar of the *Comuna 8* (11 September 2014)

- ❖ The younger the interviewees are, the more they are prone to (threats of) violence. 42 per cent of the cases concern adolescents; 35 per cent the age group of 18-21 years-old; and 17 per cent of the 22-25 years-old. Paradoxically, the age range of adolescents is less prone to interfamily violence (12 per cent);
- ❖ The adolescents, however, suffer more from forced recruitment (gangs, etc.) and sexual aggression (although numbers are generally low for both these challenges in the survey);
- ❖ The higher age ranges are more affected by crimes related to economic issues, such as theft, payment of bribes and the obligatory payments related to local "security or surveillance";
- ❖ On the basis of only the survey, the perception about safety and security of the neighbourhoods involved seems quite positive. For example, 95.4 per cent of the interviewees feel they are protected by their families, 92.5 per cent feel safe while moving through their neighbourhoods during the day and 81.3 per cent think they can

live in peace with their neighbours. Again, this picture may be distorted considerably because of the sensitivity of security-related issues when implementing the survey.

“When I was doing the interviews in the houses, I sometimes saw signs of water leakage on the walls. And the interviewee would say: “no, we don’t have any problems...””

Young woman, part of the survey team, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

Community security:

- ❖ **Participation**, in activities or programmes organised by the community or the municipality, is generally very low, and when the youth are participating, it is mostly among peers, for example in youth groups, and much less in entities where other groups (e.g. adults or other sub-groups) are also involved;
- ❖ Younger interviewees are more participating (in cultural activities, workshops, etc.) than older ones. This is an important finding. The age group of 14-17 years-old reported a **participation rate** of 30 per cent, which was at least the double of the other age groups. The question, therefore, should be how the participation rate can be a) increased but also b) continued when the youth grows older (how can we keep them involved and participating?);
- ❖ Women are indicating more than men that they are not informed about the activities organised in their neighbourhoods;
- ❖ More women than men are registered in the **SISBEN** (an instrument to identify potential beneficiaries of social programmes through the use of a household survey);
- ❖ 40 per cent of interviewees have children and quite a number of them are married;
- ❖ Interviewees frequently have to share beds with 3, 4 or 5 family members;



Field research in the neighbourhood of Llanaditas

- ❖ Families generally have a rural background, and have migrated from rural areas in the Department of Antioquia – *often forcefully displaced* by violence and conflict;
- ❖ About 80 per cent of the houses of the youth surveyed consist of hard walls and hard floors, with light but resistant roofs;
- ❖ All families have access to water. However, half of them receive potable water from EPM, Medellín's public service company, while the other half does not have access to high quality drinking water. It must be said that some participants to the seminars had the perception that the water EPM provides, was also of low quality/not potable;
- ❖ In general, access to electricity is assured, but access to gas is very limited;
- ❖ Where there is a connection to public services such as water or electricity, the focus groups showed that this does not automatically mean access, as a lot of these services are on the basis of 'pre-paid' contracts;

"We have access to water and gas in La Honda, but it is pre-paid, so we need to find the money first. Gas is very expensive and the taxes on gas and water are very high."

Young man, focus group of the *Comuna 3* (3 April 2014)

"What we have seen in the neighbourhood of La Honda [the Comuna 3, Manrique] is that there are a lot of complaints about the pre-paid system. When there is a power failure or when people start using the pre-paid cards, apparently these can immediately lose all credit. This system is dreadful for poor people."

Representative of the Department of Youth, Municipality of Medellín, seminar of the *Comuna 8* (11 September 2014)



Field research in a house in the sector of 'Chocosito', neighbourhood of Villa Liliam

- ❖ Because of the 'prepaid' systems, family members are often in conflict about how the use the available electricity at home;
- ❖ In comparison with the *Comunas* 1 and 8, the *Comuna* 3 (Manrique) has a more limited coverage in terms of public services. On average, in Manrique the quality of the houses is also worse than in the other *comunas*;
- ❖ Electricity shortages are frequent in these neighbourhoods.

Environmental security:

- ❖ Twenty per cent of the houses lived in by interviewees are not connected to a sewer;
- ❖ Only at about 5 per cent of households, the garbage is not taken away. This is an interesting finding as garbage accumulation is often portrayed as a considerable problem in some of these neighbourhoods of Medellín;

"What I don't like about Bello Oriente is the garbage everywhere, the dirty streets and the consumption of drugs."

Young man, focus group of the *Comuna* 3 (3 April 2014)



Garbage accumulation, neighbourhood of 13 de Noviembre

- ❖ When looking at (potential) emergency situations, land or mudslides are mentioned as most common (46 per cent), followed by contamination caused by waste (39.9 per cent) and contamination of the drinking water by sewage spillage or '*aguas negras*' (33 per cent);

- ❖ The problem of expensive 'pre-paid' contracts for water, gas or electricity has an important environmental consequence. It means that quite a number of families are dependent on using the less environment-friendly firewood for cooking;

"Take my grandmother, for example, she only buys electricity for the light bulb and the TV. All the cooking is done with firewood. In this way, we are not advancing."

Young woman, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

- ❖ A surprising result was that most houses in these areas seem to be quite stable with solid floors and generally constructed with cement (for the walls) and zinc (for the roofs). The expectation was that wood and other, softer materials such as earth would be found consistently, especially as most of these neighbourhoods have started out as so-called '*barrios de invasión*' (illegal dwellings on the outskirts of the city).

Food security:

- ❖ Most youth have three meals a day, but these are basic and don't vary much (mostly *eggs with rice or eggs with corn*). 40 per cent do not have access to a balanced diet;
- ❖ Only one in each five youths can decide what he/she wants to eat. The rest just has to eat what's available.

Economic security:

- ❖ School abandonment is high at 17 per cent;
- ❖ A third of interviewees neither work nor study (the so-called '*ni-ni's*'); Especially above 17 years old, this group increases rapidly;
- ❖ While a third of interviewees has a job, only 20 per cent of this group considers his or her job to be in line with the education received;
- ❖ Higher education (technological and university education) is a very distant possibility for most youth. Only 2.1 per cent reach technological education, only 2.6 per cent go or have gone to university; For example, this means that in the *Comuna 3*, only 4 youth (of the 400 interviewed) were enrolled in technical education and 8 were at university. When you look at the entire survey population, from the 1,200 interviewed, *only 2 had obtained a university degree*, both from the *Comuna 1*.
- ❖ Access to higher education – where it exists – is concentrated on the technical level (lower than the technological or university level), but only half of those finishing their studies find a job; and this group of "*lucky ones*" is overqualified and underpaid for the work that they do;
- ❖ Not a single youth that is working earns a minimum salary;

- ❖ Even those who are studying technical careers, will not earn more than the minimum wage, while they would deserve at least twice the minimum wage;
- ❖ Among the interviewees, there is hardly any professional: The research only found two miners, a social worker and somebody who worked as a dental technician;
- ❖ To be able to study, one would need at least a minimum salary to cover transportation, books, lunch, etc.;
- ❖ Salaries are not increasing among the youth interviewed;
- ❖ 17 per cent of the youngest interviewees are not in school; which seems to increase the risk of recruitment in criminal gangs, as was mentioned repeatedly in the focus groups and seminars;
- ❖ Family support and subsidies cover an important part of the tuition fees;
- ❖ There is about 50 per cent of informal work;
- ❖ More men than women are employed;
- ❖ There is hardly any economic autonomy among women.

Health security:

- ❖ 'Only' about 6 per cent of youth did not have any health insurance or coverage. Despite the fact that this means the youth's access to healthcare seems to be in better condition than other dimensions of human security, this still would leave a considerable youth population unprotected (from the surveyed population already 72 young men and women). In addition, the problem is worse among the group of 18-21 years-old, who are neither working nor studying;
- ❖ Interestingly, when looking at the roofs of the houses where the interviewees are living, in 20 per cent of the cases, the material used for the roof is 'Eternit' (asbestos). It must be added, however, that this material is still commonly sold in Colombia;



Asbestos roofs in the neighbourhood of La Sierra

- ❖ Only about half of the interviewees has (had) access to information about programmes about family planning, sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Political security:

- ❖ While access to internet is widespread, 15 per cent of interviewees still do not have access to internet;
- ❖ Interestingly, in about a third of cases, civil servants (in various places such as the police, educational centres or other public offices) were mentioned as the cause of discrimination;
- ❖ A third of the youth interviewed stated they had suffered some type of discrimination. Most of this discrimination was motivated because a) different backgrounds and cultures; b) poverty; or c) stigmatisation of their neighbourhoods as “violent”;
- ❖ Discrimination or stigmatisation because of *origin* (the neighbourhood the youth come from) is a significant problem, which is often considered as a structural barrier to education and employment;
- ❖ Around 10 per cent of the interviewees, mostly men, confirm that they have been taken to a police station or military base without any apparent reason. The treatment on these occasions is generally perceived as ‘bad’ or ‘regular’;
- ❖ The neighbourhood, the family, the school and the work place were all mentioned frequently as places where discrimination takes place;
- ❖ Within families, women suffer more discrimination; partly related with existing levels of *machismo*.



A team of the project's surveyors

2.5 Main focus group and seminar findings

The four focus group sessions and three seminars that were organised under this project have produced a valuable and vast quantity of interesting insights, perceptions and opinions of the youth of these twelve neighbourhoods. The most interesting points are mentioned below, again grouped according to the distinct categories of human security, but starting with some general findings. Again, where relevant, direct quotes are used from the focus group meetings (in purple) or from the seminars (in blue).

- ❖ In general, the focus groups and seminars were well received by the participants. However, it should be said that some participants had previously been in significant number of similar workshops. An interesting perception among some was that the *problems of the youth in Medellín seem to be over-diagnosed, but without any 'treatment' being offered*. This seems to confirm that the partial shift of the project towards the 'supply side' of the municipality has been a fundamental one;

"I think this research is important, but what worries me is that there is a lot of research going on in the Comuna 8. We recently had the Observatory of Human Security here and there are a lot of spaces, including some organised by the Department of Youth, where we have been working on many social mapping exercises. We know very well what the problems are but we do not see any solutions. Often, when a new research project is started, it also does not build on what has been done before. There is no evolution and the outcomes are not used as input for further research."

Young man, focus group of the Comuna 8 (21 March 2014)

- ❖ In addition to the perception of being 'over-diagnosed', there is another problem with the presentation of research outcomes such as the '*Índice de Desarrollo Juvenil*' (Youth Development Index) that was published in 2011: A lot of youth do not identify themselves with these outcomes. They think such studies must be about "other youth";
- ❖ One of the reasons why quite a number of participants appreciated the seminars, was that the results of both the survey and the focus group sessions were reported back to the participants. Although this is not the same as a structural follow up, at least it was not an example of the often heard complaint that they see *"one activity, workshop or seminar after the other without any real follow ups or progress"*;
- ❖ One clear contrast with the survey, was that in the focus groups and seminars, the youth started questioning some of the survey results, for example, those outcomes related to personal and community security;

“When you see some of these low numbers in the survey for abuses and discrimination, or the amount of complaints that the youth file, you need to understand that a lot of young people have no idea or no information about what constitutes a violation of their rights. What knowledge does the young man who is working without social security in an informal job really have? And what does the young single mother really know about the rights related to her body? So a future survey should include many more questions about what sources of information the youth have access to.”

Young woman, seminar of the *Comuna 8* (11 September 2014)

- ❖ But it must be said that there is – partially understandable – criticism towards the focus groups and seminars that were organised as they were viewed by some youth as “yet another talking shop without getting to any solutions”. However, to be fair, the whole purpose and set up of the focus groups and seminars were geared towards providing the youth a space to come up with solutions and suggestions. That objective, however, was achieved much less than hoped for;

“These survey results are again about ‘predicar, no aplicar’ [preaching solutions, not applying them]. So yes, the youth needs more bread, great, but how are we going to do something about it?”

Young man, seminar of the *Comuna 1* (12 December 2014)



The Metrocable, Medellín’s gondola lift system, seen from the neighbourhood of La Avanzada

- ❖ The seminar of the *Comuna 3* was a good example of how the feedback of the research (bringing the outcomes of the focus groups and survey back to the youth) successfully stimulated a more in-depth discussion of two-and-a-half hours with the youth (but to be fair: again more about creating a deeper understanding of the problems than about practical solutions);
- ❖ The seminar of the *Comuna 8* was also interesting, but for different reasons: It was the only seminar where a large number of (senior) representatives of the municipality were present. That was also appreciated by some of the youth participants, as they could directly see that the outcomes of the research and their viewpoints were directly being heard by the municipality;
- ❖ What was generally often not clear for the participating youth is how their input in this research can improve their situation. This resulted in quite some debate, for example, on the need for (and usefulness of) accurate information about what rights are currently not protected or what services are not provided/available to the youth, as well as about the fact that the municipality's subsidies and programmes often seem to be of a palliative nature: The municipality needs to know what is going wrong in its youth policies, before providing a (different) response. What was repeatedly stressed while providing the feedback to the youth in the seminars (on the basis of the focus groups and survey) was that the research outcomes were 1) the result of independent research, not the 'numbers of the municipality' and 2) based on their own perceptions and living conditions;

"This research is a good political basis for knowing what the youth really needs. The conditions of the youth in terms of their human rights can now be used to formulate responses, for example, about how to live together in a better way. In that sense, the research can really enrich the projects that we will implement from now onwards."

Young man, seminar of the *Comuna 1* (12 December 2014)

- ❖ The input of participants to the focus groups and seminars was very diverse, but it is clear that some of the participants really find themselves at the heart of the social processes, movements or groups that are trying to change things in their neighbourhoods. For example, with only the input of two or three participants of the focus group and seminar in the *Comuna 8* (in this case Jhon Jairo, Kelly and Michel) one could easily write a book about all the ins and outs of the condition of the youth in Medellín;
- ❖ While engaging with the youth in the focus groups, a substantial part was dedicated to finding out what the neighbourhoods look like in terms of geographical features, access routes, public services and main risk factors). From this exercise, it is clear

that an overarching problem for the youth is the lack of mobility and access (e.g. to services and to other parts of the city) given the isolated nature of many parts of these neighbourhoods. This also means that if certain services (e.g. educational or healthcare centres) are not available in their own neighbourhoods, they are dependent on the availability of (funds for) transportation and (the safety of) access routes to other neighbourhoods.

“What we are witnessing in these four remote neighbourhoods of the Comuna 8 is that there is a very limited public service structure. Yes, there are some recreational spaces, but if you look at health centres, libraries, cultural centres or police stations, there is hardly anything there.”

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, focus group of the Comuna 8 (21 March 2014)

Personal security:

- ❖ When it comes to insecurity in the neighbourhoods, the police is often mentioned as being “part of the problem”, and less of the solution. The perceived problems in this context are corruption, but also the direct role some police officers may have in generating violence and participating in human rights abuses. A recurrently perceived problem mentioned by the participants is the fact that many (young) police officers in these neighbourhoods are “just out there chasing young women” or using their powers to “intimidate people”;
- ❖ When there is a CAI (Immediate Attention Centre of the Police) in the neighbourhood, there is a feeling that these are not really used to provide a boost to the activities, projects and programmes that were intended to benefit from the presence of the CAI. It could be used a lot more for interaction and activities with the youth and the broader community. Some youth also express the more general perception that the police is not the type of community policing force that they are looking for to create a safer neighbourhood;
- ❖ The *combos* (street gangs) are perceived as controlling these neighbourhoods. Some youth even speak about a “complete legitimization” of illegal armed groups in the territory of the neighbourhoods, not only by the people living there or the security forces of the state, but also by the so-called *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (JAC, the local organizations that represent people at the level of the community) and the social organizations. This seems to suggest they are an accepted part of life in many of these neighbourhoods;

“The combos and the paramilitary forces that have not been demobilised, co-exist in the entire Comuna 8, not only in the domain of arms, but also in the cultural domain. They have a lot of decision-making power, for example, related to whether potatoes or Coca Cola are allowed to enter the neighbourhoods. In some areas, they monopolise the sale of ‘arepas’ [the traditional bread in Colombia]. They are an integral part of our culture and economy.”

Young man, focus group of the Comunas 3 and 8 (8 March 2014)

“If you look at the context of security and violence in these neighbourhoods, you see that the people in these communities have started to see certain behaviour as normal. It is a naturalisation process that converts violence into normal behaviour.”

Young woman, seminar of the Comuna 8 (11 September 2014)

- ❖ Interestingly the ‘normalization of conflict’ in the neighbourhoods of Medellín also translates into the acceptance of conflict or violence related jobs as ‘normal’ jobs;

“Often the youth are involved in violence or conflict-related jobs and they consider it part of normal life. For example, those collecting protection money think it is a regular job.”

Young man, seminar of the Comuna 3 (13 December 2014)

- ❖ The *combos* are also mentioned in relation to (new) community centres, social and cultural spaces, as some of these seem to be taken over by the *combos* or at least seem to have been affected by the fear that these gangs generate;
- ❖ There does not seem to exist any type of neighbourhood watch. Instead, the illegal armed groups are mentioned as “*security providers*” that demand protection money, for example, from shops to “protect” the neighbourhood;

“In Carambolas they are selling garbage bags that we are forced to buy from them at least once a week. And nobody seems to care. People say, this is not extortion, they are just selling us garbage bags.”

Young woman, seminar of the Comuna 3 (13 December 2014)



The neighbourhood of Carambolas

- ❖ The existence of '*fronteras invisibles*', so-called invisible borders (controlled by drug trafficking gangs or other armed actors) is a problem in all neighbourhoods;

"I live near an invisible border, between La Avanzada and Carpinelo. It is a border within a border. Until this point [he points at a map] the people from Avanzada pass, and those from Carpinelo on the other side up to here. Not one of them can cross this line, and they cannot control what is happening on the other side."

Young woman, focus group of the *Comuna* 1 (8 April 2014)

- ❖ In terms of security, there seems to be a huge difference between the lower and higher parts of these neighbourhoods;

"In the lower areas, the parents, grandfathers, aunts and uncles live. On Sunday, the members of the combos come down for family visits. There, they don't pick a fight with anybody to avoid putting their families at risk. But because they have nothing to lose in the higher parts, that is where all the social problems are."

Young man, focus group of the *Comunas* 3 and 8 (8 March 2014)

- ❖ Given the variety of gangs and armed groups in these areas, some youth have the sensation that they are involved in "*eternal diplomacy*". Whenever they leave their houses, these groups are there, and they have to deal with them;
- ❖ While there is clearly a presence of these groups, some participants in the research say that they even have an effect without being there. Because of fear, there are a lot of things that the youth avoid doing or places they avoid going;

- ❖ Sometimes the military-dominated state response towards the youth gangs (*combos*) is criticised by the youth as being out of proportion. In one instance this was characterised as the “elephant fighting the ant”;
- ❖ While sexual abuses, and even human trafficking, seem to be widespread, there is a feeling that these problems are hardly reported because of fear, stigma or out of embarrassment. One of the additional problems is that even when women do speak out about such abuses, the perception is that there is no NGO or community organisation that can amplify their voice or take their complaints to the governments;
- ❖ Forced recruitment into criminal gangs or illegal armed groups is another problem that is mentioned as often being neglected or under reported.

“It was quite funny that during the implementation of the survey various youth were asking whether forced recruitment included military service.”

Young woman, part of the survey team, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

Community security:

- ❖ The problem of *garbage* is mentioned in some of the focus groups. Apparently garbage is not always collected. Interestingly, this is in contrast with sometimes very positive stories about their neighbourhoods, for example, about the parks and other green spaces in La Cruz and La Honda (*Comuna 3*, Manrique);

“In the steep neighbourhoods of the Comuna 8, a lot of the streets are narrow, often pedestrian and in the form of stairs. That means cars cannot reach these areas and accumulation of garbage can become a problem.”

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 8* (11 September 2014)

- ❖ In the *Comuna 8*, the problem of widespread (*forced*) *eviction* is mentioned. Hundreds of families were apparently forced to abandon their houses because of an urban development project called ‘*Cinturón Verde*’, which is intended to stop the rapid urbanisation process and protect the borders with the rural areas of Medellín;
- ❖ There is a lot of mention of violence against women, especially within families and within couples. In addition, there are not a lot of women speaking out about this problem, sometimes because of fear, at times because they are financially dependent on their partners, but also sometimes because they think it is “*their fault*”;
- ❖ Prostitution is also mentioned as a huge problem among young women in these neighbourhoods. Interestingly, food insecurity is mentioned as one of the reasons why young women are forced into prostitution, as well as other personal reasons related to the economic situation or to the situation of the family;

“The focus groups and also the local survey teams confirmed there was a lot of prostitution among young women. In the survey, however, there was only one female interviewee that admitted working as a prostitute. It seems that quite a number of women conceal this by stating they work in bars or as domestic workers. Similarly, there was also only one person admitting to running an illegal credit service [‘paga diario’].”

Luz Nely Osorno Ospina, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

“Other interesting euphemisms that we found in the research were “sales” as an occupation, when, in the context of Medellín, this could mean they are ‘jibaros’ [drug traffickers], and “security and surveillance”, which could mean they are working for gangs or illegal armed groups. We need to dig deeper into this in follow up research.”

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

- ❖ Another problem that especially young women suffer is related to the sexist culture, *machismo* and group pressure that force them to wear certain clothes such as mini-skirts to bars and discos;
- ❖ The ‘*Buen Comienzo*’ programme of the Department of Education of the municipality, targeting *early childhood*, is mentioned as a positive experience by some of the young mothers participating in the sessions. However, it is often necessary that they look for these programmes themselves (instead of being offered to them) and access is often difficult, whether because of paperwork or long waiting lists;
- ❖ For the *displaced population* in these neighbourhoods, there is sometimes specific support available, but again the impression is that potential beneficiaries really have to go out and look for this support;



Field research in the neighbourhood of Llanaditas

- ❖ In the *Comuna 8*, the interesting example was mentioned of displaced populations that started their own projects, for example, vegetable gardens as a “*resistance strategy*” faced with food insecurity. But in general, few examples were found in the research of other “self-defense” strategies against some of the challenges of human insecurity;
- ❖ In these higher parts of the *comunas* (the neighbourhoods selected are all higher up the mountains), the neighbourhoods’ social interventions suffer from a *problem of centralisation*. The social and cultural projects and institutions (e.g. the so-called ‘*casas de cultura*’) are mostly situated or clustered together in the lower parts of the *comuna*. For these youth, it means that access is more difficult and participation rates are much lower;

“A structural problem with the system of PP, the Presupuesto Participativo [Participation Budget of the municipality that, for example, provides scholarships] is that the support only reaches the lower and middle parts of the comuna. Why? Because of the local administrators and because of those that participate most in PP: the social leaders. They are all living in the lower neighbourhoods. For us, it is much more difficult to have access to these support programmes.”

Young woman, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

- ❖ What seems to be missing for many of these youth, is what in Spanish is called a “*proyecto de vida*”, a decent perspective or plan for how they want to live their lives under ideal circumstances;

“For many reasons, including the youth’s vulnerabilities, the lack of economic resources or because they have left gangs or armed groups, the youth do not include higher education in their “proyecto de vida” because they do not consider it a realistic option. The same goes for cars or a sustainable job and many other things. What project in life can I start if I first have to worry about the day-to-day challenges such as having enough food or water.”

Young men, focus group of the *Comuna 8* (21 March 2014)

“There is no “proyecto de vida”, because the conditions of these youth do not allow them to dream with a professional education or a career, not even with raising a family. The families that are raised, are not even planned. There is a filter at play that does not allow these youth to plan for a decent life.”

“What life project can we really have if bullets fly over our heads?”

Two young men, focus group of the *Comuna 8* (21 March 2014)

- ❖ When the youth of these neighbourhoods *can* participate in cultural or educational events, there still seems to be a difference with youth from other areas. On the one hand, there is the perception that the municipality only invites these youth to “tick off” the list of participating neighbourhoods by offering two standard things: “*refrigerio y pasaje*” (a lunch box and transport tickets provided by the organisers). [*Ironically, that was also what this project offered the participating youth...*] On the other hand, however, there was the perception that the youth themselves are also to blame, because for many the lunch box is the only reason to participate in such events. Others, in turn, again argue that the latter is logical because of the serious food insecurity many youth suffer;

“The “refrigerio” in a way is playing an important role in democratic participation here. If there would not have been “refrigerios” today, there would be nobody here.

“What I am worried about is that one might think the answer to food insecurity in Medellín is the “refrigerio” of the meetings.”

Young man, focus group of the Comuna 8 (21 April 2014)

- ❖ The issue of *participation* is very interesting. While a key objective of the municipality seems to be how to increase the participation of the youth in public programmes and projects, the youth have a more nuanced opinion about this. For example, when discussing a quite expensive pilot project of the Department of Participation that aims to foster leadership by creating youth groups of 14-17 years-old in each *comuna* that so far have not been participating, the general reaction is quite negative as this is not seen as something that you “*impose top-down*”;

“This is absurd. Participation cannot be enforced. These are autonomous dynamics of the neighbourhoods and the communities. Youth groups come up because the participants decide to form such groups for various reasons, not because the government decides to create them for a specific purpose.”

“They are convening a lot of “institutional supply” for us, but it is a waste of time and money as they do not take into account the existing networks and our autonomy. We are not here to fill the government’s participation lists or projects.”

Young man, focus group of the Comuna 8 (21 April 2014)

- ❖ Connected to this idea is the perception that the municipality sometimes picks up on the initiatives and proposals of the youth groups (in itself considered a good thing) but then organise (the support for or the development of) the project in such a way that it is no longer connected to the initial idea of the youth;

"We generate proposals, but sometimes these are later developed by the municipality in a way that we don't like. And then it seems the execution of the project becomes more important than our original idea. An example is 'Jornada de Vida'. Under that programme we prioritised some themes related to the youth in the Comuna 8, but the Department of Youth decided to link its support to the "oferta institucional" [institutional offer] that exists. And that was not what we had in mind. This does not mean that what they are doing is wrong – this programme is actually working quite well – but it is not what we wanted to do."

Young woman, seminar of the Comuna 8 (11 September 2014)

"They take our own activities and initiatives and they provide them with a new "package" or "make-over." There is an institutional supply of programmes for the youth, but it is standardized, so whatever we do needs to match their "proyectos banderas" [flagship projects]. In this way, they take the youth out of the spotlight."

Young man, seminar of the Comuna 8 (11 September 2014)

- ❖ There is a perception among the youth that their neighbourhoods have **less access to the public programmes**, funds and subsidies that are available. In this context, it is also mentioned that the municipality is often changing the rules or the game, which means that some groups that are supported, suddenly lose their subsidies. In general, they do not feel respected by the municipality. On the basis of this research, it is difficult to judge how real this perceived inequality is when compared to other neighbourhoods in the city;



The neighbourhood of La Sierra

“A clear conclusion of this research is that those youth that are participating, those who are and keep themselves involved in social processes, have much more access to support and alternatives.”

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

- ❖ Sometimes there is a paradox at play that youth from neighbourhoods that are ranked a bit better, with a higher ‘*estrato*’ (the different levels by which the quality of neighbourhoods is ranked: 1 being the worst level, 6 the best), automatically miss out on some of the support programmes and subsidies. It feeds into an often expressed perception that the support goes to youth that “do not want to study, participate or work”;

“Just because we are from a neighbourhood of ‘estrato 2’ we do not get funds from the ‘Presupuesto Participativo’ [participation budget] of the municipality. Maybe our neighbourhoods are a bit better, but this does not mean that we have enough money to pay for transport and education.”

Young man, seminar of the *Comuna 1* (12 December 2014)

- ❖ The perceived *lack of respect* on behalf of the municipality is sometimes expressed in quite strong terms;

“The youth here in Medellín are perceived by the municipality as gangsters and criminals. You have to be realistic. They think we only draw AK-47s around here, while the only thing we do here is shoot with words.”

Young man, focus group of the *Comuna 8* (21 April 2014)

- ❖ And there is the often expressed perception that the municipality does not provide any support to the youth. For example, when a cultural project is mentioned involving painting the neighbourhoods in the *Comuna 8*, the youth make it sound that it all comes down to the time, investments and resources (e.g. paint) that their own social organisations can afford. There seems to be no need for more youth groups and social organisations it seems, but a challenge often mentioned is the lack of resources or the perceived misuse of the government’s budget for participatory processes and programmes;

“There are a lot of things that the youth can do in these neighbourhoods. There are youth groups, young talented bakers, carpenters and artists. But we have to be realistic, there is talent, but there are no resources. Such activities are not sustainable.”

Young woman, focus group of the *Comunas* 3 and 8 (8 March 2014)

- ❖ In both the focus groups and the seminars, a common ‘demand’ from the youth is to have their own ‘*casa cultural*’ in the neighbourhood. This seems to suggest that there still is a general need for more spaces where the youth can participate in artistic workshops, theatre or dance lessons. However, based on the information gathered in the focus groups and seminars, there seems to be a tension between the ‘*casa culturales*’ set up or supported by the municipality, and cultural centres such as ‘*Diáfora*’ in the neighbourhood Las Estancias, which is much more autonomous. The problem with the latter is that they do not have a lot of resources, unless they (quite paradoxically) can have more access to public support. But instead of supporting such existing community-based initiatives, the municipality seems to focus more on “its own supply”. This can lead to competition (for subsidies, scholarships, participation budgets, etc.) instead of reinforcing the initiatives that are taken by the very youth of these neighbourhoods.

Environmental security:

- ❖ In many of these neighbourhoods, it is common to see sewage water spill over the streets or periodically affect the potable water.

Food security:

- ❖ Interestingly, food security is not only about having enough (quality) food, but also about having access to the food that you are culturally or traditionally accustomed to. Because of the very high numbers of displacement, families may now live in areas where they do not have access to the type of food (e.g. fish or special fruits or vegetables) that they were eating before;
- ❖ In some neighbourhoods such as Bello Oriente, the price of an egg can be as high as 500 Colombian pesos (15 euro cent), compared to 300 pesos in similar neighbourhoods (9 euro cent), while normal prices would be around 200 pesos (6 euro cent). In general, prices of *arepas*, eggs and other staple foods are reported to have increased substantially.

Economic security:

- ❖ There are few opportunities for the youth in these areas to effectively move beyond secondary education, whether to higher education or to technical courses;

“Resources are very limited. A lot of young people say: “I want to study, but how am I going to go to university? How am I going to arrange transportation? What am I going to eat while at university?”

Young woman, focus group of the *Comunas* 3 and 8 (8 March 2014)

- ❖ There is the perception among the youth that the educational system in Medellín should be more oriented towards the issues related to how one can live together with others and with other groups. For example, scholarships are seen as to prioritise studies related to technological innovation, instead of the social sciences, arts or political sciences;
- ❖ Quite a number of youth in the focus groups and seminars **expect the (local) governments to do more** and solve their problems. This is interesting as the first reflex of many of the youth involved in this project does not seem to be to look for alternative routes outside of the supply of the government;

“When we start talking about the dimensions of security, you have to start with political security. The politics of this country are not fair, do not contribute to equality, and give us poor quality education and healthcare. That means that people who want to improve their life, find the doors of the government closed. That is the starting point of people losing out on economic and social opportunities. Bad governance, for me, is really at the heart of the problems we are facing.”

Young woman, focus group of the *Comuna* 8 (21 March 2014)

- ❖ However, there are **several youth that also blame themselves** for not always taking or making the best of the opportunities that are presented to them. The same goes for some of the services that are available to them (e.g. access to internet and information is mentioned) which are not always used to maximum benefit;

“I want to continue studying. There are opportunities. This negative idea of not having opportunities is very poor and not in line with reality. There are opportunities, but often when these arrive, we do not make the best of them. And we continue to complain and complain.”

Young man, focus group of the *Comuna* 8 (21 April 2014)

“One of the options that we have, for example is SENA, the public institution in Colombia that is dealing with professional education. It is also accessible for the youth in the Comuna 8 [as it also offers courses online] but we need to know whether it is really delivering on its social responsibility to provide the youth with an education that allows them to access the labour market for the first time. The number of students enrolled does not say anything about whether they also find a job in line with what they have been studying.”

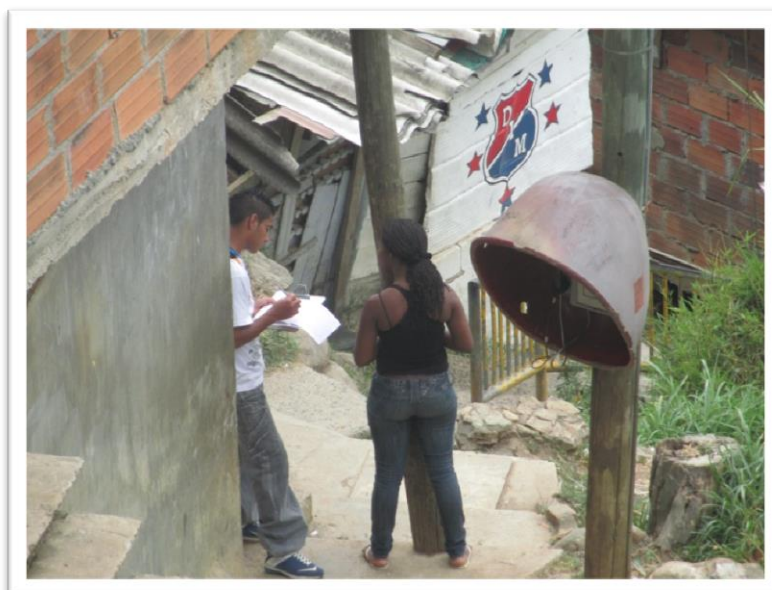
Young man, focus group of the Comuna 8 (21 April 2014)

- ❖ The **missing link** between education and job opportunities in these neighbourhoods is as apparent in the focus groups as during the survey. For example, the focus group in the *Comuna 8* confirms that the youth do not know of a single young person that has studied to be a professional and currently works in the area of his or her studies;

“Why would we study if it doesn’t lead to anything?”

Young man, seminar of the *Comuna 1* (12 December 2014)

- ❖ The unequal access to higher education in these neighbourhoods when compared with other, less disadvantaged neighbourhoods is part of a general perception among the youth. In addition to the obstacles of transportation, financial resources, stigmatisation and availability, there is a perception that many youth from other neighbourhoods have easy access to universities, while “not even being interested in studying”. However, when asked about whether all the youth in their neighbourhoods would like to go on and study after secondary education, it must be said that there is the perception that few youth seem to be interested in this option;



A public phone in the sector of ‘Chocosito’, neighbourhood of Villa Liliam

- ❖ Transportation is a significant economic barrier to education as some of the youth attending higher education need three different types of transportation to get to the educational centre. That means six transport tickets a day, for a total of around 12,000 Colombian pesos (around 3,70 euro) just for transportation. The total daily costs of going to university might be as high as 20,000 pesos (6,25 euro);
- ❖ The stigmatisation that these neighbourhoods suffer also translates into poorer quality public services. Education is a clear example. Because the *Comuna 8*, for example, has such a bad reputation, the perception is that the municipality sends them the most mediocre teachers, in some cases those that have not passed the necessary exams to be sent to other areas. These often have no interest in teaching in these areas and no real feeling with these neighbourhoods;
- ❖ Finding a job in the informal sector is often a direct consequence of not having the right education, skills, profiles or background for formal jobs;

“The general trend we found across all twelve neighbourhoods is that young men are often working in construction or in informal sales, and the young women in the clothing industry or as well in informal sales.”

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 3* (13 December 2014)

- ❖ For those with formal jobs, there is hardly any youth that is a member of a labour union, and only about half are affiliated to the social security system;

“We found in the Comuna 8 that only one of the youth was a member of a union. Since this is an essential part of the definition of a ‘decent job’, you could argue that in this case only one young person out of 400 has access to decent working conditions.”

Carlos Zapata, lead researcher, seminar of the *Comuna 8* (11 September 2014)

- ❖ While the ‘*libreta militar*’ (a military service registration card that one either gets through military service or by paying for it) is no longer a prerequisite for going to university, it is still required for applying for a job. Since a lot of youth do not have this card, their access to formal jobs is virtually impossible. At the time of finishing this report (July 2015) the Colombian Ministry of Education was working on an amnesty law that would allow youth without the *libreta* (in Colombia still around 500,000) to also apply for jobs;
- ❖ Another challenge mentioned that is equally structural is the perception that “*you only get a job if you know somebody*”, and that it therefore does not matter what you have studied or what your skills are.

“You know what is worse? Regardless of how much you know, if you do not have a ‘rosca’ [personal connection] you are not going to find any job. Everything is arranged here through ‘roschas’. I know some people without studies that are working in the Mayor’s office, and only god knows how they got there.”

Young man, seminar of the *Comuna 1* (12 December 2014)

Health security:

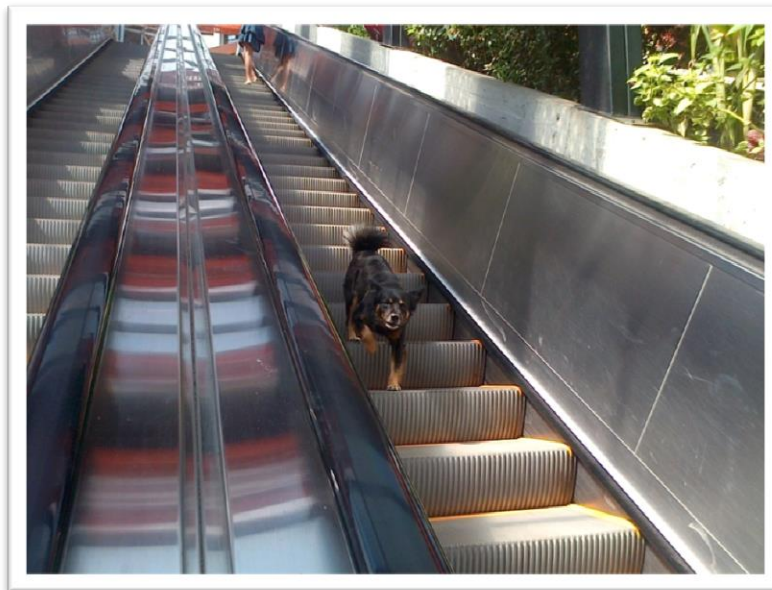
- ❖ Access to healthcare is perceived as difficult in many areas. Sometimes the health centres are hard to reach, especially in case of emergencies, limited in number, of inferior quality or they are located very far away;
- ❖ The presence of ‘*vicio*’ (bad habits, mostly associated with drug use) or ‘*plazas de vicio*’ in the neighbourhoods is a recurrent theme, whether as a negative influence on the living conditions of the neighbourhood or as the “only option” or “major risk factor” for the youth, given the lack of options in life;
- ❖ Teenage pregnancies are widespread. It is not an exception to see girls of 13 or 14 years-old that are pregnant. There is a lack of sexual education, poor access to quality information and relevant health services. Sometimes these young girls are careless but sometimes they simply lack the necessary information. This problem is related to the high frequency of abortion that is also mentioned several times.



A young mother playing a board game with several kids in the neighbourhood of La Sierra

Political security:

- ❖ Some sub-groups, such as the LGBTI, face additional problems of discrimination, for example, when trying to enter the job market or when trying to access certain healthcare services such as gynaecology. When they are insulted or harassed in the street or when they are not allowed to access certain public institutions, these are all seen as factors of discrimination. For other people, some of these factors may seem part of everyday life, but for this particular group, it can strongly affect them at an early age.



Medellín's dogs also benefit from the new outdoor escalators in the Comuna 13



The project's seminar in the Comuna 8 (11 September 2014)

3. Research recommendations

3.1 General recommendations

Collect data and measure progress at the level of the neighbourhood: While the research chose to focus on the neighbourhood level (in three Comuna's – the larger administrative unit of the city of Medellín), it proved very difficult to find neighbourhood-specific information. This is a structural problem in Medellín, and, therefore, the first general recommendation of the research is to apply (new) indicators and variables on the human security conditions of the youth that can be measured and dissected at the neighbourhood level. Given the high level of variety between and even within neighbourhoods, measuring at the *Comuna*-level is simply distorting the reality too much.

Standardise the youth's age-range throughout the system: The recent Law 1622 '*Estatuto de Ciudadanía Juvenil*' (2013) establishes the age group of youth as between 14 and 28 years-old. However, the research shows that this new range has not been incorporated yet in most of the information systems and other instruments such as the ECV (Survey about the Quality of Life in Medellín) or the SISBEN, an instrument to identify potential beneficiaries of social programmes through the use of a household survey. While some of the age ranges identified are similar, for example 14-26 years-old, others are quite different, such as 15-29 years-old. There is an urgent need to adapt all information systems towards the age range established by law, so that when they are connected or cross-referenced (in itself a key recommendation of this research), they are fully compatible and comparable.

Establish a single information system: The preliminary work done in this research project on classifying and cross-referencing the various information systems that all measure bits and pieces of the conditions and rights of the youth in Medellín, should be used as a first step to developing a **single information system** that connects all these sources of information. The project has been able to show the municipality what is needed to establish such a system, but it will require a lot of reorganisation and coordination between the various municipal, provincial and national entities of the state. The University of Valencia can only applaud that the current Secretary of Youth is willing to take this much needed process of change further, and it would be great if the Department of Youth could become the lead agency in this effort. But this change process should also be carried (and fully supported) by more state entities (and also carried through following elections) to be able to become a success.

3.2 Specific recommendations

The following specific recommendations have been distilled from the research:

- ❖ **Prioritise the ‘ni-ni’s’:** All public entities in Medellín involved in protection issues should particularly focus on the 30 per cent of youth that neither work nor study, as this is the group most vulnerable to forced recruitment, sexual exploitation or forced labour;
- ❖ **Find the ‘kid around the corner’:** The municipality should partly shift their programmes and projects away from the easy-to-target and participative sectors of the youth population and focus on ways to reach out to those that are (currently) not interested in the “supply” of the municipality. This is a difficult challenge (and this research, admittedly, has not produced easy answers to it), but the municipality cannot continue to focus primarily on those persons that already know their way to information, cultural events and protection channels. This also means that projects and programmes should be evaluated in different ways. Sheer numbers of participants or outspoken youth in events should not be the only way to measure progress as it could mean that those currently left out (or not choosing to be part) of the city’s programmes may never be reached;

“This problem is not limited to the comunas in your research. Neither the municipality nor our own youth groups seem to know how to reach the youth “around the last corner”. Even if the youth that cannot be reached represent only a 0.01 per cent of the total youth population, it is exactly this group that causes most of the problems.”

Youth leader, Morada, Fundación Casa de las Estrategias, *Comuna 13* (11 June 2013)

- ❖ **Empower the youth, not the programmes:** Instead of focusing on programmes and activities as almost goals in themselves, the municipality could also partly shift towards those type of interventions that allow the youth themselves to:
 - 1) use their knowledge, abilities and talents to find and build solutions for some of the problems that they are facing in these neighbourhoods (fostering their **transformational knowledge**) and;
 - 2) work towards **changes of attitude** (and in the longer term even cultural changes) in these areas that could be the basis of more stable and peaceful ways of living together in these neighbourhoods;
- ❖ **Offer tailor-made incentives:** When organising social and cultural events or programmes for the youth, the administration must make sure that the right kind of incentives are created for the right type of participants. In other words, the supply should really be in line with what a specific (sub) group of youth is a) needing and b)

expecting. Otherwise, the problem of youth only showing up for food and bus tickets will not disappear;

- ❖ **Focus more on opportunity factors:** Research, whether conducted by the municipality, the universities of Medellín or other agencies, needs to put much more focus on investigating what types of **opportunity factors** there are (or can be created) to produce transformational change. So far, the research has generally been dominated by a focus on **risk factors**. While equally important, there now seems to be a significant body of research available that sheds light on the risk factors related to the youth of Medellín (this research, but also previous research such as the *Índice de Desarrollo Juvenil* (Youth Development Index), the PREVIVA programme and the work that the Observatory of Human Security is doing);
- ❖ **Work with what's there:** It seems logical that the municipality should work with what is already there in terms of initiatives organised by the community's and the youth groups in these neighbourhoods. However, this not always seems to be the case. What the municipality should avoid at all costs is that parallel processes are taking place (one supported by the municipality and another by the youth themselves) that have no or few connections between them. Instead, the supply of support programmes should include those activities of youth groups and other collectives that have proven to provide the right kind of incentives to the youth to become involved and work towards better solutions for the myriad of problems these neighbourhoods are facing;
- ❖ **Do not 'institutionalise' the youth:** This does not mean that the entire participation process of the youth can or should be institutionalised. There are a lot of processes that the youth will start and control themselves, independent of the local municipality. But, where necessary, such autonomous community-based processes should be strengthened and supported by the municipality, instead of supporting new or parallel initiatives through the Participation Budget.
- ❖ **Level the playing field by investing in civic education:** In addition, the grassroots processes initiated by the youth and their own groups should be accompanied by a solid investment in **levelling the access to civic education**. Whether the youth decides to join participatory processes is in the end their own decision, but at least they all need the right type of information and knowledge to be able to make that decision in a responsible way;

“The municipality should not be the only route that the youth can take. But the government can play a bigger role to identify and support the talents of the youth. It is a challenge, but the municipality can do more to enable the youth leaders to create protective environments in these neighbourhoods.”

Youth leader, Morada, Fundación Casa de las Estrategias, *Comuna 13* (11 June 2013)

- ❖ **Offer realistic perspectives:** While offering alternative ‘*proyectos de vida*’ to the youth seems a good idea, the municipality should avoid that alternatives become **deceptive realities**. A lot of the activities, workshops, courses and other forms of support can easily be perceived as useless or even dishonest, if they later do not translate in real changes in the lives of the youth. However, it is also the role of the youth leaders and youth organisations themselves, to warn against too high expectations among their peers. For example, well-run hip hop or dance workshop facilities do not automatically mean that all the youth can become famous rappers or dancers and earn a living that way;
- ❖ **Address stigmatisation and discrimination:** More investments are needed in the city’s civil servants to change their attitudes, for example, the way they relate to or think about the youth. In more general terms, public campaigns should be initiated that explain not only the diversity of youth populations, cultures and backgrounds; but also the discrimination that the youth of these neighbourhoods are currently faced with. Finally, a specific policy should be put in place that can help prevent the stigmatisation and discrimination of youth that is linked with the neighbourhoods where they live. As this provides the youth with structural obstacles to both education and employment, it is one of the key issues that needs to be addressed through public policies of the municipality;
- ❖ **Increase access to information:** Whether through schools, families, or public and private institutions, much more emphasis should be placed on making sure the youth has access to information about programmes on family planning, and sexual and reproductive health and rights. In general, in order for the youth of Medellín to be able to claim their rights, they should first need to know what these rights are and what human security should look like in their neighbourhoods.

4. Research challenges, learning agenda and final conclusions

4.1 Research challenges

Implementing policy labs: While this research project intended to integrate the use of ‘policy labs’ (as developed by the International Council on Security and Development (ICOS) as series of highly structured series of seminars (in which there is a script with clear roles for participants and clear outputs and outcomes)), it proved to be challenging to organise such labs. One of the main reasons was the fact that it proved difficult to invite the same youth for a series of such meetings. Whenever a meeting took place for a particular *comuna*, other participants would join while some of the previous participants would not show up. Part of the explanation is the fact that the youth, especially those who are participating regularly in the cultural and social events of the city, have a busy agenda.

Reaching out to the ‘kid around the corner’: But it also shows that the project was not (completely) able to overcome one of the structural problems of such (field) research projects in Medellín (and also of the outreach done by the municipality of Medellín): it is difficult and sometimes quite impossible to *involve those youth that are not participating* or not willing to participate in activities or events.

Sensitivity of security and violence: The sensitivity of security-related issues was definitely perceived as one of the key challenges prior to the implementation of this project. However, while the survey development and implementation was affected by this challenge (most of the very sensitive security issues were taken out or avoided in the survey), the focus groups and seminars proved an ideal place to talk about the discrimination, violence, armed gangs and drug traffickers that these neighbourhoods face on a daily basis. While it logically was not one of the first issues that were raised during these events, the youth did not shy away from them and often brought these up themselves.

Moving from problem to solution: What proved to be a key research challenge is how to move the discussion in the focus groups and seminars from *problem to solution*. For example, when asked about what the youth could perhaps do against the bribes that need to be paid, there were two typical reactions: 1) We cannot do anything about it (which in some cases may be true) or 2) Yes, we are doing something about it. We are forming cultural groups, and work on artistic and cultural projects. The latter shows that there is a positive process taking place in which the youth see their community-based activities as part of a *culture of resistance or self-defence*. But such strategies are far removed from the practical day-to-day problems such as having to pay a bribe. Using the longer research process of community-focused ‘policy labs’ may (partly) solve *this huge leap from specific problems to broad solutions*.

4.2 Learning agenda and final conclusions

Firstly, from a project implementation point of view, there were two structural challenges that one would need to overcome in future projects:

- 1) Budget for more research staff costs: In general, there were no salary costs budgeted for the research coordinator (not employed by the University of Valencia) or for any local researchers in Medellín. In the end that was fine as a) the international field research coordinator was paid by a third employer and b) local researchers could be paid through the new consortium partners (especially through the contract between the University of Antioquia and the municipality of Medellín), or through the budget line associated with the survey (development) costs.
- 2) Budget for the salary of the project coordinator: Once the international researcher and project coordinator no longer received income from third sources, it was difficult to implement this project without obtaining a salary from it. The international researcher eventually found a new job in Europe, which meant that a) more international trips were needed between Europe and Colombia; and b) the coordination and support to the project could not be as direct or hands-on as was initially foreseen. Some of the delays in the final project year (and also the delay in writing up this final grant report) were caused by this inconvenience. In the future, it would be necessary to make sure that the principal field research coordinator would receive a basic salary within the project budget to make sure that he/she can continue to dedicate the required time to the project.

Engage with the youth in a more structural way: Secondly, to engage more structurally with a fixed group of youth in one of the neighbourhoods, it will be necessary to establish a more local approach, and spend more time in the neighbourhoods themselves. This will require more investment in local activities and will need to find the right incentives (e.g. rewards in terms of support to their initiatives or projects) to make sure a more or less fixed group of youth is continuously engaged with the project. That could also switch back the project's focus more towards what one of its initial objectives was: working with the youth to come up with more ways in which they themselves can contribute to improving the (human) security in the neighbourhoods in which they live.

Spending much more time with a more limited group of youth in a more defined project area can also help to make much more of the idea of organising **policy labs** (highly structured series of meetings with the community with well-defined outcomes), which really go beyond seminars as one-off affairs. Unfortunately, this first project was not able to turn its focus groups and seminars in such more structural and more in-depth processes.

Continue working with the consortium, commitment and goodwill created: Related to the previous point, the project has been quite long in terms of time frame, but given the challenges to build the necessary project consortium in Medellín and get the local municipality fully committed to this project, the time that could really be spent in the field (and engaged with youth groups was limited). Given the planning and bureaucracy involved, the project coordinator has probably spent as much time speaking to officials, experts and researchers as to the youth that were at the heart of the project. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the project was relatively small in terms of size and budget, it did produce a lot of information, connections and even commitment among local actors that can be tapped into to really help improve Medellín's public policy targeting the youth.

Lastly, in terms of the project's outcomes, there is a clear feeling that the end of this project is only a first step towards more impact in terms of policy change. Now that the project has shown in more detail what the situation looks like (both the situation of the youth themselves, but particularly also the support structure and (monitoring) systems behind the public policy that aims to improve this situation), the University of Valencia is convinced that that more research is needed into what types of interventions and programmes can be implemented locally to bridge the gap between the supply of public policies and the demand of the youth in the city of Medellín.



One of the many murals that can be found in the neighbourhoods of Medellín

5. Further research opportunities and next steps

While the results of the second, follow up project in the *Comuna 13* are not known yet at the time of writing this report, this first project shows that a very useful contribution can be made to youth policies in Medellín by research that shows what the current situation looks like, how the supply of youth programmes is currently organised and how the information systems could be better connected through one single instrument that measures the access of the city's youth to their basic rights. It seems that the current Secretary of Youth has really 'seen the light' in this regard, and is committed to improving the situation, both in terms of the type of programming but – perhaps more importantly – also in terms of *how the supply of public programmes can be more coherent, more demand-driven, and how it can generate and store information that can be easily linked to other information systems and shared with other Departments of the municipality*. That is the institutional change that seems to be required in Medellín and there is now the political will to work towards a *single information system* that connects all the available information about the situation of the youth in Medellín.

Follow up research can therefore be more targeted towards one or several of these required changes. One possibility is to have the project consortium apply for a next Call for Tenders (whether with the Gerda Henkel Stiftung or with another foundation or government). However, before doing that, we feel that 1) such a next step should be fully carried by the local Colombian organisations in terms of ownership (perhaps in addition to other entities such as the University of Valencia) and 2) it would be really helpful, before undertaking such steps, to have a solid discussion with various local stakeholders to see how the research outcomes, established connections and policy recommendations could be taken to the next level in terms of follow up research and contributing to actual *policy change at the local level* in Medellín.



Prof. Dr. Carlos Flores leaves his "thank you" for the creative youth of the Casa de Hip Hop, Kolacho