

## Medellín, the challenge of innovation

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**O**n May first this year, Medellín was appointed by the Urban Land Institute as the most innovating city in the world thanks to its advances in the areas of environmental protection, land usage for inclusion, efforts to improve the quality of education and fostering of research on mobility solutions.

This mention represents a great challenge for the city, and especially for the scholars and researchers who live in it, since it urges us to address issues such as:

- The need to comprehend research activity as an exercise for creation and a search for innovative, efficient and effective ways to act upon our environment; this encompasses the research of new mechanisms and systems up to the re-signification and adaptation of knowledge to our social, economic, cultural political and environmental reality.
- Innovation as a helping factor for social inclusion efforts that may project a more dignified city with less inequality for the thousands of people that inhabit it.
- Innovation as a fundamental quality in the daily labor of our researchers that may force them into questioning themselves and constantly shake the bases of their knowledge.
- The fostering of interaction between universities, the business sector and the state, under the understanding that this would be fertile ground to make initiatives leading to the construction of social wealth possible.
- The necessity to improve creative qualities needed for research activity in developing countries around innovation.
- The importance of being tuned to the productive vocation of the city and region, both influencing and consulting public policy for their development.
- The possibility for improving, through research activity, the quality of higher education and thus that of the new professionals that build human resources for the innovative city project.
- The opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the productive and services apparatus , to attract the mid and long-term investment that shall be originated in the city and region.
- Inter-disciplinary and also trans-disciplinary approaches as constitutive elements of innovation that lead us to be articulated in networks and support groups that may project our research and improve its attributes.
- Environmental, economical and social sustainability of the research projects as a condition in innovation initiatives.

In particular, we may highlight one of the most important aspects to which we are challenged by this qualification of innovative city, that it drives us to create synergies with our political and social environment. As a consequence, innovation must drink

from the strategic frameworks that are built from public planning for the city, region and country.

The earning of this title by the city of Medellín is not a mere lobbying exercise seeking publicity for the city; it is the product of a series of institutional efforts that are in the process of reconfiguring the productive profile of the city since the industrial crisis of the last decade of the twentieth century. As an example of these efforts we may list the following public policy documents that must be highlighted in our daily research labor:

The Medellín Science, Technology and Innovation Plan that constitutes an innovative document for political planning in our country, it visualizes a city that by 2021 shall profit from high levels of involvement between academia and the productive, political and social sectors of society as a condition to foster its integral development. This plan defines three high priority productive chains from the potential of the region and the city: energy, ICT and health, which shall be enriched with a high added value given by knowledge in such a way that it will give the region the competitiveness needed to confront a globalized market.

The AMA (Medellín and Antioquia Alliance) gives the categorization of Medellín as an innovative city a regional reach in so far as this strategic understands that the development of the capital is inextricably tied to that of the region in which it is located. Due to this, the alliance posits that the efforts in education, strengthening of the productive apparatus, the rapprochement of academia, enterprises and state, must be approached jointly by the administrations of territorial entities that compose it.

The “Medellín un hogar para la Vida 2012-2015” (Medellín a home for life) and “Antioquia la más Educada” (Antioquia the most educated) development plans see knowledge as a fundamental tool for the advancement of competitiveness of the city and the region, as it can be seen in their strategic guidelines, components and programs.

Within this legal, political and institutional framework, Universities are called to have an effect on the city and the region as the knowledge building flag bearers demanded by development. Our instructors and formation professionals must be capable of generating progress proposals that answer to these territorial dynamics with a critical and social focus.

The Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, in particular, must foster strong points, such as its solidary origins, the incidence in the communities around it, its national presence, as well as the high quality of its professionals, thus creating a seal for the production of its own knowledge that will enable it to be relevant within this new reality.

In the region, the areas of health and engineering are key aspects of incidence that, when joined to the solidarity component, will allow the University to propose innovative solutions to social and development problems such as violence, marginalization and exclusion, more so if we consider a possible post-conflict scenario in which our region is called to lead reconciliation and social reconstruction actions.

Our calling is thus, from research, to project our vision towards the challenges that the described reality poses for us, and to imbue a more inclusive, fair and equitable vision of city and region within the academic endeavor.