



Hangzhou International Congress, “Culture: Key to Sustainable Development”

UNESCO

ANÍBAL GAVIRIA CORREA. MAYOR OF MEDELLÍN.

Keynote Address: “How does culture drive and enable social cohesion and inclusion?”

I would like to begin by greeting you and sharing the pleasure it gives me to participate, from a distance (Medellín, Colombia), in this congress organized by UNESCO on culture as a key to sustainable development.

In particular, I am delighted to be addressing this forum whose thematic focus answers the question: how does culture drive and enable social cohesion and inclusion?

On behalf of Medellín, I wish to give special thanks to UNESCO and all the organizers for considering our city’s experience as a case study to share at the congress, because this encourages us to continue working for life and equality.

I will begin by quoting the United Nations’ definition of a socially cohesive society, “where all groups have a sense of belonging, participation, inclusion, recognition and legitimacy” – in my own words I would say that it is one where the whole of society has mutual aims and works under common principles.

This is the metamorphosis that we are working towards in Medellín, a city that has moved from fear to hope and is now making progress in the consolidation of a collective dream: a “City for Life” where justice, solidarity, liberty and honesty are core values.

The question, then, is: how does culture drive and enable social cohesion and inclusion?

In our case, we hold the firm belief that in Medellín all citizens should be able to develop fully and independently in the place that they live. This constitutes equality and real social inclusion.

In recent years, Medellín has received constant government investment to improve conditions and develop its citizens’ skills through education and access to public services and inclusive spaces, such as parks, library, the interactive Explora Park, quality schools and nursery schools.



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Now, the main challenge is to strategically combine two basic components for the city's development, which we shall examine more closely later on:

- the development of urban projects that promote interaction and communication in the area;
- cultural training in citizenship education for life, to get to the root of and weed out our cities' problems that are entrenched in the apathy of the majority.

The starting point for us was to identify the key problems, the first being that we are a society with tremendous inequalities and the second being the enduring infringement of the right to life and freedom in some parts of the city, owing to the presence of illegal groups in the neighbourhoods with the lowest human development.

Medellín has made decisive steps forward in restoring the value of life. This is shown, for example, by the intentional homicide rate, which has fallen from 380 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (6,349 homicides in 1991) to 52 per 100,000 inhabitants (1,251 homicides in 2012). This, as I have said, is a step forward, but it certainly remains an immense challenge now and in the future.

The city's Human Development Index (HDI) also improved between 2004 and 2011, increasing about 7 points from 79.45 to 86.44, which practically represents an increase of one percentage point per year. This is a very important result, though inequalities persist within the city: in the neighbourhood with the highest human development the index increased from 92.69 to 97.32, while in that with the lowest human development it rose from 73 to 78. The indices for both grew by five points, but the difference between the two is still 20 points.

Interestingly, the statistics show that there is a significant relationship between the number of homicides and the HDI of each area, confirming our belief that there is no greater inequality than the difference in the right to life. Inequality and violence are closely linked and it cannot be a mere coincidence that the most violent cities in the world are those with high levels of inequality.

Hence the importance of ensuring access to services, improving people's living conditions and promoting opportunities in education, culture and decent employment – key determinants of the unequal distribution of resources.

We are increasingly convinced that the attention given to an ethical and political project that is working to make Medellín a "City for Life" must be comprehensive and designed to address the structural causes of the problems facing the city in order to develop comprehensive and sustained intervention.

It is an equation with multiple variables including, among others, the following indispensable elements:

- (a) an educational and cultural project that promotes the principles of life and equality and is a source for the development of new options for young people;
- (b) inclusive and increasingly specialized social investment;
- (c) an urban planning project that also offers educational possibilities;
- (d) a management model based on innovation to find solutions to social problems;
- (e) transparent governments that are consistent over time and fight directly against illegality;
- (f) active participation and shared responsibility of all stakeholders in the city's development.

I shall focus my remarks, as I said at the beginning, on the two points of this equation that I consider essential in making culture a driving force for social cohesion and inclusion.

The first is an educational and cultural project that promotes the principles of life and equality and is a source for the development of new options for young people.

In this regard, I wish to highlight the key question that must be asked for the city: “What do the citizens need and want?” On that basis, government policies must promote the comprehensive development of these citizens.

We are currently working on a sectoral project on citizenship training in Medellín under four main headings: culture, education, participation and sport, for which we have set up a Deputy Mayor’s office from which the policy on citizenship for the promotion of life is being planned and developed, with the participation of museums, education institutions and the city’s cultural, sporting and recreational associations.

I would like to highlight three programmes within this project:

- The reading and library scheme, “Medellín Live Reading”, which integrates the city’s public and school library networks, supporting the programme to promote reading as a driving force for the development of reading skills for girls, boys and young people. Book days, book festivals and the Medellín publishing fund are some of the activities seeking to make Medellín a reading city.

We are convinced that reading fosters development, not only of reading skills but, even more importantly, of citizenship skills.

- The additional school day, “School City”, which seeks to provide training through the creative use of children’s and young people’s leisure time. The school day is thus extended and focuses on training in sports, culture, science and technology, environment and bilingualism. This is a revolutionary and unique trial for the country’s entire school system, as it allows museums, community cultural organizations, parks and the entire network of cultural institutions to join the training process, which is not hosted in schools but in spaces throughout the city used as training locations, making teachers out of the whole community.
- Cultural citizenship, which transcends the concept of civic education, and is to be understood as a concept of inclusion, culture for all and identity, with projects such as cleaning up parks, developing neighbourhood museums, and mobilization and reflection on a thematic agenda for the city. This includes the event taking place this month under the name of “May for Life”, which has become a space for civic reflection on non-violence and reconciliation, working for the inclusion of victims and reparation, through activities such as the Summit on Non-Violence, the White Night and the exhibition held in the museum network on the theme of “Life”.

The second point that I wish to highlight is an urban planning project that also offers educational possibilities.

The city has learned that urban planning generates inclusion and new cultural dynamics. The main challenge now is for this urban planning to be educational and have shared and inclusive uses. It is not enough to establish facilities in the neighbourhoods and districts with the lowest human development, it is also necessary that communities there participate in an imaginative way in the design process through interventions that call for the linking of cultural programmes, needs and

uses for the community as well as promoting links between communities in order to reduce disparities.

I would like to tell you about three projects that illustrate this point.

Articulated Life Units (*Unidades de Vida Articulada* – UVA) are a new urban typology whose purpose is to create a space for citizenship training with shared uses including sport, culture and participation. These spaces are intended for the exchange of information between citizens and are places where neighbourhood communities can meet through various youth, family and community activities. These new facilities are based in parks and increase public space for people to enjoy.

The Ring Road Garden and the River Park are two land management projects that also aim to increase public space for citizens to enjoy, with two development targets: for the River Park, the aim is to use the river as a linchpin, connecting and integrating citizens in the centre of the city rather than dividing them from each other, thus recovering the river for the city and the citizens; and for the Ring Road Garden, the intention is to bring the periphery closer to the city, creating a large garden around the valley to generate social and environmental sustainability.

These projects, which are all urban, are creators of culture and education, forging a new type of relationship between citizens and their environment.

I would like to conclude by saying that culture, in the broadest sense, is the driving force of sustainable development and enables social cohesion and inclusion when it is understood that the task is to foster the capacity building of citizens and that the focus in society is the people. The establishment of infrastructure is an active invitation to creation and the city must be designed to be convivial and promote connection and integration.

A “City for Life” is a place that we can stroll through and enjoy, create and recreate at every opportunity. That is the Medellín that we are building and that I invite you to discover and enjoy.