

SOCIAL AND NATURAL FABRIC

Based in interview with:
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Collective action stories from a neighborhood in transformation

COMMITMENTS

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Quote as: Kreisel, A., Becker, M., Holguin, C., Cardona, E. Social and Natural Fabric. P. 190-195. In: Mejia, M.A., Amaya-Espinel, J.D. (eds.), *BiodiverCities by 2030: Transforming Cities with Biodiversity*. Bogotá. Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander von Humboldt. 2022. 288 pages.

The transformation of Moravia, a neighborhood in the city of Medellín, demonstrates how biodiversity can drive social and environmental changes, in this case, regarding informal settlements on a former garbage dump called *El Morro*.

"Moravia used to be a flat piece of land. Then it became a hole created by the extraction of materials. Then that hole became a mountain of garbage. Then it turned into a neighborhood, and today it is a park surrounded by a neighborhood. Medellín is not known in the world for renovation, for tearing down and starting over. Medellín is known for innovation, and Moravia

represents this: building on what has already been built and building with the people". This reflection by Councilman Daniel Carvalho, in the 2019 public debate on the city's Urban Renewal Plan for Moravia, illustrates the capacity of communities in vulnerable settlements to transform their territory and how biodiversity strengthens this collective work by reviving the rural history of many of the communities.

The history of Moravia dates back to the early 1960s, when it was consolidated, thanks to the efforts of many displaced people who had lived in rural areas and sought housing alternatives to flee from violence and displacement. In 1977 the area was declared the municipal garbage dump, which brought negative consequences associated with its

environmental degradation and livability conditions, especially around a mountain of waste known colloquially as "El Morro" (a small, rounded hill) that reached 35 meters in height. However, the inhabitants found in these elements an opportunity to survive around the work of recycling.

Approaches with the municipal administration began in the 1990s, achieving the neighborhood's legal recognition in 1993. Subsequently, in 2000, a new relationship with the administration was initiated through the Moravia Neighborhood Integral Improvement Macro-project, which included its areas of influence and was carried out jointly in 2005 by the community, the Administrative Planning Department, and the National University's Schools of Urban Planning and Architec-

ture. This milestone contributed to the neighborhood's transformation through governmental backing framed in **social urbanism**. This gave rise, in 2012, to *Moravia Florece para la Vida* – Moravia Blooms for Life, a greening project based on measures such as creating nurseries and community organizations (e.g., *Jardineros Unidos de Moravia* – United Gardeners of Moravia, *Corserba*, *CoJardiCom*) and implementing programs such as *Guardianes del Morro* - Guardians of El Morro. The initiative represented a milestone for the neighborhood because it strengthened community empowerment and planting processes, providing its inhabitants with new opportunities in tourism and other sources of income.



MORAVIA- MEDELLÍN, COLOMBIA

Pop. **45,000**

42 km²

1,400 m.a.s.l.

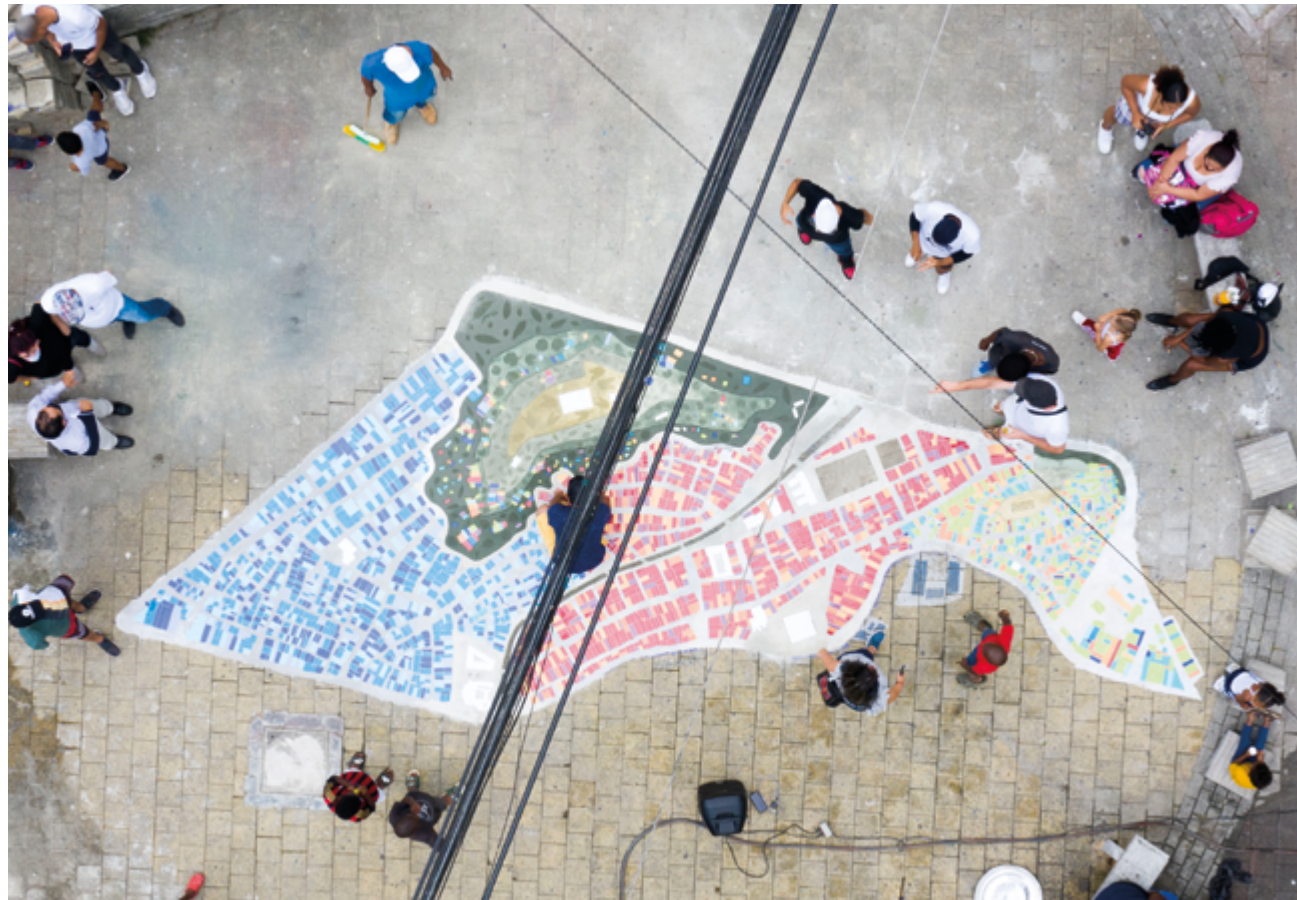
KEY CONCEPTS

SOCIAL URBANISM

DESIGN-BUILD

URBAN CODING

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION



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MOSAIC MAP OF MORAVIA

The work was carried out with the community in the main square as a playful tool to strengthen knowledge and identification with the territory. Each piece of tile represents a house.

Despite these important contributions, the neighborhood's social fabric and its occupancy model are at risk. On the one hand, implementing the Urban Renewal Partial Plan decreed in 2018 has caused organizations such as *Moravia Resiste* or *Colnvite*, whose purpose is to recognize the neighborhood and communities as a Living Heritage, to mobilize. Secondly, the appearance of new human settlements seeking to establish themselves in *El Morro* has endangered the functioning of the gardens and the employability of the sector's gardeners.

Moravia is a precise reflection of the social and environmental challenges shared by Latin American cities and the opportunities for transformation that the recognition of biodiversity can support. The Urban Lab Medellín Berlin and Palo de Lluvia initiatives exemplify how synergies can be created among initiatives, local communities, and other actors interested in strengthening their relationship with this territory.

THE CO-PRODUCTION OF A NEIGHBORHOOD

Albert Kreisel and Maximilian Becker, two German architects and urban planners, are convinced that a significant part of the solution to the challenges of urbanization sustainability in regions such as Latin America is found in informal neighborhoods. This perspective led them to work hand in hand in 2013 with Cielo Holguín, a local community leader in Moravia, to build together ways in which architecture could strengthen the neighborhood's social fabric. As a result, the Urban Lab Medellín Berlin project was developed, which led to the emergence of the non profit organization *Fundación Oasis Urbano* in 2021.

The initiative pursues two objectives: on the one hand, to weave a bridge between the neighborhood and the rest of the city, transforming the social segregation to which the inhabitants of Moravia have been subjected; on the other hand, to protect the social, economic and physical structures that have grown organically in this sector.



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COMMUNITY CENTER TALLER TROPICAL MORAVIA

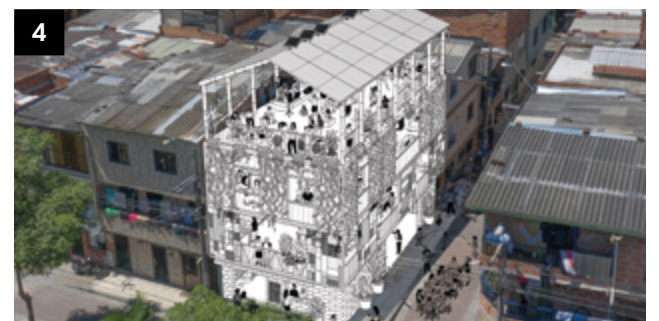
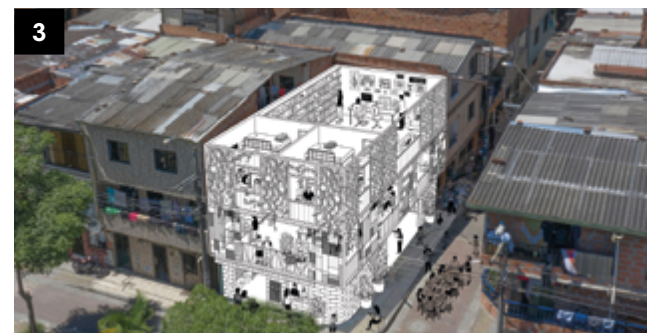
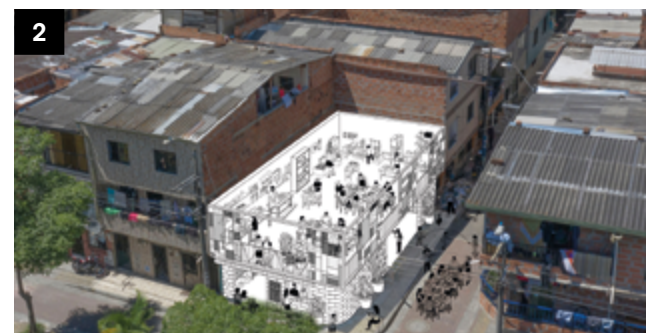
The space was designed and built in collective action, and featured a bamboo classroom, a community garden, and a mobile kitchen. Between 2018 and 2021, more than 10,000 people participated in the activities of the self-organized community center for experimental education and cultural exchange.

Thus, in 2017, a series of summer schools was launched to promote mutual learning between students from the Technical University of Berlin, several universities in Medellín (Eafit, Tecnológico de Antioquia, and UPB, among others), and local leaders of Moravia around applying methodologies such as **Design-build** or **Urban Coding**.

One of the main fruits of these summer schools is the community center *Taller Tropical*, created in 2018 for the area's cultural development and geographic recognition. Some of the workshop's initiatives focus on the role that biodiversity can play in aspects such as food security or through the use of plants such as guadua bamboo. Examples of this are the implementation of a community urban vegetable garden and the construction of a mobile kitchen called *Cocina Popular*, spaces where activities are carried out to strengthen eating patterns that contribute to improving the community's well-being. These actions take advantage of the mainly rural origin of the neighborhood's inhabitants and the diversity of traditional practices associated with cultivating the land.

TROPICAL WORKSHOP 2.0

Upon fulfilling the cycle of the temporary structure, the time has come to evolve the prototype for the long term. The new project is under development, with a cooking school, a recycling laboratory, artistic residences, and a multi-use classroom.



Source of all photos: Oasis Urbano, 2018 - 2022

PALO DE LLUVIA: A PACT OF LOVE FOR NATURE

As a result of the neighborhood agreements made with the community, the Moravia Cultural Development Center was consolidated in 2008 and currently operates under an agreement between the Mayor's Office of Medellín and the family compensation fund, Comfenalco Antioquia. The infrastructure is a work by the Colombian architect Rogelio Salmons that reflects what is known in Medellín as social urbanism. This space has several work areas and projects that are committed to culture as a transforming agent of society. Among them is the *Palo de Lluvia* Environmental Management Program, which seeks to promote an environmental culture through pedagogical and social management processes for the dialogue of knowledge, the exchange of experiences, the creation and weaving of community and inter-institutional alliances and seeking more harmonious ways of inhabiting the territory.

The program recognizes the social diversity of Moravia's inhabitants and seeks to strengthen practices that they have brought from their territories of origin while encouraging new practices toward environmental culture. Since 2010, it has promoted a pact of love for nature by focusing its actions on respecting all life forms, promoting caring for plants and gardens, and reflecting on the importance of the land and planting for food security. It also encourages caring for animals in their natural habitat, including vultures and opossums, promoting knowledge about their ecosystemic functions. Additionally, it supports proper waste management to take advantage of recyclable and organic waste through biodigester bales and encourages the care and protection of water.

In order to recognize the neighborhood's biodiversity, an inventory of species was carried out in 2019 with the publishing company *El Patio* as part of the project *El Agua no es Azul – Water Isn't Blue*, recording natural (animals and plants) and artificial (objects) species that give an idea of how the riverbed of La Bermejala creek is inhabited, understanding that people are just one of the many species that make up this ecosystem.

KEY LESSONS

- ➔ It is essential to protect community practices and encourage collective work to create opportunities for conversation among opposing positions within the same community.
- ➔ Working hand in hand with other actors allows us to approach different ways of thinking about the city and build a joint vision based on inclusion and well-being.
- ➔ It is common in a community for some voices to be heard more than others. However, it is neces-

sary to include the perceptions of normally marginalized actors in decision-making, such as young people or street dwellers, since they also occupy the territory. To the same extent, it is necessary to transcend any social stigma surrounding a sector to address its concerns and requirements. Together with the collective work, this recognition allows the worldviews of those who come to the place to be transformed and a sense of ownership of the territory to be created.



KEY ALLIANCES

For Palo de Lluvia and the Cultural Center, promoting an environmental culture through pedagogical processes and dialogue of knowledge has been vital. Thus, they have shared workspaces with Urban Lab, such as the vegetable garden that was located in the Tropical Workshop. Other actors have been the University College of London (UCL) and *Moravia Resiste*, with whom they have co-researched in the neighborhood around the Recycling Landscapes as a strategy to highlight the work that takes place in Moravia. In addition, they have worked on the recognition of the neighborhood as a Living Heritage, highlighting the specific stories of the area's inhabitants and promoting the recovery of memory.

