



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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DEVLIN: Today is November 3rd, 2009. We're in Bogotá, Colombia, with Sergio Fajardo (Sergio Fajardo Valderrama), former mayor of Medellín and now presidential candidate. Mr. Fajardo, thank you for joining us.

FAJARDO: *It's my pleasure.*

DEVLIN: I should correct myself: Dr. Fajardo.

FAJARDO: *No problem.*

DEVLIN: I thought we might begin by asking you to talk about planning, because you were meticulous about it in your administration, and you took a very strong stance on the importance of planning. So what's important to understand about the role of planning in your time as mayor?

FAJARDO: *The first thing that we have to know is that once you get into power, you have to know exactly what you want to do. It sounds trivial, but many times, people just get into power and they want to do very many things—but we had very clearly in mind what we were going to do once we got into power. That's the first thing. Secondly, we had the team that would be able to carry out the tasks that we had in mind. And so the way you choose your team is crucial so that you will be able to do what you want to do. So we had a team that had five features, the people that made up the team. Namely, in the first place, honest. Secondly, knowledgeable: people who knew what they were going to do and knew about the issues that they were dealing with. Third, passion, in the sense that that was our purpose in getting to power. We wanted to transform the city. We wanted to know—we wanted to make sure that all what we had dreamed about becomes a reality. Fourth, you have to have a team of people who have social sensibility. They understand the place, they understand people's needs and feelings and dreams and pains and everything. And fourth, or finally, we have to have decency in the way we relate to people. So we knew what we wanted to do. We had the team and the way we had gotten into power, we made sure that we didn't have to negotiate the city with particular interests. So with all those three components, we were in the position to get things done.*

Now, we clearly have some priorities. For each one of those priorities that we call strategic projects, we assembled a group of people that would be dealing with it. We had a perfectly designed plan—the different stages that we will go through so that we will be able to make sure that we will be complying with the different steps that we were going to take in order to achieve the final purpose. And we did it working permanently, all of us together, for each subject that we were dealing with. We had a way of following basically every instant of how the projects were developing. We could quickly identify where we had difficulties. We worked around solving those difficulties, and in that way we were able to achieve what we wanted to do. And at the same time we always made sure that we were communicating with the city, with everyone, letting them know where we were at each stage, so that people could, let's say, see the development of each project, so when we finish, everyone will see that realization as a process that took us from scratch to giving the city something powerful.

DEVLIN: Now you mentioned that you were very particular about communicating with the city and, as I understand, you didn't rush. Once you

assembled this team, you took the better part of the first year to continue planning, to develop your goals. How did you manage communications? How did you keep the pressure off in that early planning phase?

FAJARDO: That's usually difficult, because once you have a new government, right away people will start saying: "Well, let's see what these guys have to say and show." We were always saying: "We are planning so that we won't improvise." And we explained from day zero what we were doing. So, for example, just to illustrate. We were going to build a park library. So I had an activity program every week, which was named "With the Mayor," every Thursday night from 8:30 until 10. So that would be a privileged space to be in touch with citizens throughout the city, even beyond the city. And the first thing we said: "We are going to build a park library," and I would explain what a park library was all about. Those words, first of all, were my words, explaining what there should be in there, what would be the components. It would just be words explaining what we were going to do.

Then we had the place where we were going to build the park library. So we would go directly to the place, and we would say, "In this lot we are going to build a park library." But now there was the first direct contact with the physical location where the park library was going to be built, and I explained more now, located at the place, why we were at this place, what was the community that was going to be directly affected by what we were going to do. Then, later on, we would have the...contest for the architectural design, the contest, and then we chose one project as the winner. So then we would go to that lot with the architects that had won the competition, the contest. Then they would explain what they had designed for the place. So we would have the first sketches of what was going to be, what was going to be happening in that piece of land in the city.

Then we would have the people who won the contest for building the place. So we would make sure that we would explain how the process had been carried out so people would see that it was a transparent process, that it was—. Everyone could see what was done. So then, on the same lot, we would have the architects and the builders, and then we would come there later and say, "This is the first stone being put into place." Then we would have the people who had worked with the community, because we moved the community around the place so that it wouldn't be a building that appears there after some years. And what we would be doing is having a team of people working with the community, showing different aspects of what we we're going to be building there and what it was going to be for. So there was a social mobilization: readings, theater, and explaining to people what was going to happen in there. So from day zero the city would see directly what was going—what was happening in that place. So as we moved along, then, later on, during the construction of the building, we would go there and we would say, "Look at how it is right now, how much we have advanced." And the day that we inaugurated the place, everyone had followed the process, so it was a very rich process, and once we had it done, people would be very happy and proud of what we had done. So we kept the city tuned on what we were doing so that everyone could feel that the city was being transformed. And we tried to do that in all the projects that we were carrying out in the city, so that it gave us a very direct relationship with the citizens in the city. People were proud of what was happening, and something very crucial: they saw things happening, and that was very powerful.

DEVLIN: So you were clearly very conscious about managing the public constituency for your reforms, but, of course, the other side is the politicians. You broke a long tradition of traditional party dominance in Medellín. You were—it's well known you were an independent candidate. But how did you interact with the traditional political interests in the city?

FAJARDO: *We defined the relationship that we were going to have with the city council. That's where the politicians related to the city life would go everyday, and during the first semester we discussed—with the councilmen, we discussed our development plan. Since we knew what we were going to do, they were part of the discussions. We asked them to get involved with whatever ideas they had so that our projects could be—"improved" is the word, so that they would also feel part of what was going to be happening in there. And so we were able to build a working relationship with the politicians in the city. We built trust, and since they were seeing what was happening and they were seeing how the community was reacting to this, we managed to have a good, decent working atmosphere so that we didn't have to go through political battles—bad. There were some natural discussions, but basically we worked all together.*

DEVLIN: Now, when most people think of city councils, two words that come to mind are patronage and clientelism, in most settings in the world. How was that an issue for you? How did you confront that problem?

FAJARDO: *From the very beginning we said, there are no contracts for anyone here, we are not going to give the bureaucratic positions to politicians, we are going to work around this development plan, and that's why—that's the reason we were elected. And since we didn't negotiate the interests of the city in the development of the political campaign, so once we got into power, we didn't have to come into power to divide it to private or political interests, but we were able to work for the whole interest of the city. So from day zero we established a relationship that broke with this tradition, and we defined the ground where we were going to interact, and we were very successful.*

DEVLIN: And beyond the city council, you were also very clear on transparency, and that you would not accept any corruption in your administration. How did you go about that? Because that was a significant change from the past, again.

FAJARDO: *Once again, everything could be seen. Everything would be explained so that people would see and feel that the public resources were used where they were supposed to be used. In all the boards that we had, for example, in all the places that we were intervening, there was a phrase. They would say, "Here are your taxes." And that was always a message to people. We increased the land tax from the very beginning, we collected the money, but we showed people that the money that they had paid to the city was directly used in these social interventions that we were carrying out.*

DEVLIN: Now you mentioned that you raised the land tax, and your administration is well known for that, but it's the envy of every mayor. How did you do that?

FAJARDO: *Usually people in the administrations are afraid of having higher taxes, and many times, many of the administrations want to avoid raising taxes, and usually, many times, the councilmen would be against taxes because they know that people, in principle, don't want to pay. Nobody is for increasing taxes. But from day one we*

said that we were going to do it. We were going to follow the rules that are established in our constitution, but we were bold in the sense that we were going to do it. We explained the reasons why we were going to do it, and anyone who had any question about it could ask. And it was our duty to answer all those questions. And people paid. People paid. People trusted us, and so we collected the taxes. We had our public utilities company, which is a very powerful public utilities company, and so we had the money. And we made—we used that money according to what was our political proposal for the city, and everyone felt that we were doing exactly what we said that we were going to do. And, of course, this was associated with the communication program that we had, so the people would see it. And that's—I guess that's the main reason for our success.

DEVLIN: And out of this very careful planning process emerged a focus, a catchphrase that Medellín would be the most educated, and education really defined at least the rhetoric, the language of your administration.

FAJARDO: *Exactly.*

DEVLIN: Why? It's not immediately obvious why education.

FAJARDO: *Well, I come from the world of education, and I have spent a good deal of my life, a good part of my life, talking about the importance of education in order to transform a society. Usually with education, the problem is that everyone in a political campaign, regardless of the ideology or the party, will say, "Education is the most important thing." That happens all over the world. Now, the problem is how you make sure that that phrase becomes a reality, and that's what we knew. We knew exactly what we were going to bet on. We knew what type of stages we had to go through. We knew, and we were sure that the way we got into education, which was understood in a broad sense, not just education which relates to school, but science, technology, innovation, entrepreneurship and culture, and we had a powerful tool to make, in that sense, what was an urban transformation. We said the first step in building this would be building the places where we could get together, which is necessary when you're fighting violence. Violence splits people, divides people into smaller groups. People are afraid of moving around. So we knew that we had to build the new places to get together once again into the public space. And everything that we did—or almost everything, because we did very many things—had that character. So whatever we did, we explained it around this narrative about education, understood in that broad sense. So we built park libraries, which are not libraries in a traditional sense. It's a way of getting together in a place where you had the components that you have been able to see. We talked about entrepreneurship, but we had the social entrepreneurship program, which had a physical expression everywhere. We talked about science and technology. We built Explora Park (Parque Explora), which is a new symbol of the city, where it's knowledge, and it would be for everyone. And so on. So we had our idea. We knew how we were going to carry it out. We transformed the city physically, which was a powerful message to the poorest communities, and that was the key to our success. We knew what we wanted to do.*

DEVLIN: But your program for education wasn't without its challenges, one of which, as I understand, was the teachers' union. That was a relationship you had to negotiate, had to find a middle ground with them. Can you talk about that challenge and how you dealt with it?

FAJARDO: *By my trajectory was associated with education, in that broad sense that I have mentioned. So we never negotiated with the teachers' union before we got into power. We explained what we were going to do once in power. And actually, the teachers' union supported another candidate. But once I was in the streets walking with our people, I would find many teachers who would come to us and say, "We are with you." And once we got into power, we said, "We are going to work together." We didn't come into a confrontation, but said, "We are going to make sure that education is the key in this city." So without having negotiated anything, once we got into power we realized what, by far, but beyond any expectation of any teachers' union—a project that would give sense to recuperating the dignity of public teachers, the public schools, and that was very powerful. We worked with them in all the projects that we were carrying out. We didn't have a single strike in the city while I was the mayor. A strike by the teachers in the city, which was very often, very common in public education.*

We created the program "Medellín, the most educated" ("Medellín, la más educada"). I talked about education. I recognized myself as a teacher. So this created a different atmosphere. I visited, I don't know how many schools. Nobody, and I would claim in the world, has done what we did, and in particular how many schools I attended. We didn't go to the schools or the teachers saying that they were bad. We said, "We are all good, and let's work together." So we created the conditions so that they would be proud of what has happening in the city. For the first time, people were looking at education and public education in particular as something valuable. And we recuperated the dignity of education, and it could be seen and felt by the people in the city.

DEVLIN: And one of the high-profile aspects of your work on education were these quality pacts that you signed with the schools.

FAJARDO: *Right.*

DEVLIN: But it wasn't just education. You signed other pacts. What was the idea behind pacts, and why did they appeal?

FAJARDO: *Around every subject, we wanted to get the people from society that had to deal with that subject. And what we always did was: "This is our plan, let's work together." We invited different sectors to be part of what we were going to do. And so that was a breakthrough with regard to the ways, many times, government is seen, because usually government is by itself, and everyone is subsidiary to what government asks. We said, "Come with us, let's work together." And we did that systematically in as many subjects as we could. So people would feel part of our group. And that created trust, and so we tried. I guess I could put it this way: the best from everyone in order to have the best for the city. And I guess that was very powerful. Since we weren't dividing the city into particular interests, we were able to make clear what it means to work for the public good.*

DEVLIN: So this idea of participation intersects with planning, in an interesting way, with the participatory budget. Why was this important? Why was that participatory budget a big part of how you chose to administer?

FAJARDO: *We didn't negotiate with anyone in order to get into power, so once we got into power we would be able to call the people from the different sectors of the city—now I'm talking about the barrios, the "comunas"—and we asked them, "Let's*

work together.” We have these resources that traditionally had been used just by the government, and they would do exactly what they wanted or with the leaders that were the followers—and said, “Let’s take a look at this. We have these resources, we want to have people saying what has to be done with those.” So it opened up a wave of community participation. People would discuss. People from different parts of a neighborhood would come and say what they wanted, and this was a very good process in the sense that it increased participation. And when people feel that they are included in what is happening, their reaction is always positive. It wasn’t a government that had the money, so it would put the conditions into everyone, but we said, “Let’s do it together.” And for the very first time, I think, many voices were heard that hadn’t been taken into account before.

DEVLIN: So let’s stay with this idea of the “comunas,” the barrios, the poor parts of Medellín. You invested large amounts of money, constructed world-class architecture in what had been some of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the Americas. Why?

FAJARDO: *Because we had perfectly clear that we had to work with the communities, and we had to have a rupture with the traditional idea that—. If you have poor neighborhoods, whatever you give to them is an improvement, because they have very little or nothing. And it was a political decision. The most beautiful things that we have in this society, the best that we can have in this society, will go to those places where they have never had the chance to have the best.*

And the architecture came into the political atmosphere, and having the most wonderful buildings built in the poorest sections was very powerful to the communities. The beautiful things are not for the privileged people in society. The beautiful things, with this concept of education around, would be for our poorest communities. And that meant that for them we had opened up a door that was locked. And that made them proud. We gave them dignity, and, as a matter of fact, the whole city was proud that it was happening, and it was a very powerful message: say, social inclusion. We have to fight against social inequalities, and this was a way of expressing it in something that would be tangible.

DEVLIN: Now you worked on a tremendous amount of fronts. You had social urbanism, education, we talked about taxes. It begs the question: what couldn’t you do? What was the trade-off? If you had all these priorities, what did you have to sacrifice in order to achieve all these other great things?

FAJARDO: *I have been asked that question many times, and I would say: nothing. We did what we wanted to do. Some things we did more than we expected to do. We showed how every peso could be transforming to a social investment. Now, there is the social transportation system. Medellín has a metro, has had a metro for more than 10 years, and there is under construction right now another part, with this massive transport system using buses that would connect with the metro systems to have a whole system integrated in the city. With that we had problems. Now, from the very beginning, we understood and I, myself, realized that it would be something that we couldn’t control, because there were many components taking a say into that project. For example, the national government. And they would make decisions that would effect the project. So we quickly realized that we could not bet on this system, because we were trapped in the sense that we couldn’t control the project. We couldn’t go through the stages because, as I said, there were many interests that would affect the project. So I would say that it would have been nice to have that system integrated, but I*

realized that we couldn't bet on it, in the sense of making it our, or one of our government's targets, because there was plenty of room and there was plenty of space that we didn't have a say in there, and then we couldn't assume a responsibility with the city with something that wasn't in our hands.

DEVLIN: Now, you mentioned the national government, and as mayor of Medellín, you were clearly one of the most high-profile figures in the country. In most situations there's sometimes some tension there between the national government and regional leaders. How did that relationship work out for you?

FAJARDO: *We had a good relationship with the government, national government—and, of course, because we knew what we were going to do. We were organized. We had very clearly in mind. So for the national government, which has to work with the local governments throughout the country, working with us was very easy because we were organized and we made things happen. So it was a good place for the government to work, because they could see that whenever we worked together, things turned out well. So we didn't have a political confrontation. We said, "We're working on this," and we worked and it was very serious, and I have no complaints.*

DEVLIN: And again, thinking on a national level, one of the aspects of your tenure that distinguished Medellín was, you oversaw an amazing improvement in the security situation. It was a drastic change. What is the story behind that?

FAJARDO: *It's a complicated story, and it's a story that is very often under question, and it's part of the tax that I will receive—I have received and I will receive as a presidential candidate. The national government negotiated with the paramilitary narco-traffickers of Colombia a peace agreement. That was negotiated in the year 2003, before we even won the election. So the national government negotiated with them, and that negotiation had an impact on Medellín, because in Medellín we had had the presence of paramilitary groups, and the government negotiated with them a demobilization process. So once we got into power, then the government had negotiated with them, and there were plenty of these former paramilitaries that would be demobilized according to the agreements that the national government had made, and then they would be handed out to us. They would be in our territory. We made a decision, in spite of the fact that these groups, during the campaign, were against us. For example—now usually you don't talk about this, but some of those groups would go to places where we had our presence, and they would threaten people, saying that they shouldn't vote for me. And actually, a week before the election, there were some parts of the city that were—they were handing out leaflets saying that I was a guerilla guy and I was the number one enemy of President Uribe (Álvaro Uribe Vélez). But once we got into power, we took the decision and said, "These guys are here; these guys are the expression of all the violence that we have had for decades." So we took in our hands the process of reintegration. That was a political decision that we made. And before I even got into power, January 1, 2004; in December, just 15 days before we got in there, the first 868, that number I'll never forget, of these demobilized peoples came into the streets of Medellín as demobilized. So we said, we have to work with them. They are going to be in the city. Who is going to be respon—who is going to be in charge of them? And we said, we are going to do it. And we decided that—. We designed a reintegration process. This ended up being more than 4,000 guys who had been demobilized, who had been to crime—different forms of crime. And we worked with them. We designed a project, and during that time that they were demobilized. We used that condition*

in order to make sure that we would come quickly into the city to have all the social interventions. And that was the point.

After I finished as mayor in April, March of 2008, the national government finished, stopped the process with them, and from then violence escalated once again. So some people say that we had an agreement with them in order to run the city, and as I have explained to everyone, there was a—or some people will say, “No there an implicit agreement.” We said, “No, nothing implicit.” The national government had an explicit agreement with them. What we did was, we made sure that we tried to get as many of them out of violence, and once we were working on that, we would come out very quickly with the social interventions. That’s something difficult. It’s difficult because it was a decision of the national government, and the national government has a particular characteristic. President Uribe is associated with right wing and so on, and we in Medellín were making sure that this would work, because it was our decision to make it work for the sake—for the improvement of the city. So this gets tangled with many political interpretations and, of course, after I finish, I became a nationally-known figure, and once we get into the presidential race, then we will be the subject of attacks, and they will try to destroy whatever we did, associating that with the narco-traffic and the paramilitary. That’s the dirty part of politics. We have explained it. We explained it throughout, but that’s part of what is discussed, and I have always explained, every time, about what we have done, why we have done it, why I believe that we did the right thing. But then we get into this dirty war of politics and, of course, I’m very proud of what we achieved, all the recognition that we have gotten, and the simplest way of explaining it—I can go around the country looking into people’s eyes, and that’s our political capital. Trust. They will try to destroy that. They will try to destroy me. They will try to destroy Medellín, try to get a political advantage. But all of you have been there, and you saw it, and after all what we have done is—it could be summarized in the following sentence. We have been narrowing, everyday, the entrance door into the legal war. That door had been wide open in Medellín, unfortunately, painfully, because Medellín has paid for dealing with violence throughout decades now. And what we did was, we were narrowing that door, which means: with all the social interventions that we did, what we have been trying to make sure is that once we get our people to get to the places that we build, to the programs that we designed and we had for the city, nobody will take that door and go in that direction. And that’s something that I strongly believe and that’s our stand. The current mayor came from our movement. We managed to hold on to power—and I had plenty of enemies, plenty of enemies, because we showed that things could be done differently. We gave sense or meaning to the word transparency. We got all this recognition, and I got plenty of enemies, as I said, because they could never stand that we took them out of power. And that’s the way it is.

DEVLIN: So I know your time is very short these days—so, a quick closing couple of questions. Are there lessons you take from your tenure? Is there advice that you would offer to others who face similar challenges?

FAJARDO: *Don’t negotiate the public interest before—I mean, don’t negotiate the city during the elections, because the way you get into power will define the way you will handle the administration. We were free, and we were able to do it for everyone. One. Because transparency is the equivalent of trust, and that’s the best political capital that you can have. Secondly, you have to know what you want to do. And then, if you don’t have to pay and you know what you want to do, have a very*

careful process of planning so that you could see what you have dreamed being turned into reality. I talked to many mayors afterwards, and I would always tell them, "What would you like people to remember you for after four years?" You have to have that picture in mind before you get in there, so that you will mobilize into that direction. And that's what we did. It works. Bring people to work with you, make sure that you get the best from everyone, and design a ground where you can work with your rules, where decency should be crucial.

DEVLIN: And so, a final question. A lot of people stress the importance of having a leader who can articulate a vision, sell people a dream. How did you do that? How did you communicate your vision to people?

FAJARDO: *From day zero. We began, we entered this world, unknown to me 10 years ago, and we said that we were going to do some things. The way we behaved from day zero up to today has been perfectly coherent. We had some basic set of principles that we have respected all the time, and we have coherence, and what we say we represent. And that's the crucial thing. We never backed off in front of a problem. We always moved forward. We knew where we were going to go, and we always moved forward. They always told me that we were crazy. They always told me that it was impossible, that it didn't make sense, that we had to do it other way, and here we are.*

DEVLIN: Well, Dr. Fajardo, thank you for being so generous with your time.

FAJARDO: *Okay, thank you very much for coming here.*