

University Of Cambridge ~ Researchers In Colombia Are Trying To Reimagine Slums To Foster Equality

Dr Felipe Hernández was born and raised in Cali, Colombia's third-biggest city and one of the country's most dangerous - riven by fighting between drug trafficking gangs and the grinding poverty of its shanty towns.

One of the most violent neighbourhoods is Potrero Grande along the Cauca River. "When I was a child I never went to the settlements along the bank, although they were only nine or 10 miles away," Hernández said. "They had a reputation for being dangerous. It took several years and some geographical distance for me to see how deeply divided Cali was then and remains today. As recently as 1997, the city's most prestigious club denied membership to black people."

Various schemes have been initiated to regulate the development of Cali and address the levels of violence in its notorious poorer districts. Although these schemes have commendable objectives, and valuable aspects, they fail to take people's lived experiences, especially their social networks and productive capacity, into account

"Teaching music to poor children is useful because it gets them off the streets," Hernández said. "But what happens when they grow up and need to earn a living? How many children have the opportunity to follow a career in music?"

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