



## ***Educational Peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crises***

### **Briefing Paper 1: Public Policies and Peacebuilding**

Public policies that aim to address violence and improve security for successful peacebuilding within the communities (Fuentes-Romero 2003; Kpessa, 2011) have tended to do so through one of two main approaches. The first approach to solving the problem of violence looks at it through a legal and criminological perspective with a view to controlling it (Fuentes-Romero 2003). This approach assumes that hard-line responses, implemented within the legal landscape and which include harsh punishments, can lead to violence reduction (Abello and Pearce 2015). In Latin America, for instance, this heavy-handed response to the increase of urban violence related to drug trafficking and organized crime has permeated public policies for security, especially in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Mexico (Abello and Pearce 2015; Zaitch and Antonopoulos, 2019). While governments in countries, such as Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador employ security departments for law enforcement directed at the repression of violence, it is often the case that a vigilante and para-legal responses emerge alongside this "iron fist" approach (Pion-Berlin and Trinkunas, 2011). The deployment of strategies within this approach, however, often triggers an even more violent backlash and has little effect in reducing the initial levels of violence (Abello and Pearce 2015). Of course, as the process of peacebuilding progresses it is vital that a clear legislative and policy framework emerges that deals with ongoing violence whilst acknowledging the role of the state in the conflict. This transition is just one element of policy framework to peacebuilding and we acknowledge that this paper is a contextualization of our project rather than a nuanced explanation of peacebuilding which will be explored in subsequent briefings.

The second approach to reducing violence assumes that it is caused by a variety of factors and therefore can be prevented if they are managed. The shift in the last two decades to a public health and epidemiologic approach which involves anticipating violence and tackling its causes (World Health Organization, 2008), instead of focusing on its effects and the use of a coercive method, has determined a new design of public policies in places such as Colombia and Uruguay. This change in perspective has also strengthened the idea

that security measures should involve citizens, rather than solely the police forces and state institutions. Thus, the focus moves towards communities and groups of citizens as potential agents for the prevention of violence and to the rethinking of the role of security forces within this framework (Abello and Pearce 2015).

The British Academy project funded UK's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy via the Global Challenges Research Fund, *Educational Peacebuilding in Medellin and Acapulco: Understanding the role of education, culture and learning in responding to crises*, is framed under the second approach. It aims to examine the circumstances, policies and practices through which the city of Medellin in Colombia has been able to develop and implement an inclusive, life-long learning strategy which has a positive impact on peacebuilding and violence reduction. Through an ambitious shift in policy, transforming spaces of violence into arts and literacy centres, libraries and parks giving rise to an innovative way to reduce crime rates and homicides (Vulliamy, 2013). In recognition of its success in promoting an inclusive educational strategy in 2017 Medellin was named a UNESCO Learning City and in 2019 gained a UNESCO [Learning Cities Award](#).

The research therefore considers factors such as infrastructure, engagement and resources, as well as the role of the community and citizens. The main focus is on the ways in which education, culture and learning contributed to reducing the negative impacts of drug-related violence and crime. These pathways will be highlighted by mapping out community educational spaces where culture and the arts have played a part in the peace processes. The potential for these pathways will then be explored in the city of Acapulco in Mexico. In the 1950s, Acapulco was considered a top tourist destination and refuge for celebrities, but in the past 20 years, the resort has changed dramatically becoming one of the most violent cities in the world, struggling day to day to cope under the strain of gang warfare.

The first phase of the review of documents from Medellin along with the initial research into the context in Acapulco has already noted findings that will have implications for the latter. The first finding is in relation to the lack of community-based infrastructure in Acapulco: in some areas there are very few community-based, informal educational or cultural centres. Thus, the first step in this context will be to identify and establish connections with key community leaders and other crucial actors, for example, among those that we have identified, the Catholic Church which seems to play a major role in supporting peacebuilding activities. The lack of visible, sustainable community infrastructure is vitally important when beginning to analyse the context of Acapulco. Not having safe spaces and sites for the beginning of conversations on a society moving towards eradicating violence highlights the need for investment, negotiation and the engagement of community leaders within the process.

If we are to produce an educational peacebuilding model and index for transferability based on the findings from Medellin, it will be crucial for the city of Acapulco to look to the levels of community cohesion, infrastructure and business engagement, all of which played a vital role in translating governmental policies to community-based

peacebuilding in Medellin. Our first insights from the analysis of the context of Medellin has highlighted five main public policy dimensions in which education, culture and the arts have played a significant role in the reduction of violence and the promotion of peace:

*Education and culture as a vehicle for social inclusion.* Fostering education and art-based activities through a strategic partnership of cultural and educational institutions to reduce local socio-educational disadvantages.

*Youth policies.* This includes both the equipment and the development of educational hubs, subsidizing full or partial scholarships for young people, combating discrimination and poverty through educational and art-based activities at the community level.

*Citizen coexistence through a civic culture.* These programs and training activities have been offered by local government and institutions, providing the trust and confidence to improve family and community integration.

*Culture and learning to promote the city.* Encouraging art and cultural activities that alter the perceptions of a city in order to encourage tourism, enable business relocation and attract inward migration of residents to improve the city's identity.

*Peace and reconciliation programs.* This includes the disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration of members of armed groups to prevent recidivism in armed groups and long-term social integration.

The next stages of the project will involve interviews with key community stakeholders and the development of a remote approach of mapping local community infrastructure using participatory methods. Despite the challenges of Covid-19, the research will continue to engage and work alongside politicians, community members, young people and stakeholders in both cities, in order to move forward in the creation of the vision for 'the Acapulco we want'.

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