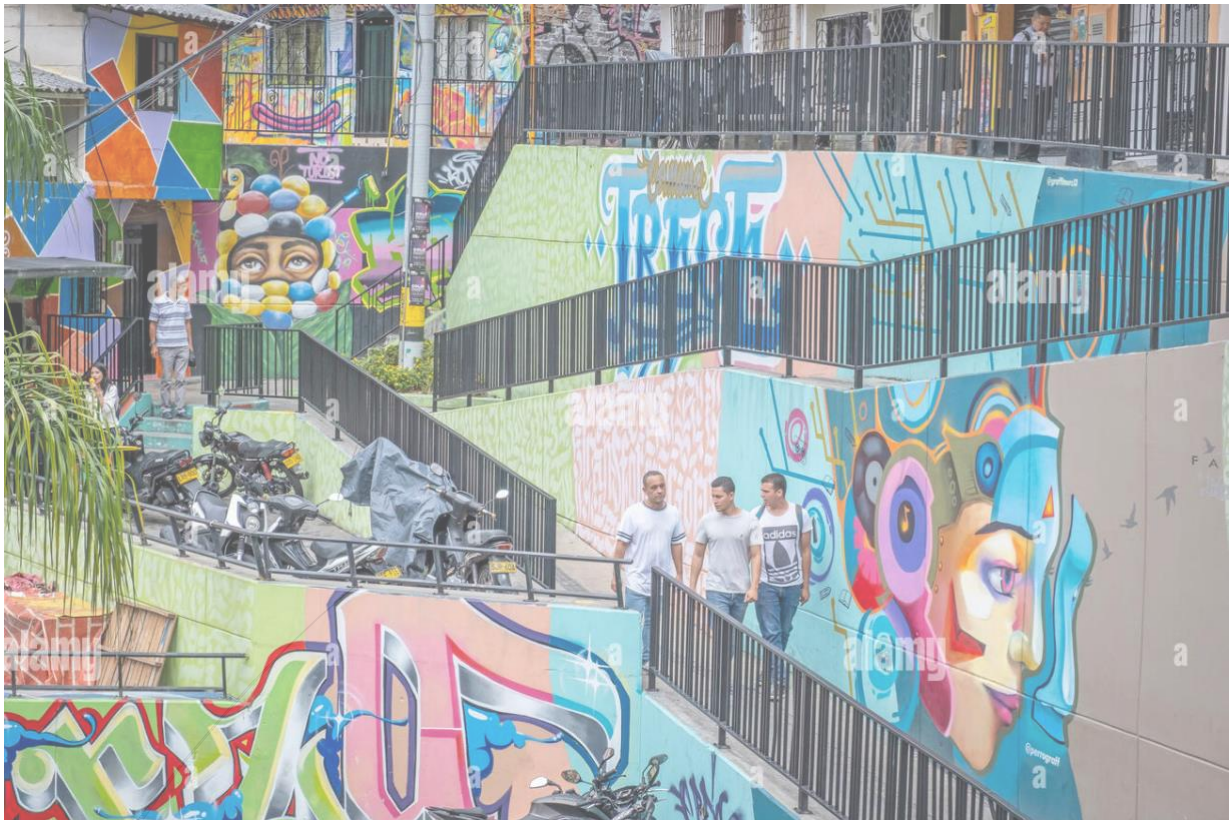# How does street art as a form of social urbanism influence the quality of life and social cohesion in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Medellin?

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How does street art as a form of social urbanism influence the quality of life and social cohesion in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Medellin?

Introduction

Colombia's tumultuous history of internal migration, fueled by political conflict, has rendered major cities susceptible to informal settlements and poor urban planning. In response, cities like Medellin and Bogota began re-evaluating these settlements, offering increased opportunities to connect with the urban landscape and ameliorate precarious living conditions. The resulting initiatives of social urbanism have yielded remarkable success since the 1990s. Presently, neighborhoods once plagued by drug trafficking and violence have transformed into popular tourist destinations, with public street art emerging as a central attraction and a tool for community engagement, particularly with the youth.

This paper contends that public street art, integral to a broader strategy of social urbanism, significantly enhances the quality of life for city inhabitants. The focus will predominantly be on Comuna 13, arguably the most prominent neighborhood in the city positively influenced by this urban approach. To unravel the mechanisms through which street art brings about life improvements, the paper delves into three key arguments. Firstly, it explores how street art fosters community engagement and creates a sense of belonging, especially among vulnerable communities. Secondly, it contends that the local economy experiences a substantial boost, driven

by the tourism industry, which, in part, owes its success to the neighborhood's vibrant street art scene. Lastly, the paper investigates the decrease in violence and crime within communities, attributing this positive change to the newfound opportunities provided to local youth, enabling them to express themselves, integrate with the city, and generate income through their artistic activities.

Contemporary academia has primarily directed its attention towards understanding the positive impacts of social urbanism on the lives of Comuna 13 residents. This focus has predominantly revolved around examining the infrastructure, economic, and educational dimensions of social urbanism. However, despite their significant efforts in emphasizing the importance of street art, there is a notable absence of extensive academic research on how street art currently enriches the lives of inhabitants. To address this gap, this paper aims to conduct a comprehensive investigation, drawing insights from various sources such as academic and news articles, government documents, an interview, and a survey.

Background

The existing literature and numerous international media articles have highlighted Medellin as a resilient city that effectively transformed its image from being one of the world's most violent cities to becoming an exemplar of how social urbanism can enhance the lives of marginalized communities. However, most of the research has primarily centered on infrastructure and certain social policies, neglecting to explore the significance of street art as a form of community engagement. This aspect, which has gained significant popularity, remains understudied, despite its role in drawing tourism, generating community engagement, and in the decrease of violence and crime to these communities.

Comuna 13, is a neighborhood with profound historical significance owing to its remarkable transformation. Formerly plagued by violence and marginalization, Comuna 13 has now become a symbol of urban innovation and community resilience. This transformation is exemplified by initiatives such as the Metrocable, a cable car system that improves accessibility to the city center, and the installation of public electric stairs. More importantly for this paper, the neighborhood is adorned with captivating street art, cultural spaces, and actively promotes community programs.

The origins of the marginalized neighborhoods, commonly referred to as "Comunas," trace back to Colombia's internal armed conflict and significant rural-to-urban migration. The phenomenon is particularly notable in major cities such as Medellin, Bogota, and Cali. This influx has led to the proliferation of informal settlements and haphazard urban planning since the 1960s. Consequently, Medellín's metropolitan population surged from 350,000 to 4 million within a span of 40 years (Leite et al., 2019). The Comunas located in the northern, northeastern, and northwest ern zones of the city correspond to the areas with the lowest quality of life and human development index (Medellin CómoVamos, 2021). Additionally, these areas coincide with sectors exhibiting the highest levels of violence.

The OECD notes that Colombia has undergone rapid urbanization in the last 70 years. Initially, by the end of the 1930s, 70% of the population resided in rural areas. Years later, the proportion of the population living in urban areas increased from 38.3% in 1950 to 75.5% in 2018, according to the latest census data (OECD, n.d). Bogota and Medellin, much like numerous other large cities in

Latin America, have evolved through a blend of formal planning and informality (Leite et al.,2019).

In the 1980s, the emergence of drug cartels, coupled with spatial inequities, triggered a profound crisis. Territorial violence was concentrated mainly in the informal neighborhoods on the outskirts of Medellín, with social conflicts manifesting intensely in the urban space, particularly in the most precarious northern neighborhoods where Comuna 13 is now located.

To address this phenomenon, since the 1990s, public administrations, academia, and non-governmental organizations have been studying and implementing programs to transform the quality of life for residents of marginalized neighborhoods and compensate for part of the social debt accumulated over decades of inequity. At the national level, Medellin, along with Bogotá, has been the most successful city in the implementation of such programs due to the impact generated on the quality of life of its population (Echeverri & Orsini, 2013).

Methodology

The research design for this paper adopts a case study approach, focusing on Comuna 13. This case study is particularly relevant due to Comuna 13's prominence as the pilot area for the initial government policies of social urbanism implemented two decades ago.

Data collection for this study involves three primary sources. Firstly, news articles and online publications from various newspapers were consulted, some of which provide statistical data. Secondly, an official document from the City of Medellín was analyzed, specifically a report assessing the community engagement aspect of social urbanism. Thirdly, an online interview was

conducted with Juan Sebastian Aguirre, a local social leader actively involved in community initiatives and collaborating with the city of Medellín.

Additionally, 10 interviews were conducted using a snowball sampling method. Participants, aged between 18 and 50, were selected to ensure the protection of their identities. They completed an online questionnaire delivered via Google Forms, consisting of nine questions divided into three sections. Each section corresponds to the three focal points of analysis in this paper: street art as a contributor to community engagement, as an enhancer of the local tourism industry, and as a reducer of violence and crime. Each section contained three multiple-choice questions. The surveys were conducted between December 28th and December 6th, 2023 (Refer to Index).

Literature review

Social Urbanism

Social Urbanism according to Hernandez Garcia, can be a highly controversial term because every urbanism is social, but to some extent the term has been validated by the several papers produced and official documents in which it has been used (Hernandez Garcia, 2013).

In addressing the urban challenges faced by cities in the global south, particularly in Colombia, the concept of social urbanism that will be discussed in this paper, as highlighted by Carlos Leite et al in their book "Social Urbanism in Latin America," originated in Medellin. This approach underscores the integration of vulnerable areas into the urban landscape, aiming to improve urban life and foster territorial inclusion. Social urbanism achieves this by channeling investments into socially vulnerable areas, emphasizing integrated solutions for social housing and urban infrastructure (Leite et al., 2019). Inspired by Henri Lefebvre's "right to the city" concept, social

urbanism in Colombia finds its roots in the ideas of geographer-urbanist Jordi Borja (Naef & Modoianu,2020).

According to Quinchía-Roldán, the concept of social urbanism initially encompasses urban interventions in areas burdened with "accumulated social debts by the State, aiming to create high-quality public spaces. The official discourses of that time offer potential definitions of social urbanism" (Quinchía-Roldán, 2013). Firstly, it is seen from the perspective of receiving spaces, focusing on regions in the city experiencing delays in public infrastructure and deficiencies in addressing essential needs. Secondly, in terms of its implementation, social urbanism involves participatory planning processes characterized by consultation with all stakeholders in the territory, combining technical expertise with the community's imaginaries. Furthermore, it is characterized by its quality and aesthetic standards in urban interventions within the most marginalized zones. Politically, social urbanism advocates for policies directing greater and improved investments in public works to neighborhoods with lower human development indices. The overarching objective is a comprehensive intervention, both physically and socially, addressing social debts in areas affected by violence and excluded from prior administrative decisions. Ultimately, the effects of social urbanism are seen as a means to generate social participation, social capital, and social inclusion. (Quinchía-Roldán, 2013)

Researchers in the field of social urbanism, including Leite, Quinchía-Roldán, Echeverri, and Orsini, have underscored the central role of citizen participation in this urban approach. "Social urbanism is geared towards nurturing a sense of belonging, rebuilding trust between the administration and citizens, and implementing a legal framework that mandates state consultation in urban projects". (Echeverri and Orsini, 2013). Local artists and cultural agents mediate between

public authorities and communities, playing a vital role. Collaborative projects influence community knowledge and Imaginary Workshops, proposed by public authorities, integrate collective imaginaries into local planning. (Naef & Modoianu,2020).

Moreover, authors like Echeverri and Orsini have a big emphasis on the infrastructure projects that social urbanism has done. Echeverri explains in that in 2004 Communa 13 was the chosen neighborhood to be the pilot project of social urbanism because it fulfilled all the criteria created by the Sergio Fajardo's administration to approach social urbanism projects. He created what is called the Integral Urban Project which is "a planning and physical intervention tool designed for areas marked by significant levels of marginalization, segregation, poverty, and violence" (Echeverri and Orsini, 2013).

Using these criteria, the northeast commune 13 of Medellin was selected as the ideal location for the first pilot project. "This choice was influenced by two key factors: firstly, the area had the lowest levels of ICV (Quality of Urban Life Index) and HDI (Human Development Index) in the city. Secondly, the imminent inauguration of the Metrocable, a medium-capacity transportation system, in the same area was a crucial element. The Metrocable was set to connect the informal city to the Metro via cable car, providing a transformative transportation link (Echeverri and Orsini, 2013).

Other scholars like Leite et al, delve into the policy and political strategies integral to social urbanism. They conclude by highlighting the historical policies enacted through administrations that have facilitated the success of social urbanism in Medellin. The authors also emphasize the crucial role of strong institutional approaches in shaping the concept of social urbanism in the city, highlighting the assemblage of a specialized team and the institutional articulation of the Urban

Development Company (EDU), the financing and technical support of the Public Companies of Medellin (EPM), and the quality of the urban-architectural interventions, based on great sensitivity to the social fabric (Leite et al., 2019)

Furthermore, Hernandez Garcia critiques that city officials have utilized social urbanism to create a brand for the city, positioning it as a political tool for their administrations. However, Hernandez Garcia acknowledges the positive economic impact of social urbanism on the comunas. He notes, the crime rate has dropped drastically, and the perception of security has increased. He notes that this is evident with the influx of several visitors to the area (Hernandez Garcia,2013).

Additionally, he observes in his study that children and ex- gang members wait for tourists at the cable car station, guiding them to the main attraction which is the library. "In exchange for a tip, they share the story of the barrio and the noticeable changes. New shops have opened in the last few years, and street vendors are now visible in the main streets and near the library and other urban facilities. (Hernandez Garcia,2013)

Public Street Art

Several scholarly works highlight street art's capacity to foster community engagement and enhance the sense of belonging. In their paper, Petronienė and Juzelėnien observed that street art initiatives, such as community mural projects, create platforms for residents to actively participate in shaping the visual identity of their neighborhoods. "The collaborative nature of these projects not only strengthens social bonds but also instills a collective sense of pride and ownership within the community" (Petronienė & Juzelėnien, 2022).

Similarly, they emphasize the role of street art in reclaiming public spaces. "By transforming neglected areas into vibrant canvases, street art contributes to the revitalization of neighborhoods, encouraging residents to take an active interest in the improvement of their surroundings" (Petronienė & Juzelėnien,2022). This participatory aspect of street art initiatives correlates with increased community engagement and a heightened sense of connection among residents.

Rodríguez-Gonzalez explores the concept of "Urban Graphic" as a communication medium. The author analysis how the macro mural in Bogotá, known as "La Mariposa," in a low income and marginalized neighborhood, managed to express a language and culture specific to the community. In other words, it conveyed what the community wanted to express on its walls regarding the dynamics and realities of its territory, a phenomenon she refers to as urban graphics. In her own words, it is "a unique form of communication that reflects the culture of a community." (Rodriguez-Gonzalez,2021)

The author also finds in her study that the murals make the community constantly feel and recreate its history, as there are several murals depicting indigenous and peasant communities, paying tribute to the first families that populated the territory (Rodriguez-Gonzalez,2021). It is worth noting that the most interesting aspect of this study is that the community itself requested the local government to include these types of murals as part of the house beautification project.

Moreover, when it comes to tourism, street art has emerged as a compelling attraction for tourists, playing an important role in enhancing the cultural and economic vibrancy of cities. Street art reshapes travel experiences, prompting tourists to explore less-traveled neighborhoods often ignored in conventional itineraries. In addition to renowned landmarks, street art provides an authentic and culturally immersive dimension to destinations.

For instance, in their examination of the impact of street art on tourism, Crespi-Vallbona and Mascarilla-Miró discovered that dynamic street art scenes in Barcelona draw a diverse array of visitors in search of immersive cultural experiences. The allure of encountering unique and often transient artworks significantly elevates a city's desirability as a destination, thereby bolstering various tourism-related activities and businesses (Crespi-Vallbona & Mascarilla-Miró, 2021). The authors note a shift in tourists' preferences, as they increasingly seek to distance themselves from crowded tourist attractions. Instead, they yearn for more local experiences, with open-air street art museums in Barcelona emerging as a compelling alternative.

In addition, studies have investigated the correlation between street art initiatives and a reduction in violence and crime within urban areas. In a longitudinal analysis, Ross found that "neighborhoods with active street art projects experienced a decline in reported incidents of vandalism and violent crime" (Ross,2016). The presence of well-maintained murals and art installations not only deters criminal activity but also fosters a sense of community guardianship, encouraging residents to actively protect and preserve their shared spaces.

Furthermore, Ross's research highlights the transformative impact of community-driven street art projects on neighborhood dynamics. These initiatives empower residents to reclaim and shape their public spaces, fostering a sense of safety and connection within the community. As a result, the prevalence of violence and crime tends to decrease. Ross also emphasizes that art projects, when implemented in communities with high rates of violence, showcase a reduction in crime and violence. This reduction is not solely attributed to the art projects but is often the outcome of a synergistic combination of social and educational strategies, wherein art projects play a significant role (Ross,2016).

Research Findings and Discussion

1. Street Art Generates Community Engagement - Increases the sense of belonging.

The findings in this aspect, align with the assertions made by the scholars previously cited. After carefully analyzing all my three sources, this paper found that social urbanism often incorporates art and urban design as tools for transforming the visual and aesthetic aspects of neighborhoods, resulting in a sense of belonging due to the high connections that it has with the history of Comuna 13. In Comuna 13, Initiatives like graffiti tours and public art installations contribute to the cultural identity of the community.

In her article, Diaz emphasizes the significant role of community engagement through art as a form of social urbanism in Comuna 13. Diaz argues that artistic expressions like graffiti and street hip-hop competitions came even before government infrastructure projects, such as electric stairs, libraries, or bridges, in the neighborhood. She interviews Jeison Ríos, one of the founders of the artistic movement in Comuna 13, who states, "The internationally known Graffitour emerged long before the construction of the stairs and Casa Kolacho" (Diaz,2021). A statement that underscores how art has always been a part of the community's identity.

In addition, Diaz also shows how with the intention of giving greater visibility to Comuna 13, cultural centers that were not usually visited emerged. "The Medellín Se Pinta de Vida project allowed Casa Kolacho-the most famous cultural center in the neighborhood, to be recognized by the neighborhood itself through color, painting, and transformation as a way of narrating the realities of locals through images" (Diaz, 2021). Street art serves as a form of cultural expression, allowing residents to showcase their identity and tell their stories through vibrant murals. This cultural richness enhances the neighborhood's identity, making it a source of local pride.

On the same note a report by the Municipality of Medellín in 2013, highlights the visual transformations experienced by homes in the city's neighborhoods. "A noteworthy aspect of these changes is the program, "Medellín Paints Itself with Life", an initiative that has contributed to filling various urban sectors with color and fostering community interaction. This initiative has received crucial support from the community and strategic allies in the private sector, all integrated into an interinstitutional effort" (Acadia de Medellin,2013). The events, characterized by their vibrant expression of art made by local artists, have allowed numerous households to transform the facades of their homes and, consequently, the neighborhood environment (see images 1-3).

Image 1- Group of members of the community painting the steps of their street. Source: Acadia de Medellin,2013

Image 2-A group of tourists gathered around one of the murals made by local artist in comuna 13. Source: Alcaldia de Medellin,2013

Image 3- Members of the "Medellín Paints Itself with Life" instructing the community with mechanisms to paint their homes. Source: Alcaldia de Medellin,2013

Juan Sebastian Aguirre, a resident of Comuna 13 who actively contributes to community development through his work with the City of Medellin, shared insightful observations about the transformative impact of street art in the neighborhood. According to Aguirre, when new artists from different areas arrive to paint houses, the community not only embraces their presence but becomes remarkably involved and protective of their homes. "Initially, there was some hesitation about painting their houses, but now residents actively submit 'citizen's petition rights' to the city, officially requesting more paint and artists," he explained.

Aguirre also highlighted a positive shift in community behavior, noting that residents now take greater pride in maintaining their homes. "People have started cleaning their windows and front yards more frequently than ever before". Additionally, he shared a delightful detail about the festive spirit during Christmas, revealing that households engage in friendly competitions to determine which home boasts the most impressive decorations.

In addition, Aguirre underscores a crucial point by emphasizing that the majority of art and hip-hop events in the neighborhood incorporate a historical aspect. These artistic expressions not only depict the neighborhood's violent past but also highlight the cultural and ethnic diversity stemming from internal migration. This assertion signifies that art serves as a medium through which a profound sense of belonging is conveyed. The historical references embedded in the artwork resonate not only with tourists but also with future generations, providing them with insights into the tumultuous history and cultural richness of the community.

Lastly, the survey findings unequivocally demonstrate a significant surge in community engagement over the last two decades, coinciding with when social urbanism interventions started. Every participant in the survey said that actively contributed to enhancing their living spaces
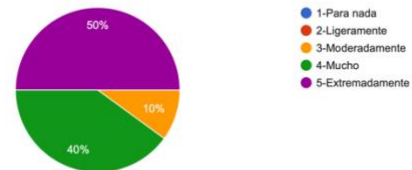
(Graph 1.0), and a noteworthy 80% expressed a profound sense of connection to the comuna(Graph 1.2).
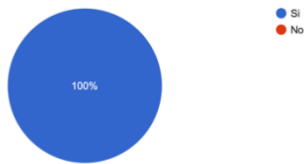
Graph 1.0- Have you participated in artistic initiatives organized by the government for the improvement of your house or the community in general?

Graph 1.2- Do you feel connected to your neighborhood.

## Improvement of Local Economy in Tourism Industry

The colorful and expressive street art in Comuna 13 has turned the neighborhood into an open-air art gallery. Similar to what Crespo and Miró explained in the case of Barcelona (literature review), in Comuna 13 tourists are drawn to the area to witness the creativity and stories depicted in the murals, providing a cultural experience that goes beyond traditional tourist attractions. The rise of graffiti tours, such as the internationally known Graffitour, has become a major draw for tourists. El Comercio newspaper asserts that these guided tours take visitors through the narrow streets of Comuna 13, showcasing the history, meaning, and artists behind each mural (El Comercio,2022). This shows that tourists are not only passive observers but actively engage with the local stories and artistic expressions.

In addition, Mahne in an article explains that the influx of tourists who are mostly coming from north America and Europe, has created economic opportunities for the community. Local businesses, such as cafes, souvenir shops, and eateries, benefit from increased foot traffic. Additionally, residents who offer guided tours or sell local artwork directly benefit from the tourism industry (Mahne,2019).

According to El Tiempo, a local newspaper, it is estimated that around 2,600 tourists visit the area during the week, and on weekends, this number increases to between 6,000 and 7,000, according to data provided by tourist organizations. The article also highlights a remarkable post-pandemic surge in tourism, resulting in a threefold increase in official requests to establish new businesses within the neighborhood, mostly cafes (20%), restaurants (30%) and hostels (10%) and 40% for all other types of business. Currently, there are over five companies providing tours in the area, extending beyond the confines of graffiti tours to encompass a broader exploration of the city's historical and memorial aspects (El Tiempo, 2021). This diversification in tour offerings reflects the growing interest and demand from visitors keen on exploring the multifaceted narratives and cultural richness of the neighborhood.

Moreover, the survey findings underscore a unanimous local perspective that views tourism as undoubtedly positive and impactful for the community. A comprehensive 100% of the respondents observed a surge in tourism over the past year (graph 2.0), and all 100% expressed a favorable outlook on its influence on the neighborhood (graph 2.1). Additionally, a substantial 90% reported experiencing tangible benefits for themselves or their families from tourism in the last decade.(2.2)
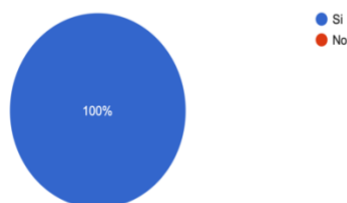
Graph 2.0- Have you noticed an increase in tourism in the neighborhood over the past year?
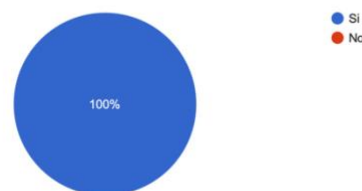
Graph 2.1- Do you think tourism is a positive influence on the neighborhood?

¿Tú o tu familia se han beneficiado del turismo en la última década?
10 responses

Si
No

10%
90%
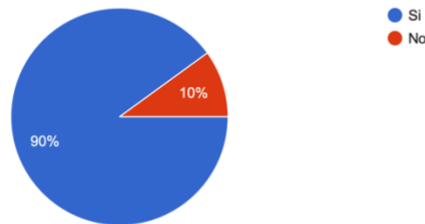
Graph 2.2- Have you or your family benefited from tourism in the past decade?

Aguirre, my main source, agrees that tourism significantly contributes to the local economy of the neighborhood. "Visitors are drawn not only by the colorful houses and beautiful art but also by infrastructure projects such as the electric escalators and the cable car". Aguirre highlights the recent opening of museums showcasing the history of the neighborhood. In addition, he notes that all tours are exclusively offered by locals, a potential downside because he thinks that they have become "too protective" of those jobs limiting new entrants.

In addition, regarding the local economy, Aguirre observes that many tourists are willing to pay for "Instagrammable" pictures next to the murals and support local shops in the area. Despite this, he underscores that the local economy is predominantly informal. When residents purchase items like food or coffee, they often opt for street vendors rather than more established businesses.

When questioned about the potential for gentrification, he acknowledges that gentrification is a significant and concerning issue in Medellin, primarily fueled by tourism and digital nomads. However, he remains unconcerned about gentrification in Comuna 13, asserting that it is not a destination for tourists to stay, and he believes such a transformation is unlikely. Nevertheless, Aguirre does highlight that tourism is impacting the neighborhood, leading some residents to feel a loss of privacy.

His assertions align with an article from El Colombiano newspaper, which contends that, overall, residents of Comuna 13 appreciate the surge in tourism initiated in 2011 with the introduction of the electric stairs. However, they are also aware of the associated side effects. They reference a resident, Johana Marín, who expressed, "As a worker, things are going well," running a small bar. "But as a resident, it's getting increasingly difficult. My sister-in-law had to finish her pregnancy elsewhere because the noise here was stressing her out." (El Colombiano, 2021)

In essence, the locally driven tourism industry has experienced remarkable growth in various aspects over the past decades. While Graffitours significantly contribute to local employment, it is not the sole contributor. Local businesses, restaurants, and informal vendors have also reaped the benefits. These findings align with the sentiments expressed by the locals I interviewed, indicating an economic improvement and enhanced quality of life due to tourism. However, the growing concerns of privacy invasion and overtourism should also be considered.

Decrease violence and Crime

Any article that delves into Comuna 13 typically starts by highlighting the transformations of its historical violence and dangerous reputation. Several of these articles attribute the transformation to government interventions in the form of infrastructure and social programs. Nevertheless, there is an agreement between the articles, my primary source, as well as the findings from my surveys, emphasizing the significant role played by organizations in using art to steer the youth away from criminal activities.

Perhaps the case of Casa Kolacho is the most quoted. As explained by Hierro, Casa Kolacho, located in the San Javier district (Part of Comuna 13), stands as the pioneering community initiative offering young individuals an alternative path away from drugs and crime through

tourism and training. Simultaneously, it provides them with a platform to take pride in their music and art. Through drug prevention workshops, a hip-hop school, musical spaces, cultural festivals, and guided tours, Casa Kolacho narrates the story of violence and reconciliation in Medellín. (Hierro,2016). While they are not the only ones, they certainly are the most popular in the neighborhood.

Furthermore, LA Network, a think tank dedicated to Latin American cities, published an interview made to Jeihhco Castaño, a youth leader from Comuna 13. Castaño says that, although it is not the only way to do it, "Urban art is associated with enhancing life opportunities for the youth through the hip-hop movement in its four artistic expressions: graffiti, DJ, breakdance, and rap" (LA Network,2016).Jeihhco argues that this art gives a voice to those on the outskirts of the city, enabling many to get to know, live in, and claim ownership of the streets. This creates a meaningful concept of the city for those who previously lacked it, ultimately enhancing the safety of these spaces.

Similarly, the article describes how Castaño founded the hip-hop network called La Élite in 2002, whose main mission was to promote life projects and remove children and young people from the influence of criminal gangs. In hip-hop schools, participants not only receive artistic training but also political and social education, developing citizenship competencies in areas such as ethics, human rights, peace, and coexistence" (LA Network,2016). What appears to distinguish these types of projects is the educational component.

Moreover, in my discussion with Aguirre, he agrees that education plays a pivotal role in reducing crime rates. However, he attributes this improvement less to government strategies and more to the efforts of independent local organizations. These organizations, employing avenues like hip-
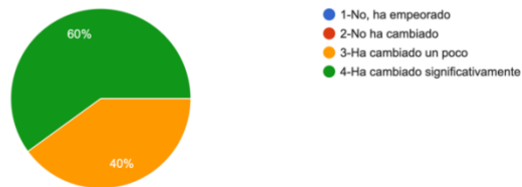
hop, street art, and entrepreneurship workshops, have spearheaded transformative initiatives, especially within his immediate social circle.

In addition, Aguirre highlights a significant accomplishment in terms of security and violence reduction—the eradication of what he refers to as "invisible borders." According to him, these were imperceptible demarcations created by certain gangs asserting control over specific areas of the Comuna for illicit activities. The removal of these boundaries has brought tranquility to residents and paved the way for organizations to establish a more educational presence in the neighborhood without the fear of being targeted by gangs.

Meanwhile, La Vanguardia, a Spanish newspaper, offers an interesting perspective on the security and violence discourse. On one hand, the newspaper presents insights from local artists, asserting that the government tends to highlight its successful achievements through the good infrastructure constructed in the neighborhood. However, it is argued that the government does so in a manner that glosses over the violent history the Comuna—initially due to government absence and later during their regaining of control over the neighborhood (La Vanguardia,2019). The article explains the impact of "Operacion Orión," launched in 2003 to eliminate insurgency in the community. Despite restoring government control, this operation faced significant criticism for its violence, leading to casualties among innocent residents and accusations of government-led social cleansing.

Finally, the survey results indicate a positive shift in the perception of safety over time. When respondents were asked if they have observed a reduction in criminality in the Comuna 13 over the last decade, 60% expressed that it has changed significantly, while 40% noted a slight change. Importantly, none reported that there has been no change or an increase in criminality during this period (see graph 3.0).
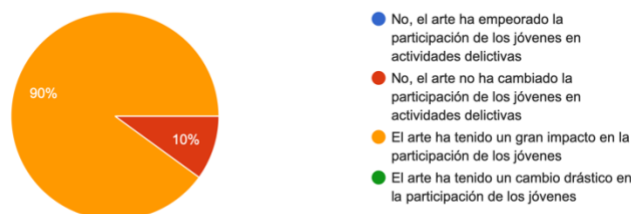
Selecciona la respuesta que mejor exprese tu opinión sobre la siguiente afirmación: He notado alguna reducción en la criminalidad en la última década en el barrio

10 responses

- 1-No, ha empeorado
- 2-No ha cambiado
- 3-Ha cambiado un poco
- 4-Ha cambiado significativamente

60%
40%

Graph 3.0- Please select the answer that best expresses your opinion on the following statement: "I have noticed any reduction in crime over the past decade in the neighborhood: - 1 (No, it has worsened)- 2 (It has not changed)- 3 (It has changed a little - 4 (It has changed significantly)

To investigate the perceived correlation between the reduction of criminal activities and art programs, two key questions were posed. When respondents were asked whether engagement with art provides alternative activities for youth, reducing their involvement in criminal activities, a significant 90% acknowledged that art has indeed brought about a substantial change in youth involvement, while only 10% believed that art has had no impact (see graph 3.1). Remarkably, none of the respondents indicated that art has either made a drastic change or worsened youth involvement in criminal activities.

¿Crees que la participación en el arte ha proporcionado actividades alternativas para los jóvenes, reduciendo su participación en actividades delictivas?

10 responses

- No, el arte ha empeorado la participación de los jóvenes en actividades delictivas
- No, el arte no ha cambiado la participación de los jóvenes en actividades delictivas
- El arte ha tenido un gran impacto en la participación de los jóvenes
- El arte ha tenido un cambio drástico en la participación de los jóvenes

90%
10%

Graph 3.1- Do you think engagement with art has provided alternative activities for youth, reducing their involvement in criminal activities?

- 1 (No, art has made it worse for youth involvement in criminal activities) - 2 (No, art has not changed youth involvement in criminal activities) - 3 (Art has changed youth involvement a little) - 4 (Art has made a big change in youth involvement) - 5 (Art has made a drastic change in youth involvement)

Similarly, when asked about their knowledge of individuals involved in art activities who were formerly gang members, 80% affirmed that they were acquainted with such individuals, which underscores the reach of the impact (graph 3.2).

¿Conoces personas que están involucradas en actividades artísticas que antes eran miembros de pandillas?
10 responses

- Si
- No

80%
20%

Graph 3.2- Do you know people who are involved in art activities that used to be gang members?

In summary, the reduction of violence in Comuna 13 has been attributed to government efforts in implementing social urbanism policies. While this has been a key contributor, it is crucial to recognize the significant role played by local art organizations. They have effectively utilized art to engage with the youth, providing them with an alternative to violence and crime, a perspective that can be seen in the community's overall perception of street art as an effective mechanism in reducing crime.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has investigated how street art as a form of social urbanism influence the quality of life and social cohesion in disadvantaged neighborhoods in Medellin. The findings in all three points of analysis contended that public street art, as a manifestation of social urbanism, significantly enhances the quality of life in marginalized communities within Colombian cities, with a particular focus on the Comuna 13 neighborhood in Medellin.

Emphasizing the importance of community engagement and a sense of belonging, the paper underscores that these elements are crucial for replicating such social urbanism initiatives elsewhere. The study delved into how local artists consider the realities and history of the community when creating murals, granting residents the autonomy to propose ideas for enhancing their surroundings. The various sources used in the paper, also showed that people are actively engaged in the creation of art, which ultimately benefits the sense of belonging to the neighborhood.

Moreover, the emergence of a sustainable tourism model has allowed residents to benefit economically from the tourism generated around public art and infrastructure projects. The general perception of the community is that tourism has benefited them, and they see the phenomenon as a positive thing. Despite this it is important for future academic on the topic to see research on the negative side effects of over tourism in the area that has already created some concern.

Lastly, the reduction in violence and crime is not a coincidental byproduct of street art as a social urban practice; rather, it is the result of coordinated efforts by organizations, the private sector, and the government. These initiatives provide individuals, who previously had limited options beyond criminal activities, with alternatives through art, thereby mitigating crime and improving educational opportunities. These new opportunities are well seen by the communities and seem to have a great recognition.

This research has contributed to the field of urban studies by offering a more targeted examination of various facets of social urbanism that were previously overlooked. Earlier scholarly works

tended to concentrate broadly on infrastructure, political dynamics, and financial elements of social urbanism. While street art was acknowledged as one aspect of social urbanism in Medellin, this paper seeks to present a contemporary analysis of the perceptions and realities of street art specifically in Comuna 13.

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