Negotiating Neighborhood Priorities: The Politics Of Risk & Development in Medellín’s Comuna 8

by

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Abstract

In a time of increasing concern over the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, urban insecurity, and rapid urbanization, risk management has come to the forefront of planning agendas in cities across the world. No longer considered solely in environmental terms, key drivers of risk include a range of socio-economic and governance factors, and as such, risk management interventions have become tightly entwined with urban development politics. With many risks distributed unequally and affecting a city’s most marginalized individuals and communities most significantly, understanding how the intersection of risk management and urban development manifests in planning and policy interventions at the neighborhood level proves increasingly important for equitable city planning pursuits.

Using the case study of a Comuna 8, a semi-informal district in Medellín, this thesis explores how community-based groups situated in municipally-defined areas of high environmental risk negotiate their development priorities with city government and development entities. By examining how risk is invoked, re-interpreted or contested by different stakeholders pursing planning at different scales in Medellín, it demonstrates how the political nature of risk discourse and designations allows different stakeholders to justify, challenge, or carry through different development visions for a specific territory. For planners and communities concerned with equitable outcomes in cities facing complex environmental and social risks, this thesis suggests both the need for analytic frameworks that address risk in context of disputed development and improved decision-making structures that recognize the agency of grassroots actors in local development and risk management.

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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

In a time of increasing concern over the impacts of climate change, environmental degradation, urban insecurity, and rapid urbanization, risk management has come to the forefront of planning agendas in cities across the world. No longer seen as solely an environmental problem, key drivers of disaster risk are understood to include poverty, inequality, and poor governance (United Nations 2015), making risk management a key component of sustainable development and planning. While international development institutions and national government agendas focus largely on institutional coordination and multi-scalar and -sectoral policy responses to risk, work on the politics of risk and risk management in marginalized urban communities – where individuals are most likely to experience the consequences of risk drivers and policy interventions – remain under-developed. In particular, examining the urban development politics that influence how the problem of risk is framed and intervened upon will be critical for carrying out workable and equitable solutions.

The Latin American region, which experiences a wide range of environmental challenges as well as some of the highest rates of inequality in the world has recently gained increasing attention in global risk management efforts. Of countries with high mortality rates from two or more natural hazards, 12 of the top 25 are situated in Latin America and the Caribbean (Dilley et al. 2005). Within the region, Colombia serves as an important case for examining how risk is framed and treated in urban policy and how risk-related interventions impact residents of high-risk areas. As a country where multiple socio-environmental risks – some reaching crisis proportions – converge, and where planning models in several of its cities have gained international praise in the last decade, the Colombian case offers key insights into attempts at managing risk while promoting urban equitable development.

Research Questions & Case Study

An increasing focus on urban risk raises new questions of what these conditions mean for paradigms of urban governance and planning. With this in mind, this research seeks to explore a series of questions: How do community-based groups situated within city-defined zones of ‘high environmental risk’ negotiate their local development priorities with the municipality? How does risk
guide, inform, or justify high profile municipal interventions? And, how are designations of risk understood, incorporated, reinterpreted, or contested in community-led planning processes?

Focusing on Medellín, which has entered the international spotlight for efforts at improving spatial integration, I explore these questions through a case study of Comuna 8, a semi-informal district on the high eastern slopes of Medellín’s Aburrá Valley. As a primarily low-income district with a significant population of households displaced from rural areas due to Colombia’s ongoing armed conflict, its exposure to landslides and flooding, violent conflict between extra-legal armed actors, and the threat of displacement for new infrastructure projects, Comuna 8 represents a place facing multifaceted hazards, where residents engage in daily struggles for greater autonomy over the territory and local development agendas.

Comuna 8 has become one of the municipality’s primary sites for the implementation of strategic urban infrastructure projects. Following an urban development trend initiated in the early 2000s, these urban macro-projects are a continuation of the bold “Social Urbanism” experiments that have contributed to Medellín’s fame as the world’s “most innovative city” (WSJ 2013). During the summer of 2014, construction crews were dotted high along the urban boundary line in Comuna 8, where workers, many contracted from the abutting neighborhoods, labored on the Cinturón Verde Metropolitano (Metropolitan Greenbelt) and the Jardín Circunvalar (Encircling Garden) – urban macro-projects comprised of contiguous eco-parks and environmental protection areas circling the upper limits of the valley, and representing the flagship projects of the current mayoral administration. Downhill from the boundary line, Medellín’s urban development agency was erecting new cable car stations to improve mobility between the city center and areas of Comuna 8 difficult to reach by road, and in six of the eighteen neighborhoods comprising the district, streets and dwellings were being mapped and appraised to lay the groundwork for a new phase of neighborhood upgrading known as Barrios Sostenibles, or “Sustainable Neighborhoods.”

Yet as these large-scale interventions reshape the landscape – making visible and physical an urban boundary that before was an imaginary line in municipal planning documents – Comuna 8 leaders and activists contest many aspects of these urban development projects for their lack of alignment with community-articulated needs, their high cost and distribution of resources, and the risk of displacement they pose for residents living in areas marked for intervention. Set against a challenging
topographic and climatic context, where already-vulnerable residents in precarious settlements are exposed to heavy annual rains and geologic instability, these development disputes often become mediated and framed by discussions of risk. Justification for the *Cinturón Verde* and *Jardín Circunvalar* includes arguments that they will manage risk by preventing settlement growth, and decisions of whose homes will be upgraded or resettled with *Barrios Sostenibles* are influenced by risk maps drawn up by the municipality. As the city implements large-scale urban projects in the district and as neighborhood activists engage in their own parallel planning process, risk in Comuna 8 becomes both a vehicle for questioning and challenging competing visions of development, and an object of contestation itself.

Risk management is a concern high on both the municipality’s agenda and in Comuna 8’s locally-led community planning process. In the last several years, Medellín has invested in risk management technologies (Alcaldía de Medellín 2015), revised its risk and vulnerability studies with new methodologies (Rendón 2009), and is now implementing public space and growth management projects it argues will address the risks of landslides and flooding (EDU 2008). For the Comuna 8 Planning Council, a group of community leaders pursuing their own local development planning process in the district, a “re-classification of risk designations and a risk management and mitigation plan” was second on a list of ten planning proposals developed by the district leaders and ratified by nearly 3,000 residents in a popular voting process, demonstrating the importance of effective risk management in the eyes of local leaders. While it is promising that the Comuna 8 Planning Council and municipal planners agree on the importance of risk management planning for the district, their values, processes, goals and decision-making calculuses differ substantially, creating an environment of contestation.

As I will argue in this thesis, the Comuna 8 Planning Council disputes authority-driven designations and decisions around risk on three main fronts. First, by disputing initial identification of what constitutes the greatest risks within the territory, leaders in Comuna 8 highlight a normative-empirical tension between their priorities and what risk management professionals identify as probabilistic evidence of environmental hazard (Fischer 2003). In many community forums, development-induced displacement, land and real estate speculation, and violence are highlighted as greater threats to life and livelihood than the hazards focused on by the municipality. Second, local leaders contest the lack of transparency in the risk designation and management process. Where risk
maps are presented without the studies used to inform them and where attempts to obtain such
information through formal legal channels have failed, effective risk communication becomes
undermined and discredited for lack of trust in the reporting entity. And third, residents dispute
perceived inconsistencies between currently populated areas that are designated as high-risk zones,
yet simultaneously sited to receive macro-project infrastructure after households on those sites are
resettled. In this sense, their contestation plays out in a framework of perceived urban development
intentions and the political uses of risk designations.

Below I discuss my methodology and precedents in the literature that have informed my analysis of
the risk-related development conflicts in Comuna 8 and Medellín before outlining the structure of
the rest of this thesis.

Methods

This thesis is based on three months of fieldwork in Medellín during January 2014 and from June
through August of the same year. My entry to the field began with my participation in a practicum
course offered jointly through the Department of Urban Studies and Planning at MIT and the
School of Architecture at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia—Medellín during Spring 2014, in
which three faculty members and 22 planning and architecture students partnered with the Comuna
8 Planning Council to provide planning and design support to Comuna 8 leaders engaged in
negotiations with city government over urban planning and development interventions for the
district. I then returned to Medellín that summer, where I was hosted by the School of Urban and
Regional Studies at the Universidad Nacional and the Comuna 8 Planning Council, and continued
the work that began through the practicum. This included further research on risk management,
food security and income generation, producing a summary document addressing the specific
inconsistencies between local development priorities and the new Medellín master plan then under
debate, and producing an exhibition of planning proposals that emerged from the collaboration.
This point of entry and working relationship also opened the door for the thesis research I carried
out concurrently, allowing me exposure to a range of local development issues and the opportunity
to engage in participant observation within several community spaces. These included various social
and community-building events, eight sessions of a weekly socio-political leadership class offered by
the Comuna 8 Planning Council, two sessions of an urban planning-focused course for community leaders, three community organizing meetings, and various other informal settings.

Through these spaces I was introduced to residents and leaders from a range of neighborhoods, community-based organizations, age groups, and places of origin. During my fieldwork I carried out five formal interviews with Comuna 8 leaders, one focus group of residents engaged in environmental risk management work, and countless informal conversations during class breaks, community events, and everyday gatherings in neighborhood open spaces or the homes of leaders and residents I came to know through my original contacts in the Comuna 8 Planning Council.

In addition, I interviewed several municipal representatives, including two city planners working for the mayor’s office, three municipal risk management professionals, a resettlement coordinator from municipal housing agency, and a contractor at Medellin’s urban development company (EDU). On several occasions I was able to observe interactions between Comuna 8 leaders and municipal employees during presentations made to community members about planning processes or during academic or civic forums in various parts of the city. Furthermore, I interviewed the coordinators of two different research and planning partnerships between Comuna 8 and local universities, and had access to several academic events focused on Medellin’s urban development and master planning process while in the field.

While social inquiry poses a number of debates in respect to research reliability – particularly when the researcher’s identity and positionality influence her access and relationships in the field – the mixed method case study research design sought to achieve the greatest reliability possible within the constraints of the research. Through extensive participant observation I was able to frequent everyday community forums in which leaders and residents set the agenda – allowing me to observe which topics they engaged with in what ways, through their own frames of reference. In coupling this with review of political, policy and planning histories the case study approached allowed observations to be analyzed within their historical, institutional and social context. These observations were then used to validate the formulation of interview topics and questions.

At the same time, the research posed several limitations. These included the relatively short timespan of the fieldwork, which I sought to address by making two visits to the field and supplementing
evidence gathered during that time with historical and plan analysis, as well as the fact that my interactions and interviews occurred mostly within circles of activist leaders in Comuna 8, meaning the perspectives of everyday residents and elected representatives from the district was less accounted for.

Literature Review

Risk & Vulnerability -- Realist and Constructivist Perspectives

Approaches to risk and vulnerability in the academic and practitioner literatures have evolved significantly over the past several decades, with important implications for how risk is framed and intervened upon in urban and community planning. In the early 1980s, the vulnerability approach to addressing disaster risk began to emerge in the planning and development fields, challenging the conventional view that the natural trigger event was the primary cause of the disaster, and the lens through which to best understand its impact (Wisener et al. 2004). Defining vulnerability as “the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard,” Wisener et al. situate the vulnerability approach within a politics of difference, interrogating the ways in which social systems generate differential outcomes to a natural hazard event for different groups (2004: 11). Juxtaposing this with a hazard-based approach, the authors explain that it is not the natural event that creates disaster; rather, “social systems operate to generate disasters by making people vulnerable” (2004: 10).

Wisener et al. use a two-part framework to approach risk from a predominantly realist, rather than a constructivist position, arguing that recognition of the objective nature of natural hazards is necessary for achieving effective improvements to disaster risk management practice. On one hand, they use the “Pressure and Release” model to explain disaster impact as a result of two forces bearing down on an affected population: the root causes, dynamic pressures, and unsafe conditions that contribute to vulnerability; and the hazard. By reducing the factors that contribute to vulnerability, pressure can be released from the group affected by a natural hazard. On the other hand, they complement this with the “Access Model,” intends to incorporate understandings of human agency into models of risk by accounting for the “capabilities, assets and livelihoods opportunities that will enable them (or not) to reduce their vulnerability” (Wisener et al. 2004: 88).
While helpful for understanding some of the ways that disaster risk might be alleviated, these approaches still present a number of shortfalls in attempts to understand how risk knowledge is generated, communicated, and acted upon within contexts of socio-environmental conflict and contested urban development. While Wisener et al.’s work is admittedly focused on disaster in the context of natural hazards, it leaves little room to account for anthropogenic hazards and the direct, rather than structural, roles that different arms of the state and powerful private actors play in generating risk and hazards for marginalized populations. In Comuna 8, the imminent threat of displacement by urban macro-projects, namely the Cinturón Verde and Jardín Circunvalar, generates the risks of livelihood destruction, food insecurity, and fracture of social support networks. This vulnerability is not just the result of the systemic inequality, marginality and discrimination that Wisener et al. identify as root causes of social vulnerability. These risks also emerge as direct results of political decisions and actions targeting already vulnerable populations. In the Colombian context, these politically-based hazards also become entwined with natural hazards as the national displacement crisis generated by armed conflict intersects with inadequate social housing policies, forcing impoverished migrants to Medellín, or victims of intra-urban displacement, to settle on steep slopes over the geological fault line, or construct their homes without the adequate infrastructure that could reduce their vulnerability to earth movements and heavy rains.

Second, in both of Wisener et al.’s models, “normal life” is interrupted by a disaster event. Yet what do we make of complex environments where the intersection of environmental, political and economic hazards – some natural and some anthropogenic – converge on a single territory or population? This state of constant and multifaceted risk recalls notions of an everyday state of exception, or what Françoise Coupé (2011) has called the “quotidian tragedies” of small, everyday disaster events in Medellín’s comunas that go unacknowledged by media and public authorities. Assumptions that the everyday conditions (outside of a natural hazard event) constitute normalcy have proven problematic when examining political roots of risk and disaster. In situations of chronic violence, Davis (2011) demonstrates that because the status quo often generates or sustains the problems of acute or everyday disaster, “it is clear that a ‘return to normalcy’ would not in fact be the desired state” (35). The literature on disaster resilience has increasingly challenged aims of “bouncing back” to critically question the political implications, erasures, and oppression inherent in resilient recovery (Adams 2012; Vale 2013), and looked instead toward building the means to
“bounce forward” (Shaw 2012; Vale 2013). In Comuna 8, the intersection of territorial conflict between the state and extra-legal armed actors, the threat of development-induced displacement and the factors contributing to residence in precarious settlements demands a re-questioning of disaster risk models based on a temporary diversion from “normaley” and requires a deeper analysis of the economic interests and political actions that generate consistent risk themselves.

Finally, as Wisener et al. themselves note, their model is etic, “in that it imposes the researcher’s own interpretation and perception of vulnerability, hazard and risk” (122). In contexts where hazards are multifaceted and rooted in human agency, as we see in the case of Medellín, an externalist view may both obscure key elements of the risks that residents face, while also becoming a barrier to effective risk communication and trust in authorities and decision makers in the urban development process. In Comuna 8, where risk designations and management are woven into urban development politics, an emic model proves helpful for pursuing approaches inclusive of the needs and orientations of neighborhood-level stakeholders.

This realist perspective on risk and vulnerability is also reflected in the risk management frameworks of multilateral institutions investing both in risk reduction globally and in Colombia. Both the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and the World Bank’s Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction (GFDRR) identify exposure and vulnerability reduction as key to reducing the risk and impact of what they identify as objective hazards (UNISDR 2013; GFDRR 2014). Medellín began its first multilateral technical assistance partnership on risk management with the United Nations Development Program in 1987, and along with other Colombian urban centers, has become a major recipient of World Bank and GFDRR investment since 2008. Identified by the GFDRR as the country with the tenth highest economic risk to three or more natural hazards, it became a focus country for the GFDRR in 2008, with significant funds from the World Bank going toward vulnerability reduction and probabilistic risk assessment (GFDRR Country Notes). While Medellín did begin to incorporate social vulnerability analysis into its risk management planning in 2007, however, its influence in risk management practice still remains limited. While a major report published by the GFDRR in 2014 does give a nod to the need for community participation in the risk designation and management process, its toolkit remains predominantly focused on quantifying physical infrastructure vulnerabilities though technocratic risk assessment (GFDRR 2014).
While the realist approach to risk articulated by Wisener et al. and multilateral development organizations does account for some of the social forces shaping disaster impact, understanding the politics of risk designation and policy decisions in the context of contested urban development in Medellín demands a more nuanced examination of how risk is constructed, utilized or engaged with by different stakeholders. Constructivist or “weak-constructivist” approaches can help us to better make sense of how risk is understood, contested and acted upon in situations characterized by uneven power relations and multifaceted hazards generated by a variety of forces and agents.

The ways that risk is understood and experienced are shaped by both social and political interactions. Using the case of an Argentine shantytown exposed to toxic chemical hazards, Auyero and Switsun (2008) examine the factors that influence and shape collective understandings of risk to argue for its social construction and demonstrate its political manipulability. Identifying three spheres in which risk is constructed, the authors utilize a framework that examines the interplay of history of place, local routines, and power relations to raise questions not only about how residents living in risk understand risk differently than governmental actors and polluting corporations, but also how risk is communicated, and the impacts that has on resident agency and resistance capacity. Auyero and Switsun conclude that the ambiguity of risk discourse, and even the lived experience of biological responses to toxicity means that, “toxic uncertainty does not solely stem from the intrinsic complexity of environmental contamination but also from the relational anchoring of local residents’ perceptions and from the labor of confusion performed by powerful actors” (28). Lack of transparency and confusion about risk are also a central element of the contestation of risk and technocratic expertise in Comuna 8, pointing to the relevance of a framework that takes account of how local routines and knowledge contribute to understanding risk. This recognition of the emic nature of how risk is constructed, perceived, and acted upon challenges the objective, external viewpoints of the realist literature on risk, as well as trends of top-down or technocratic municipal risk management practices.

Zeiderman (2013a) also examines use of risk as political tool through his ethnography of environmental risk management agencies in Bogotá. Conceptualizing risk in the context of urban planning institutions and complex dynamics of violence, epidemics, and informality in Bogotá, Zeiderman argues that risk has become a mode of urban governance, used both as a means of controlling urban populations and for citizen claim-making on the state. By tracing the
municipality’s landslide mitigation practices, crime control strategies, and management of the 2009 H1N1 outbreak – as well as shifting discourses around what constitutes risk at different political moments – he argues that, "it is within the domain of biopolitical security that poor and vulnerable populations engage in relationships with the state" (2013a: 1). Zeiderman demonstrates the ways in which municipal risk designations serve as a primary vehicle for the poor to make claims on the State, with marginalized citizens regularly invoking conditions of vulnerability and victimhood (in zones of high environmental risk or armed conflict, in particular) as justification for their ‘right to claim rights.’ While victim-status enters into the discourse of activists in Comuna 8 as well, risk there is contested more often than it is invoked. Strong local organizing around the right to remain in the territory prompts the question of whether and to what extent the condition of contested macro-project development changes the calculus of resident-invocations of risk in Medellín.

These ethnographic case studies raise important considerations for risk management in Comuna 8 in that they demonstrate not only how hazard and risk can be subjective and manipulable, but also that reducing social vulnerability – while important – is not sufficient for reducing risk in contexts where political decision-making is actively reshaping ecological and social landscapes.

Risk Knowledge & Communicative Planning

Planners and theorists attentive to the social and political factors that challenge objective, expert-defined notions of risk have pushed back against technocratic approaches to its management and sought to validate and harness different forms of risk knowledge in the process.

For communicative and other process-oriented planners, the inadequacies of a technocratic approach to defining and managing risk are several. The contestation of “objective” data – even among experts – prevents agreement on how to take action and does little to persuade the public that the levels of risk are acceptable; lack of public trust in standardized, a-political risk discourse generates problems for political legitimacy and public buy-in; and the neglect for social considerations create significant challenges for effective regulation, which depends on the interplay of technical information and the social context of decision making (Fischer 2003). Seeking a different approach, the communicative turn in planning seeks to remedy many of the failures of the scientific rationality model.
Central to efforts to transform the failures of the rational scientific model is the question of how to relate empirical evidence to norms and values, which Fischer (2003) highlights as having a long tradition in philosophical and social science inquiry. Furthermore, in the context of risk situations, the political exigencies to act when threats to life and livelihoods are imminent or potentially severe bring an added dimension of urgency to the debate. Communicative planning theorizes the role of the planners as the communicative linkages between various stakeholders, able to problem solve through attention organizing, coalition building, and mediating within the social realm of planning.

Fischer’s (2003) argument for the transformation of the technocratic risk assessment into a participatory process also embodies elements of the communicative turn. Rather than simply suggesting increased one-way communication between the expert and the lay-person, Fischer states “the solution is to be found in the invention of new institutional forums and methodological approaches” (426) that involves building a range of stakeholders into the initial identification and definition of what the risk is, the assignment of value to these risks, and the decision making process. The author points to possibilities for using processes such as “collective technology assessment,” which incorporates a variety of stakeholders as technological processes unfold, as well as mediation. At the same time, he raises concerns with these processes — particularly issues of access to these forums due to biases inherent in how the processes are structured, and differential power relationships between participants. While Fischer advances the debate on participation by emphasizing the need for public involvement in not only supplying information but also defining the question and making decisions based on the findings, he still identifies the public’s role as primarily contributing social knowledge to the inquiry. Corburn refers to such an approach as a “complementary model” of public participation, explaining that “the public is asked to offer values, raise questions of fairness, and provide ‘political’ insights, but scientific experts retain autonomy over technical issues (Douglass and Wildavsky 1982; Slovic 1991)” (2003: 423).

Risk Knowledge & Co-Production

What Corburn (2003) and others refer to as the “co-production model” in environmental risk decision making moves beyond traditional notions of “participation” based largely around offering forums for citizen input, in order to more deliberately protagonize lived experience as a generator of
technical knowledge, and thus, more fundamentally transform the balance of power between citizens and authorities. Based in traditions of Participatory Action Research, which finds various roots in the emancipatory pedagogy of Paulo Freire and other social justice work (Freire 1970; Torre 2009; Gruenewald 2003), co-production challenges structures of authority, the very beliefs of what constitutes knowledge, and the binary of emic and etic approaches to understanding and acting. In addition to rejecting the scientific rationality approach to treating risk, the co-production model further problematizes the communicative approach, which seeks to include the public in analysis and decision processes, but still guards the belief that technical knowledge is situated within the expert’s domain. Using case studies of local knowledge production in an ethnically diverse and low-income neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, Corburn demonstrates how collaboration between public health officials, researchers, and members of the affected groups were the only effective way to identify and generate solutions for environmental health risks at hand.

In Corburn’s case studies as well as other accounts (Fine & Torre 2004; Su 2010), co-production remains situated in the realm of community struggle; it has not be widely accepted or institutionalized within government bureaucracies, and in many cases represents a threat to traditional structures of authority. By both contesting expert-led questions, designations and methodologies to address risk, and producing their own knowledge and data that illuminated the limits of experts’ technical rationality, these community groups were successful in shifting the practices of the Environmental Protection Agency and generating expert support for processes that better identified and addressed community needs. While traditions in Participatory Action Research date back several decades, similar approaches are still being articulated and developed in planning thought, and remain at the margins of “official” planning practice, as evidenced in Medellín.

These conceptual frameworks for addressing risk and the evolving planning responses that different stakeholders have employed provide a foundation to analyze intersection of urban risk and development politics in Medellín’s Comuna 8. Moving forward, Chapter 2 provides historical context of economic development, urbanization, and conflict in Colombia, all of which have interacted to shape urban space and socio-economic dynamics in Medellín in ways important to understand the politics of risk and development. Chapter 3 traces the evolution of risk management practice in Colombia from the mid-20th century forward, demonstrating shifting conceptions and treatment of political and environmental risks over time, and what this has meant for municipal
planning practice in the last two decades. Chapter 4 outlines the organizational architecture of urban planning in Medellín, current municipal development visions, and the specific infrastructure projects that have resulted. Chapter 5 provides a historical overview of Comuna 8's development and resident mobilization, and presents the district-level vision and planning process, through which residents attempt to shape their territory in ways different than the municipality. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of three types of risk-related development conflicts in the district to argue for the ways that risk is not only used as a political tool by diverse stakeholders to pursue different development aims, but also a mechanism for local activists to render their contestation over, and visions for, local development visible against Medellín's dominant urban development model. And finally, Chapter 7 concludes to highlight what the case of Comuna 8 contributes to understandings of contested risk and development in planning theory and practice.
Chapter 2. URBANIZATION, DEVELOPMENT & CONFLICT IN COLOMBIA

The interplay of industrialization, urbanization, and armed conflict in Colombia has greatly shaped the history and politics of urban development and the production of social vulnerabilities in its cities, and continues to generate significant urban planning challenges – including for the management of environmental and other risks.

Industrialization & Early Urban Growth

The industrialization of Colombia’s major cities at the beginning of the 20th century generated early challenges for urban planning and management. As production urbanized in an economy previously centered around mining and agriculture, new industries including textiles, metallurgy, and paper began to transform the socio-economic and spatial fabric in urban centers (Palacios 2007).

In the context of this manufacturing growth, municipal authorities in Colombia followed global hygienist trends for planning industrial cities, seeking to reconcile increasing production with the principles of hygiene, comfort, and aesthetics (González Escobar 2007). Consistent with planning trends across Latin America at the time seeking to mirror European progress and modernist visions rooted in scientific rationality, engineers pursued efforts at opening up streets and canalizing waterways, removing streets plagued by insalubrious conditions, and implementing other beautification measures (González Escobar 2007). However, increasing rural-to-urban migration – due to both economic pull factors and the later emergence of rural conflict, would soon outgrow these early plans, put new pressures on urban authorities, and pose new challenges related to environmental hazard and service and infrastructure provisions.

La Violencia

At the same time that municipal authorities were struggling to accommodate the growing population drawn to industrializing urban centers, the 1948 assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, whose platform took a radical reformist approach to economic redistribution and political participation (Sánchez 1992), set in motion a series of events that would further transform the dynamics of urbanization in Colombian cities, in addition to the major impacts it would have on national development and political trajectories more broadly.
Emerging from Colombia’s long history of partisan conflict between the Liberal and Conservative parties (Palacios 2007; Roldán 2002), Gaitán’s assassination sparked mass violence in the streets of Bogotá and new waves of political conflict that soon evolved into a 10-year civil war known as La Violencia that would result in over 200,000 deaths. Playing out mainly in the countryside and in smaller towns and villages, La Violencia became pervasive within Colombian society, and political affiliations drew sharp divisions among Colombians. As La Violencia scholar Gonzalo Sánchez explains, “Conflicts, between neighbors, between rural leaders and employers, between squatters and landlords, or between participants in simple barroom disputes – were resolved in bloodshed by those who, by virtue of their political affiliation, could count on the complicity of the authorities” (1992: 89).

While La Violencia concentrated in the countryside, fought by and affecting the lower-class and peasant populations most directly, the ruling party at the time cemented an economic alliance with the major capitalist interests spanning the manufacturing, banking, agriculture, and real estate sectors. The consolidation of this elite coalition at the same time as high returns on coffee exports allowed the Colombian government to move forward with a range of modernization and industrial development initiatives, securing major advances in transportation and energy infrastructure, despite the ongoing civil war (Palacios 2007). As the conflict came to a close in 1958 with the formation of the National Front, a power sharing agreement in which Liberals and Conservatives that would alternate control every four years, the government would establish new economic policies following regional protectionist trends for the recovery period. From 1950 to the mid-1960s, industry created 10,000 jobs a year, not including the indirect jobs (in areas such as raw materials, product distribution, and finance) that supported the country’s growing industries (Palacios 2007). Colombia’s distinct regional development history, fragmented, mountainous geography, and the state-aided distribution of industry among urban centers prevented strong urban primacy and brought new waves of migration and settlement to several Colombian cities. The 1950s and 60s thus experienced unprecedented levels of urban growth, as peasants fleeing sustained violence in the countryside migrated to cities and economic growth generated larger urban worker bases. In 1951, 39% of Colombia’s population was urban, by 1964 53% of the population lived in cities, and by 1985 the proportion had grown to 65%. These demographic shifts would help set the stage for
future settlement growth on risky land, new spatial distributions of social risks for the urban poor, and new institutions for responding to urban risks.

Table 1: URBAN POPULATION GROWTH IN COLOMBIA, 1951-2000

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>URBAN</td>
<td>4,459,345</td>
<td>9,239,211</td>
<td>13,656,107</td>
<td>19,628,417</td>
<td>26,573,924</td>
<td>31,707,820</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RURAL</td>
<td>6,995,415</td>
<td>8,077,100</td>
<td>9,221,614</td>
<td>10,427,019</td>
<td>10,848,867</td>
<td>9,471,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>11,454,760</td>
<td>17,316,311</td>
<td>22,877,721</td>
<td>30,055,436</td>
<td>37,422,791</td>
<td>41,178,987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERCENT URBAN</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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SOURCE: CUERVO & GONZALEZ 1997 IN RUEDA-GARCIA

**Guerilla Conflict & the Drug Trade**

In addition to the deep social, political, and economic changes that the era of *La Violencia* would have for Colombia, it also gave birth to early guerilla resistance and warfare, which would evolve to play a major role in the political conflicts of the Cold War era (Sánchez 1992). The founding of the Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the National Liberation Army (ELN), and the Popular Liberation Army (EPL) in the mid-1960s ushered in a new phase of violence in which these leftist revolutionary guerilla groups began to systematically target large rural landowners. Seeking political power and Marxist-inspired redistribution, these groups grew steadily over subsequent years, and by 1980 had amassed 10-15,000 recruits (Pecaut 1992). In addition to counter insurgency responses by the military, the rural elite also began to contract paramilitary and private defense groups to protect their property in areas beyond State reach (Pecaut 1992), escalating the conflict and further driving displacement into Colombia’s cities. The emergence of the drug trade would soon intersect with these ideological conflicts, creating complicated new divisions and redrawning alliances, providing access to new resource flows to support the campaigns of armed groups, and generating new incentives for the appropriation of land (Pecaut 1997).

At the same time that guerrilla and military conflict intensified and the drug trade began to infiltrate cities, neoliberal restructuring of the 1970s and 80s would soon change the national economic outlook, with important implications for development in Colombia’s urban centers. IMF-demanded
cuts to public spending as well as the opening of the Colombian economy contributed to the
stagnation of manufacturing in cities like Medellín, and a concurrent decline in market demand for
coffee and other agricultural exports generated new unemployment crises in Antioquia and other
departments (Roldán 2004). Alongside this backdrop of economic restructuring and industrial
decline, the rise of narco-trafficking in cities like Cali and Medellín would generate lasting
consequences for urban form, socio-economic conditions, municipal governance, and security. The
consequences of these economic restructuring trends across Latin America have also led many
scholars to root the urban violence and insecurity that characterize many cities of the region today to
this early shift toward economic liberalization (Davis 2010; Arias & Goldstein 2010). In addition to
this, Colombia today continues to be subject to ongoing armed conflict in the countryside.

Colombia’s history of economic shifts, urbanization and conflict lays an important basis for
understanding current social, political, and planning challenges in its cities. In the following chapter I
build upon this historical context to discuss the how the framing of risk and implementation of risk
management policies have evolved in response to, and in interaction with, these particular political
moments, as well as evolving urban planning opportunities and challenges in Colombia and
Medellín.
Chapter 3. EVOLUTION OF RISK MANAGEMENT: NATIONAL POLICIES & MUNICIPAL PLANNING PRACTICES

Since the late 1940s forward, disaster risk management in Colombia has been constituted by evolving institutional arrangements, legal and planning frameworks, and understandings of what constitutes hazard and risk. Responding to dynamic interplays of the national conflict, political violence, large-scale environmental and climate disaster events, as well as technical advances in disaster modeling and management, this lineage has come to influence current risk management practice and politics at the municipal level in Medellín, as well as risk- and development-related conflict with local planning efforts in Comuna 8.

This chapter provides an overview of the historical context of risk management in Colombia before turning to current risk management practices and interventions at the municipal level in Medellín.

**Early Management of Disasters in the Public Sphere**

The first national policy for addressing large public calamity in Colombia emerged in response to the 1948 Bogotazo, the mass political riots sparked by the assassination of Liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, that left several thousand people dead in the streets of Bogotá. The consequences of the riots were felt at various scales. Nationally, the Bogotazo played a significant role in igniting La Violencia, the 10-year civil war between Liberals and Conservatives that would devastate the nation (Roldán 2003; Palacios 2007). In the years to come the conflict would accelerate rates of migration into Colombia’s cities, generating urban governance and land management challenges for decades forward that would create new environments of risk for urban dwellers (Zeiderman 2012; Betancur 2007). In the sphere of emergency risk management in particular, the Bogotazo marked a key political moment for establishing new disaster response institutions and shaping understandings the responses to different political, security, and environmental risks.

The consequences of the riots became the base for the first national-level policy for responding to large-scale emergencies in the public sphere (Zeiderman 2012). Prior to 1949, most emergencies were responded to locally – namely by firefighters (Zeiderman 2012) and occasionally by department-level Cruz Roja (Red Cross) offices. However, the Bogotazo demanded a more centralized response for the new national scale of the emergency. In response, the national government
established an agreement with the Cruz Roja to create the Socorro Nacional, a "semi-public parastatal organization" that would take the lead on emergency management (Zeiderman 2012, referencing Ramirez Gomez and Cardona 1996).

In the midst of highly charged partisan conflict between Liberals and Conservatives, the Cruz Roja was identified as a neutral entity that would serve victims regardless of social class or political affiliation. When President Mariano Ospina Perez passed Law 49 of 1948 that established the Socorro Nacional, he made the Cruz Roja the managing and implementing entity “for being the only impartial and neutral entity” able to effectively respond to this type of disaster (Cruz Roja Colombiana 2009).

In the 10-year period of La Violencia that followed Gaitán's assassination, the non-partisan nature of the Cruz Roja would play an important role in ensuring universal humanitarian response as the balance of power between different actors vacillated. Its neutrality allowed it to effectively respond both to events of mass political violence and to other types of humanitarian and environmental disasters, regardless of political jurisdiction. Still active today, the Cruz Roja Colombiana now administers violence prevention programs in addition to its natural disaster prevention and response work. However, its mid-century protagonism in responding to conflict and political violence would be eclipsed by other entities in the succeeding decades.

The Environment-Security Nexus of Disaster Response

The 1960s represented a decade of shifting security logics in Colombia. In the context of the Cold War, governments across Latin America responded to the fear of emerging communist threats with both new security institutions and collaboration with entities like USAID, offering intelligence and investment to counter growing leftist movements in the region. In Colombia, this new context prompted a shift from the humanitarian model of disaster carried out by the Cruz Roja to more politically-motivated coordination by the Defensa Civil Colombiana, or the Colombian Civil Defense (Zeiderman 2013). An offshoot body of the military, the Defensa Civil Colombiana was created in 1965 through the Ley de Defensa Nacional, one year after the FARC’s founding and the same year as the ELN’s emergence (Zeiderman 2013).

The role of the Defensa Civil in maintaining national security would soon intersect with environmental risk management, as a number of large-scale environmental events would impact the nation in the years following the passage of the National Defense Law. In 1973 and 1979, major
earthquakes destroyed entire municipalities and subsumed the island of El Guano; in 1974 Medellín’s Santo Domingo Savio landslide left 70 dead; in 1983 the Popoyán earthquake killed 102 people and destroyed several thousand homes; in 1985 the Nevado de Ruíz eruption left 25,000 people dead and affected 300,000; and in 1987 the Villatina landslide in Medellín’s Comuna 8 killed 500 (Coupe 2011; Re Habitar la Ladera 2013). In the aftermath of each of these events, the Defensa Civil played a primary response role.

In the context of new perceived political threats alongside several large-scale environmental events, Zeiderman argues that a new conceptual and practical connection was forged between ‘natural’ and anthropogenic hazard. As Zeiderman writes, “President Betancour exemplified this approach to disaster management in 1983 when he assured survivors of the Popayán earthquake that the Army would soon arrive to ensure that subversive elements did not create disorder and social instability” (2012: 15). Concerns that in the absence of effective state response to environmental disaster, groups representing national security threats would take hold and breed political violence codified the management of environmental and security threats – already intertwined since the 1948 Bogotazo – more explicitly in disaster policy discourse and legislation. Since 1948, responses to both natural disaster and major political and social disruption were coordinated from within the same institutions – first the Cruz Roja and then the Defensa Civil – but along with the rise of perceived leftist and guerrilla threats to the nation, natural hazards came to be treated as potential trigger points for the risk of violence and diminished state control. Already in the early years of Colombian risk management policy, the nexus of political, social and environmental vulnerabilities at play demonstrates the inadequacies of risk models that frame risk in predominantly environmental terms. In the context of Colombia’s civil war rooted in partisan politics and subsequent conflict rooted in a Cold War security logic, environmental risk took on an explicitly political dimension in both discourse and practice. At the same time, however, such a logic was directed less toward reducing social vulnerabilities of the population, but rather toward reducing the political vulnerabilities of the State, demonstrating the historical roots of the politicization of risk.

Shifts Toward Specialization

While legislation of the 60s, 70s, and early 80s treated environmental risks and political risks related to the national conflict as interrelated and established response institutions that addressed them conjointly (Zeiderman 2012; Decreto 3398 de 1965; Decreto 3489 de 1982), the late 80s and early
90s saw new technical expertise, partnerships with multilaterals to address environmental disaster risk specifically, and major changes to legal frameworks – including the urban reform and new constitution – prompt a separation between environmental and political disaster risk. A more specialized concept of disaster risk would be one characterized solely by natural or accidental human cause.

In 1988, national Law 46 established the Sistema Nacional de Prevención y Atención a Desastres (National System for Prevention and Attention to Disasters), or SNPAD. This new national coordinating body sought to integrate risk management activities across various agencies and scales of government, and maintain an information system to more effectively identify and measure disaster risk. According to the legislation, the term disaster was understood largely in physical terms as “severe damage to, or severe alteration of conditions of, normal life in a determined geographical area, caused by natural phenomena or by catastrophic effects of accidental human actions” (Article 2).

During the same period, similar changes to the definition of disaster could be found in other legislation as well. As Zeiderman notes, “the 1989 law that brought the [National Disaster] Fund into operation replaced the term “catastrophes” with “situations of disaster, calamity, or those of a similar nature” and limited its application to “floods, droughts, frosts, hurricane winds, earthquakes, tidal waves, fire, volcanic eruptions, avalanches, landslides and technological risks in declared disaster zones” (Presidente de la República de Colombia, 1989)” (2012: 17-18).

Scholars have pointed to different political and environmental events contributing to this shift. Zeiderman argues that ineffective governmental response of the Betancour administration to two major disaster events in 1985 – the Nevado de Ruiz volcanic eruption that killed 25,000 and the guerrilla siege of the Palacio de Justicia – prompted Betancour’s successor, Virgilio Barco, to adopt more anticipatory mechanisms for disaster management, including the creation of the Oficina Nacional de Atención de Emergencias (National Office for Attention to Emergencies), which required future development plans to include risk prevention regulations, and later, the aforementioned SNPAD. The scientific specialization required to more effectively anticipate and calculate future risks contributed to increasing separation of natural and anthropogenic hazards in national and municipal policies.

Additionally, sociologist and disaster risk management specialist Françoise Coupé argues that in
Medellín the 1987 Villatina landslide and the 1988 floods prompted changes to how risk was conceived. As these events occurred in areas not previously designated as “high-risk zones” by planning and engineering experts at the time, they prompted a push for greater technical rigor in identifying risk. Soon after the Villatina landslide, the city government established an agreement with the United Nations Development Program to improve municipal risk management, and SNPAD was borne of this collaboration (Interview with Humberto Caballero, 14 July 2014).

At the same time that Colombia began to invest in specialized technical expertise for risk management, numerous shifts in political administrative governance would also lay a new architecture for institutional treatment of risk in urban centers. In 1988 the country entered a new phase of decentralization, held its first mayoral elections, and designated new risk management responsibilities to municipalities. In 1989, President Ernerto Samper passed Colombia’s first Urban Reform law (Law 9) after thirteen failed attempts over the previous three decades (Ortiz 2012: 77), which had several implications for urban governance as well as disaster prevention and response. Every municipality with more than 100,000 residents would be required to formulate a local development plan that addressed land use, infrastructural and social investment, preservation of land for future social and ecological function, and financing plans, among others (Law 9, Article 1). In addition, every municipality with over 100,000 residents would be required to inventory “zones of high risk” within 6 months of the law’s passage, and to relocate residents of those areas. If residents refused to leave, Law 9 established the municipality’s responsibility to expropriate the property, by police force if necessary, and to demolish constructions (Law 9, Article 56).

The new Colombian Constitution of 1991, intended to increase political inclusion of previously marginalized groups (Ortiz 2012), would also have important implications for future governance of risk in Colombia. As Ortiz explains, “the [new constitution] gave priority to the municipality as the pivotal administrative unit. Thus, the [new constitution] changed the relationship of society and state, impacting the legal and institutional bases for planning and regulation of land property” (2012: 80). Municipalities were now legally responsible for the administration and provision of the housing system as well as integration of “subnormal” settlements into the city (Coupé 2011, Betancur 2007). It revised the previous legal conception of property as “absolute right,” to place its social and ecological function above private interest – though the realization of that discursive and legislative shift remains a point of criticism and debate (Betancour 2007; Brand 2013; Ortiz 2012).
Decentralization and the municipal responsibilities outlined in the 1991 constitution would provide a new basis for a planning framework that would further systematize definitions of and responses to hazard, vulnerability, and risk, and codify risk management more directly in urban planning practice.

**Understandings Of Hazard, Vulnerability & Risk In the Municipal Sphere**

*Risk, Hazard and Vulnerability in the 1999 Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial*

The passage of the national Territorial Development Law (Law 388) in 1997 marked a major moment for the consolidation of the urban planning field in Colombia, as well as the systematic incorporation of hazard, vulnerability, and risk into strategic planning. Prior to Law 388, risk maps were generated in reaction to specific disaster events, or during technical assistance missions carried out by multilateral organizations, yet hazard and risk were not methodically inventoried as a basis for proactive planning action in Colombian cities. Law 388 codified risk management as a necessary component of planning practice and mandated its incorporation into Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial (POTs) – the 12-year strategic spatial plans that became required of all municipalities with over 100,000 residents.

The POT’s primary purpose is to articulate and carry through a “shared territorial vision” for the city, designate municipal land classifications, and define the purpose and location of strategic urban projects to be implemented through smaller scale planes parciales, or “partial plans” (Ortiz 2012). With the establishment of the new territorial planning system in 1997, the already growing policy and planning divide between political and environmental disaster risks was further consolidated.

The improvement of human settlement security in respect to natural risks is designated as one of the four public functions of spatial planning established through Law 388, in addition to the creation of public infrastructure, land use planning oriented toward the common interest, and the improvement of quality of life through equitable distribution of development opportunities and benefits (Article 3). Following from the legislative language emerging in the late 1980s, each mention of risk in the Territorial Development Law refers exclusively to natural and/or geologic phenomena. On a more operational level, Law 388 requires each iteration of a city’s POT to identify zones of high risks – a process identified as the first and guiding determinant for land use designations – and to also
prioritize resettlement of residents in these areas (Law 388, Article 10).

For Medellin, Law 388 and the approval of the city’s first POT in 1999 marked the first time that official, systematic hazard and risk maps were formulated and strategically incorporated into the territorial planning system. The results of the risk mapping process in Medellin’s 1999 POT classified many of the city’s hillside settlements as “high risk,” with important implications for the obligations of the city government in providing services to these settlements, and the legal claims that residents could effectively make within that legal urbanistic framework. The 1999 map of Zonas de Alto Riesgo, or Zones of High Risk, demarcates areas of both mitigable (or recuperable) and non-mitigable risk areas to determine appropriate land uses. Here, zones of mitigable risk refers to:

“...Zones with low and medium levels of risk that, with reasonable economic, social and environmental investment, can be improved and rehabilitated, or completely recovered, through the execution of an integrated plan of control and protection that permits the mitigation and reduction of risk to tolerable levels. This applies to sectors whose instability is associated with the urbanistic characteristics of settlements themselves, either for lack of, or deficiencies in, basic infrastructure, inadequate building practices, or the typology and quality of construction” (Article 81).

The identified areas of mitigable risk were classified in land use plans as suelo urbano – by its definition meaning land fit for urban occupation – and the 1999 POT determined there were 155.42 hectares of mitigable risk areas across 48 neighborhoods within the urban limit. By classification, these were areas recommended for neighborhood upgrading investments.

The POT defined non-mitigable risk zones as ones affected primarily by geologic instability and high physical hazard levels. According to Article 95, they are occupied areas that:

“...due to topographical challenges of high slopes, hydro-geological characteristics, or the presence of unstable geological processes – active or latent – are subject to external risk or hazard, are highly unstable and difficult to recuperate; including lands located on stream and river banks and in flood plains lacking protective infrastructure, and that are not apt for human settlement.”

The implications of non-mitigable, or non-recuperable, risk designations included their exclusion from any type of land titling or regularization program as well as prohibitions on State infrastructure or service investment, such as roadway construction, water and sanitation services, and energy connections (POT 1999, Article 96).
The 1999 POT determined a total of 803.71 hectares of non-mitigable risk areas and listed 75 neighborhoods subject to these conditions. Together, these two types of risk zones primarily span the eastern periphery of the city, in Comunas 1, 3, and 8, and are also present to a smaller degree on the western periphery, in Comunas 7 and 13 (See Figure 1). Very few pockets of risk are found in central areas of the city.

Despite occurring at a time of acute social and political conflict in the city of Medellín – only a few years after the apex of Medellín’s homicide rate and at a time that violence remained staggeringly high – the codification of risk management as a component of the municipal spatial planning system further rooted discussions and responses to risk in the sphere of the environment, and more specifically, land management.

Understanding and identifying vulnerability remained largely missing from the equation of designating risk, and planning responses largely involved prescriptions for resettlement of homes in risk areas and mitigation infrastructure projects in zones identified as mitigable.

*Risk, Hazard and Vulnerability in the 2014 Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial*

Medellín’s second POT was formulated in early 2014, and with the incorporation of small changes passed a multi-step approval process involving review by various governmental and civil society entities over the course of several months. Officially adopted in October 2014, the POT defines the city’s strategic spatial plan for the next 12 years and involves several changes to risk criteria and risk maps based on studies that began in 2007. It includes maps of *Zonas con condiciones de riesgo y alto riesgo no mitigable* (Zones with Risk Conditions and Non-mitigable High Risk); *Amenaza por movimientos en masa* (Earthquake Hazards); *Amenaza por inundaciones* (Flood Hazards); and *Amenaza por avenida torrential* (Flash Flood Hazards). Furthermore the POT addresses three types of risk, all physical: earth movements, floods and flash floods risk; technological risk; and climate change.

The 2014 POT includes new labels and criteria for defining risk areas in Medellín. One of the two new risk categories, *Zonas con condiciones de riesgo*, identify areas of potential hazard, but do not represent a definitive designation regarding possibilities of effective intervention and recuperation. According to Article 216 these are:

“…areas classified as high hazard occupied by habitations or other buildings. These
areas will require detailed risk studies to determine the possibility of risk mitigation and the level of risk for exposed elements. This will also apply to sections of streams, along which there are habitations or buildings.”

The land use implications designate these areas as *Suelo de Protección*, or Protection Areas, that by definition are deemed “unfit for urbanization” until detailed studies are carried out.

The second category, *Zonas de alto riesgo no-mitigable* refers to inhabited or built areas that fall within high hazard zones, where recent or imminent geological events have affected, or threaten, the area (Article 217). The 2014 POT indicates that once determined to be non-mitigable, these areas should be classified as Forest Protection Areas (*Suelo Forestal Protector*).

These designations rely on studies carried out at a more detailed scale than previous risk mapping in the city. While the risk studies of 1999 were carried out at a scale of 1:20,000, the 2014 version used more precise scales of 1:10,000 in the metropolitan area and 1:5000 in Medellín.

As noted in the definitions above, the criteria used to determine risk zones changed between 1999 and 2014. In 2007, a team of specialists from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia was contracted to carry out a comprehensive study titled: *Amenaza, Vulnerabilidad y Riesgo Por Movimientos en Masa, Avenidas Torrenciales e Inundaciones en el Valle de Aburra: Formulacion de Propuestas de Gestión* (Hazard, Vulnerability and Risk From Earthquake, Flash floods and floods in the Aburrá Valley: Formulation of Management Proposals), which would become the primary basis for the new risk maps in the 2014 POT. The study involved a locally unprecedented vulnerability study to accompany hazard analysis in order to provide a more complete assessment of risk in the Valle de Aburrá. Based on the logic that Risk = Hazard + Vulnerability (Interview Jose David Ramirez, 3 July 2014), the 2007 study defined vulnerability as “the condition of a population’s exposure to, or danger of, being affected by a natural or anthropic phenomenon, that also takes into account the population’s capacity to recuperate from the effects of a disaster” (Libro III pg. 3).

The 2014 POT, which incorporated findings from the vulnerability study, returns attention to the socio-political construction of risk, discussing components of vulnerability in the context of non-natural factors including: poverty and socio-economic marginalization; democratic and institutional fragility; un-regulated, un-planned rapid urbanization; slum formation and occupation of hazard zones; demographic growth; rural-urban migration; growth of areas affected by disasters; transformation and deterioration of ecosystems; growing intensity of weather events; economic
damage caused by disasters; failures in effective communication of scientific knowledge; and expansion of agricultural practices (Acuerdo 48).

While the need for vulnerability studies was first established in legislation in 1982 (Decreto 3489), the 2007 study represented the first attempt to systematically measure it, and the 2014 POT represents its first application to risk mapping and risk management planning. While the vulnerability framing that emerged in the early 1980s positioned the concept in the realm of social capital and human resources, the current framing of vulnerability includes not only social and environmental factors, but also the political and institutional factors mentioned above.

At the same time, while the 2007 study and 2014 POT mention the above aspects of vulnerability, the mapping itself largely considers only the physical components of exposure and precariousness, and uses a wide scale of 1:10,000 that prevents detailed documentation at a sub-settlement level (Interview Jose David Ramirez, 3 July 2014; Interview Humberto Caballero, 14 July 2014). While mapping the complex vulnerability indicators would in many cases prove difficult, excluding these maps from official planning documents may serve to perpetuate the slipperiness of the concept. Without being rendered visible, it may remain harder to identify opportunities to appropriate or contest such designations as a means to influence policy interventions.

**Evolving Geographies of Risk**

To summarize, various changes occurred in the determination and mapping of risk between the 1999 and 2014 designations, including: use of a smaller, more precise scale; greater field verification of risk zones calculations; incorporation of vulnerability analysis and mapping; and a change in criteria of what constitutes non-mitigable risk (i.e. prior or impending disaster event). Additionally, the concepts of hazard and risk were more thoroughly separated, with the 2014 maps excluding areas that are exposed to natural hazard, but still uninhabited. In the 2014 POT these areas were changed to be protection areas (Acuerdo 48). According to disaster risk management specialists, these changes have been the result of technological advancements, changes in internationally accepted practices around disaster risk management, and the incorporation of new vulnerability studies (Interview Jose David Ramirez, 3 July 2014; Interview Humberto Caballero, 14 July 2014).
Furthermore, these changes have resulted in substantial changes to the city’s risk maps – both in the number of hectares marked as risk zones as well as different distributions of the different types of risk. The total risk areas (“recuperable” + “non-recuperable” in 1999/2006 and “with risk conditions” + “non-recuperable” in 2014) have fluctuated somewhat over time. As a result of applying the new risk designation criteria outlined above, in 1999 there was a total of 959.14 hectares of risk zones, in 2006 this increased to 1084.52 hectares, and in 2014 this was reduced to 754.6 hectares. When breaking this down to examine the total hectares of non-mitigable risk across the three versions of the POT, we find an original 803.72 hectares in 1999, a slight increase to 859.21 hectares in the 2006 mid-term revision, and a drastic reduction to only 162.14 hectares in 2014. The totals for recuperable risk were 155.42 hectares in 1999 and increased to 225.32 in 2006. The 2014 POT identifies 592.46 hectares as having “risk conditions,” meaning that further detail studies are needed to determine whether the risk is mitigable or not. While the stated number of hectares of non-recuperable risk in 2014 is significantly lower than it was previously – the new application of the “risk conditions” category remains vague and potentially slippery.
The shifting categorizations and geographies of risk demonstrate the malleability of risk calculation and the social and spatial consequences that result. As the following chapters demonstrate, this evolution of national risk management policy and municipal planning frameworks lays an important backdrop for risk-related conflicts that emerge between stakeholders advocating different urban development agendas in Medellín.
Chapter 4. MUNICIPAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN MEDELLÍN

The municipal development visions and strategic urban projects of recent administrations in Medellín have gained significant attention within the planning, architecture and academic communities. Perspectives on these pursuits have varied to include reiterations of Medellín as an example of urban innovation (Bahl 2011; WSJ 2013); attempts to quantify positive social impacts of the interventions (Drummond et al. 2012; Brand & Davila 2011); and critiques that these development agendas primarily represent efforts at neoliberal city marketing (Brand 2013). To provide context for Medellín’s current planning model, I first provide a brief discussion of the historical political and economic trends that have influenced urban development in the city. I then provide an overview of the current institutional architecture of urban development in the city and outline the development visions and strategic urban projects of recent mayoral administrations, to which Comuna 8 leaders respond directly in their counter planning pursuits.

Medellín in Historical Perspective

Nestled within the Aburrá Valley in the Central Andean region of Colombia, Medellín’s geography and resource-rich environment made it a strategic site for early colonization by the Spanish in addition a fruitful base for gold mining and coffee cultivation in the nineteenth century. As a premier manufacturing center of Colombia during the first half of the twentieth century, Medellín became one of the primary sites of urban growth in Colombia. It’s strategic location along newly developed railroad routes as well as its proximity to energy sources including hydropower and coal attracted the textile and other industries (Drummond et al. 2012). Around this, the city rose as a center for both cultural and artistic institutions as well as higher education, and today remains prominent in Colombia for its respected arts and educational facilities.

As global economic shocks prompted more inward-focused economic production in the 1920s and 1930s, industrial growth accelerated and it became clear that the city plans implemented at the turn of the century could no longer accommodate the new population influx. By the 1940s, authorities and elites sought to address the serious need for an updated, revised, and more modern master plan. Contracting with Town Planning Associates in New York in 1948, the municipality of Medellín
brought architects Paul Lester Wiener and José Luis Sert to the Antioquian capital to craft Medellín’s new *Plan Piloto*, or Master Plan, which would be completed two years later. Working in the modernist tradition of Le Corbusier, Wiener and Sert crafted the *Plan Piloto* to separate residential, commercial and industrial functions; utilize the neighborhood unit as the main model for housing; create lineal parks along the river that would intersect perpendicularly with main roads across the valley; and create a bold civic center as the “heart of the city” where cultural centers, museums, convention spaces, and libraries would concentrate around a main square (Schnitter 1999). While constraints on resources hindered implementation capacity and the outbreak of national conflict would prevent some elements of the plan from being executed, the *Plan Piloto* still left an important spatial legacy for Medellín’s future development.

At the same time that municipal authorities were engaged with this reconfiguration of Medellín’s spatial plan and regulation of the informal residential growth that had emerged alongside the city’s rise in manufacturing, the outbreak of *La Violencia* and subsequent guerrilla conflict would accelerate demographic growth in Medellín, with new migrants settling largely on precarious land along the urban fringe. The challenge of providing services to a growing population in the context of the economic restructuring of the 1970s and 1980s would generate a severe unemployment crisis for Medellín and lay a backdrop for the rise of the Medellín Cartel – whose legacy continues to influence Medellín’s international image and its urban fabric.

The Medellín Cartel’s rise translated into significant urban development changes in the city. With an increase in urban real estate prices and the Cartel’s pervasive role in underwriting new urban development, the narcotics industry led to a boom in the construction of luxurious residential and commercial projects “tailored to the demands of a newly minted narcotics aristocracy” (Roldán 2004: 132), and in so doing, “defined the stylistic taste and even the character of particular urban neighborhoods and architecture” (130). In addition to a new influx of money into the coffers of a rising class controlling the drug trade, as well as traditional cattle ranching and other industrialist elites in aligning themselves with the Cartel, the expansion of the drug trade also generated significant trickle down effects for other segments of the population. The scale of the industry generated employment opportunities in various areas, as it required mules, accountants, chemists, drivers, bodyguards, managers, and a large base of workers to provide security or assassin services (Roldán 2004). This influx of income and wealth manifested as consumer purchasing power in
neighborhoods of all socio-economic levels. As Roldán explains, “As a result, even businesses not directly connected to the narcotics trade nonetheless felt the immediate impact of cocaine profitability” (2004: 140).

The consequences of the narcotics industry would soon take a darkly violent turn, resulting in Medellín’s notorious position – by homicide statistics and the international imaginary – as the most violent city on earth. As traffickers amassed greater political and economic power, new tensions began to rise with the State. Subsequently, when the 1990 Constitutional Assembly introduced new possibilities of extradition of drug leaders to the United States, the Cartel began to engage in campaigns of terror, in which bombings and shootouts became regular occurrences, even in the wealthy areas the elite had considered their own (Palacios 2007; Roldín 2004). In response, the state began to carry out cleansing campaigns and indiscriminate massacres in the low-income neighborhoods from where henchmen and foot soldiers originated (Roldán 2004). By the early 1990s, violence in Medellín had reached outstanding proportions and in 1991 the homicide rate peaked at 388 per 100,000 (Garcia et al. 2012). After Pablo Escobar’s death in 1993, and a series of negotiated ceasefire pacts and disarmament campaigns between various armed groups in subsequent years, however, Medellín’s future took a different course, that would make it known in urbanist circles as the world’s “most innovative city” (WSJ 2013) for drastic reductions in violence (Samper 2014), major infrastructural and social investments in marginalized neighborhoods, and new levels of citizen participation in urban planning and governance (Bahl 2011; Davis 2012).

In response to tendencies to portray drug trafficking in Medellín as a determinant of the urban challenges and crises Medellín has experienced, Roldán (2004) argues that the social, political and economic “wounds” Medellín carries are not the consequence of the drug trade itself, and that instead it is a “city’s individual history of constantly shifting and renegotiated systems of authority, production, social relations, cultural expectations, values and norms ultimately [that] determin[e] the impact of the drug trade on urban life” (130). Similarly, the influences of a violent partisan history on leanings toward technocratic governance (Roldán 2004) and the political-economic conditions that have generated significant demographic and cultural diversity in urban centers both provide insight into how development values are constructed and contested – and how they intersect with the framing of problems by governments and community level stakeholders, including, but not limited to notions of risk.
Institutional Architecture of Urban Development in Medellín

The stakeholder landscape of urban development in Medellín represents a unique arrangement of public and semi-public agencies that has played an important role in the city’s ability to carry out the urban planning and development interventions that have gained it global attention in recent years.

Within Medellín’s *Alcaldía* (mayor’s office) the Planning Department (DAP) coordinates among various city agencies focused on meeting the population’s needs and ensuring efficient urban functioning, including the municipal risk management agency, DAGRED. With the primary responsibilities of carrying out geological and hydrological hazard and risk studies, risk mapping, monitoring, implementing mitigation infrastructure (such as containment walls and structural supports), and enforcement of risk management regulations (such as stream set backs and permitting), DAGRED plays an important technical planning role, particularly in areas of complex terrain such as Comuna 8. It also coordinates with ISVIMED, the municipal housing agency, which is responsible for the resettlement of households in environmental risk zones or post-disaster event settings, and other agencies involved in public infrastructure provision and environmental management.

In addition to these departments and agencies housed within the *Alcaldía*, a number of semi-autonomous entities for planning and service provision also play prominent coordinating and financing roles for urban development in Medellín. One of these, the *Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano* (Urban Development Company), or EDU, is a municipally-owned company with administrative and financial autonomy, responsible for urban and real estate operations and management, urban development, as well as assessment, consulting and execution of urban plans, program and projects. The EDU is the main implementing body for the large-scale strategic projects that have garnered international attention for Medellín in recent years – including the current *Jardín Circunvalar*. Since its creation in 1993 to carry through public space renovation projects (EDU 2008), the EDU’s strong emphasis on technocratic management has kept it staffed largely with architects and engineers, who work to implement the development visions of each mayoral administration, but are also granted the administrative autonomy to bypass some layers of bureaucracy and partisan barriers in urban development.
Additionally, most socially-oriented urban development initiatives are made possible with unique financing mechanisms that have been identified as key enablers of the unprecedented scale of investments seen in Medellin's marginalized neighborhoods (Davis 2012). Empresas Públicas de Medellín, a state-owned utilities company that not only provides water, sanitation and electricity to all customers in Medellin, but also in other Colombian and Latin American cities, provides a unique revenue stream by channeling 35-40% of its annual operating budget (equivalent to over US$300 million in 2011) to the municipal government and EDU for investments in urban development projects (Brand 2013). The state-owned METRO transit company has also been responsible for financing the cable car systems that link many of Medellin’s informal hillside neighborhoods with the central city.

**Municipal Development Visions in a Transforming City**

Each of Medellin’s mayoral administrations is responsible for creating a Municipal Development Plan, which outlines and operationalizes the social and economic development goals they intend to achieve during their term. These have also served as the primary plans for implementation of two development agendas – known as Social Urbanism and Civic Pedagogical Urbanism – that have gained international attention in recent years.

**Social Urbanism**

Beginning in the early 2000s, significant physical, social, and political transformations began to lay the foundation for Medellin’s current global renown. As a combination of “pacification” processes and negotiated settlements between armed actors contributed to a reduction of violence in the city, the administration of Mayor Sergio Fajardo (2004-2007) began to pursue an unprecedented portfolio of social investments in poor areas of Medellin. Framed as an effort to “repay the social debt” owed to historically marginalized neighborhoods, what is now widely know as “Social Urbanism” became the guiding agenda for urban development in the city. This model placed boldly designed schools and library parks in low-income neighborhoods, expanded urban mobility with more lines of the cable car system initiated under Fajardo’s predecessor Luiz Pérez Gutiérrez, and in so doing, inserted new levels of State presence into areas of disinvestment. From these projects emerged common references to the “Medellin Miracle,” which described the city’s turnaround from the world’s “murder capital” (Bahl 2011) to a lauded model of spatial inclusion.
Civic Pedagogical Urbanism

As the subsequent iteration of Fajardo's "Social Urbanism," Aníbal Garívia's mayoral administration (2012-2015) has branded the EDU's current development motto "Urbanismo Cívico Pedagógico," or "Civic Pedagogical Urbanism." Based on the idea that public infrastructure investments are a vehicle for civic education and citizenship construction, the stated elements of the vision are that: the government should play a primary pedagogical role in the construction of citizenship; public space is where citizens find equal ground to build a more equitable society; that infrastructure should have an educational message; and citizen appropriation of social infrastructure serves as the best example for a civic urbanism model (EDU 2008). While these statements remain quite vague, particularly in respect to the "pedagogical" aspect of the agenda, their focus on public space investment manifests in major recreational and open space interventions bridging urban settlement and surrounding natural spaces.

The Civic Pedagogical Urbanism agenda is comprised of two key strategic projects, both representing large-scale infrastructure interventions: the overlapping Cinturón Verde Metropolitano (Metropolitan Greenbelt) and Jardín Circunvalar (Encircling Garden), and the Parque del Río Medellín (Medellín River Park). Together they comprise an intersecting package of interventions enveloping and traversing the city infused with discourses of harmony with the natural environment. In line with the stated vision of Civic Pedagogical Urbanism, the interventions focus largely on public space creation, with the implied hope being that such spatial interventions can contribute to strengthening the public and civic sphere. As the macro-project most directly affecting the territory and population of Comuna 8, here I focus my attention on the Cinturón Verde/Jardín Circunvalar.

While often referred to interchangeably, the Cinturón Verde Metropolitano and the Jardín Circunvalar represent distinct but overlapping designations or interventions, which exist under the purview of different planning and development entities. As the 13,143 hectare zone designated by Medellín's POT and the BIO 2030 (the master plan for the Aburrá Valley Metropolitan Area) to control municipal growth and ensure a harmonious transition between urban and rural areas, the Cinturón Verde Metropolitano is a long-term strategic land classification that will hold across the next several administrations. Comprised of a three concentric zones along the upper reaches of the valley, the


_Cinturon Verde Metropolitano_ classifies areas intended for urban consolidation, urban-rural transition, and environmental protection (represented respectively by orange, yellow, and green in Figure 2).

Figure 2: CINTURON VERDE METROPOLITANO PLANS

The concept of the “greenbelt” as an urban growth boundary is not new in global planning history, nor in Medellín’s history of urbanization. While growth boundaries have a long history in human settlement, the greenbelt as a physical planning tool for urban containment and demographic dispersal is often traced back to the Garden City model of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Herington 1990). Though greenbelt justification continues in the terms of environmental protection and the quality of life benefits in cities with burgeoning populations, however, greenbelt and similar environmental enclosure models have also been subject to critiques for falling short on the protective and agricultural productive capacity it is meant to provide (Herington 1990); using “green pretexts” in ways that “contribut[e] to privatization and dispossession” (Ojeda 2012: 357); as well as commodifying nature and serving the interests of elites (Fairhead et al. 2012) interested in the greenbelt’s contribution to pushing up land values (Evans 2004).
In Medellín, the concept of a greenbelt dates back at least to 1981, when the municipal government established a “Cordón Verde” to prevent further outward growth (Rendón 2009). Since, multiple iterations of the concept have appeared in other pieces of municipal legislation (Acuerdo 46 de 2006), the 1999 POT (Article 11; Article 102), and Municipal Development Plans (Alcaldía de Medellín 2001, Article 27). Additionally, the Cinturón Verde serves as a prominent connecting thread throughout the 2014 POT, and is referenced in relation to growth management (Article 261), risk management (Article 236), environmental management (Article 264), and ecological protection (Article 11; Article 53). The definition of growth boundaries has key political implications for a municipal government’s area of influence and its responsibility to citizens: it defines where the city is required to provide urban services, influences land values and tax structures, and affects which populations will be included or excluded from the voter base. While the repeated expansion of the urban limit has allowed new settlement to be incorporated into the city over time, the current moment represents the first time in Medellín that physical infrastructure is being constructed to make visible the dividing line.

Within the areas designated as the Cinturón Verde Metropolitano, the Jardín Circunvalar represents the set of spatial and infrastructural interventions being pursued by the EDU and the municipality as part of the current administration’s development vision. Its five guiding elements – growth management; dignified, secure, sustainable and accessible housing; inclusive public space; integral territorial sustainability; and territorial connectivity – manifest as a series of spatial interventions directed at the comunas abutting the municipal growth boundary. The key pieces of the Jardín Circunvalar project include recreational infrastructure and public space; the Barrios Sostenibles (Sustainable Neighborhoods) upgrading interventions; and new Metrocable (gondola) lines connecting the upper fringes of the valley to the city center. Additionally, the Jardín Circunvalar’s execution proves particularly relevant for Comuna 8, one of the pilot sites for implementation that will receive each of these key components of the program.

Within the Jardín Circunvalar’s key objective of growth management, the EDU outlines several aims: to control disorderly growth, conserve rural land, restore native ecosystems, order the territory and mitigate environmental risk, act as a cultural and pedagogical space, ensure physical security, and offer a variety of recreational activities and facilities (EDU Presentation 26 Jan 2014). Here, the key measures to prevent further settlement expansion up the hillsides takes the form of public space
interventions, primarily the “Camino de La Vida” (Pathway of Life), a series of walking and hiking paths, and the “Ruta de Campiones” (Route of Champions), a network of bicycle pathways. According to David Rodríguez Martínez, a planning contractor with the EDU,

“One of the most important objectives is to recuperate areas in high risk, resettle [people living there] and recuperate that space. In this sense we are making new park spaces and the Camino de La Vida, a pedestrian path. It’s like an invisible barrier – a line that let’s residents know they cannot construct anything above it...It’s not about stopping growth, but about organizing it. The city is going to keep growing, so the idea is to better order the hillsides to order the growth” (Interview 4 August 2014).

Complementary to this effort is the municipality’s aim to promote inward and upward growth by densifying housing in the central areas of the city (POT 2014; Ortíz 2012). As the area of the city with traditionally higher land values, this objective poses a number of challenges for the aims of equitable development and dignified housing articulated by the EDU and Garívía administration. As Ortíz (2012) details, in contrast to critiques largely focused on the processes of neoliberal deregulation in Latin American cities, the 1991 Constitution’s construction of a new property regime rooted in the social function of land contributed to greater separation of property and development
rights. In essence this means that through the use of a mechanism known as “partial plans” the “landowner acquires development rights only if he or she assumes responsibilities as defined in the municipal plan (i.e. public amenities and infrastructure provision)” (2012: 80-81). However, abilities to transfer these rights, as well as lack of controls over speculation “jeopardizes the self-fulfilling mandate of partial plans because the increase in land values diminishes the agent’s ability to fund public amenities” (2012: 9).

Additionally, despite the fact that the city’s urban development and planning agencies both function under the mandate of the current administration, their fragmentation may further contribute to contradictions in current housing aims and policies. According to Rodríguez Martínez, the aim to redirect growth from the fringes toward densification in the city center “poses a problem, because land values in the city center are very high – at the moment it’s nearly impossible to build social interest housing in the central areas. But this issue of access is not part of the EDU’s role – that’s an issue for the Planning Department” (Interview 4 August 2014).

For residents living in areas city authorities deem upgradable, the Jardín Circunvalar program also includes resources for select neighborhood upgrading initiatives. While municipal neighborhood upgrading programs are not new to Medellín, the current iteration – branded Barrios Sostenibles or “Sustainable Neighborhoods” – is unique for existing under the umbrella of a larger macro-development program whose key goals of growth management and public space creation are more visible than those of neighborhood- and household-level investments. Prioritization for which neighborhoods would receive upgrading happened within the districts targeted for the pilot phases of the Jardín Circunvalar, as well as which districts were effectively able to mobilize and harness resources from Medellín’s participatory budgeting process toward those ends (Interview David Rodríguez Martínez 4 August 2014). As a highly organized district with a strong focus on neighborhood level improvements, Comuna 8 leaders fought to secure five of the eight initial Barrios Sostenibles projects within their district (Interview David Rodríguez Martínez 4 August 2014; Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política, multiple sessions).

Before neighborhood upgrading was reconfigured and rebranded as Barrios Sostenibles, the Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales en Medellín (PRIMED) was the primary program for addressing the physical conditions contributing to risk in precarious settlements. PRIMED
functioned between 1993 and 2000, and was created in cooperation between Medellín’s municipal government, the Colombian national government, and the German government. The jointly-administrated program focused on the six objectives of: establishing proper mechanisms of planning and implementation; promoting citizen participation; physical neighborhood improvements; home improvement and in-situ relocation; legalization of tenure; and mitigation of geological risks. Program evaluations have highlighted PRIMED’s success in providing transportation and social infrastructure to under-serviced neighborhoods, making improvements to 3,500 homes, legalizing 2,100 households of the 5,180 targeted, and the recovery of nearly 70% of areas classified as high risk within the targeted areas (2007). Other scholars (Bahl 2011) have pointed to the program’s limited impacts; arguing it was not given continuity for its failure to “improve municipal administration, strengthen community organization or build a political clientele around pro-poor governance” (Bahl 2011; xi). The impacts of Barrios Sostenibles are not yet known, as the program was only in the diagnostic phase during my fieldwork. However, in contrast to the current model of upgrading nested within an assemblage of urban macro-projects, PRIMED placed neighborhood level improvement and technical and infrastructural risk mitigation measures at the forefront of its work, as opposed to current efforts at risk mitigation by way of constrained growth.

**Dealing with Risk through Medellín’s Macro-projects**

Risk appears in both a discursive and practical capacity in the current municipal development vision and models of intervention. It highlights both how risk is conceived by municipal actors and how it is used to justify particular urban infrastructure projects. In the 2014 POT, Article 236 highlights the consideration of risk management as a fundamental objective in pursuing the POT’s four main macro-projects (Cinturón Verde, Proyecto Rio Medellín, Corredores de las quebradas La Iguaná y Santa Elena; and the series of Ecoparques through the city) – as well as how each will contribute to risk reduction. As the POT articulates for the Cinturón Verde,

“This project has a fundamental objective to manage risk, contain formal and informal urban expansion on the fringes – areas that in large part present high geological, geomorphological, geotechnical, and hydrogeological restrictions for occupation – as well as the implementation of risk reduction measures related to processes of household resettlement, neighborhood upgrading, and mitigation works associated with earth movements and floods” (Article 236).
Alongside the technical and infrastructural risk mitigation solutions carried out by DAGRED, municipal urban development visions conceptualize risk management largely in terms of efforts to control future urban growth, and offer this as part of their justification to pursue particular projects. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, these aims to manage risk by controlling growth are also echoed by the EDU as they construct recreational infrastructure in the Jardín Circunvalar. As I discuss in the chapters that follow, this notion of risk management contrasts with that of local leaders in Comuna 8, who primarily seek interventions that will ameliorate existing high environmental risk conditions in ways that do not threaten resident permanence in the territory due to large infrastructure projects.
Chapter 5. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLANNING IN COMUNA 8

The local development vision articulated by leaders in Comuna 8 reflects social and cultural values of residents and also offers an alternative model of development to the municipality’s. Here I provide brief historical, geographic and demographic background on Comuna 8, followed by an overview of recent forms of resident mobilization, the organizational structure of local planning pursuits, and visions for local development as articulated in the district’s Plan de Desarrollo Local (Local Development Plan) – all of which prove fundamental to understanding the way that risk-related development conflicts play out in the territory.

Comuna 8 in Historical Perspective

As the rise of manufacturing in Medellin during the first decades of the twentieth century created new demands for worker housing, a number of barrios obreros, or popular neighborhoods housing mainly factory workers, consolidated in Medellín and its suburbs to accommodate new migrants in search of work. Areas adjacent to the Aburrá Valley’s networks of quebradas (streams) feeding the Medellín River were of high interest for their access to hydroelectric power that fueled many manufacturing activities. The textile factory Compañía Colombiana de Tejidos was one such manufacturer that was established along the banks of the Quebrada Santa Elena, and the first neighborhood of what is now Comuna 8 grew alongside it (González Escobar 2007). As migration to the city continued along with the growth and consolidation of industry, and subsequently with the massive displacements caused by La Violencia as well as different iterations of political conflict that continue to today, new neighborhoods were settled and expanded along the northern slopes of the Quebrada Santa Elena, and subsequently incorporated into the city’s urban boundary.

Today the district of Comuna 8 is comprised of 16 officially-recognized neighborhoods, and as of 2011, was home to 153,756 residents (PDL 2008). As the district’s population has grown, older neighborhoods closer to the city center became more consolidated, and newly settled sectors higher on the hillsides continue to demonstrate more precarious building conditions.
While the district demonstrates an important set of community assets including over 120 community-based organizations or collectives (Corporación Cultural Diáfora 2013), Comuna 8 also faces a number of socio-economic challenges. According to neighborhood planning documents, a majority of residents experience significant economic insecurity, with 49% of residents living on less than one minimum salary, 37% living on less than two minimum salaries, and only 8% having amassed any degree of savings (PDL 2008: 22). Food insecurity also represents a significant challenge, with 20% of residents participating in public sector nutritional assistance programs, and in the most vulnerable neighborhoods on the fringe, this number reaches close to 50% (PDL 2008: 23). Additionally, 19% of adults did not finish primary school, 23% did not finish high school, and only 5% have completed higher education in technical or academic programs (PDL 2008: 20). Despite, and in response to, many of these challenges, however, strong networks of mobilized residents have emerged to pursue local development planning.
Mobilization and Community Planning Organizational Structure

While Comuna 8 has had a long history of local activism and neighborhood-led social development, its focus on integrated territorial planning and development emerged only recently. As Jairo Maya, a Planning Council member and one of the leaders of the Mesa Ambiental (Environmental Committee), said,

"The [mid-2000s] was a depressing time in terms of development. The issue of the environment had been cast aside by the state and the community. We were really disarticulated from urban development in the city, where real estate development interests defined everything. From there we began to raise these issues to raise alarm; to get people to mobilize. In 2010, a small group of seven people got together for collective discussion about making claims on the State, and this was the first time that we cemented an organized territorial focus [for the district.] Before then there were many groups mobilizing around social issues, educational issues, etc. But in this space, we began to mobilize ourselves around the themes of housing, risk, habitat, and habitability. From here emerged the Mesa de Vivienda [Housing Committee], the Mesa de Victimas [Displaced Persons Committee]" (Interview 18 July, 2014).

In addition to the Mesa de Vivienda and the Mesa de Victimas/Desplazados, a number of other thematic committees also emerged to focus on the environment, the LGBT population, women, public health, and human rights, among others. Today they have become key entities to represent diverse population- and issue-based interests within the district and in its relationships and negotiations with city government. Some leaders of the Mesas have also played key roles in the Comuna 8 Planning Council – the inner circle guiding the execution of the Plan de Desarrollo Local – which, in addition to Mesa representatives, is also comprised of elected officials that represent the district in city council affairs and representatives from distinct geographic sectors of the district. This foundation of local mobilization has not only constituted a key component of the district’s social fabric, but has also greatly influenced the planning and development visions articulated and carried out through the Plan de Desarrollo Local.

The Plan de Desarrollo Local

In 2008, Comuna 8 leaders crafted and published the ten-year Plan de Desarrollo Local. As the Mesas began to mobilize around territorial planning issues, they saw the need for the local territorial development plan to address the many inconsistencies between how the municipality and the
community understood the territory, defined problems, and advocated for particular planning interventions. According to the Plan de Desarrollo Local's justification for a community-led plan:

“There exist inconsistencies in the delimitation of neighborhoods between the conceptions of the Municipal Planning Department, community imaginaries, and in some cases, in the historical references of the population. Because of this, since the beginning of the Comuna 8 Local Development Planning and Management process, the interpretation of the territory has constituted one of the principal difficulties, given the disparate degrees of development across the district, that many sectors are not recognized by the municipal administration, which does not coincide with the territorial, social, and cultural references of residents; and that community organizations multiply and act without accompaniment or recognition in territorial planning.”

With this in mind, community planners have taken both strategic and symbolic measures to define and plan their own territory. As a basis for this, they have reconstructed and remapped neighborhood dividing lines in ways that better reflect the social and cultural cohesions perceived from within the district, as opposed to the arbitrary political boundaries imposed by the municipality. The adoption of alternative political boundaries in the PDL represents the first time this has been done in any local development plan in the city, and used as the basis for strategic community planning.

The PDL’s vision for local development highlights a number of values that influence the differential approach to development that local activists articulate in response to the municipal models centered around large-scale infrastructure projects. According to its vision statement, the PDL aims to construct:

“A territory where integral sustainable development contributes to a strong social fabric and habitability; that guarantees quality of life and respect for the Human Rights of its residents; where community-based work is articulated with State action to produce social inclusion and integration with the city, under the principles of equity, solidarity, convivencia and peace, social opportunity, and harmony with nature” (PDL 2008, 45).

On a more operational and programmatic level, the PDL orients its work around three main axes: sustainability, which focuses on education, health, and income generation; habitability, addressing environmental and urban management issues; and the social fabric, which includes work around citizen participation, culture, and recreation. Within each of these axes, the PDL articulates a
number of broader programmatic interventions (such as improving food security for vulnerable populations or supporting initiatives to grow the solidarity economy), as well as specific projects they seek to implement (such as urban agriculture projects or advisory and capacity building services for establishing workers cooperatives).

Plans to carry through these programs and projects are rooted a cross-sector approach to planning that actively accounts for multiple stakeholders. Placing community interests and actors at the center of this model, the PDL identifies the different roles and collaboration necessary by local entities, the State, academic institutions, the private sector, and the public in planning and managing the territory – indicating awareness and value for the distinct contributions they each offer in strategic and technical matters.

**Risk in Local Planning**

The PDL addresses environmental risk management specifically, and risk more broadly in its orientation toward reducing vulnerabilities through sustainable human development. As part of its Habitability section, the PDL includes a programmatic intervention for Risk Mitigation, intended to “eliminate, mitigate or prevent geologic risk factors in Comuna 8, for the human habitability of the territory, through strategies that permit the establishment of measures that prevent disasters and recuperate risk zones” (PDL 2008: 55). Planning programs articulated in the Sustainability section focus on socio-economic risk factors, and the Social Fabric section seeks to build further social capital to sustain development gains in the territory. As the next chapter will detail further, these efforts to reframe risk is more holistic ways become part of district-level strategies to secure the type of development they want to see in their territory.

The distinct, and at times competing, development visions between the municipality and the Comuna 8 Planning Council in many ways become mediated and framed by discussions and actions around risk. The chapter that follows details three risk-related conflicts to provide an analysis of how community- and municipal-level actors use risk to pursue or contest specific models of development in the territory.
Chapter 6. DISPUTING RISK & DEVELOPMENT

As municipal urban development entities and the Comuna 8 Planning Council articulate diverging visions of territorial development on the eastern slopes of Medellín, risk becomes a vehicle for bolstering these respective visions of development, in addition to a contested object in and of itself. In this chapter I detail three ways in which competing visions of development in Comuna 8 manifest as risk-related conflicts, each dealing with the designation, use, or contestation of risk. Normative-empirical tensions around risk prioritization, disputes over transparency in risk mapping, and perceived inconsistencies in risk management interventions all rise to the surface in debates over the district’s future development, raising important questions about the structuring of decision making processes at the intersection of risk management and urban development pursuits. Here, I draw on observations from community planning meetings, interviews with local leaders, and community planning documents to detail these conflicts, my interpretations of what they reveal in the context of competing urban development agendas, and an analysis of the strategies that community activists employ in response to divergent agendas.

I posit that the Comuna 8 case reflects trends in the constructivist risk literature, illustrating the multiple understandings and values attached to risk, as well as political ecology scholarship identifying risk as a tool municipal governments use to justify large-scale projects in informal settlements and low-income areas. However, I also argue that this analysis fails to fully account for residents’ collective capacity to harness and reframe risk towards their own territorial development aims. As I attempt to demonstrate here, local activists in Comuna 8 not only contest risk, but also invoke, and in some cases, reframe it to actively construct an alternative vision for local development. In addition, I demonstrate how risk becomes a mechanism for local activists to render their contestation over, and visions for, local development visible against Medellín’s dominant urban development model – one hailed internationally as a success case in spatial inclusion and planning innovation. I use evidence from my fieldwork to lay the basis for a discussion of what the case of Comuna 8 contributes to our understandings of contested risk and development in planning theory and practice in my concluding chapter.
Risk-Development Conflicts in Comuna 8

Normative-Empirical Tensions in Territorial Risk Management

For activists in Comuna 8, the complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental conditions rooted in physical space and political interactions with armed groups and the state contributes to an understanding of risk that goes beyond landslide and flood risks. In addition to environmental risks, urban crime and drug-related violence as well as large-scale urban development interventions produce risks of displacement, risks to life and livelihoods, and fragmentation of community social fabric. Disaggregating these risks to examine their impact and interplay proves important for understanding how risk management becomes a value-rational, rather than purely technocratic, pursuit, how local experiences lead to different prioritizations for dealing with risks, and how categorizations of risk influence visions and processes of urban and community development.

Urban Crime and Violence as Risk

One key contextual factor for understanding how risks are perceived and evaluated within Comuna 8 is Colombia’s internal displacement crisis. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center reports that the population of internally displaced persons due to conflict in Colombia ranges between 4.9 and 5.5 million and represents one of the most severe displacement situations in the world (IDMC 2013). These numbers primarily reflect the consequences of massive displacements from the countryside, where the state sovereignty is actively disputed by paramilitary and guerilla groups seeking territorial control, or providing security to transnational corporations attempting to expand extractive industries like African palm oil and gold mining through coercive land acquisition (Escobar 2008; Garavito, Sierra & Adarve 2005). The result has been a convergence of social, political and environmental crises, with lasting impact for both rural and metropolitan areas of the country. In 2013 Medellín was one of the four top cities receiving displaced persons (IDMC 2013).

Despite attempts by migrants to leave violence behind in their rural places of origin, arms of the drug-related conflict play out in Comuna 8 as well, and become a major driver of displacement within the district. According the Plan de Desarrollo Local, about 18,400, or 12%, of the district’s approximately 155,000 residents arrived to their current homes after being displaced one or more times due to violence. In Comuna 8, similar to trends identified in many Colombian cities (Zeiderman 2012), the population of desplazados tends to resettle in areas with high environmental
and socio-economic vulnerability and very low land values. In Comuna 8, this has meant most migrants concentrate in the neighborhood clusters of Esfuerzos de Paz I and II (61%); Villa Tina, La Libertad 2, Sol de Oriente (32%); and Villa Turbay, La Sierra and Las Mirlas (17%) (PDL 2008).

However, as an area of Medellín affected by low State investment or control, Comuna 8 has also been subject to violent vying for territorial control between paramilitary contingents and guerrillas groups involved in the international drug trade, as well as smaller gangs at times aligned with more powerful groups that exercise or enforce control at a sub-neighborhood or block level (Samper 2014). In the context of the conflict, Comuna 8 is the district with the second highest number of registered cases of intra-urban displacement in Medellín. While in reality the number is likely higher due to underreporting, in 2012 the Personería de Medellín recorded 2,427 official registries (Formatos Únicos de Declaración de Víctimas) of forced displacement in the city, and 431 – or 18% of these – occurred in Comuna 8 (Personería 2012: 29). In addition, the homicide risk in Comuna 8 remains high relative to Medellín as a whole, and as of 2013 its homicide rate of 39 deaths per 100,000 (Sistema de Información para la Seguridad y la Convivencia 2014) was almost four times higher than the United Nations’ classification of a homicide epidemic.

Urban Development as Risk

In addition to the risks displacement due to armed violence in Comuna 8, displacement due to urban development projects, new infrastructure, or environmental enclosure also represents an important risk to livelihoods and cohesion of the local social fabrics that residents believe play an important role in resisting violence (PDL 2008; Davis 2012). In an interview with Gisela Quintero, a leader of the Mesa de Desplazados, Gisela explained, “For people who live along the urban fringe, urban planning becomes a risk in and of itself. The Mesa de Desplazados focuses on three principal issues: housing, food security, and income generation – all of which are put at risk by urban macro-projects” (Interview, 1 July 2014). In the context of the Cinturón Verde’s construction along the upper reaches of the district, this assertion demonstrates the complexity of determining and weighing different risks in a territory undergoing disputed development interventions and experiencing a diverse range of vulnerabilities.
Many of the interventions being pursued by Mayor Aníbal Garivía's administration are actively contested by Comuna 8 leaders and activists for both their intended purpose as well as the displacement risk they generate in the territory: the *Cinturón Verde Metropolitano*, under construction since the middle of 2013, promises the creation of recreational areas, public space, and environmental protection zones; the *Barrios Sostenibles* neighborhood upgrading program, existing under the umbrella of the *Cinturón Verde*, is being piloted in five Comuna 8 neighborhoods; and new transit interventions including two Metrocable lines will connect hillside hubs to a new tramline near the city center. Additionally, the ambiguities of land use surrounding the urban growth boundary are also perceived as latent threats to resident permanence by producing a “legal limbo” for dwellers in their immediate vicinity (Interview El Pacífico Leadership 5 August 2014; *Escuela Socio-política*, multiple sessions).

Reliable data on the scale of displacement and the risks it generates remains difficult to come by, and households already displaced or resettled due to urban development projects, as well as the resettlement projections for future developments were often incomplete or unclear across interviews and official statistics. According to a formal information solicitation I submitted to ISVIMED (the municipal housing agency) for data on displacement and resettlement due to infrastructure, risk prevention, and post-disaster interventions over the last ten years (and for which I received data from 2009 forward), since 2009 the number of resettlements due to Public Interest Infrastructure projects in the district include 56 households between Comuna 8 and Comuna 9 resettled due to construction of the Ayacucho tram line running between along their shared district boundary (the exact numbers in each district were unspecified), 8 households in Comuna 8 resettled due to construction of the Quebrada Santa Elena Linear Park, and 1 household in Comuna 8 resettled for construction of a sports and recreation complex in the Las Estancias neighborhood of Comuna 8.

For future phases of the *Cinturón Verde Metropolitano*, the EDU estimates 7,500 households will be resettled to make way for infrastructure projects, to enclose environmental protection zones, or as part of the *Barrios Sostenibles* neighborhood upgrading under its administration (MIT-UNAL 2014). The plans for implementation and resettlement have not been made fully available, and confusion about when, where, and under what terms resettlement would occur has surfaced in many community leadership forums and meetings (Community Meeting 12 July 2014; Community meeting 14 July 2014; *Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política*, multiple sessions).
During my fieldwork in summer of 2014, members of the Comuna 8 Planning Council reported that approximately 300 households in the neighborhoods along the urban fringe had recently been delivered eviction notices due to Cinturón Verde construction. As a neighborhood leader from one of the affected neighborhoods explained during a Mesas meeting, “Three months ago, the municipality arrived with a list of 50 families, saying they needed to leave – just like the paramilitaries do. They come saying we have to leave, but they never tell us what the conditions of resettlement will be” (14 July 2014). His comment highlighted the trauma of double displacement in the conflict-development continuum, where a common practice of paramilitaries – to arrive to towns and villages with a list of families to be expelled (or possibly killed) – was mirrored by representatives of the city government, also arriving to the territory with no prior notice with a list of families that would have to leave their homes. In the same meeting, a leader from the neighborhood of Esfuerzos de Paz reported that all 26 homes in the sector of Buenaventura received notice they would be removed as part of the Barrios Sostenibles intervention in that neighborhood – despite the fact that the municipality would not share the risk studies, the complete plans for the sector, or the resettlement terms.

For residents of Medellín – and particularly, but not exclusively, those who have already experienced violent expulsions from their places of origin in regions experiencing severe socio-environmental conflicts – the possibility of being displaced from their new homes generates a range of intersecting risks, including the interruption of social and support networks, loss of assets in the homes they have built in their new neighborhoods, as well as the psychological impacts of being forcibly uprooted once again. The impacts of conflict- and development-induced displacement have been widely documented and shown to include impoverishment (Cernea 1996; Desmond 2013; Rajagopal 2001), adverse physical and mental health outcomes (Goessling 2010; Good 1996; Kedia 2009; Cao, Xi & Hwang 2012), and violations to social, cultural and economic rights (Escobar 2008; Narula 2013). Relocation can also expose the resettled to new environments of conflict and physical violence (Interview Humberto Caballero 14 July 2014).

Environmental Risks

It remains important to note that in Comuna 8, while the impact of development- and conflict-induced displacement each affect hundreds of residents, the importance of environmental risk
management and disaster-induced displacement is not, nor is it perceived to be, insignificant. Two of
the Aburrá Valley’s ten largest landslides in history have occurred in Comuna 8, including the 1987
Villa Tina landslide, which left 500 people dead. Since then, smaller events have continued to pose
risk for residents. With the risk studies informing the 2014 POT indicating there are 5,285
households in mitigable risk zones and 1,026 in non-mitigable risk zones in Comuna 8, concern for
adequate environmental risk management and mitigation also appears prominently in the Planning
Council’s plans and other publications, as described earlier (PDL 2008; Mesa de Desplazados & Mesa
de Vivienda 2014a; Mesa de Desplazados & Mesa de Vivienda 2014b). Rather than contesting or de-
prioritizing environmental risk per se, community planning documents request and demand
municipal technical support in identifying risk and carrying out management interventions. Instead,
district-level engagement with the issue in and of itself appears more prominently in conflicts over
transparency and consistency in risk management planning action.

Residents of these zones not only face exposure to natural hazards, but also risks posed by urban
conflict and development projects that threaten to displace or resettle them once again. In this
context, the phenomenon of urban displacement represents one facet of what is often a continuum
of conflict-, environment-, and/or development-related displacements, and all three of these drivers
of displacement play out across the territory of Comuna 8 to shape residents’ more holistic
perceptions of risk than those found in formal municipal documents.

Transparency: Risk Communication and Trust

A central point of contention over municipal intervention in Comuna 8 is transparency around
environmental risk studies, prioritization schemes, and the decision-making process underpinning
State intervention in zones of high risk. While the risk communication literature focuses on the
social interactions that influence credibility and trust in sharing risk information (Kasperson et al.
1988), it does not fully account for the anchoring of risk perceptions through history and routines in
space and place (Auyero & Switsun 2008). Additionally, based on transparency conflicts discussed
below, I argue that in the context of Comuna 8, traditional frameworks of risk communication fail
to consider how the use of risk as a political tool for pursing development (in addition to a social
construction and a probabilistic calculation of impact from hazard) challenge understandings of
trust-building between neighborhood- and city-level actors. Where environmental risk designation
and development aims are tightly intertwined, improved risk communication on its own is insufficient to get to the root of distrust. Rather, transparency in risk designation in addition to increased community control in urban and community development decision making both become key components.

Municipal efforts at improving risk communication and transparency manifested in two ways during my fieldwork. First, risk management professionals from the Planning Department met with community members to run a series of educational sessions about different forms of geological and hydrological hazards common in Medellín, ways to identify imminent disaster events, as well as how the Planning Department mitigates these risks (19 July 2014). At the end of this meeting, the lead technician arranged for a guided walkabout through Comuna 8 to look for and identify areas of concern along with the residents in attendance. While these efforts at risk communication are intended to create space for interaction and understanding between residents and risk management professionals, this particular event was very poorly attended, with only six to seven residents present, and with a low level of actual engagement and dialogue.

Additionally, beginning in the mid-1990s, as the municipality made risk management advances through new integrated prevention and response systems, the mayoral administration also attempted to decentralize risk management practice to the community level. The Comités Barrales de Emergencia (Neighborhood Emergency Committees) were created as groups of local volunteers acting as the primary bodies of interface between the community and public risk management agencies, and trained by the municipality to identify and monitor hazards and risks, craft district-level Emergency Response Plans, and act as first responders to adverse events (Interview Laura Mesa, Comités Barrales de Emergencia founder, 17 July 2014). To this degree, the Comités Barrales de Emergencia have played a role in increasing risk communication between the city government and Comuna 8 residents. According to Laura Mesa, current director of the municipality’s Social and Political Participation Program, and founder of the Comités, members of the Comités “are excellent mediators” between residents and the municipality (Interview 17 July 2014). However, while the program seeks to increase community ownership of the risk management process and situate this work within neighborhood-based social networks to leverage local trust, coordinators of the Comités experience tensions in their position between city institutions and their communities, citing accusations by their
neighbors that they only serve the interests of the municipality, as well as inadequate financial and logistical support to carry out their mission from DAGRED (Focus Group, 7 August 2014).

While the Medellín Planning Department’s efforts to increase communication about environmental hazards and risk management and to include neighborhood representatives in the process of managing risk are important strides, there remains a disconnect between these endeavors and concrete, focused commitments to transparency about the EDU’s urban development decisions that have direct impacts on a household’s ability to stay in the context of large scale development. With the Cinturón Verde and Barrios Sostenibles projects underway, lack of information about which households will be affected by removal or resettlement, for what reasons, and under what terms remains a major source of contention within Comuna 8 and in the interactions between local activists and the municipality. During my fieldwork, residents explained in multiple forums how the municipality has presented them with risk maps evidencing the need for their resettlement, but has not fulfilled resident requests to view the scientific studies used to create the maps (Community Meeting 12 July 2014; Community Meeting 14 July 2014; repeated sessions of the Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política). Additionally, leaders who have submitted formal information requests to city government – which authorities are required by law to respond to within 15 days – have found their requests repeatedly delayed, misdirected within the bureaucracy, or not responded to (Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política, 11 July 2014).

This distrust over both the risk studies and what some Comuna 8 leaders perceive to be perverse intentions behind risk designations becomes heightened in the context of contested large-scale urban development initiatives underway in Comuna 8. As further demonstrated below, where development values and visions do not align, better communication is not sufficient to engender trust.

Socio-Spatial Inconsistencies: Shifting Equations of Risk in the Context of Development Politics

Finally, conflicts over what I call socio-spatial inconsistencies in risk designation and management emerge as further tensions between Comuna 8 leaders and municipal planners and policymakers. Rooted both in the legislative definitions of risk, hazard, and vulnerability – which have shifted overtime – as well as perceived contradictions in where zones of environmental risk and areas of
urban development investment overlap, these conflicts highlight both the power of technical arguments in defining policy problems as well as perceptions of development values in the context of vulnerability, precariousness and poverty.

Based on the evolution of definitions for risk, hazard, and vulnerability traced in Chapter 3, these definitional shifts have played a role in changes to the spatial configuration of risk zones over time. Alongside technical advances and new abilities to identify risk at a more fine-grained scale, the incorporation of an unprecedented vulnerability study into the most recent POT changed how vulnerability was conceived, and as such, which areas exposed to hazard were considered to be “high risk” (Interview Humberto Caballero, Geological Engineer, 14 July 2014). While vulnerability was largely associated with the physical precariousness of informal settlements in the late 80s and early 90s, its definition in the 2014 POT accounts for a combination of socio-economic conditions, degree of regulation, democratic and institutional fragility. This slipperiness in how vulnerability has been defined over time highlights the complexity and malleability of what contributes to risk, as well as assumptions about what factors impede resident capacity to recuperate in the aftermath of an adverse event. Additionally, there have been inconsistencies in how vulnerability has been measured and incorporated into the municipality’s calculations of risk: the 1999 POT did not measure or map vulnerability explicitly, while the 2014 vulnerability maps only showed the physical elements of vulnerability, despite the establishment of a new, broader socio-environmental definition of vulnerability in the 2014 POT (Interview Humberto Caballero, 14 July 2014).

Additionally, as discussed in Chapter 3, the revised risk categorizations in the 2014 POT still leave the majority of the risk zones in a gray area – the potential for mitigation will only be determined if and when the authorities carry out detail studies. This lingering uncertainty about the mitigation of risk in certain areas hinders resident attempts to make claims on the municipality regarding obligations to provide infrastructure and services, and also contributes to a community-level perception that risk designations are manipulated by the government.

Beyond such definitional issues that shift how risk and vulnerability are treated in public discourse and in policy, political tensions also come into play in understanding risk management inconsistencies. Maria Victoria Rivera, a planner at the Municipality of Medellín, and former coordinator of a lauded upgrading intervention in Moravia (a neighborhood built on top of a trash
dump and exposed to multiple types of environmental risk), highlighted the political barriers that impede the planner’s ability to deal with risk-related development issues as they might hope:

“If the administration promises to resettle 5,600 households in risk into new homes as part of their development plan, and after a few years they haven’t made good on that promise because the process of negotiating resettlement with the population takes a long time, they might decide they would like the process done differently in order to meet the quantitative goals they set. It creates a constant tension... I believe that civil servants have a great deal of knowledge and many capacities to do that work well, but there are also preoccupations with the preservation of their jobs – which creates a tension between the technical and the political [aspects of their work]. When an intervention doesn’t work, is it because we planned poorly? Or is it because we had to deal with both the [public’s] social expectations as well as the [politician’s] political expectations?” (Interview 14 July 2014).

Questions about these politics of development also emerge from planning texts like the city’s strategic spatial plans. The 2014 POT establishes a set of criteria for prioritizing detail studies and resettlement in different sectors (Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial, Section 5.7.1). The method considers different sectors with “risk conditions” (condiciones de riesgo) and based on different sector characteristics generates a score from 0-100, with higher scores receiving priority for further detail studies or intervention. The criteria for resettlement in risk zones uses the following prioritization scheme:

Table 2: CRITERIA FOR RESETTLEMENT PRIORITIZATION IN NON-MITIGABLE RISK ZONES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AREAS WHERE RESETTLEMENT IS ALREADY UNDERWAY</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREAS WITH PRIORITIZED RESETTLEMENTS FOR NEIGHBORHOOD UPGRADE OR STRATEGIC URBAN PROJECTS</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREAS WITH HIGH VULNERABILITY</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREAS PREVIOUSLY AFFECTED BY DISASTERS CAUSING LOSS OF HUMAN LIFE AND/OR RECURRING DISASTER EVENTS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AREAS RE-OCCUPIED AFTER A PREVIOUS RESETTLEMENT</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCENTRATIONS OF INFRASTRUCTURE EXPOSED TO THREATS</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESIDENTIAL DENSITY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRECARITY</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSENCE OF MITIGATION WORKS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: PLAN DE ORDENAMIENTO TERRITORIAL 2014, SECTION 5.7.1
After areas where resettlement processes are already underway, areas slated to receive neighborhood upgrading or strategic urban projects receive the next highest priority weight for resettlement. In the context of Medellín’s current urban development model based around large urban infrastructure projects, this point raises questions about the crossover of risk designations and areas of development interest. While these new prioritizations would supposedly hold across different mayoral administrations to perhaps lessen the interference of specific political interests in resettlement schemes – a point expressed by municipal risk management professionals in a presentation to Comuna 8 leaders (Concentrización del Gestión del Riesgo Comuna 8, 19 July 2014) – the higher weight afforded to areas that will receive strategic urban projects, even above areas previously affected by recurring disaster events and areas with large concentrations of infrastructure exposed to hazards, prompts further inquiry into how these discrepancies play out in different parts of the city.

Such discrepancies do not go unnoticed within Comuna 8. In one meeting of the Mesa de Desplazados and the Mesa de Vivienda, leaders shared several of the new 2014 risk maps that municipal representatives had provided them. As these maps were passed around, one resident called out that the highest concentration of risk areas – in and around the neighborhoods of San Antonio, Villa Tina, Las Estancias, Villa Lilliam, and Villa Turbay – is exactly where the State has construction interests for new Metrocable stations and other public space and infrastructure interventions (as reflected in Figure 5). This generated substantive and heated conversation among meeting participations about municipal intentions around the designation of risk, as well the lack of transparency. The ability to point to contradictions on a map becomes one tool for local leaders to make visible their disputes over Medellín’s current model of urban development as it affects their territory.

The three conflicts detailed in this section – normative-empirical tensions, transparency, and socio-spatial inconsistencies – demonstrate how, in addition to a condition where vulnerability and exposure to hazard intersect, risk also becomes a strategy employed in the pursuit of development goals. Decisions about how the problem of risk is defined in policy and planning circles, what information is made accessible to whom, and how areas deemed “high risk” will be intervened upon, all demonstrate the political nature of the issue and hold implications for the possibilities of trust, collaboration, and conflict resolution between stakeholders in sustainable planning.
While many scholars have explored State use of risk in ways detrimental to the interests and well-being of marginalized communities (Dooling & Simon 2012; Ghertner 2010), activists and leaders in Comuna 8 also harness the political possibilities of risk to advance their own development vision, demand greater control in risk management and development decision making, and make visible (and physical) their claims within the context of an internationally praised urban development model. Below, I discuss three major strategies that district-level stakeholders employ towards these ends.

**District-level Strategies: Contesting, Reframing & Invoking Risk**

In the context of these conflicts over the prioritization, communication, and designation of risk(s), Comuna 8 leaders engage multiple strategies to build resistance and to support a development
agenda addressing risk in ways aligned with local development values. Here, counter planning, utilization of formal legal channels, and knowledge and capacity building form a constellation of actions that address these conflicts at distinct geographic and administrative scales.

**Counter Planning**

Counter planning carried out in partnership with different academic and research entities represents one important strategy for redefining, reframing, and appropriating risk in Comuna 8. The *Plan de Desarrollo Local*; a participatory action research initiative that produced an “Agenda for Community Security;” and neighborhood-level planning around self-growth management and food security each demonstrate different ways that organized attempts at local planning address risk-development conflicts.

**The Local Development Plan**

The *Plan de Desarrollo Local* (PDL) represents the key counter planning pursuit within the territory, and breaks from a narrow focus on environmental risk mitigation to frame risk interventions in a more holistic way. The Plan articulates three strategic areas of focus: Sustainability, based in the notion of integral human development; Habitability, based in maintaining biodiversity and eliminating risks through territorial ordering; and Social Fabric, focused on the construction of citizenship. Each strategic area is then broken down into a series of specific objectives to be addressed through proposed programs or interventions.

In the second strategic principle, the PDL describes “habitat” as something that goes “beyond a reality that is given or natural, it is the product of a configuration in which humans intervene [in the environment] directly and actively” (PDL, 52). This framing demonstrates the role of social action in creating and shaping the “natural” environment and the need for an integral set of socio-environmental investments to accompany technical risk mitigation in order to work towards the goal of a “territory without risk” (PDL, 52). The plan outlines interventions for geologic risk studies as well as land recuperation and mitigation, but links these programs with others focused on local environmental management, socially just spatial and land use planning; upgrading and housing development with on-site resettlement requirements to ensure dignified housing within the territory; as well as access to services, transport and public facilities (PDL, 52-58). Within the PDL, landslide
and flood risk management becomes only one component of this larger project of “habitability,” which addresses risk under the umbrella of the right to remain within the territory with a dignified standard of living. Here, this tension offers insight into local understandings of what comprises risk: not only does the Comuna 8 Planning Council consider geologic stability and other environmental factors, but also the social and political forces and interventions that shape that environment.

Partnerships also play an important role in the counter planning process, and the proposals in the PDL have been further developed and supported by collaborating academic institutions such as the Universidad Nacional de Colombia-Medellín. Within the School of Architecture, faculty in the Urban and Regional Studies program along with the Habitat program have been key allies in both providing technical planning support as well as legitimizing the work of community planners in Comuna 8 within the public sphere. Such collaborations – including some with foreign institutions including University College London, Columbia University and MIT – have assisted the Comuna 8 Planning Council in carrying out over 25 technical, social and political diagnostics that have informed their planning work (Interview Jairo Maya, Mesa Ambiental, 18 July 2014). Additionally, collaborating universities have created alternative design proposals that the Planning Council has used when advocating for the types of housing and infrastructure investment (UCL 2013; MIT DUSP + UNAL 2014); as well as independent analyses of risk zones within the Comuna that challenge some of the municipality’s designations (GSAPP 2012). Through district level mobilization to articulate priorities and partnership building with academic institutions for methodological and design support for implementation, the counter planning process that Comuna 8 leaders continue to engage throughout the 10-year projection of the PDL prove important for broadening the discussion of what constitutes risk and effective risk management response.

Action Research & Human Security Frameworks

University collaborations carried out within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework have also been important for challenging a purely environmental approach to risk. One initiative coordinated within the Observatorio de Seguridad Humana Medellín (Medellín Observatory of Human Security), or OSHM, a research center at the Universidad de Antioquia, sought to prioritize a range of vulnerabilities and risks within a framework of human security in Comuna 8 and three other districts across the city. Community researchers worked with OSHM to develop their areas of focus and
methodologies for understanding the human needs in their respective districts over six months, and then engaged in ten months of research and knowledge exchange between their respective groups and OSHM staff. As Temis Angarita, Project Manager at OSHM, explained,

“The project was based on a triangular framework focused on human security, human rights, and development. Community groups in Comuna 1, Comuna 13, Comuna 6 and Comuna 8, in conjunction with the Observatório de Seguridad Humana Medellin, worked with a methodology focused on ‘security from below’ and used their results to construct an “Agenda for Community Security.” The intent was to place a greater focus on a diverse security needs not addressed in policy” (Interview 1 July 2014).

Working from the position that in situations of chronic violence, “security” can only be achieved if a particular set of social, political and environmental components are addressed in an integral way, community-based researchers identified eight dimensions for focus: personal, political, economic, community, food, health, and environmental securities, as well as security of women. These were then consolidated into a framework for analyzing and acting upon the nuance of vulnerabilities, challenges, and potentials across different populations in different districts.

As Comuna 8 is the district with the second highest population of displaced persons in Medellín, community-based researchers identified the desplazados as a key population for focus in the territory, and determined priority areas for policy and investment to be economic security (access to dignified work providing for all basic needs); food security (access to quality nutrition); and political security (autonomy from manipulation and cooptation of political processes by armed groups) (OSMH 2014). With the largest populations of displaced persons in Comuna 8 also living along the fringes, where the municipality has designated the highest concentrations of zones of high environmental risk, the Agenda for Community Security demonstrates the normative-empirical tensions that emerge when prioritizing vulnerabilities, insecurities and risk in socio-environmental context (Fischer 2003). Rather than pointing to environmental vulnerabilities as most prominent within those neighborhoods, as municipal planners have done, the community researchers’ focus on economic, food and political security demonstrates the value-rational understandings of what constitutes the most prominent types of risk for these groups based on their backgrounds, trajectories of migration, and current socio-economic situation.
In the case of the Agenda of Community Security, the reframing of what might be considered ‘risks’ in terms of ‘human (in)security’ allows for both a holistic understanding of their interrelation, and more explicitly highlights the political and anthropogenic roots of vulnerabilities in Medellín neighborhoods. Using policy-oriented reports that highlight these insecurities not as the result of an interplay between naturally occurring hazard and structural vulnerability, but instead as phenomena actively created by direct action, researchers convey their highly political nature. In contrasting with the treatment of risk in the realist tradition (Wisener et al., 2004), which acknowledges the structural production of unequal risk distribution yet fails to account for the role of direct human action in generating risk for marginalized populations, the human security framing in part echoes Fischer’s (2003) notion of normative-empirical tensions in addressing vulnerabilities and managing risks. In constructing an alternative framework through the Agenda of Community Security that allows decision makers to understand the nuanced and diverse situations of vulnerability and insecurity (or risk) faced by diverse populations across different districts, community-based researchers challenge the ability of technical experts to effectively analyze local needs in complex social and political terrain, and prioritize appropriate policy interventions accordingly.

At the same time, this work on human security also takes us beyond the idea of these normative-empirical frictions, to entirely reframe issues the municipality or other planning bodies may consider ‘risks.’ In so doing, the community researchers imply that environmental risk management, as well as any other intervention around the vulnerabilities and insecurities highlighted in the Agenda, is not an end in and of itself. Rather, it is one element of the greater goal of integral human security and development in the territory, articulated by community members and lifted up and given greater reach through collaboration with, and support from a respective academic institution in the city.

In addition to the support and visibility that OHSM lends to community efforts, the PAR approach itself proves an important method for community members dealing with the politicized framing and designation of risk, and as such, deserves a bit more attention here. Structured as a problem-focused inquiry that values lived experience of the problem being addressed as well as ownership of the process by those it will most impact, PAR intends to transform the established distribution of power between those traditionally conceived as ‘researchers,’ ‘decision-makers’, and marginalized groups. By rejecting an objectivist approach to social science and situating itself in the realm of the political, PAR not only aims to achieve workable solutions to problems identified by a group or community,
but also seeks to increase critical consciousness, problem solving capacity, and political agency to secure desired outcomes at – and from – the margins (Freire 1970; Reid & Frisby 2008; Greenwood & Levin 2007; others).

In the context of contested risk and development, PAR becomes an important method for counter planning in two senses. First, its premises counter the scientific-rational lens on environmental risk promoted by many planners and technicians, and instead allow participants in the PAR process to engage with the political nature of risk’s designation and use through exploring their own positionality and immediate local context – what Freire (1970) has referred to as “naming the world.” According to Temis Angarita, Project Manager at OSHM, “the most important outcome of the process was the political empowerment that community researchers achieved through the process of recognizing their own needs and the needs of the other populations involved” (Interview 1 July 2014). Secondly, the collaborative nature of PAR methods, which challenge traditional power-knowledge relationships between governing or elite institutions and individuals or communities with lived expertise, has the potential to generate better-informed local planning decisions and contribute to a planning culture based in co-production. As Carlos Velázquez, leader of the Mesa de Vivienda explained in a community leadership class, PAR is an important tool for Comuna 8 leaders to utilize when engaging different neighborhood issues. Emphasizing that “A good leader must be a good researcher,” Carlos attested to the ways such consciousness building focused on increasing local problem-solving capacity is a key component for both constructing appropriate plans for the territory, and for garnering the evidence to legitimize counter planning pursuits when confronting the authority imbued in municipal plans (Velázquez, Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política, 13 June 2014).

Small-scale neighborhood land management

Finally, at the neighborhood-level, leaders of the local residents associations (Junta de Acción Comunal) engage in smaller scale counter planning practices to contest justifications of, and resist threats posed to livelihoods posed by, the Cinturón Verde Metropolitano. In response to the EDU’s argument for the Cinturón Verde’s need in managing informal growth, some neighborhood associations have organized to control their own growth. In the neighborhood of El Pacífico, a settlement on the extreme fringe first settled in the late 1990s by migrants from the Pacific region of Colombia, the Junta president explained the underpinnings of community consensus to disallow any
further settlement. El Pacífico experiences one of the most complex property situations in Comuna 8, which has generated a number of serious issues in terms of sanitation and basic services, but also a strongly mobilized core of neighborhood leaders. With one portion of the settlement existing outside the official urban growth boundary, one portion in a designated area of high environmental risk, and another portion in what is officially designated as a nature preserve (Community Meeting 14 July 2014; Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política 12 July 2014), El Pacífico is largely unconnected to potable water systems, cannot receive official upgrading, and remains in constant risk of removal.

As I sat with Betty, the Junta president in El Pacífico, on her front porch overlooking the neighborhood, I asked if families were still arriving. She explained, “No, the Junta made the decision not to let any new houses be constructed here.” Looking out at the densely packed residences tucked between steep upper slopes, I commented that it seemed there was little room left, to which Betty told me,

“No, no. There is plenty of room for more, but with such little water already, more settlement would make it even scarcer. It comes only three hours a day [from the tanks collecting rainwater up the hill] and it’s not potable. But also, with the imaginary line drawn by the new POT [the urban growth boundary], more houses means more chance for them to clear us out. It doesn’t just create risk of eviction for the people in those new homes—it puts the whole neighborhood at risk of removal. [The municipality] thinks it needs to manage growth, but we’ve already been doing it” (Interview 5 August 2014).

By managing their growth through neighborhood governance bodies, residents of some neighborhoods in Comuna 8 like El Pacífico are engaging in a small-scale form of counter planning and land management. In the context of municipal efforts to control growth through urban mega-project development, this practice of neighborhood-led growth management—though not part of any planning document—still represents a strategy to secure local development interests not currently accounted for or deemed legitimate in the POT nor in the EDU’s plan for the Cinturón Verde—namely the aspiration for development that meets basic needs without the threat of displacement.

Planning for food security represents another form of alternative territorial ordering that residents of Comuna 8 engage in to resist threats the Cinturón Verde poses to their livelihoods and construct a development vision that values socio-cultural and economic practices of the comunas’s large migrant
population. In his ethnography of social movements in the Colombian Pacific, Escobar (2008) explains of the significance of food security in the context of violence and displacement in the country: “The focus on food security – or food autonomy, in the term preferred by activists – came about as a result of displacement in recent years, since food security and self-subsistence are seen as minimum guarantees to hold on to the territories” (147). Where armed actors sought to drive displacement and achieve territorial control by coercively isolating communities and impeding their economic subsistence, food security through agricultural production and cooperative development became “a way to resist in place” (Escobar 2008: 301). The context of Comuna 8 recalls this logic to a certain extent, as a sizable population of desplazados attempts to resist another experience of displacement from their current homes. Where opportunities for income generating activities that ensure food and economic security are still out of reach for many residents (PDL 2008) the expansion of a network of community gardens along the upper fringe of the community becomes both a source of nutrition and subsistence for families experiencing socio-economic vulnerability, as well as a cultural practice with the potential to strengthen the social fabric of households facing the socio-economic risks posed by municipal development projects (Interview Gisela Quintero 1 July).

In the context of a municipal planning culture that has gained international renown for its focus on interventions in historically marginalized areas, counter planning becomes a crucial means to work within the framework of Medellin’s current approach to planning, while also attempting to reshape the social and spatial interventions that manifest at the district level. In pursuing counter planning from diverse angles – including integral development planning for the district, community-defined agendas for policy intervention, and neighborhood-level practices focused on locally-led land management and strengthening social, cultural and economic fabric – local leaders and residents simultaneously contest how risk is framed and used in municipal plans, and generate their own approach to risk that aligns with their vision for more just development in Comuna 8.

Utilizing Formal Legal Channels and Communication Modes

Utilizing formal legal channels and employing formal modes of communication with government represents an important strategy for demanding transparency in municipal risk management and development interventions. Rather than disengaging from municipal processes perceived as antagonistic, the Comuna 8 Planning Council’s communication of what emerges from local counter
planning, in languages and formats deemed legitimate by municipal stakeholders, becomes one means to hold the City accountable. However, despite the State’s legal responsibilities and activist claim-making that invokes constitutional rights and responsibilities, the utilization of formal legal channels is often not sufficient to achieve transparency around the designation and use of risk in territorial development.

Right to Information

One of the tools used extensively by local activists, albeit with mixed results, is the Derecho de Petición. A legal tool available to Colombian citizens under the 1991 constitution, the Derecho de Petición is a formal mechanism for soliciting information that the relevant public agency is required to respond to within 15 days of receipt. The Derecho de Petición provides both documentation of citizen concerns as well as a legal record of the information requested and delivered.

When I arrived in Comuna 8 during June 2014, the Comuna 8 Planning Council was awaiting a long-overdue response to a Derecho de Petición requesting that the city’s Department of Planning respond to how the Planning Council’s 10 proposals for the 2014 POT would be taken into account. During this time, a leader of the Mesa de Vivienda explained that upon following up with the city after the 15-day period, the city informed them that the response had ended up in the wrong department (despite being clearly addressed to Planning Department), hence the delay. Finally, on July 1st, several weeks after their Derecho de Petición was originally submitted, the Planning Council received a response, not to the solicitation they originally submitted, but to an identical petition submitted on their behalf by a human rights-focused legal firm. During a meeting of the Mesa de Vivienda and the Mesa de Desplazados, a local leader recounting the response they received through their legal firm allies explained,

“The Planning Department, the EDU, and DAGRED [the Risk Management Agency] all try to clear themselves of responsibility. The Derecho de Petición says that DAGRED and the EDU have completed studies but have yet to give them to the Planning Department. But in our requests to the EDU, we were told that this information is all in the hands of the Planning Department” (14 July 2014).

In addition to stating that much of the data requested lay within different agencies, the response also listed several risk studies that residents could only access by going in person to the Planning Department’s documentation center, where they could consult the relevant studies in the office
(Response to *Derecho de Petición*, 1 July 2014). However, members of the Planning Council explained their past experiences with this process were highly cumbersome; if they were granted access upon arrival (in the past the office has sometimes been unable to find the requested studies), it can take hours to access, read and understand the copies of the studies, which they are not always able to take with them.

In utilizing a rights discourse and engaging legal mechanisms to demand the information they are entitled under the constitution, leaders simultaneously engage in acts of resistance and push forward with attempts to obtain the information they need to consolidate greater local autonomy in territorial planning. As Jairo Maya, a leader of the *Mesa Ambiental* explained:

> “We need to build critical awareness in the community [*concientizar la comunidad*] – we must educate [*formar*], organize, monitor and evaluate. There’s fear in resisting, because of what’s at stake, but we can’t subjugate ourselves to these powerful interests. We have to build the awareness that the law and the constitution protect us. We have to utilize these legal standards and the constitution to defend our rights” (Interview 18 July 2014).

However, the shortcomings of this legal approach illuminated in the example of the *Derecho de Petición*’s repeated delay or the municipality’s non-response (something that members of the Planning Council explained has happened on many occasions) – demonstrate that claim making through legal channels is not sufficient on its own. In this case, partnership building with a legal firm working pro bono – that is, an entity able and willing to provide greater leverage in holding the municipality accountable – was key.

**Mirroring municipal modes of communication**

In addition to engaging formal legal processes, local activists also seek to mirror formal modes of communication employed by the municipal government in order to deliver information about the impact of planning interventions on the ground. Here the “*comunicado*” – or the press release – becomes a tool the Planning Council and the *Mesas* regularly employ for building awareness of pressing issues in a format well known to and utilized by city government itself. Distributed to government agencies as well as civil society groups, academic institutions, and local and international human rights organizations, these publications have been a consistent means of building citizen
knowledge, keeping partners and stakeholders systematically informed, and placing pressure on the municipality for more transparent development interventions.

One such example is the release of the May 18 Consulta Popular results. This community-organized vote, in which 98.6% of 2,221 residents voted to approve the Planning Council’s 10-point agenda for desired revisions to the 2014 POT under debate at the time, was critical for establishing the local legitimacy of the Planning Council’s demands on the municipality. Based on the knowledge generated through three years of community planning work as well as 25 technical and planning support documents from local and partnering organizations, the publication seeks to “put [the community’s planning agenda] in discussion and debate with planning authorities to specify how it will be integrated into the 2014 POT and the city model, as well as in land use classifications, strategic projects and the programs of the next three municipal administrations” (Resultados Consulta Popular Propuestas Comunitarias Bordes Comuna 8 Al POT de Medellín, 2014). The dissemination of the voting results was crucial for making the municipality aware of strong community backing for the Planning Council’s alternative development agenda, particularly as it related to issues of integral development without displacement.

Prominent in the text were demands for an alternative approach to environmental risk management, revealing both a desire to integrate ‘expert’ knowledge into the community planning process, albeit in a way aligned with local planning values and the district’s development vision. The second agenda item in the press release, titled “Reclassification of Risk Zones and a Plan for Risk Management and Mitigation,” makes a set of demands around existing and new risk studies and district-appropriate forms of mitigation and management:

“[The city] must disseminate the detailed land studies from different neighborhoods and settlements, and continue to carry out risk studies... in all sectors of the comuna to determine the most adequate land classifications. We need those studies shared immediately in order to begin debating and proposing alternatives in relation to the comuna’s settlement trends and the location of future housing units... The greatest priority must be the development of risk mitigation infrastructure, including the construction of retention walls and the paving of pathways and stairs (the true ‘camino de la vida’ digna,” canalization for storm water and sewage, structural

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1 Here, “camino de la vida” – translated as “pathway of life” – refers to the paved walking trails intended to circle the Medellín valley as part of the Jardín Circunvalar project. By including the word “digna” – or dignified – the Planning Council indicates their belief that dignified development does not follow the urban macro-project model being pursued by the municipality.
reinforcement of homes, and construction of aqueducts in precarious areas. The Plan Bordes (EDU, 2009) determined that to reduce risk in the 70 hectares of mitigable and non-mitigable zones in Comuna 8, they would need a budget of approximately 64 billion pesos, which currently could surpass 80 billion pesos, to benefit the neighborhoods [of Comuna 8]” (Resultados Consulta Popular Propuestas Comunitarias Bordes Comuna 8 al POT de Medellín, 18 May 2014).

This statement proves interesting for revealing both the Planning Council’s recognition of the value of scientific expertise in identifying and mitigating environmental risk, and also its clear positioning against the current model of city development pursued within a discursive framework of risk prevention. The request that the municipality move forward with further risk studies – in detail and across all neighborhoods in the district – demonstrates that residents do not dispute risk studies or scientific knowledge in and of themselves. Rather, it critically questions where the studies are carried out, and why; how results are shared, or not; and what type of intervention will ensue. In demanding that studies be carried out universally and made public, the Planning Council seeks to safeguard against ambiguities in definition and designation that facilitate the use of risk as a tool to implement development projects contrary to district-level planning visions. Additionally, in referencing the EDU’s 2009 Plan Bordes, which provided cost estimates for mitigation in risk areas along the urban fringe, the Planning Council demonstrates its recognition of data and information generated by the EDU in its development pursuits, opening space for further dialogue and engagement.

At the same time, by highlighting their conviction that risk mitigation infrastructure in the form of networked retention walls, paved pathways and staircases throughout the comuna would constitute a true “Camino de La Vida Digna” (emphasis mine), the Planning Council also makes clear its position that the EDU’s “Camino de La Vida” – the network of walking and hiking paths in the Jardín Circunvalar’s mobility corridor – is not only an inadequate solution in risk management needs, but also an affront to what they consider dignified development in a district struggling with a wide range of human security issues.

Lack of transparency, and particularly the use of risk maps unaccompanied by the studies used to inform them, was also denounced in a July 2014 comunicado written by Comuna 8’s Mesa de Desplazados and Mesa de Vivienda and sent directly to various city agencies and human rights organizations. Addressing several community concerns with early phases of the Barrios Sostenibles upgrading project that is institutionally situated within the Cinturón Verde project, the press release
highlighted the municipality’s use of environmental risk as justification for resident resettlement without providing any necessary evidence:

“The Administration cannot come here and say with a map, with a red stain [over our homes], that we are in risk. We need the detailed risk studies that underpin them – that is to say, the technical justification for why we must leave – but we still have not received a technical argument. We are waiting for our response to the Derecho de Petición we submitted to the EDU regarding the updated studies, and after that, we will be able determine if parts of our neighborhoods must stay or go. But until we can count on these studies we cannot accept being told that we have leave. We need the complete studies endorsed by the Planning Department and an engineering firm, and not an unsupported map.” (Mesa de Desplazados and Mesa de Vivienda y Servicios Públicos Domiciliarios, 2014a)

Again, by referencing desired involvement from both the Planning Department and engineering firms, the Comuna 8 Planning Council demonstrates its openness and commitment to working with technical experts in managing environmental risk. At the same time, however, by publicizing the EDU’s lack of follow-through on their legal obligations to provide the requested information and describing the City’s use of unsupported risk maps to move forward with development interventions, the press release pushes back on the process and objectives of municipal interventions in the territory, alluding to the perception that maps are in fact being misused toward particular development ends. The theme of how risk maps are used and the distrust they generate among residents was a recurring theme not only in Planning Council press releases, but as I will demonstrate below, in several forums for community organizing as well.

By engaging in formal legal claim-making and mirroring modes of communication employed by the municipality, the Comuna 8 Planning Council seeks to contest risk and articulate local development visions in ways deemed legitimate by municipal stakeholders. Through their demands for accountability around environmental risk designations, the Planning Council demonstrates that local leaders and residents do not contest expert knowledge in and of itself; in fact, they demonstrate their need for technical support to achieve the objective of risk mitigation. Rather, the greater issue at stake is transparency regarding the production and utilization of such technical expertise, and the decision-making process of what types of interventions will be used to address the problems that are diagnosed. With trust and credibility in question, conflicts over transparency highlight citywide need for effective risk communication, improved mechanisms to ensure legal accountability, and
engagement that goes beyond resident participation to co-production of development visions more broadly.

Knowledge, Capacity & Resistance Building

Finally, community knowledge and capacity building initiatives in Comuna 8 provide a crucial base for mobilizing residents to resist urban development projects justified by risk, as well as articulating collective visions for a more just local development. While there is a wealth of community groups and organizations focused on social, environmental and cultural development in the Comuna – over 120 according a district-led organizational mapping effort (Corporación Cultural Diáfora 2013) – here I focus on class sessions from the Escuela de Formación Socio-política (School for Socio-Political Education) and meetings of the Mesa de Vivienda and the Mesa de Desplazados as two prominent spaces for organizing resistance through knowledge and capacity building for several reasons. First and foremost, the activities of the Escuela de Formación Socio-política and the Mesas are of particular interest to this case for their focus on planning and development specifically. In addition, their reach across neighborhood boundaries and thematic areas as well as their interactions with municipal government places them in a unique position to negotiate development needs in district in relation to larger urban development models in Medellín. With evidence from these community meetings and forums for leadership development, I attempt to demonstrate how knowledge and capacity building around city planning frameworks is used to help residents identify and resist the use of risk toward ends inconsistent with local development visions.

Knowledge, Capacity & Leadership Development

During my fieldwork, the Escuela de Formación Socio-Política was a key space for knowledge, capacity and resistance building among diverse communities of local leaders. Organized by the Corporación Cultural Diáfora, a community organization focused on arts, culture and citizenship development in the comuna, along with members of the Comuna 8 Planning Council, the Escuela Sócio-Política emerged as a programmatic intervention from the Plan de Desarrollo Local, with the objective to help leaders “acquire the necessary competencies to insert themselves in the political process, the exercise of democracy, and the development of their communities” (PDL 2008, p.60). The multi-week course was funded with participatory budgeting money allocated to the district, and met every Friday
afternoon in the Biblioteca La Ladera – one of Medellín’s well-known library parks constructed under the Fajardo administration.

The course content focused on the political economy of urban development in Medellín, the construction of alternative development visions, as well as more targeted knowledge building about municipal administrative structures, planning processes, and the 2014 POT revision as it applied to Comuna 8. In several class sessions, instructors or participants raised issue with the politics of risk designations and management and these issues were explored through critical consciousness building as a means to organizing resistance. Modules focused on territorial planning and the political nature of cartography proved especially relevant for building consciousness and resistance in the context of risk-related development disputes.

In a session of the Escuela Sócio-Política focused on territorial planning, instructor Carlos Velázquez opened class with the question: “¿Quién ordena el territorio?” or, “Who orders our territory?” Participants called out a number of actors: the State (at the national, departmental, and municipal levels); private sector actors (developers, corporations, multilateral development banks); “experts” (namely those providing technical support from within local universities); community residents (and local organizations); and armed groups (which divide and reorder territory by establishing invisible gang boundaries and driving forced displacements). When asked who played the most important role, the class came to agreement that while all of these actors play important roles, above all, it is residents of the territory. Exercises and discussions such as this played an important role throughout the class in changing the narrative of what urban planning is, and who has the authority to plan. By building a consciousness of residents’ collective agency to define and shape their own development, initiatives like the Escuela Sócio-Política help lay the groundwork for residents to demand state services and technical support in areas including but not exclusive to risk management – within a process that places greater value on local visions for how these interventions should be carried out.

Working from this foundation, other units focused specifically on understanding the political nature of planning documents – and particularly the subjectivity of mapping and the role of these subjective representations in supporting different planning goals. Under the facilitation of two graduate students in the Urban and Regional Planning program at the National University of Colombia-Medellín, one workshop situated planning and cartographic theory in the context of lived territorial
experience, and involved both analysis of municipal maps and participatory mapping exercises to illustrate a map's power to shape accepted realities and implement territorial interventions. This study of cartography led to critical questioning of why risk studies were carried out in certain areas of Comuna 8 and not others, why maps are presented as fact without the supporting technical studies that informed them, and why, if areas along the upper fringe of the district were designated as non-mitigable risk zones, were large-scale recreational infrastructure and public facilities being constructed in these same areas. Criticism of the Cinturón Verde Metropolitano as a “risk management” intervention focused on enclosures for public space rather than mitigation projects in existing residential areas occupied a good deal of the class time – and arose again and again in subsequent weeks. At the end of that afternoon, Carlos Velázquez closed the session by imploring residents to demand the risk studies behind the maps if they are threatened with eviction and resettlement.

Using these efforts at critical awareness and knowledge building as a base, course facilitators then focused on developing specific capacities useful in struggles over local development. These ranged from sessions focused on producing media and communications reports to other on writing an effective derecho de petición for making claims on or demanding information from the municipality, among others. Finally, the Escuela Sócio-Política represented an important space for strengthening social ties among leaders working in different neighborhoods and in organizations or groups with diverse thematic focuses. By complementing class sessions with weekend trips and retreats, the project sought greater unity among a diverse set of leaders sometimes situated within different or competing social political arrangements within the district.

**Mobilizing Resistance through the Mesas**

Regular meetings of the Mesas also represent crucial spaces for cross-neighborhood organizing and building resident resistance to risk- and development-induced displacement. During my fieldwork, the Mesa de Vivienda and the Mesa de Desplazados were devoting most of their energy to organizing resistance to the revision of the 2014 POT then under review and debate across the city. I find several accounts from these meetings to be illustrative of how risk is contested and how local leaders mobilize resistance around it.
On an early July evening in 2014, the Casa Vivero – a community meeting space high on the comuna’s fringe in the Pinares de Oriente neighborhood – filled slowly with neighborhood representatives from across the district. The Casa Vivero serves as a home base for many of Comuna 8’s Mesas, as well as for educational activities and other community events. After many meetings, the kitchen adjacent to the gathering hall is abuzz preparing a group snack or meal, and on some occasions waist-deep pots simmer over wood fires on the patio, serving up cupfuls of sweet rice pudding, or sancocho, a traditional meat and root vegetable stew. It is both a space for the Planning Council’s strategic work, and for strengthening relationships and community social fabric.

This particular evening brought together leaders serving as interlocutors between their respective neighborhoods and the EDU for the implementation of the Barrios Sostenibles upgrading program, as well as members of several of the Mesas and other interested residents. Facilitated by coordinators of the Mesa de Vivienda and the Mesa de Desplazados the meeting focused on updates about the Barrios Sostenibles process in the neighborhoods of Pinares de Oriente/Villatina, Golondrinas, and Esfuerzos da Paz, and the issue of areas of high risk came quickly to the fore.

The meeting opened with representatives sharing reports of the socio-economic diagnostics carried out by the EDU, which revealed severe indicators in many areas: in one sector, for example, within the population of 350 residents, only 3 individuals had any higher education or professional qualifications. Gisela Quintero of the Mesa de Desplazados reemphasized the importance of Mejoramiento Integral de Barrios (Integral Neighborhood Upgrading) in these areas considering the socio-economic situation, and Carlos Velásquez of the Mesa de Vivienda reminded those in attendance that securing Mejoramiento Integral de Barrios has never been the result of a benevolent State, but rather the result of ongoing organizing, struggle, and effective leverage of participatory budgeting funds. Due to the Planning Council’s ability to organize the district and channel these funds effectively, five of the eight upgrading interventions currently planned in Medellín, under the Garavito administration’s brand of Barrios Sostenibles, are to occur in Comuna 8.

Once upgrading investment is secured, however, new challenges arise for residents, particularly in respect to risk designations and the threat of displacement without clear commitments on the terms of resettlement. A leader representing the neighborhood of Esfuerzos de Paz explained that since the last meeting of the Mesas, Barrios Sostenibles representatives arrived and explained that everyone in
one sub-section of the neighborhood would be removed. Presenting only risk maps as justification, they did not provide local leaders copies of the diagnostics carried out in that sector, nor did they share the detail risk studies. As she explained that all of the houses within that area would need to be removed – her own, included – the coordinator of another neighborhood housing committee began to argue that she had given in and succumbed to co-optation by urban development authorities.

As the verbal exchange hardened in tone and volume, a member of the *Mesa Ambiental* urged everyone to remember that the municipality was using opaque information about removals in order to divide the community and it was crucial to support one another in the challenges arising in their respective sectors: “They come here using maps, but not the studies behind them. This is coming between us. We have to respect our autonomy as leaders in our own neighborhoods, but we also make up the same Comuna” (Community Meeting, 12 July 2014). Following on this, one of the meeting facilitators implored that when residents are confronted by municipal representatives saying they live in a risk area and will be resettled, they must demand to see the studies before anything else: “If there’s no study – what they are telling you is false!” (Community Meeting, 12 July 2014).

Encouraging residents to demand the studies informing risk maps and focusing on consciousness and capacity building for collective claim-making across neighborhood boundaries where common themes in different spaces for organizing resistance.

The *Escuela Sóciopolítica* and *Mesa* meetings represented important forums to facilitate knowledge building and critical awareness around high stakes development issues within the territory. As part of their organizing efforts, this becomes a base for encouraging and coordinating resistance to the political use of risk and disputed development aims, and a launching point from which leaders learn to more effectively engage the language and frameworks of municipal planning experts and legal authorities. As the *Escuela de Formación Socio-política* came to a close, members of the Planning Council were in the process of structuring another course that would provide deeper understanding of the 2014 POT that was then being debated in Medellín, as well as help Comuna 8 leaders network with community groups and social movements in other parts of the city. As Carlos Velázquez, coordinator of the *Mesa de Vivienda* and both *Escuelas* explained before the first session of the *Escuela del POT*, its purpose is for the community to educate itself about the technical and normative aspects of the POT’s formulation and place this within the framework of lived experience of the territory, so “everyone is able to debate these issues effectively with the state” (Carlos Velázquez, 12 July 2014).
Beyond producing counter plans that frame risk in differential ways and challenging the municipality's lack of transparency through formal legal channels, mobilizing resistance among a wide network of leaders represents a key facet of the work carried out by the Comuna 8 Planning Council and the various Mesas in the district. Knowledge building around urban planning frameworks and mechanisms, critical consciousness raising around the political economy of urban development, and capacity building around specific skills and processes that help residents to insert themselves into political and planning processes, all help residents contest development projects antagonistic to local needs and resist co-optation by State actors.

**Making Sense of Risk in the Context of Contested Development**

The array of responses pursued by the Comuna 8 Planning Council represent a multi-faceted strategy in which leaders have been able to simultaneously work with and against the State. While the Planning Council's strategic partnerships with respected academic and other institutions offer them the political capital and technical skills to work within State frameworks to produce counter plans and harness resources, their concurrent grassroots mobilizing work unites diverse leaders and residents to challenge and protest lack of transparency and the socio-spatial inconsistencies of risk designations and urban development plans. In this sense, risk represents not only a physical reality, or an object of contestation in and of itself, but is also politically negotiated in diverse ways by stakeholders with different interests.

On a more practical level, this case of disputes over environmental risk in relation to urban development projects raises the issues of how the political nature of risk shapes municipal- and district-level framings of policy problems, and subsequently, how risk management plans are crafted and interventions are carried out. The tensions over the values inherent in different notions of risk, transparency in risk management processes, and inconsistencies in risk designation and response identified in this chapter allude to the need for resolutions that go beyond improved risk communication to broader reform of the decision making structures at the intersection of risk management and urban development pursuits. In the following chapter I re-examine these conflicts in light of trends in the literature and planning practice to highlight how they can inform more equitable risk management and local development processes and outcomes.
Chapter 7. CONCLUSION

As cities increasingly deal with the stresses and shocks of environmental disaster and change, socio-economic inequality, and conflict and insecurity, risk management becomes an ever more crucial element of good urban governance and equitable development. Increasing attention and investment by multilateral development institutions, major foundations, as well as national and municipal governments in mitigating risks, as well as efforts to build infrastructural, fiscal, and institutional resilience reflects these trends – and has raised renewed debate about paradigms of planning and governance. Discussions and new hypotheses that porosity of risk in urban space and at the global societal scale has produced new governance paradigms in which risk becomes a primary vehicle for the control of space and populations (Zeiderman 2013) challenge traditional conceptions of the role and efficacy of planning. However, exploring these dynamics of risk, urban planning and governance requires attention not just to the city scale, but to the district or neighborhood scale in particular. With many risks distributed unequally and affecting a city’s most marginalized communities first and most intensely, understanding not only how risk is experienced and addressed within sub-sectors of the city, but also the agency and capacity of grassroots groups to reshape these conditions proves increasingly important in sustainable city planning pursuits.

In light of these questions, this thesis sought to explore how community-based groups situated in municipally-defined areas of high environmental risk negotiate their development priorities with city government and urban development entities. By asking how risk is invoked, re-interpreted or contested by different stakeholders pursing planning at different scales in Medellín, it demonstrates how the political nature of risk discourse and designations allows different stakeholders to justify, challenge, or push forward different development visions for a specific territory.

By analyzing three risk-related conflicts that emerge in Comuna 8 – normative-empirical tensions around risk prioritization, disputes over transparency in risk mapping, and perceived socio-spatial inconsistencies in risk management interventions – I demonstrate the ways in which risk is not only empirically meaningful and socially constructed, but also politically enacted to pursue development goals. In addition to highlighting the individual and collective experiences, hardships, and values that influence the ways residents define and prioritize risks in Comuna 8, these conflicts also challenge
the representativeness of current decision-making structures for risk management and urban development

Local leaders in Comuna 8 have responded to these conflicts with multi-angled strategies that in some cases build resistance to municipal development plans, and in others, bolster their own development agenda that addresses risks in locally meaningful ways. The concurrent work of counter planning as a means to propose alternative approaches to development, utilization of formal legal channels to hold the municipal government accountable, and capacity building to strengthen resident mobilization and resistance all add to understandings about the ways in which community-level actors – particularly those experiencing multiple vulnerabilities – exercise agency in risk management and development planning. Additionally, it shows how engagement of the physicality of risk – as delineated zones on maps that have concrete implications for the types of investment, services, and activities possible within them – has become a vehicle for Comuna 8 leaders to render their development priorities visible against the “Medellín Model” of urban development, internationally lauded as an example of spatial inclusion.

While my fieldwork does evidence ways in which risk is used to control space in Medellín, I argue, contrary to Zeiderman (2013), that risk does not represent a new urban governance paradigm for cities, but rather an ordering mechanism engaged by diverse stakeholders to build influence and power in efforts to secure particular urban development aims. With the greatest risks in Comuna 8 manifesting in physical space – from the geologic and environmental precariousness of land, to the territorial nature of armed conflict and homicide concentration, to the construction of large infrastructure projects that threaten physical and economic displacement of local populations – risk management responses occur as particular localized interventions within municipal planning processes. For city planners and politicians, risk continues an element and a justification of the planning process, rather than a challenge to planning itself. Contrary to being a means of governance, risk emerges from and illustrates the repercussions of how the city has been planned and governed over time. Looking to the district or neighborhood scale not only illustrates how this has resulted in unequal distributions of risk across geographic space, but also how this distribution enables divergent political uses of risk in efforts to secure both localized and city-wide planning and development outcomes.
In addition to these considerations, analysis of the Comuna 8 and Medellín cases also points to several suggestions for the future study of risk in contexts of contested urban development and socio-environmental conflict, as well as for the frameworks that policymakers, planners and community stakeholders adopt and act upon in managing risk.

First, contrary to risk frameworks that primarily consider the interplay between natural trigger events and structural vulnerabilities of exposed populations (Wisener et al. 2004; GFDRR 2014), the case of Comuna 8 pushes us to also identify anthropogenic risks resulting from direct political decisions, and the ways that these factors shape the risk calculus of affected populations. In Comuna 8, where municipal development planning threatens livelihoods and social networks through the construction of urban macro-projects in neighborhoods experiencing socio-economic vulnerability, and where many residents have experienced conflict-, disaster-, or development-induced displacement one or more times already, risk frameworks should not only be based in primarily environmental terms (Wisener et al. 2004) or in the social construction of place (Auyero & Switsun 2008). Rather, with risk and its management tightly intertwined with urban development politics, we require analytic frameworks that allow us to interrogate these interconnections for pursuing more equitable planning efforts.

Second, this case reveals that risk is not only used as a political tool by governments and other elites in order to pursue their own interests, but by socially and politically marginalized groups as well. While Zeideman (2012) has demonstrated how individual households have invoked their positioning in zones of environmental risk in order to secure State benefits in Bogotá, the case of Comuna 8 demonstrates that beyond individual actions, the invocation of risk is also part of a collective community-based strategy to secure district-wide outcomes for more sustainable development. The ways that community-based groups can mobilize experiences of vulnerability in ways that “expose, resist, and transform the mechanisms that generate and reinforce conditions of being vulnerable” has recently gained more attention in the field of political ecology (Dooling & Simon 2012: 8), but remains an important area for future study. The insights that emerge from the experiences of residents living in risk can provide important insights for most just and effective planning solutions (Fischer 2003; Gupta 2013; Corburn 2003). Following from this, city leadership, municipal planners and development practitioners should ensure that policies and planning interventions are attuned to emic approaches of understanding risk in particular locales and more
localized scales, and structure urban development decision making processes in ways that recognize and incorporate such contributions. While Medellín has demonstrated some notable efforts to involve residents in identifying risks and crafting management plans, decentralized risk management remains a double-edged sword for local populations. While treating risk at the localized scale can empower residents to exert greater influence, it also becomes a means of constraining the sphere of intervention to the geographies and terms set by the municipality. As planners and risk management professionals seek to improve their practice and support genuine resident engagement, identifying and involving interlocutor institutions that have built rapport with both municipal and neighborhood stakeholders can represent one especially productive step. In the university-community partnerships organized by Comuna 8 leaders, the university becomes a key legitimizer, negotiator, and capacity building entity within community processes, elevating the possibilities for more effective engagement between district leaders and municipal government, particularly in regards to technical and strategic planning.

Finally, as policy mobility accelerates through processes of urbanization (Peck 2011) and as urban elites pursue the “art of being global” through different “worlding” practices (Roy & Ong 2011), local dynamics of risk, and the efforts of grassroots groups to make visible their contestation over urban development visions, become more easily obscured. Now in the global spotlight as “most innovative city,” Medellín is a case where this is particularly pronounced, though it also reflects the experiences of many other cities in Latin America and other world regions. In this context, attention to the diverse strategies grassroots groups are using to increase their agency in matters of risk management and local development can help inform similar community efforts to elsewhere – within and beyond Medellín. The multi-scale strategies that leaders in Comuna 8 use to work simultaneously within and against State frameworks have helped them engage various channels to render visible their visions for territorial development by engaging risk. Particularly effective among these efforts have been the ways that district leaders engage in strategic alliance building for both holding the State accountable in legal spheres and building planning capacity to produce viable counterplans to those of the City. By bringing proposed alternatives to the table, rather than engaging municipal planning frameworks in solely oppositional ways, community actors are able to slowly build increased legitimacy as they seek greater autonomy in ordering territory. Exchanging knowledge about these sorts of lessons across communities facing similar challenges will of course be crucial for ensuring more democratic and sustainable development.
Glossary of Spanish Terms and Acronyms

Alcaldía
Mayor’s Office

Barrios Sostenibles
“Sustainable Neighborhoods” – Medellín’s current neighborhood upgrading program

Cinturón Verde Metropolitano
“Metropolitan Green Belt” – Growth boundary on the fringes of Medellín

Comités Barriales de Emergencia
“Neighborhood Emergency Committees” – Volunteer program for community risk management

Comuna
“District” – Administrative division within the municipality of Medellín

Consulta Popular
“Popular Consultation” – Community voting process used in Comuna 8

DAGRED
Medellín’s Municipal Agency for Risk, Emergency and Disaster Management

Derecho de petición
Formal mechanism for soliciting information from government agencies

Desplazados
“Displaced Persons”

EDU / Empresa de Desarrollo Urbano
“Urban Development Company” – Medellín’s State-owned company for planning and development

Escuela de Formación Sócio-Política
“School for Socio-Political Education” – Leadership training and education initiative in Comuna 8

ISVIMED/ Instituto Social de Vivienda y Hábitat de Medellín
Medellín’s Municipal Housing Agency

Jardín Circunvalar
“Encircling Garden” – Public space and recreational infrastructure being constructed along Medellín’s urban fringe as part of the Garíva mayoral administration’s development vision

La Violencia
“The Violence” – Colombia’s partisan civil war (1948-1958) that killed 200,000 people
Mesa Ambiental
“Environmental Committee” – Organizing body in Comuna 8 focused on environmental issues

Mesa de Desplazados
“Displaced Persons Committee” – Organizing body in Comuna 8 focused on needs of the displaced

Mesa de Vivienda y Servicios Domiciliarios
“Housing and Services Committee” – Organizing body in Comuna 8 focused on housing and urban service provision

Metrocable
Gondola system connecting hillside neighborhoods to the city center and metro system

OSHM / Observatorio de Seguridad Humana de Medellín
“Medellín Observatory for Human Security” – Research Center in the University of Antioquia

Ordenamiento Territorial
“Territorial Ordering” – Colombian spatial planning and land management system

PDL / Plan de Desarrollo Local de la Comuna 8
“Comuna 8 Local Development Plan” – Locally-led and authored 10-year development plan articulating a local development vision and planning interventions for the district

POT / Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial
“Plan for Territorial Ordering” – 12-year strategic spatial plans required of all Colombian municipalities with more than 100,000 residents

PRIMED / Programa Integral de Mejoramiento de Barrios Subnormales en Medellín
Medellín’s neighborhood upgrading program from 1993-2000

SNPAD / Sistema Nacional de Prevención y Atención a Desastres
“System for Prevention and Attention to Disasters” – National coordinating body for risk management

Zonas de Alto Riesgo
“Zones of High Environmental Risk”
Acuerdo 46 de 2006: Por el cual se revisa y ajusta el Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial para el municipio de Medellín y se dictan otras disposiciones. Municipio de Medellín.

Acuerdo 48 de 2014: Por el cual se adopta la revision y ajuste de largo plazo del Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial del Municipio de Medellín y se dictan otras disposiciones complementarias. Municipio de Medellín.

Acuerdo 59 de 2011: Por el cual se crea el Departamento Administrativo de Gestion del Riesgo de Emergencias y Desastres, el Comite Municipal de Gestion del Reisgo de Emergencia y Desastres y el Fonde Municiapl para la Gestion del Riesgo de Emergencias y Desastres, se establece una destinacion especifica a unos ingresos correietes y se dictan otras disposiciones. Municipio de Medellín.

Acuerdo 62 de 1999: Por el cual se adopta el Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial para el Municipio de Medellín. Municipio de Medellín.


Departamento de Planeación. Response to *Derecho de Petición* submitted by Corporación Jurídica Libertad. 1 July 2014.


Decreto 21 de 2013: Por el cual se conforma y organiza el Consejo Municipal de Gestion del Riesgo de Desastres del Municipio de Medellín, los Comités Municipales y se dictan otras disposiciones.

Decreto 3398 de 1965: Por el cual se organiza la defensa nacional.
Decreto 3489 de 1982: Por el cual se reglamenta el Titulo VIII de la Ley 09 de 1979 y el Decreto Ley 2341 de 1971 en cuanto a desastres

Departamento Administrativo de Planeacion (2013) “Revision y Ajuste al Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial.” Provided on CD ROM.


Instituto Social de Vivienda y Habitat de Medellín. Response to Derecho de Petición submitted by Alison Coffey on July 28, 2014 to Claudia Ruiz, Director of Resettlement.


Ley 9 de 1989: Reforma Urbana Por la cual se dictan normas sobre planes de desarrollo municipal, compraventa y expropiacion de bienes y se dictan otras disposiciones. El Congreso de Colombia.


Ley 1523 de 2012: Por la cual se adopta la politica nacional de gestion del riesgo de desastres y se establece el Sistema Nacional de Gestion del Riesgo de Desastres y se dictan otras disposiciones. El Congreso de Colombia.


Municipio de Medellín (2005) Modulos de Capacitacion y Acompanamiento a los Comites Barriales de Prevencion y Atencion de Desastres de la Ciudad de Medellín.


