

Expanding Green Space in Medellín's
Parques del Río Norte, Colombia

Greening Medellín's northern riverbank



Why this matters

This case matters because it shows how river restoration and public space can work together as climate infrastructure. It reframes green space not as amenity, but as a protective, social and economic asset for communities that are often most exposed to climate risk and least served by urban investment.

The urban pressure

The city's northern riverbank faced a combination of environmental and social pressures: limited quality public space, high flood exposure, intense heat island effects and weak connectivity. Residents in nearby low-income neighbourhoods experienced the consequences most directly, with poor access to safe recreation, local services and cultural or educational programmes. Without intervention, flood risk would have persisted across the river system, heat impacts would have worsened and the area would have remained economically marginalised.

The partnership response

The partnership combined municipal leadership, technical project preparation and international climate finance support. Cities Finance Facility (CFF) acted as facilitator and technical partner, helping the City of Medellín coordinate across secretariats, structure the project and strengthen capacity. C40 Cities Finance Facility (CFF) supported project preparation, cross-sector coordination and climate finance readiness in partnership with the City of Medellín and delivery partners. Community engagement helped shape the project and address social safeguard issues, including potential displacement risks.

What the project did

The project designed a large urban park along the northern riverbank. It uses nature-based solutions to manage water, reduce heat and create new accessible green space. The work also improved the project's financial and institutional readiness, including evidence on economic benefits and long-term value. The city is financing the initial investment through its own budget, with future phases considering value capture through commercial, sports and cultural services while keeping entry free.

Interventions and outcomes

- Designed a major riverbank park using nature-based solutions, wetlands and sustainable drainage to reduce flood risk and heat.
- Strengthened municipal capacity in project structuring, climate risk assessment and financing mechanisms.
- Combined public space, mobility, social programming and climate adaptation to benefit around 91,000 residents.

What made it work

The project worked because it connected environmental performance with visible public benefit. Cost-benefit analysis helped demonstrate that every euro invested could generate wider savings, while community engagement and municipal coordination supported trust, ownership and continuity across political transitions.

Challenges and lessons

Managing social safeguards and potential displacement required careful engagement. The wider lesson is that nature-based infrastructure must be planned as a civic project as well as an environmental one, with local communities involved from the beginning.

Relevance to other cities

Relevant to cities seeking to transform river corridors, address heat and flood risk, and bring green infrastructure to underserved neighbourhoods.

Follow-up opportunity

This case could support further exchange on nature-based infrastructure, river corridor regeneration, climate finance readiness and inclusive public space delivery.

For more information visit: www.c40.org



Partnerships to deliver

prosperous urban futures

Part of the UK's contribution to the thirteenth session of the World Urban Forum, this case study highlights how cities are responding to challenges through practical, place-based collaboration. It reflects a shared commitment to learning, collaboration and building partnerships for the future of cities.