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Healing Wounds with Trust

Shedding its dark past associated with crime and drugs, the Colombian city of Medellín has worked hard to build a high trust society. Mayor **Federico Gutiérrez** shares with *Urban Solutions* how they have achieved this feat through a collaborative effort that unites stakeholders at the heart of the transformation.

At the World Cities Summit 2018, you said Medellín has progressed from a period of hope to a period defined by trust. How does this trust play out?

The history of our city is fascinating. There is no magic formula to explain what we had gone through. But there is a very important component to which we can attribute much of what we have achieved as a society—joint work between the public, private, academic sectors and citizenry. This teamwork involves weaving relationships and trusting each other to achieve common purposes.

Medellín has become a high trust city: a physical space in which the relations between citizens and institutions work because everyone contributes what they are responsible for and receive what they are entitled to.

**“That is how I rule:
with and for the people.”**

Every local government in Medellín has invested in areas with lower quality of life to improve connections and public spaces, and guarantee institutional presence in places that, for decades, were neglected.

We have begun a process to update the systematisation of our governance model. This new Medellín model, called Medellín Model 4.0, focuses on transforming urban spaces for the people and building a present and efficient State that listens to citizens and provides them with guarantees to build trust. That is how I rule: with and for the people.

So how does the city government work with other institutions to ensure trust?

Medellín's success has been driven by collaborations between good and successive governments and the private sectors, universities and civil society. For years, this alliance has consolidated and, I dare to say, today it is indestructible. Institutions are bigger than people and offer a clear common purpose that is met when everyone does what they are responsible for.

Since 2003, through the University, Enterprise and State Committee (CUEE when abbreviated in Spanish), the city has generated a dialogue and consensus space that promotes entrepreneurship, innovation and partnership for the economic and social progress of the territory. Eleven higher education institutions in the region participate in this committee alongside 21 companies, seven centres of technological development, the Mayor's Office and other key entities for development. This strategic alliance has facilitated and maintained the union of wills and knowledge among entrepreneurs, university managers, unions, and local and regional governments through dialogues, to improve productivity and competitiveness of companies.

Medellín is known for its inclusive transport system. How have efforts in this area built trust?

In Latin American countries, transportation is a great factor that generates social gaps. For instance,

because of rural-urban migration, our city had territories that were built without planning or institutional presence. These disconnected territories ended up becoming places full of poverty and violence.

Precisely because of that disconnection, the citizens who have less ended up being the ones who pay the most for public transport. They must take longer routes, which translates into more time and money.

One of our greatest challenges has been to reduce transportation costs and time, to create a more equitable city with a higher quality of life. This in turn reinforces the bonds of trust between people and institutions. Therefore, our transportation system has a social meaning: connecting territories to connect citizens with new opportunities.

We have an integrated transport system, unique in Colombia, which combines the Metro, Metrocable lines, trams and buses. Over the last 20 years, we have put it at the service of the people, overcoming topographical and social barriers. Our Metro Culture strategy has generated bonds of trust and respect between citizens and their public transport system.

In addition, we have set ourselves the goal of becoming the Latin American capital for electric mobility, to improve the well-being of our people. To promote sustainable means of transport, we are purchasing 64 new electric buses and we are determined that 100% of new vehicles entering the bus system must be electric. This year, we will have 200 new electric taxis to replace older ones.



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01 Metrocable lines form part of an integrated transport system that has overcome both topographical and social barriers.

02 Trams not only connect people to territories but also to new opportunities.

“The city centre is a neighbourhood that belongs to everyone in Medellín.”



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Medellín continues to work hard on infrastructure development projects to meet your population's growing needs. How does the government gain the people's support and trust for such projects?

I believe the most important thing is for the people to feel the presence of institutions. Infrastructure is a great tool to make this happen, but it must be charged with meaning. It is necessary to talk to people to understand their needs, so we can invest in work that impacts their daily lives. This is the only way to build trust.

Medellín's take on urbanism might as well be coined social urbanism because infrastructure does change lives. Transforming urban spaces affects interpersonal relationships—a park only makes sense when people hang out and sit on its benches.

Interventions from a sidewalk to a park or the Metrocable are always thought out around a community so they can contribute to the construction of the city. We have developed tools and initiatives for citizens to participate in creating a

more equitable and liveable city. We bring institutions to the people—our Mayor's office reaches out to the citizens and not the other way around.

Initiatives such as Imaginary Workshops gather the perspectives, visions and dreams of the citizens to drive interventions in the local environment. We ask them about their expectations and needs, and everything they say influences the Development Plan and the final product.

We also engage people in the renovation of the city centre, which is a neighbourhood that belongs to everyone in Medellín. With the input and participation of people who visit the area, we have created and improved public and green spaces for the citizens' enjoyment, such as green corridors and renovated historic sites of the city.

Another example is the Pact for Air Quality and the BreatheLife workshop. In just one year, we have involved local authorities to implement public policies that engage all stakeholders in improving air quality. This has transformed the adoption of low carbon emission technologies.

01 Car lanes along Paseo Bolívar have been pedestrianised to give both pedestrians and cyclists better access to surrounding commercial areas.

02 Greening efforts along Avenida Oriental, a major thoroughfare in Medellín.



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In high trust cities, even vulnerable groups feel they are protected and respected by the society as equals. How does Medellín ensure this?

Cities worldwide have an important commitment to avoid any situation involving discrimination, insecurity or violation of people's fundamental rights. From the Mayor's office, we promote and undertake actions so that everyone in Medellín can exercise their rights without any distinction.

Therefore, we decided to join big initiatives such as the United Nations Safe Spaces for Women and Girls and the Latin American Network of Rainbow Cities to create real changes in our city and generate change in our region by working with other territories.

In Medellín, we have the Secretariat of Social Inclusion, Family and Human Rights. It works for the ethnic and diverse population. We have teachers, officials and leaders who are trained as agents against discrimination; an Afro-descendant Integration Centre; and a Centre for Sexual Diversity and Gender Identities. We offer training for teachers and officials and have undertaken campaigns to educate people on the value of diversity.

We also have a Secretariat for Women, which has made progress in terms of new policies for gender equality to pursue economic, political and social equality for women. Recently, we launched the Pact for Equity, which invites all sectors of the city to join an exercise of co-responsibility that is based on collaboration for cultural transformation.

“Our Mayor's office reaches out to the citizens and not the other way around.”



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01 A lone schoolgirl makes her way through Comuna 13. Once Medellín's most dangerous neighbourhood, Comuna 13 has undergone massive transformation and is now a safe and vibrant neighbourhood.

02 Mayor Gutiérrez visits children at the Buen Comienzo Gardens, a centre offering early childhood education and care.



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We look ahead with pride, yet we don't forget our past.

It is very important for the government to work around these matters. However, values in a society should primarily be promoted at home. Therefore, we consider it important to invest in that. My wife Margarita leads a project called Weaving Homes, which brings workshops to people's homes to improve family relationships. These sessions talk about respect, love and tolerance as the basis of healthy coexistence.

Another type of trust Medellín has done well in is improving international trust in the city. How does Medellín reconcile the image of a high trust city with the city's dark past of crime and drugs?

Many people still have the same notion of Medellín from more than 20 years ago, and continue to display that version of our city in the news, movies and television series. But that is not our reality today. Medellín has transformed and even though there are still challenges ahead of us, it is safe to say that the violence that tainted our global image in the 80s and 90s is in the rearview mirror.

No city has suffered what Medellín went through. We need to tell our story, heal the wounds and get closure. We must give both victims and heroes the space they deserve.

As a society, we unite to carry our city forward. Today, we look ahead with pride, yet we don't forget our past. A very important project underway is called "Medellín embraces its history", which involves the demolition of the Monaco Building, the former residence of narco-terrorist Pablo Escobar. A memorial in honour of the victims of narco-terrorism is being built there as we speak. Thousands of people fought the Mafia or died innocently because of it: they are the true protagonists of the story. The memorial, named Inflexión, was designed by architects based on the citizens' inputs, gathered through public talks and imagination workshops.

This is just one of the actions to rebuild our history so the world understands what we suffered and sympathise with our pain, but also understands why our transformation is so valuable. We conduct a specialised history module in schools to educate our children on those dark times and prevent the Narcos television series from being the only narrative. We are also working on a memory tour for tourists, among other projects.

Many societies that have suffered the horrors of violence have done valuable work to recover their memories. We studied their experiences and will continue to learn from them.

What are some developments in social trust from other cities that have caught your attention?

In Medellín, we continue to learn from other cities around the world. Singapore is of great inspiration to us in terms of planning and developing inclusive cities.

Recently, we have been learning from cities such as Palermo (Italy) regarding the generation of a culture based on legality; from Seoul (South Korea) to develop a more intelligent and sustainable transport system; from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on learning and education; and the World Economic Forum with respect to technological adaptation and implementation. Not to mention, we have been working alongside C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group for climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, among others. 