

We love  
Medellín.

A visual account of a learning journey to Medellin, Colombia  
as a source of inspiration for OBA Next, the Library of the  
Future in the Southeast of Amsterdam

October 2023  
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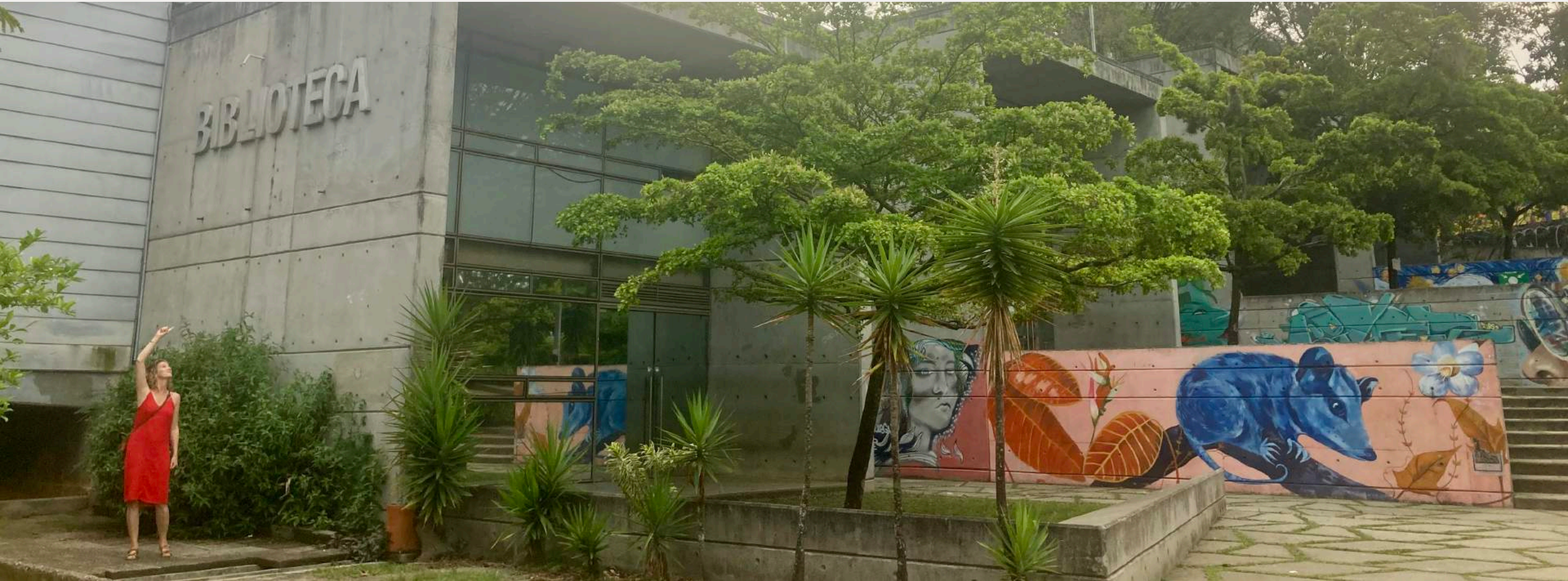




We love  
Library Parks.



# LIBRARY PARKS



San Javier Library Park



# LEARNING JOURNEY



# NEXT

- LIBRARY PARKS; AN OVERVIEW
- A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDELLIN
- 5 LESSONS FOR OBA NEXT
- THE STORY OF MORAVIA
- NEXT STEPS
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# LIBRARY PARKS: AN OVERVIEW

A Library Park (Parque Biblioteca) is a term first used in Colombia for an urban complex formed by a combination of a library building with ample surrounding green space for public use. These Library Parks are strategically located in the periphery of Medellín to address the need for more cultural and education space and public services in areas with high levels of social and economic inequality.

The goal was to bring educational and cultural resources to neighbourhoods that historically lacked access to such facilities. The locations were chosen based on factors like population density, socio-economic indicators, and the need for community development.

The idea behind this initiative was to use architecture and public spaces to promote social integration, education, and community building. By placing these Library Parks in underserved areas, the government aimed to bridge the gap and provide residents with opportunities for learning, cultural enrichment, and social interaction. The design and placement of the Library Parks were part of a larger urban development strategy to create a more inclusive and connected city.

Leon de Greiff Library Park

# NEXT



“The library parks are cultural centers for social development that encourage citizen encounters, educational and recreational activities, building groups, the approach to the new challenges in digital culture. And they are also spaces for cultural services that allow cultural creation and strengthening of existing neighbourhood organisations.”

~ Sergio Fajardo, former mayor of Medellín



# LIBRARY PARKS: AN OVERVIEW

The popularity of Library Parks in Colombia and their success in improving the conditions of outer city neighborhoods has helped spread the idea to other countries in Latin America. Not only have Library Parks sparked new notions on urban renewal, it has also innovated the concept of a library worldwide.

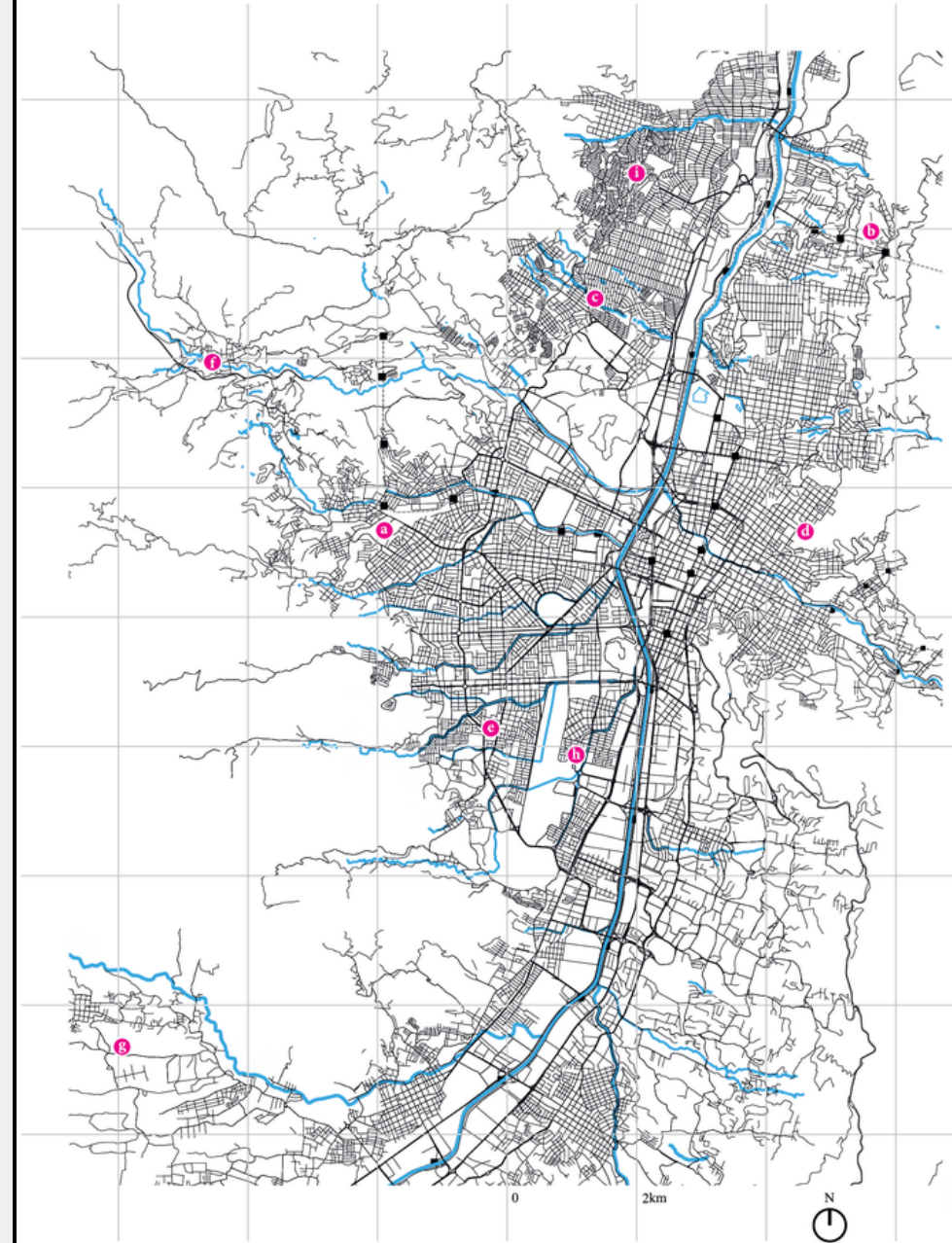
There were two phases in which the Library Parks were built. The first was from 2005 till 2008 and the second was from 2009 til 2011.

During the first phase the following 5 parks were built:

- Spain Library Park/Parque Biblioteca España - Comuna 1 - Popular
- La Quintana Library Park/Parque Biblioteca Tomás Carrasquilla - Comuna 7 - Robledo
- León de Greiff Library/La Ladera Parque Biblioteca - Comuna 8 - Villa Hermosa
- San Javier Library Park/Parque Biblioteca San Javier - Comuna 13 - San Javier
- Bethlehem Library Park/Parque Biblioteca Belén - Comuna 16 - Belén

Map of the Library Parks

# NEXT





# LIBRARY PARKS: AN OVERVIEW

The success of the first five ensured the second phase in which another five library parks were realised:

- Library Park Doce de Octubre - Comuna 6 - Doce de Octubre
- Las Estancias Library Park
- Guayabal Library Park - Comuna 15 - Guayabal
- San Cristobal Library Park - Corregimiento de San Cristóbal
- Library Park San Antonio de Prado - Corregimiento de San Antonio de Prado

All buildings were designed by different architects from around the world among them Giancarlo Mazzanti, Ricardo La Rotta Caballero, Javier Vera and Hiroshi Naito. The Library Parks are some of the most impressive buildings of the city.

Since the realisation of the Library Parks, the recent mayors of the city have shifted their focus more to the development of technology and innovation. This has led to a decline in the budgets of Library Parks which explains the current lack of maintenance and equipment.

Leon de Greiff Library Park

## NEXT





# LIBRARY PARKS: AN OVERVIEW

During my trip to Medellin I visited seven of the above listed Library Parks and visited the Piloto Library (the oldest library of Medellin) and the Biblioteca EPM and Claustro Confama Library in the center which is one of libraries run by a welfare organisation. Furthermore, I visited the Moravia Cultural Center which includes a library.

During my visit I spoke to Natalia Duque, a library and information studies professor, Santiago Velasquez, a library professional, Natalia Castano, director of URBAM, EAFIT University, Herman Montagna from the cultural city department and Juan David Hoyos, architect.

Chris Sigaloff in the Piloto Library

## NEXT







San Cristobal Library Park



# A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDELLIN

In 1991, there were 6,349 murders -17 a day- in Medellín, the second largest city of Colombia with close to 4 million inhabitants, making it the most violent city in the world. Much of the violence was attributed to the notorious drug-lord, Pablo Escobar, who used Medellín as a base for his cartel and controlled 60% of the world's cocaine.

Since the early 2000s, however, the city has seen a remarkable transformation, with rates of violence plummeting. In the last two decades Medellín has become a world-renowned centre of innovation with a thriving civil society, and is beloved by city planners around the world for its innovative architecture and public infrastructure.

Cable carts connecting the city

# NEXT





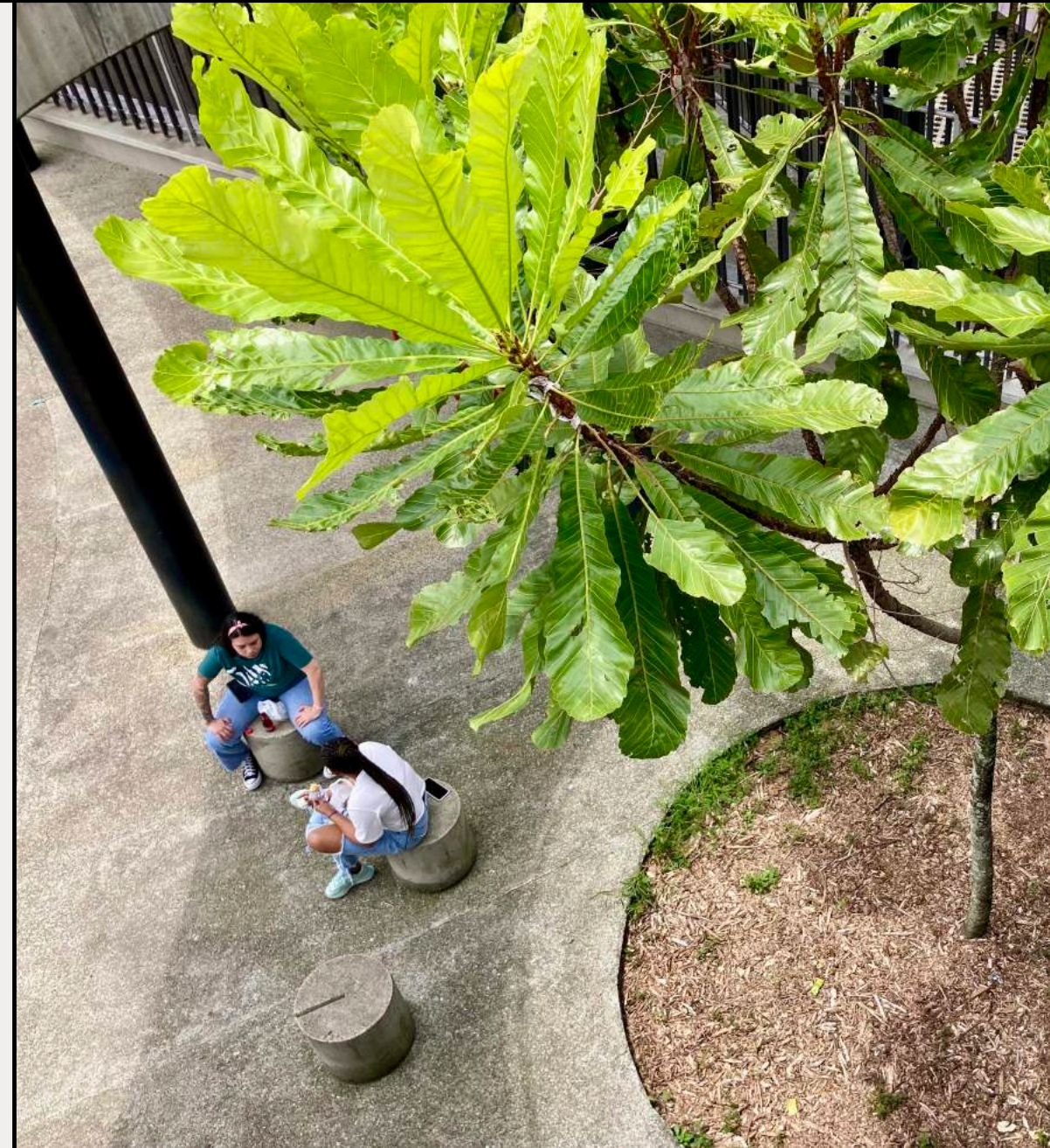
# A BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDELLIN

A large role in this transformation was played by Sergio Fajardo who became mayor of Medellín in 2003. He, being a former teacher, diverted 40 percent of the city's \$900 million annual budget to education, much of which was used for his flagship project: the Library Parks.

He proclaimed that the city would put its most beautiful structures where its poorest residents lived, that it would create hilltop sanctuaries where they could learn, interact, and relax. He believed in transformation through education and public spaces and invited residents to meet with architects, academics, and developers and so worked on what he called 'social urbanism'.

Social Urbanism is a developmental approach based on investing in people, places and jobs, through the creation of public spaces and infrastructure. The ability to have input in these infrastructure projects creates a sense of empowerment among the community.

## NEXT







Spain Library Park



## 5 LESSONS FOR OBA NEXT

During my stay in Medellin I visited most of the Library Parks and talked to librarians, policymakers, researchers and architects. This has given me some valuable insights for the development, design and use of OBA Next, the library of the future that will be built in Amsterdam Southeast which can be summarized in the following five lessons:

- **Lesson 1: Location Matters**

In determining the location of the Library Parks a lot of attention has been paid to the exact location regarding its physical and cultural importance.

- **Lesson 2: Mix top-down with bottom-up**

In all cases the Library Parks have been a result of an interplay between a top down city led process and a bottom up people's process.

- **Lesson 3: Space for multifunctional use**

All Library Parks are much more than libraries in the sense that they provide room for cultural, recreational, social and educational purposes.

- **Lesson 4: Connect the inside with the outside**

A distinct feature of all the Library Parks is the connection between the building and its surroundings.

- **Lesson 5: Create public space for a vibrant, inclusive, and healthy city**

Due to the creation of the Library Parks, Medellin has created public spaces increasing the well-being and vitality of the city

Claustro Comfama Library

## NEXT





“First life, than spaces,  
than building”

~ Jan Gehl, architect



## LESSON 1

## LOCATION MATTERS

All the library parks have been strategically placed in the center of marginalised communities. Natalia Castana from URBACT, the center of urban studies at the EAFIT University explains that all libraries are placed in the for the community important and meaningful locations in order to reclaim parts of the natural or historical system for the community. All locations were selected in a meaningful place for the community.

For example the library park in Belen is made on the place where there used to be a prison which had an historical importance for the neighbourhood, the San Javier Library Park was placed where there used be a creek and the San Cristobal Library Park was made on a hillside that overlooked the community.

Hillside location of La Quintana Library Park

## NEXT







Belen Library Park



# LESSON 1

Three criteria were used to define the locations of the library:

- The presence of a community/social or commercial center.
- A historical or natural system meaningful for the community.
- The vicinity of public transport to connect the library with the whole city.

In essence, the Library Parks in Medellin are not just structures imposed on the landscape; they are carefully planned to coexist with and enhance the natural systems of the surrounding environment. This approach reflects a holistic view of urban development that considers both the needs of the community and the preservation of the natural ecosystem.

Leon de Greiff Library Park

# NEXT









## LESSON 2

MIX TOP-DOWN WITH  
BOTTOM-UP

Although the concept of the library park was a top down decision part of a larger urban planning process the development of the Library Parks can be seen as combination of both top-down and bottom-up approaches.

While the initial impetus and funding for the project came from government authorities and city planners, there was a strong emphasis on community engagement and participation.

In all cases there was a significant effort to involve the local communities by consulting the needs and preferences of residents and by making each library different as to suit the community needs. This way the architecture and design of the Library Parks reflect the cultural identity of the communities they serve. This combination likely contributed to the success and positive impact of the Library Parks in Medellin.

La Quintana Library Park

## NEXT





# LESSON 2

In all cases there was a process set up that allowed active community participation. This was done in various phases from the design phase to the implementation phase. In some of the Library Parks the architectural phase included “imaginary workshops” in which the community directly participated in the building design. In other Library Parks local people were hired as staff and in most of the Library Parks there is strong connection with neighbourhood groups.

A specific feature in the Library Parks is the ‘Sala Mi Barrio’: a dedicated space for the neighbourhood. These rooms which are literally run by the neighbourhood serve as community spaces for various activities such as meetings, workshops, classes, and cultural events. They also serve as a local heritage center. The aim is to foster community engagement and provide residents with opportunities for learning and socialising.

Belen Library Park

# NEXT









# Colección

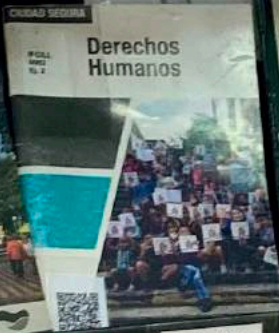
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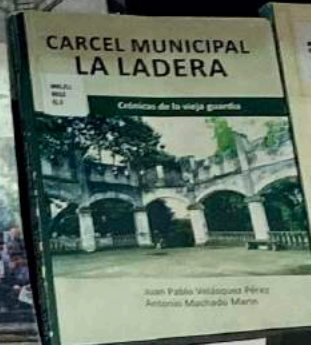
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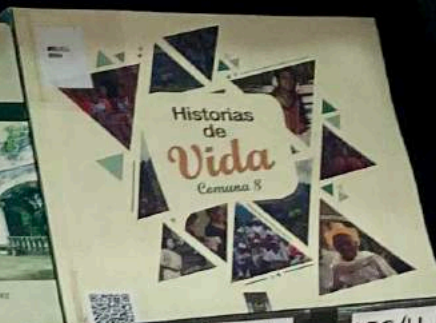


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## LESSON 3

MULTIFUNCTIONAL  
USE OF SPACE

Library parks are more than just traditional libraries. They are innovative, multi-functional spaces designed to serve various purposes and meet the diverse needs of communities. Having visited the different Library parks the following functions can be distinguished:

- Educational Hubs: all library parks include educational programs, workshops, activities that cater to different groups and interests.
- Cultural centers: the library parks serve as cultural hubs, promoting local arts, literature and heritage. They contain exhibitions spaces, auditoriums for performances, they host cultural festivals and some even have dance studios, music studios and creative maker-spaces.

San Javier Library Park

## NEXT





## LESSON 3

- **Community Spaces:** Library parks are designed to be community-centric. All have a “Sala mi Barrio” which functions as a meeting point for the community. In some Library Parks this was combined with a heritage center with information about the community. Also most Library Parks have a communal kitchen. This fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens community bonds.
- **Recreational areas;** All Library Parks incorporate recreational facilities, such as outdoor spaces, playgrounds, and sports facilities.
- **Technology and Innovation:** all Library Parks are equipped with free wifi, computer facilities and some also have other digital resources such as innovation labs and maker-spaces to support technological literacy and creativity.
- **Environmental awareness:** Many of the Library Parks are designed with a focus on sustainability and environmental awareness. They include green spaces, eco-friendly features, communal gardens and sustainable practices, promoting a connection to

## NEXT





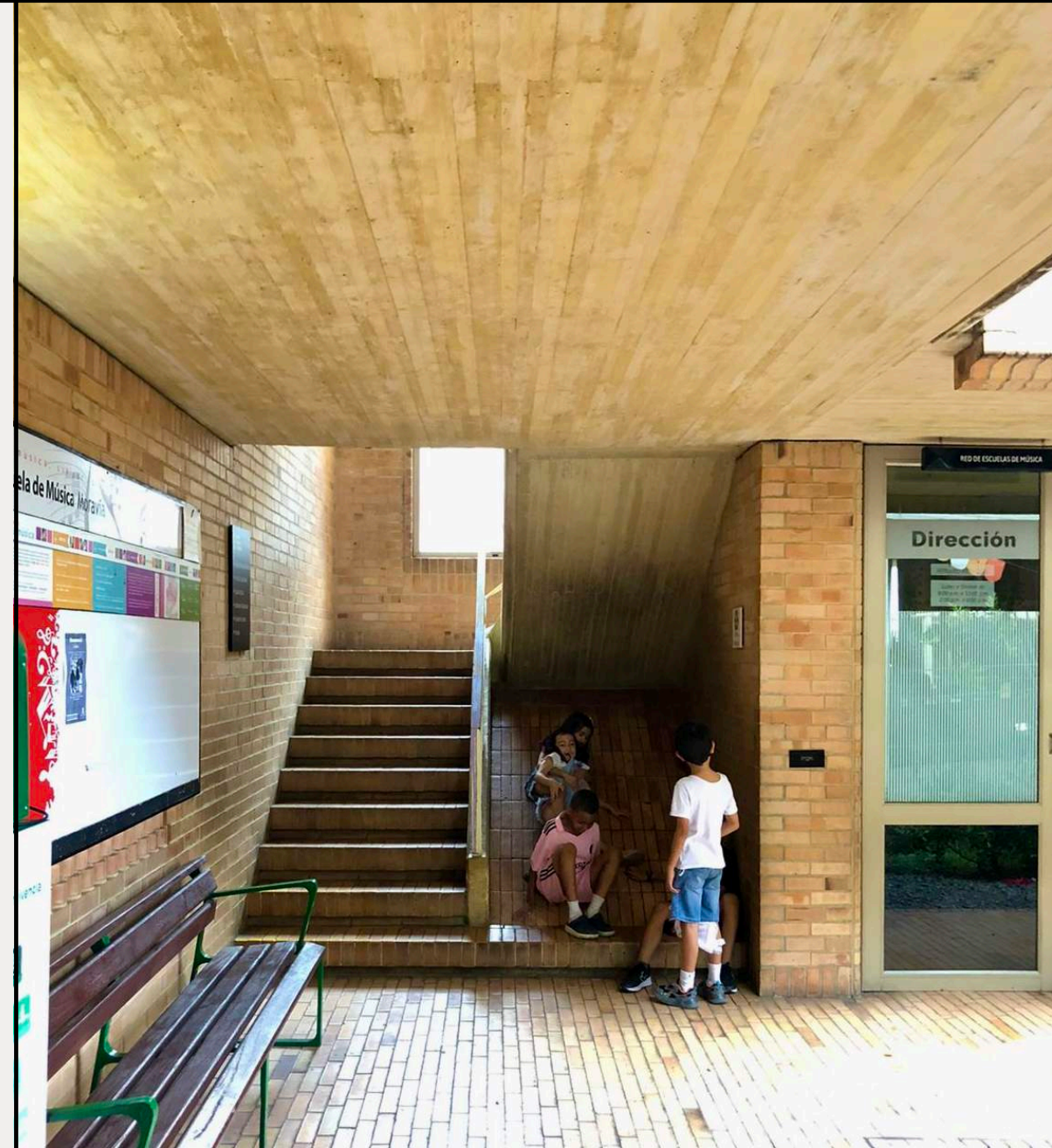
## LESSON 3

Architecturally the Library Parks are designed as dynamic, open and flexible spaces that can adapt to the evolving and varied needs and interests of the communities. There is no 'over designing' of spaces, maybe also due to the lack of budgets. This makes it possible for people to use the versatile spaces according to their wishes and insights.

Fundamentally, the facilities are designed to get people, particularly youth, off the streets. They succeed in attracting young people by showing films, staging exhibitions and theatre productions, and giving local talent the chance to perform. These opportunities, in turn, raise self-esteem, participation and creativity.

Moravia Cultural Center

## NEXT

























‘We will build a new public space. Let’s break away from the idea that beautiful things are for the rich, but rather that the most beautiful is for the most humble. And so we state how we will get to them. [...] And we begin to build this entire space simultaneously so that any person would say: something happened here.

~ Giancarlo Mazzanti, architect Library Park







## LESSON 4

CONNECT OUTSIDE WITH  
INSIDE AND VISA VERSE

The inclusion of outdoor spaces in Library Parks is a deliberate and thoughtful design choice. In many cases the Library Parks are formed by separate buildings which create a public outdoor space. In Belen this is for example a courtyard and at the Leon de Greiff Library the three pavilions create a lush park. The Claustro Comfama Library has an inner courtyard with trees.

These outdoor areas serve multiple purposes, enhancing the overall experience and functionality of the Library Parks. Not only are the outdoor spaces used for sports, recreation and culture, they also enhance the accessibility of the libraries by reducing barriers and making the library a welcoming and inclusive space. The focus on accessibility can also be seen by the use of ramps, elevators, and other accommodations that ensure that the spaces are accessible to individuals with disabilities.

Leon de Greiff Library Park

## NEXT





# LESSON 4

Another distinct feature of the library parks are the open and inviting spaces with plenty of natural light. All libraries have large windows, open-air areas, gardens inside of the building and outdoor gathering spots that contribute to a welcoming and communal atmosphere. Of course the temperature in the city of the enduring spring makes this very attractive.

The openness and interaction with nature makes the Library Parks very accessible. They feel very open and inclusive.

La Quintana Library Park

# NEXT







Belen Library Park



















## LESSON 5

## PUBLIC SPACE FOR A VIBRANT, INCLUSIVE, AND HEALTHY CITY

In a overwhelming busy and often dangerous city as Medellin, the Library Parks literally felt as a safe haven. A refuge from the city life, accessible for all. Library Parks are powerful examples of public space creation, as they bring together the benefits of libraries and outdoor spaces by combining the educational resources of libraries with the recreational and community-building aspects of outdoor spaces. Also they provide a sense of belonging and empowerment for the community.

It is in these spaces for example that new community initiatives take place. At the Moravia Cultural Center for example the women meet weekly to discuss practical matters. At San Javier Library senior citizens daily do morning gymnastics and in Belen Library Park there is a program for mental health. By focusing on the creation of public space Library Parks contribute to the social, cultural, and environmental vitality of communities, making them dynamic and engaging places for residents.

## NEXT





# LESSON 5

Well designed public spaces are essential for creating a sense of community, promoting physical and mental well-being, supporting economic growth, and enhancing the overall quality of life in a city. They contribute to the identity and character of a place, making it more livable and attractive for residents and visitors alike.

Libraries and parks are one of the only public spaces left in our cities. By making a combination of these functions can benefit both functions. It can can help to make a library attractive to all ages and enhance the connection a library can have with nature and the importance of sustainability.

Gyming at the library

# NEXT













# STORY OF MORAVIA

The highlight of my trip was a visit to the Moravia Cultural Center. Not part of the Library Parks but it definitely is very similar and is an powerful example of the lessons listed above.

Moravia is a neighbourhood that was once a landfill. Over the years, it has undergone a remarkable evolution from a marginalised area to a vibrant community with a focus on culture, social and economic development. Although the recent years have been difficult due to a large influx of refugees from Venezuela, it still remains an example of an extraordinary transformation.

Moravia Cultural Center





# STORY OF MORAVIA

A key success factor of this area is that the residents of Moravia actively began organising and advocating for improvements in their living conditions. Besides housing and recycling initiatives the renewal included the creation of a cultural center: the Centro de Desarrollo Cultural de Moravia.

The center opened in 2008, on a plot of land set free by the inhabitants of Monrovia, and was designed by a renown Colombian architect Rogelio Salmona. It serves about 50.000 users per month.

Moravia Cultural Center





# La Casa de Todos

MUEVE  
URA

**" En el Cultural  
aprendí a abrazar  
la diversidad "**



**" Todo es posible  
con el centro  
cultural "**

**" El cultural  
es la casa  
mía "**



## STORY OF MORAVIA



The cultural center - called by the community 'La Casa de Todos' is a multifunctional building and serves as a catalyst for the local economy and development. Not only is it the central meeting point for the whole community, it is also an attractive sight for residents of Medellin and tourists. At the cultural center there is a neighbourhood community and memorial center, an auditorium, music studio's, a dance hall, a communal kitchen, a toy library, an exhibition space, workshop rooms, computer spaces, a business development center and a library.

Over the years the building has been adapted by its users. The open inner courtyard has been covered to create more space and extra rooms have been created for different purposes.



# STORY OF MORAVIA

In an area where for decades the relationship between the community and the government was one of distrust and confrontation, the development of this cultural center proves the potential of co-production. Community engagement and participation were central to the development process of this center. Residents of Moravia actively contributed to the planning and design and the architectural design involved innovative and community-centric approaches. The result is a well used building which serves a connector between the community and the rest of the world. It has a lasting impact on the neighbourhood and strong acceptance within the community.





# STORY OF MORAVIA

# STORY OF MORAVIA



# STORY OF MORAVIA







# NEXT STEPS





## Inspired by the Library Parks in Medellin next steps for OBA Next are:

- Select a strategic and meaningful location in Amsterdam Southeast
- Actively engage the community from the start in design and programming by deeply understanding needs and preferences.
- Create room for all sorts of cultural programming in order to stimulate the popularity, rootedness and identity making it a dynamic hub of community life.
- Offer educational opportunities thereby promoting knowledge sharing and skills development
- Think public space and not just building, meaning focussing on the creation of communal public meeting points
- Be inclusive, welcoming to people of all ages and backgrounds. This inclusivity fosters a sense of community and shared ownership of the space.
- Ensure stable government support and financial backing for a long period of time.
- Create space for innovative and sustainable architecture making OBA Next the visibility and appearance needed to become an attractive place to go.















"Only when you realize that the other could have been you, you can really engage in creating spaces that have meaning for all of us."

~ Lyongo Juliana, architect



# COLOFON

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# NEXT







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