

## Participation and innovation, the keys to rural development: The case of rural Medellin

Participación e innovación, claves del desarrollo rural: el caso de la ruralidad de Medellín

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### ABSTRACT

The challenge of rural development in the Municipality of Medellin has to do with a political decision to assess processes based on participation and innovation in rural communities. The authorities have the opportunity to establish a territory in order to guarantee stability and consolidation of the populations considering their many activities when the districts are threatened by rampant urban sprawl. The opportunity exists to rebuild civil society in the territory based on cultural identity and to build new spaces without exclusion.

**Key words:** rural development, participation, innovation, cultural propositions and cultural.

### RESUMEN

El reto del desarrollo rural en el caso del Municipio de Medellín, tiene que ver con una decisión política que valore procesos endógenos basados en la participación y la innovación de las comunidades campesinas. Las autoridades tienen la oportunidad de establecer un orden en el territorio que garantice la permanencia y consolidación de las poblaciones por reconocimiento de sus múltiples actividades cuando los corregimientos se ven amenazados por la conurbación rampante. Existe la oportunidad de recomponer la sociedad civil en el territorio que los convoca a ser reconocidos por sus identidades construyendo nuevos espacios sin ser excluidos.

**Palabras clave:** Desarrollo rural, participación, innovación, proposiciones culturales y determinantes culturales.

### Introduction

The challenge of rural development in the Municipality of Medellin is the preservation of the rural economy as well as the preservation of strategic ecosystems. The territory is crucial because in the perspective of the city rural communities can transform into urban areas, or otherwise, recognize the opportunities of their rural residence as a forced structuring. The conservation of the environment, food production and water production are options for improving the quality of life in a city like Medellin.

The observation of the reality of farmers led to a characterization by the Municipality to define micro planning as a contribution to the rural development plan. The rurality of Medellin and its natural resources are in constant degradation, threatening the retention of communities.

A new rural development plan for inhabitants as generators of economic and cultural possibilities. Every society has a way of knowledge, which is not evident or explicitly organized but forms social action, economic activities and

the ability to take external knowledge (Tomassini, 2000; Touraine, 1973). The possibilities of new landscapes, new partnerships, knowledge, tradition and imagination would also be the target of the rural projects.

This presentation allows the observance of the cultural elements of development and the perspective of social action. A communication strategy would reveal the recognition and value of rural life, and is the basis for improving participation and fostering innovation.

### Rural Medellín as an object of study (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2007)

The multidimensional analysis of villages in the Municipality of Medellin started with an interagency agreement to create a plan for rural development. This study addressed, for the first time, the territory of the villages, picked up concepts and proposed development plans that preceded this study<sup>3</sup> and designed the multidimensionality of the territory as a part of the micro-regional planning to determine actions by criteria of happenstance.

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<sup>3</sup> Previously mentioned development plans based on culture and tourism.

The territory of the districts of Medellín are defined as: east St. Helena (eleven villages) and the west territory San Sebastián de Palmitas (eight villages), San Cristóbal (seventeen villages), Altavista (eight villages), and San Antonio Prado (eight villages).

Understanding the territory as a space built by human groups, concerning their needs and aspirations (Agnew, 2006), the dynamics of communities with a cultural heritage, their production and their projections are conditioned by environmental and physical conditions with political and institutional relationships. This multidimensionality permitted the analysis of the structural problems, not as a list of invariable conditions, but as an association of conditions that must respond to future public policies for the rural municipality. Indeed, one community representative drew attention towards the idea of development as “progress is not roads, and buildings, nor is it the social level assigned to us; it is social participation based on our identity and our culture and also tells us who we are and want to be”<sup>4</sup>

## A benchmark of rural Medellín

The history of the districts of Medellín is marked by the mobility of people and products from the mining economy that favored the development of agriculture and trade. In this way, the districts were sites of passage in Santa Fe de Antioquia or Ebéjer to Medellín and Rionegro, Honda and Bogotá. (Mayor of Medellín *et al.*, 2006). In 1920 and 1930, the development of land transportation with roads and railways replaced mule transport and regulated mining, the mule drivers then become farmers. The transit sites or resting points also received people displaced by violence and as well as urban populations, now called neo-rural areas.

Since the early forties of the last century, Medellín has grown obeying the orders involving national and international industrial growth and a flourishing rural-urban migration, until exhausting its developable space. From the fifties on, the process of growth and expansion of the urban network determined settlement patterns in the district, until annexation.

From these roads, trails and pathways, spaces were established, knitting economic and social activities and identifying patterns of behavior (Alcaldía de Medellín *et al.*, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> As expressed by “Beatriz” a leader from a sector in la Loma, San Cristóbal, on the occasion of meeting the project team.

## Micro-region planning (Alcaldía de Medellín and Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2010b)

Analysis with the perspective of five dimensions: institutional politics, economy, physical space, environment and socio-cultural, micro planning allowed state intervention and territorial units for the protection and projection of the rural municipality (Alcaldía de Medellín and Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2010a)

The Micro-regional Development Planning of Agricultural Production corresponds to areas of the districts technically suitable for agricultural production. In this area, the effort that must be done to promote food production and crop farming that allow the integration into the regional economy, national or international legislation on the basis of technology, processing and local food security and the city. This region corresponds to the activities of the rural economy and is related to life zones and soil conditions and the environment most conducive to productive development.

The Micro-regional Environmental Development Planning for the territory of supply of goods and services. Therefore micro-regional outcrops for the preservation of water and forests are created with their structural elements in the outer parts of the villages.

The Micro-regional Planning of the central and suburban areas corresponds to areas with a commuter use classification (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2004), where the exchange should be strengthened are public services, concentrations of homes, installation of transformation processes and development of administrative activities.

## Cultural elements of development. “Words and things”

Historically new words have not transformed reality, but cultural reality easily creates new words. You can easily show that rural development plans are based, among others, on participation, sustainability and competitiveness. But while such concepts do not show a political motive, in social practice it will be difficult to deal with responsibly.

The lack of applicable environmental laws, lack of policies for the rural economy, the historical experience of social exclusion and lack of participatory practice allow us to understand the poor performance of development plans.

This creates a call from communities and common sense, to enhance regulatory capacity and settlement of the state in social and economic advancement of rural areas. On the other hand, it is clear that innovation and competitiveness are complex mechanisms necessary for sustainable and equitable development and as stated are transforming rural Medellín.

From a historical perspective, in Latin America and Colombia, rural development has been a failure. There has been an inability to conduct evaluation strategy and results. They have copied foreign models that were inefficient because the same problems remain and deepen. The conflict in resource use by the deteriorating productivity and the inability to stir up local capacity for effective participation prevented necessary structural changes, kept the concentration of land and dependence on external resources, and poverty is encouraged by allowing the loss of sovereignty when developed countries buy land in poor countries to produce food for its population and move toward controlling water sources (Machado, 2010).

The desired change is not the idea of a preconceived rational model but the collective creation process through which community members learn together and determine ways to cooperate (Crozier and Friedberg, 1977). On the one hand, recognize the progressive nature of building confidence and solutions to priority problems and, secondly, that the unequal relationships structured from the top to the bottom of the social scale, more or less, provide social cohesion (Lefevre, 2002).

The recognition of the importance of public affairs, when it comes officially from the Mayor, emphasizing a transparent and equitable share of public entities, easily sets criteria for trust between authorities and communities to develop a new rural development plan.

## The cultural foundations

Every society has a foundation in the culture of cohesion or set of values that shape the symbolic and the desirable, making sense of knowledge and communication (Tomassini, 2000).

While culture foreshadows what is desirable, it is not practical sense that society defines organization and government. A corresponding culture-oriented model is implicit to the way of being, feeling and acting in a society. Social life becomes a relative balance in so far as moral, ethical and legal observances relative (Mockus, 1998). Today, more than

at other times, man must assert his identity and sense of belonging as a subject of knowledge and authority of his world (Bajoit, 2003), so the participation and modern innovation<sup>5</sup> rather than technical processes are the cultural dynamics that make sense as the consensus for collective action (De Greiff and Nieto, 2005).

Culture, in this light, is a resource for society building, a condition for good planning, appropriate public policy and social mobilization, especially in a context-deficit society, with high levels of violence, crime, corruption and individual actions and deinstitutionalization (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2007).

The permanence of communities in a territory is based on handling life problems (Bajoit, 2003) and managing the production of wealth to ensure surplus, managing domestic order for a life of living, given the socialization of its members to community adaptation to a changing environment, managing consensus and social solidarity between different logics to prevent discrimination and managing relationships with other communities to avoid conflict.

Rural communities and culture, as specific communities are also subject to some existential needs (Bajoit, 2003) concerning the extent to which they have been marginal to the development of modernity. The primary need for these rural communities has to do with the security of having social recognition, a personal fulfillment in their identity to avoid the decline of their culture and their economy and their ability to innovate.

Modernity was born with the notion of self-regulation where there is capacity to govern in accordance with reason, equality, freedom and justice, seeing politics as an instrument of the State desirable to organize and strengthen the social fabric.

Experience has shown the inadequacy of individual initiative and institutions that guarantee<sup>6</sup> (Kliksberg, 2000). Where the importance of culture that underlies social

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<sup>5</sup> Knowledge and technology have been linked throughout history to control processes and authority which also presents a challenge to developing countries.

<sup>6</sup> The growth of developed economies in the last thirty years has been based on human capital and social capital rather than natural capital and built capital. The generation of technology, competitiveness and democratic stability indicates this. Additionally it has been shown that the lower confidence among senior citizens is the average mortality rate. Such inequality reduces social capital and adversely affects the health of the population.

capital factors<sup>7</sup> (Vargas, 2002), in trust based on recognition and commitment on standards and private organization.

Social evolution defines man, not because they belong to nature, but for their freedom and their responsibility to themselves and their environment. Culture, social organization, power, capacity for action, including conflicts and ways of solution form a coherent whole (Touraine, 1973).

## Social action and outlook

Currently, there are a number of inclusive social reconstruction processes, where the right to difference and multiculturalism, appears as the new value of civilization, unlike the homogenization processes linked to the West. Call this intent, political civilization and a reworking of the people (Escobar, 2005). Here, rural economic production must be in connection with rural life in all the cultural logic and political rationality.

Rural culture should be valued for itself, in its specificity and its renewal. On the one hand, one should generate a process of de-stigmatization, as the peasant is often considered of lesser value and disadvantageous in social relations. On the other hand, one should reinterpret the peasant culture, to abolish practices that hinder the project management of a society according to a participatory democracy: inclusive, equitable, socially responsible and ethical citizens. Knowledge and technology have been linked throughout history to control processes and authority which also presents a challenge to developing countries

The requirement of a State to encourage rural development does not make it paternalistic but creates a coherent institutional action (Von Haldenwang 2005) with the purpose of a conservation plan of rurality, acknowledging inequalities in access to resources and the pace of the economy and rural life.

## A framework for social action (Alcaldía de Medellín and Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2010a)

In Colombia, civil society is weak, still searching for an identity and the formation of an ethical self. The system of

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<sup>7</sup> Kliksberg shows the importance to many multilateral institutions of taking culture in its many manifestations: Unesco sees culture as a way of living together: thoughts, images and behaviors. The World Bank has recently stressed the importance of institutions in developing both formal (laws, regulations, constitutions, contracts) and informal (trust, religion, and other implicit codes).

knowledge, like the same social contract, is closer to *logos* than to a practice of self-production and autonomous action (Boisier, 2002).

Under these conditions, policies of decentralization and regional development in the area are behind the results. Lack of education and political and institutional development in a decentralization society makes every organization a social power able to intervene in its own environment (Boisier, 2002).

The need to generate prospects for a social initiative or an unsafe condition undertakes to create a sense of belonging in the territory, culture or some aspect that leads to consensus. Thus, political power in Medellín has an opportunity to create order in the territory, to search for objective purposes of the group. There, the danger of urbanization of rural areas, environmental risks and the possible disappearance of the rural economy and its cultural expressions, give an opportunity to place another meaning in the territory of the districts.

The consideration of culture as a driving force and technology as an expression of the expertise and the possibility of driving a transformation show a development perspective based on two major premises: participation and innovation.

Effective participation is ultimately based on individuals or communities, with sufficient degrees of information and knowledge (De Greiff and Nieto, 2005), and their ability to negotiate greater autonomy.

*“Siempre me han enseñado que San Antonio de Prado queda al Sur del Valle de Aburrá, pero eso es falso, porque realmente queda en CORANTIOQUIA y en la Alcaldía de Medellín, la comunidad no es tenida en cuenta en ninguna de las decisiones, en ningún proceso, en la Alpujarra se sientan y deciden por nosotros...”*(Alcaldía de Medellín, 2009).

The communities are demanding more facts and less data collection to address rural issues. However, forms of representation and social coherence, still tend to be effective and enable a rapid transformation of the rural.

*“De qué nos sirve estar en las JAC, nos estamos estallando y entre más días las diferentes veredas del corregimiento son más pobres, se está perdiendo la vocación agrícola, no se tienen recursos para la siembra, los campesinos se preguntan ¿qué hacer ante estas condiciones de pobreza? La gente está viviendo con \$150.000 que se reciben cada dos meses, aquí vivimos es de milagro”*(Alcaldía de Medellín, 2009).



The basis of conscious participation is free negotiation (Crozier, 1970), it is the starting point of development, not a concession of any democratic system or the outstanding feature of a development plan.

Programmatic public policies for the recognition, promotion and dissemination of a rural culture are needed to include the functional (Von Haldenwang, 2005) traditional life over other forms (urban, modern and global). Farmer participation has faced, because their livelihood has been functional to some extent, the dominant production system, which cannot absorb the lost labor it creates, but is a source of cheap food and supplies. Communities must take development independently and assess their progress, prioritizing their unmet needs, and claiming their constitutional rights and duties.

Thus, according to Crozier, the modern organization of the state allows direction and participation to be predictable. If these conditions are not met, the State is no longer able to guarantee free negotiation and autonomous communities.

Innovation, as another basis of the vision of development, has to do with a reflection of society on itself, and corresponds to the possibilities of creativity and mobility of citizens (Crozier, 1970) but the proper social conditions should be indicated to allow their development and their implementation.

In rural conditions, what is clear is that the construction of economic sustainability remains a dream, when the rural economy has a premium for family subsistence, and there are very few or no responses from specialization and much less from forms of joining together to “modernize” and generate added value.

Innovation makes sense as a reason to support development intent, being a process of negotiation and cooperation of market relations. The biggest challenge is to maintain an organization where communities and authorities allow free and open relationships to sustain the individual creatively in the context of collective innovation possibilities.

### **The redeployment of the culture of development: communication strategy**

It is now necessary to construct new identities and consolidate new values. The mode of being of things and the mode of being of man is only the starting point. Man has a project condition, the world is full of possibility and it makes sense because of the value obtained in the communicative

interaction between people. Only understood by the group objectives, generating commitment and responsibility allow human beings to arouse identity, participation and realize freedom to locate what they think is best for the project under construction.

Today's world is becoming indeterminate, can be constructed and reconstructed in accordance with the development of existential projects that interact. In the center of the new direction will be the awareness of living in a world of possibility, where little by little, the existential projects will build networks and solidarity, independent of the state, and flood like a virus to the society to take root and express new values, new directions of development (Touraine, 1997).

Latin American has (Kliksberg, 2000) three permanent elements, namely, the conviction of common goals that mobilize the latent force of social groups, the design of a participatory and inclusive organization and definition of principles of behavior to achieve the objectives. In all cases, the consolidation of effort and setting the overall direction comes with time. Constant communication was as necessary as the strengthen of conviction for participation.

### **Regulation and assessment of rural and peasant culture**

The proposals and actions taken should benefit from concerted organizational bases to feed the rural policy of Medellin. Legal actions and control for the preservation of strategic ecosystems located in the upper parts, suppliers of water and forest, is one of the first policy considerations that must be upheld. This follows the design of regulations designed to contain urban development in the villages, on the edge of town, and public policy and the ability to consolidate public services.

Believing in the value of social ties in the villages and the urban city, mediated by the government of the municipality of Medellín, highlights certain visions of “appellation of origin”, with the aim to “... apply science and the latest technology to enhance and project tradition”<sup>8</sup>.

The intimate relationship between the farmer and the earth, laden with symbolism and meaning of life, in the historical and cultural districts of Medellin, gives property valuation in the considerations of rural culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Presentation of the Laboratorio de la quesera Roquefort, Roquefort, Francia, 1991.

## Economy, farmers and civic culture

The rural economy is not based primarily on production but on social and political action, binding the peasant to the overall dynamism and therefore the state must consistently encourage and subsidize the temporary support for the easy integration of peasant agricultural to the commodity market and for their transformations, to be self-empowered to foster development.

With a base material in natural resources through reforestation programs, incentives and agreements with the owners of the land, the aim is to recover the territories that have a defined land use and forestry production and resolution of the POT contradiction. These actions of public policy should encourage the participation of institutions, organizations, ONGs and rural communities.

The assessment of knowledge based on tradition, experience and ownership of modern science and technology (Quintana and Benavides, 2002) is based on citizenship education in the countryside and the city to recognize the capacity of adaptation to recognize the potential of rurality to adapt to the growing capitalist market in an economy based on life<sup>9</sup> and promoting farm products. Citizenship education will build a virtuous circle of cooperation and solidarity to strengthen sustainability.

Rural communities must be integrated so as not to degrade (Escobar, 2005). The revaluation of tradition and memory require revision in the light of a proposed society to be democratic, participatory, equitable, inclusive, multicultural and united.

It is well known that traditions are renewed but do not lose the sense of time, thus linking them will need to be updated with a proposed redefinition of the native or local and if necessary, create new ones that reinforce it.

Rural communities and the city as a whole could be thus able to modify their systems, with the possibility of creating normative behaviors to produce or transform social order (Touraine, 1997), reviewing and adjusting its orientation

to the creation of rules and institutions<sup>10</sup> and social organization for action.

Moreover, the promotion of creativity, entertainment and empowerment of farmers and rural trades must be complemented by cultural management (Mouton, 2003). In particular, the strengthening of education in the districts must allow access to science and technology for the youth, who will be the ones to consolidate the generational change in rural areas (Henriques, 1970).

Leveraging the rich landscape where they develop rural activities can configure an aggregate creative recreation environmental education, cultural and agricultural, to call the attention of inhabitants of urban areas, especially children and the family. Local environmental parks, sustainable production, ecological management of soil, wildlife conservation, the preservation of sounds and scents of the field and peasant art forms are elements to be evaluated.

They emphasize rural cultural identity to ensure control of the adverse effects of urban culture and traditional tourism in the districts. Tourism as a revenue generator should not be seen as a substitute for rural life. This should not transform the fields into hotels and parking lots, and neither should it promote noise, pollution, drugs and prostitution<sup>11</sup>. The farm cannot be transformed from a source of rural productivity to a subservient role in the tourist industry.

The recognition of values worthy of being symbols of identity and belonging will help strengthen rural culture based on citizenship learning/teaching strategies. Rural communities in the districts of Medellín have expressed an identification with physical space<sup>12</sup> and a deep concern for environmental conservation. Lacking of income, the society could recognize the compensation values of environmental activities, producing the landside or related artistic expressions.

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<sup>9</sup> A concept coined by Hernando Hincapié, the rural creator of the self-sustaining model at la Pequeña Granja de Mamá Lulú, Qimbaya, and which presents the latent risk of acculturation from the dominant perspective.

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<sup>10</sup> Institutions are not rules for the life of a social organization but the mechanism of legitimate decision making within a political unit. The political system is the separation between legal and illegal. Social control is not a direct reflection of cultural values but the refraction of class relations through an institutional system.

<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, said adverse effects have appeared in areas of agro-tourism in the department of Quindío.

<sup>12</sup> The most recognized heritage properties in Corregimientos must see the natural value of areas like Cerro del Padre Amaya, el Alto de Boquerón, la Serranía Las Baldías, la Laguna de los Morenos, la Laguna de San José de la Montaña, el Cerro El Yolombo y el Alto Loma Hermosa or the areas which were developed for community life activities such as mining, salt mining, agriculture, and flower growing (Alcaldía de Medellín, 2006).

## A final reflection

The ability of the society to think and act on itself to achieve desirable goals, is a current challenge. Development is not a linear pattern where groups have to follow the path of the most advanced. We all play at once, so do not try to emulate but be sources of creativity.

Politics ultimately stabilizes the changing relationships of social dynamics as it seeks an agreement, coordination and organization between different communities (Savater, 1992). The government as an agent and regulator of society constitutes a privileged instrument for making decisions, arbitrating interests and giving meaning to the construction of a project of general interest.

You cannot expect that the authorities simply come from immediate interests and rise to the strategy of long-term projects, they are but one part of society, therefore community participation and innovation is the basis of the rural development strategy pursued.

The policy will be then the degree of organization of the state, the level of socio-economic and cultural structure of society and the structuring of the territory. Politics in the literal sense of the term is called to reconstruct social spaces and representation particular conditions, facing concrete demands, calling again from public debate for understanding what cannot be resolved not by the omnipotence of the market nor the State.

The farmer as a new target linked to the development of the territory and its opportunity to create value and meaning of a new rural-urban ratio within the municipality of Medellin, is the basis of a sustainable rural development plan. Civil society is composed of the space formed by those who want to be recognized as individuals.

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