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**Understanding dual agency challenges in
metropolitan contexts: Public Policies as a
measure of administrative thresholds in Colombia**

María Mónica Salazar Tamayo

PhD in Politics, Policies and International Relations

Tesis doctoral

Director: Dr. Carlos Delclos Gomez-Moran

Institut de Govern i Polítiques Públiques
Facultat de Ciències Polítiques i de Sociologia
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Abstract

This Thesis investigates the implementation challenges of public policies in metropolitan areas of Colombia through the lens of the “dual agency” concept. While global development agendas increasingly position cities as key actors in tackling significant challenges such as climate change, housing, and sustainability, their real capacity to act is constrained by fragmented institutional arrangements and overlapping mandates. Drawing from urban studies, new institutionalism, and policy implementation literature, the Thesis develops a novel analytical framework to understand how inconsistent institutional designs give rise to dual agency problems—situations in which local governments must simultaneously respond to competing demands from national authorities, regional frameworks, and local constituents.

Considering the nature of the housing provision challenge, its relevance within national and international agendas, and the complexity of coordinating both vertical and horizontal actors, housing policy stands out as a key, timely, and highly relevant example for the development of this study. The research employs a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analyses map urban growth patterns and assess the alignment between planning instruments and observed development. They also provide an analysis of the evolution of the housing deficit, assessing the effectiveness of housing policy. These are complemented by qualitative data from interviews and focus groups with public officials, planners, and experts, which reveal the lived experiences of policy actors navigating fragmented governance systems. The findings reveal that institutional incoherence—particularly in areas such as territorial planning and housing policy—undermines effective policy delivery, resulting in implementation gaps and contradictory outcomes. The study introduces the dual agency framework as a diagnostic tool to identify how overlapping mandates, blurred accountability, and inconsistent competences impede the operationalization of national and local policy agendas.

Ultimately, the Thesis argues that addressing urban policy failures in the Global South requires not only technical improvements to policy design but also institutional reforms that enhance coordination and clarify roles. By centering in the experience of local actors and unpacking the interplay between metropolization, decentralization, and policy implementation, the dissertation offers both a theoretical contribution and practical insights for strengthening multilevel urban governance.

Resumen de la Tesis

Esta tesis investiga los desafíos de implementación de políticas públicas en áreas metropolitanas de Colombia a través del concepto de “doble agencia”. Aunque las agendas globales de desarrollo posicionan cada vez más a las ciudades como actores clave frente a retos como el cambio climático, la vivienda y la sostenibilidad, su capacidad real de acción se ve limitada por arreglos institucionales fragmentados y competencias superpuestas. A partir de los estudios urbanos, el nuevo institucionalismo y la literatura sobre implementación de políticas públicas, la tesis desarrolla un marco analítico novedoso para comprender cómo los diseños institucionales inconsistentes dan lugar a problemas de doble agencia, es decir, situaciones en las que los gobiernos locales deben responder simultáneamente a demandas contrapuestas de autoridades nacionales, autoridades regionales, marcos metropolitanos y comunidades locales.

La investigación adopta un enfoque de métodos mixtos. Los análisis cuantitativos mapean los patrones de crecimiento urbano y evalúan la alineación entre los instrumentos de planificación y el crecimiento observado. También analizan la evolución del déficit habitacional, evaluando la efectividad de la política de vivienda. Estos se complementan con datos cualitativos obtenidos de entrevistas y grupos focales con funcionarios públicos, planificadores y expertos, que revelan las experiencias de los actores de política en sistemas de gobernanza fragmentados. Los hallazgos muestran que la incoherencia institucional—especialmente en áreas como la planificación territorial y la política de vivienda—socava la implementación efectiva de políticas, generando brechas de implementación y resultados contradictorios. La tesis introduce el marco de doble agencia como una herramienta diagnóstica para identificar cómo los mandatos superpuestos, la rendición de cuentas difusa y las competencias inconsistentes obstaculizan la ejecución de agendas de política pública tanto nacionales como locales.

Finalmente, la tesis argumenta que abordar las fallas en las políticas urbanas del Sur Global requiere no solo mejoras técnicas en el diseño de políticas, sino también reformas institucionales que fortalezcan la coordinación y clarifiquen los roles. Al centrarse en la experiencia de los actores locales y analizar la interacción entre metropolización, descentralización e implementación de políticas, la tesis ofrece una contribución teórica y recomendaciones prácticas para fortalecer la gobernanza urbana multinivel.

Resum de la tesis

Aquesta tesi investiga els reptes en la implementació de polítiques públiques a les àrees metropolitanes de Colòmbia mitjançant el concepte de “doble agència”. Tot i que les agendes globals de desenvolupament posicionen cada cop més les ciutats com a actors clau per afrontar desafiaments com el canvi climàtic, l’habitatge i la sostenibilitat, la seva capacitat real d’acció es veu limitada per estructures institucionals fragmentades i mandats superposats. A partir dels estudis urbans, el nou institucionalisme i la literatura sobre implementació de polítiques públiques, la tesi desenvolupa un marc analític innovador per entendre com els dissenys institucionals inconsistents donen lloc a problemes de doble agència: situacions en què els governs locals han de respondre simultàniament a demandes oposades d’autoritats nacionals, marcs regionals i ciutadania local.

La recerca adopta un enfocament de mètodes mixtos. Les anàlisis quantitatives cartografien els patrons de creixement urbà i avaluen l’alineació entre els instruments de planificació i el desenvolupament observat. També analitzen l’evolució del dèficit d’habitatge, avaluant l’eficàcia de la política d’habitatge. Aquests resultats es complementen amb dades qualitatives obtingudes a partir d’entrevistes i grups focals amb funcionaris públics, planificadors i experts, que revelen les experiències viscudes dels actors de política en sistemes de governança fragmentada. Els resultats mostren que la incoherència institucional—especialment en àmbits com la planificació territorial i la política d’habitatge—compromet la implementació efectiva de les polítiques, generant bretxes d’implementació i resultats contradictoris. La tesi introdueix el marc de la doble agència com una eina diagnòstica per identificar com els mandats superposats, la rendició de comptes difusa i les competències inconsistents dificulten l’execució d’agendes polítiques tant nacionals com locals.

Finalment, la tesi argumenta que abordar els fracassos de les polítiques urbanes al Sud Global requereix no només millores tècniques en el disseny de polítiques, sinó també reformes institucionals que millorin la coordinació i clarifiquin els rols. En centrar-se en l’experiència dels actors locals i analitzar la interacció entre metropolització, descentralització i implementació de polítiques, la tesi ofereix una contribució teòrica i recomanacions pràctiques per enfortir la governança urbana multinivell.

Agradecimientos

Como dijo el Eternauta, nadie se salva solo. O más filosóficamente el dicho de “It takes a village” haciendo referencia al rol de la comunidad.

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Gracias a mi familia perruna. Su amor incondicional me llena de felicidad todos los días.

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Gracias a mis exjefes, que fueron sobre todo mentores y ahora son amigos.

Gracias a mis profesores. Por su ejemplo e inspiración. Por ser mentores, apoyo y ahora colegas.

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En resumen, gracias a todos los que han estado presentes en este proceso de 5 años, no creo que muchos se lean estas más de 300 páginas, pero sepan que sin todos ustedes no habrían sido una realidad.

Section I. Foundations of the research

Section I. Foundations of the Research establishes the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological groundwork of the thesis. It begins by situating cities as central arenas of public action, especially in the context of the Global South, narrowing progressively from Latin America to Colombia as the primary case study. The section articulates the research objectives and propositions, introduces the methodological approach, and outlines the broader contribution and structure of the work. It then delves into foundational debates on public policy implementation, unpacking how policies are designed, the instruments used, the styles of implementation, and the modes of governance that influence outcomes. These dimensions are essential for understanding the complexity of delivering urban policies in fragmented institutional settings.

Building on this, the section explores institutional design and governance through the lens of (neo)institutional theories and their relevance for public policy and supramunicipal governance. It introduces the concept of institutional consistency and the implementation gap as key analytical tools, which help explain why well-designed policies may still face challenges during implementation. Finally, the section presents the research methodology, detailing the logic behind case selection, data collection strategies—including the use of spatial data, policy documents, and interviews—and approaches for analysis and validation. Limitations and challenges encountered during fieldwork are also discussed, providing a transparent account of the research process and framing the analytical lens applied throughout the thesis.

1.Introduction

1.1 Cities in the International Arena: An Emerging Centrality

We live in an urbanized world. Today, over 56% of the global population resides in urban areas—a figure expected to rise to nearly 70% by 2050 (Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Urban areas concentrate economic activity, infrastructure, services, and innovation, but also embody some of the most pressing challenges of our time—rising inequality, climate vulnerability, housing shortages, and social fragmentation. The demographic, economic, and political weight of cities has turned them into critical arenas where global and local agendas intersect. Increasingly, the fate of national and international development hinges on the ability of cities to manage complexity, deliver services, and ensure equitable living conditions.

Across the international development landscape, cities are progressively asserting themselves as actors in their own right. Local governments now participate in global governance networks, influence international norm-setting, and shape policy implementation frameworks—often alongside or even independently from national governments. As documented by Andersson (2017) and Subirats (2017), this phenomenon is particularly visible in areas such as climate change, housing, and migration, where local governments are tasked with delivering results that align with international agreements like the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. In many cases, cities navigate these complex mandates while facing institutional fragmentation, fiscal limitations, and overlapping jurisdictional competences.

This growing presence of cities in global affairs has led to what some scholars call a “global urban turn” (Blanco et al., 2014). In this view, cities are not merely spaces of implementation but are also key nodes in global policy experimentation and diffusion. Through networks such as C40, UCLG, and ICLEI, cities are shaping best practices and influencing global standards, often through forms of “soft governance” and mutual learning. As Neil Smith set “the production of urban space under capitalism is not a neutral process but one shaped by logics of commodification and exclusion”

(The New Urban Frontier, 1996, p. 78) which reveals that the influence of cities on global agendas is conditioned by underlying structural constraints.

However, this protagonism is not without tensions. This dual role of cities—as both contributors to and solvers of global problems—underscores the urgent need to understand the political, institutional, and territorial dimensions of urban competences and power. More specifically around institutional design, so its clear what powers cities have when it comes to implement public policies.

1.2 The Fragmented Power of Cities: A Limitation for Global Action

Despite the growing recognition of cities as central actors in addressing global challenges, their actual capacity to act is often overstated or misunderstood. International agendas—including the Sustainable Development Goals, the Paris Agreement, and the New Urban Agenda—place increasing responsibility on local governments to deliver on issues such as climate mitigation, inclusion, and adequate housing. However, these expectations frequently ignore the legal, political, and fiscal constraints under which cities operate (Blanco et al., 2014; Subirats, 2017). The prevailing discourse tends to treat cities as cohesive and empowered actors, while in reality, their formal authority varies widely and is often fragmented or incomplete.

A core problem lies in the conceptualization of what a "city" is. Cities are generally understood as spaces where key social, economic, and environmental phenomena occur. However, in practice, urban dynamics often transcend the administrative boundaries of a single municipality, involving multiple jurisdictions, each with distinct mandates and competences. This mismatch between urban processes and governance arrangements creates major challenges for coordinated policy implementation (Andersson, 2017) (Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016).

In many metropolitan regions, especially in the Global South, the absence of clear institutional design and competences distribution is a problem. Urban agglomerations frequently include a central city and a ring of peripheral municipalities that lack the mechanisms or incentives to coordinate their actions (OECD, 2015). In

Latin America, less than half of the metropolitan areas with over one million inhabitants are governed by an overarching institution capable of steering regional development (Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016). This disjunction leads to what Brenner (Brenner, 1999) refers to as "institutional misalignment"—a situation in which the spatial scale of governance lags behind the spatial scale of urbanization itself.

1.3 Latin America a Strategic Context for Observing the Governance-Urbanization Mismatch

Among the regions of the Global South that will continue to experience urbanization throughout this century, Latin America stands out as the most urbanized. With over 80% of its population already living in urban areas (Angel et al., 2016; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019), the region offers a unique empirical window to observe whether the growing contradiction between institutional means and developmental ends is not only theoretical but also materially shaping public policy outcomes (Howlett, 2009, 2019; Peters & Zittoun, 2016). Unlike regions where urbanization is still accelerating, Latin America allows for the analysis of mature metropolitan configurations and how their complex institutional settings—characterized by overlapping competences, fragmented jurisdictions, and uneven decentralization—affect the efficiency of local public policy delivery (Andersson, 2017; Blanco et al., 2014)

This analytical value is enhanced by the fact that metropolitan areas and urban agglomerations have become the dominant urban typology across the region—not only in megacities like Mexico City, São Paulo, Buenos Aires or Bogotá, but also in mid-sized cities such as Mendoza, Pereira, Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Florianópolis, which are evolving into polycentric urban systems (Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016; OECD, 2015). This widespread metropolization creates fertile ground to assess whether institutional fragmentation and asymmetries of power and resources are systematically undermining the ability of local governments to meet the ambitious goals outlined in the SDGs and related global agendas. In this sense, Latin America offers not just a relevant case, but a critical one to understand how the interaction

between urban form and governance design may either enable or constrain effective urban development in the Global South.

1.4 Colombia a Laboratory for observing Institutional- Urban Contradictions

Colombia is among the most urbanized countries in Latin America, with over 80% of its population living in urban areas and continues to experience significant urban growth and transformation. According to recent spatial analyses, between 1990 and 2020, the urban footprint of Colombian cities expanded at a rate (2.1x) significantly faster than their population growth (1.6x), leading to widespread horizontal expansion and declining urban density (Saavedra et al., 2022). This dynamic of outward growth has fostered a typology of urban agglomerations that includes both large metropolises and rapidly growing mid-sized cities. These urban forms are spatially integrated yet institutionally fragmented, encompassing multiple municipalities with varying administrative capacities and competences. In this context, Colombia offers a valuable empirical setting to observe how institutional complexity—particularly in decentralized systems—shapes local public policy efficiency, especially in delivering infrastructure, housing, and environmental sustainability measures.

Colombia also presents a unique case due to its unitary state structure combined with a multilayered decentralization system, making it ideal for analyzing the interplay between central policy frameworks and territorial governance. Over the last two decades, the country has undergone a wave of institutional reforms (i.e. Law 388/1997, Organic Territorial Development Law 1454/2011, and Law 2079/2021), alongside increased support from international development institutions and donors for implementing global agendas at the local level. However, as the same recent studies have shown (Saavedra et al., 2022), this evolution has occurred in a disarticulated fashion, producing normative and institutional inconsistencies, coordination failures, and mismatches between competences and resources. These conditions allow us to examine whether the growing misalignment between urban realities and institutional structures translates into observable inefficiencies in policy design and delivery—offering critical lessons for other rapidly urbanizing nations in the Global South.

1.5 Objective and Propositions

The primary objective of this research is to understand the challenges that local public policies face as a result of the distribution of competences across different levels of government, with a focus on how institutional (in)consistency and dual agency problems affect the efficiency of policy implementation in metropolitan contexts in Colombia. By focusing on Colombia as an emblematic case within Latin America, the research aims to shed light on the institutional bottlenecks that hinder the delivery of public goods and services in the growing urban typology or the region: the metropolitan areas.

The ultimate purpose of the research is to develop an innovative analytical framework that integrates the dynamics of metropolitan urban growth, the structure of institutional design, and the processes of public policy formulation and implementation. Such a framework is intended to equip local governments with a conceptual and practical tool to better navigate the complex, multi-actor, and multi-level governance environment in which they operate. In doing so, it also contributes to the broader theoretical and empirical debates on decentralization, urban governance, and policy efficiency in the Global South. Especially by linking the concept of institutional consistency to the dual agency concept to understand the mix incentives and contradictory actions derive from complex competence distribution systems.

Based on this objective, the research is guided by the following propositions:

1. **Urban growth is rendering administrative boundaries increasingly obsolete**, as the functional dynamics of cities—mobility, housing, service provision, environmental degradation—extend beyond formal jurisdictional lines. This spatial-functional mismatch limits the capacity of local governments to address urban challenges in a coordinated and effective way.
2. **International development agendas and national policies tend to overlook the legal competences, fiscal capacities, and political autonomy of local governments**, often assuming their ability to implement ambitious goals without ensuring that the necessary authority and tools are in place. This

disconnect reinforces the gap between what is expected of cities and what they are empowered to do.

3. **Institutional inconsistency undermines local public policy efficiency**, particularly in terms of output delivery. In metropolitan areas with fragmented jurisdictions and overlapping competences, policy responses are more likely to be redundant, delayed, or uncoordinated.

This research aims to analyze how the institutional design of decentralized governance systems interacts with processes of metropolization and public policy implementation, with a particular focus on the manifestation of dual agency problems in local governments. It seeks to assess how this institutional-urban mismatch affects the efficiency of local public policies, and to propose an integrated framework that can support local governments in navigating the multi-actor, multi-level governance challenges arising from urbanization.

To do so, the main research questions this thesis seeks to answer is: What dual agency problems do local governments face amid urbanization, and how do these challenges affect the efficiency of local public policy implementation?

This main question can be answered or tackled by a set of sub-questions regarding foundational topics. For instance, from a perspective of analytical framing it is relevant to ask: How can institutional design challenges be analyzed through the lens of principal-agent theory? And how does the interaction between institutional (in)consistency, decentralization design, and policy implementation contribute to or mitigate dual agency problems?

Regarding the empirical manifestation of the issue, is good to question how are dual agency problems manifested in decentralized countries like Colombia? This takes the research into the road of governance structures and scales, more specifically, questioning how adequately do current decentralization and territorial governance schemes reflect the realities of urbanization and agglomeration? And what specific roles do jurisdictions, legal boundaries, and governance frameworks such as metropolitan areas play in enabling or hindering policy coordination?

Finally, in terms of the implications around policy effectiveness, a question to answer by the research will be how decisive dual agency challenges are in shaping the capacity of local governments to meet development goals, particularly those aligned with international agendas like the SDGs?

For the purposes of this thesis, dual agencies refers to the condition in which local governments are simultaneously accountable to multiple principals—such as national authorities, supramunicipal entities, and local constituencies—often under conflicting mandates. This situation generates overlapping responsibilities, ambiguous accountability, and contradictory incentives, which in turn undermine policy coherence and effectiveness. A more detailed elaboration of the concept is presented in Chapter 3.

1.6 Contribution of the research

This research contributes to the study of urban governance in three interrelated ways: conceptually, empirically, and practically. Conceptually, it introduces and adapts agency theory—originally developed in the context of legal-economic relations between principals and agents (Berle, 1948; Coase, 1937)—to the analysis of metropolitan and urban governance in decentralized settings. While agency frameworks have been widely used to study hierarchical relationships in corporate or national bureaucratic contexts, their application to multilevel and interjurisdictional governance remains limited, especially in the Global South. This research proposes a novel use of dual agency as a lens through which to understand how local governments must navigate conflicting pressures from above (national and international agendas) and from below (local constituents and territorial complexities), often without adequate power, resources, or coordination mechanisms.

Empirically, the study focuses on Colombia as a critical case where the tensions between urbanization, decentralization, and institutional fragmentation are especially salient. Drawing on spatial evidence of urban expansion (Saavedra et al., 2022), fiscal and legal decentralization reforms, and sectoral analyses in housing and planning, the research provides grounded insights into how governance and institutional mismatches manifest in policy inefficiencies. It documents the contradictions that arise

when development goals are assigned to local governments without considering the limitations of their competences, and how these contradictions are exacerbated in metropolitan areas (Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016; Subirats, 2017).

Practically, the research aims to develop an integrated analytical framework that connects three core dimensions: metropolization, institutional design, and public policy design and implementation. This responds to a broader call in the policy studies literature for greater attention to institutional consistency—that is, the alignment between governance structures, coordination models, and policy styles—as a necessary condition for closing implementation gaps (Fontaine et al., 2023). By bringing together tools from institutional analysis, urban studies, and policy design, the research offers a diagnostic and planning approach that local and regional governments can use to identify critical governance bottlenecks and improve policy delivery.

In sum, this study not only adds to the theoretical literature on decentralization and governance but also provides applied knowledge to inform reform processes and support more context-sensitive approaches to urban development in Latin America and beyond.

1.7 Research Structure

This thesis is structured into five main sections that progressively build the theoretical, methodological, and empirical grounds necessary to address the research problem. Each section responds to a distinct analytical purpose and is composed of multiple chapters that unpack key conceptual, contextual, and empirical dimensions of the governance challenges faced by local governments in metropolitan contexts. The overall structure supports an inductive exploration of how institutional fragmentation and decentralization design impact policy efficiency in urban settings, especially in the Global South.

Section I, titled *Foundations of the Research*, lays out the conceptual and methodological framework of the study. It begins with the Introduction, which situates the relevance of cities in global governance and explains the rationale for focusing on Latin America and Colombia. This is followed by chapters on public policy

implementation, institutional design, and the notion of institutional consistency—each engaging with relevant theoretical traditions (policy design, institutionalism, implementation studies) to construct the analytical framework. The final chapter of this section details the methodological approach, including case selection, data sources, and the limitations of the research process.

Section II, *Urban Expansion and Institutional Expansion*, addresses the governance of territorial development. Through three chapters, it examines how demographic and spatial trends in Colombia produce metropolitan dynamics that challenge institutional coherence. It studies how competences for urban planning are distributed, how formal and informal institutions interact, and how urban growth often occurs without adequate coordination, thus offering an empirical lens to observe dual agency problems and policy inefficiencies in territorial planning.

Section III, *Housing Policy*, shifts the focus to another critical domain of urban development. Here, the research explores how governance complexity affects local governments' capacity to deliver results on housing policies. The section begins with an overview of housing needs and trends in Colombia, followed by a chapter on the institutional architecture and competences in the housing sector. It concludes with an in-depth analysis of coordination dynamics among stakeholders—highlighting how institutional design influences implementation realities.

Section IV, *Discussion, Results, and Conclusion*, synthesizes the findings from the empirical chapters. It presents a cross-case discussion of how metropolization, institutional design, and decentralization intersect to create or constrain public policy efficiency. The section culminates in the proposition of a new **analytical framework** to assess and improve governance performance in metropolitan contexts, ending with broader reflections on policy and research implications.

Finally, **Section V** compiles the **research support materials**, including the full bibliography and annexes. This structure ensures coherence across theory, method, and evidence, while enabling a step-by-step engagement with the research problem—from conceptualization to empirical exploration and normative contribution.

2. Metropolization, Institutional Design and Public Policy Implementation: the analytical framework

Cities today house the majority of the world's population, a trend expected to continue throughout the century, posing complex challenges for urban life and governance (UN-Habitat, 2022). The future of cities depends on their ability to provide sustainable access to resources while ensuring equitable living conditions for residents, thereby securing optimal life chances for future generations within their territory's carrying capacity.

In response to growing urbanization and its associated social, economic, and environmental challenges, global consensus was reached in 2015 to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. This consensus is encapsulated by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 11, which aims to construct sustainable cities and communities. The SDGs represent a collective obligation, requiring a new understanding of urban planning and management, viewing cities as sources of solutions rather than problems.

The international development agenda places high expectations on cities, assigning them an ever-increasing set of responsibilities. However, the actual capabilities of cities to take effective action are often overlooked. The institutional design surrounding the political, fiscal, and administrative powers of cities is constantly evolving and frequently constrained by administrative frameworks and competing interests. Consequently, local governments in regions such as Latin America face dual agency problems that are increasingly evident and problematic. A particularly pressing issue, and the dual agency problem at the heart of this thesis, involves the paradox of remaining accountable to local voters while fulfilling the goals of national governments and international development agencies.

Broadly, these dual agency challenges stem from complex decentralization processes that do not always align with the urbanization processes of each country. This misalignment can lead to a growing contradiction between goals and means, threatening the effectiveness of local public policies in achieving improved living standards. The main problem to be addressed is the intersection of global

development agendas, cities' institutional and managerial capacities, and the effectiveness of local public policies.

The goal of this chapter is to lay the conceptual foundation for the analysis developed throughout the thesis. The ultimate purpose of the research is to develop and apply an innovative analytical framework that integrates the dynamics of metropolitan urban growth, the structure of institutional design, and the processes of public policy formulation and implementation. Such a framework is intended not only to provide conceptual clarity, but also to offer local governments in the Global South a practical tool to better navigate the complex, multi-actor, and multi-level governance environments in which they operate. By doing so, this research contributes to broader theoretical and empirical debates on decentralization, urban governance, and public policy effectiveness. Specifically, it seeks to bridge the literature on institutional consistency with the concept of *dual agency*, in order to unpack the mixed incentives and contradictory actions that result from fragmented systems of competence distribution.

This theoretical framework directly responds to the thesis's overarching objective, namely, to understand the structural and institutional factors that condition the effectiveness of public policy implementation in metropolitan contexts. The research is guided by the following question: *What dual agency problems do local governments face amid urbanization, and how do these challenges affect the efficiency of local public policy implementation?* To address this question, the analytical framework proposed in this chapter is structured into three interrelated domains, each of which corresponds to one subsection:

- **Metropolization and Multilevel Governance.** This section examines the dynamics of urban growth and metropolitan expansion globally, and in Colombia specifically. Drawing on empirical data and theoretical contributions from urban studies and decentralization literature, it explores how the metropolitan scale has been developed, as well as how rapid urbanization challenges the traditional administrative boundaries and the capacity of local governments to coordinate effectively. The purpose of this section is to make evident how the concept of *dual agency* becomes critical, given the fact that

local governments are not merely executors of national directives but also strategic actors pursuing their own development agendas. This duality creates implementation frictions, especially in multilevel governance systems where planning and service delivery depend on coordination across jurisdictions.

This perspective helps answer the research question by revealing how urban growth is not only a demographic or spatial phenomenon, but also a governance challenge shaped by institutional design and competence allocation. To do so, the thesis grounds its empirical focus in territorial planning and housing policy, both of which are particularly affected by such governance tensions.

- **Institutionalism and Institutional Design.** This section engages with classical and new institutionalism theories to understand how formal and informal rules shape the capacity for policy implementation. It explores how institutions distribute authority, define roles, and create incentives for coordination or fragmentation. Particular attention is paid to the notion of *institutional consistency*, understood as the degree to which institutional arrangements, mandates, and resources are coherent and aligned across levels and sectors. In this context, *institutional inconsistency*—manifested through overlapping mandates, vague responsibilities, or asymmetric capacities—becomes a key explanatory variable for understanding *implementation gaps*. Moreover, the section discusses how institutional configurations can either mitigate or exacerbate dual agency dynamics, depending on how clearly, they define the role of local governments in relation to national or regional entities.

This dimension responds to the research question by providing a conceptual lens through which to analyze how governance frameworks either enable or constrain coherent policy implementation, particularly in decentralized metropolitan settings.

- **Policy Design and Effectiveness.** The final conceptual component focuses on the policy process itself. Drawing from the literature on policy design (Peters,

Howlett, Capano), it foregrounds *effectiveness* as the central objective of policy formulation and implementation. It explores how the fragmentation of authority and problems of coordination affect not only the content of policies but also their chances of being successfully implemented. By emphasizing the interplay between policy instruments, actor incentives, and governance styles, this section shows that policy failure is often not due to poor ideas, but to systemic misalignments between institutional structures and policy objectives. It also highlights the importance of design capacity and implementation styles—dimensions frequently overlooked in the Global South, where legal and institutional proliferation does not necessarily translate into performance.

This subsection addresses the research question by providing tools to assess how dual agency problems and institutional inconsistencies are reflected in policy outcomes—particularly in the domains of territorial planning and housing.

Together, these three dimensions form the analytical framework. It shows where they intersect and how the concept of dual agency can be a feasible framework for better understanding and navigating this intersection. This is particularly relevant in the context of ongoing urbanization—a trend the world is expected to experience until the end of the century.

The chapter establishes a theoretical gap by bridging three literatures: urban growth and metropolization, institutionalism (classical and new), and policy design. It also connects empirical inquiry to theory by identifying the need and fit of concepts such as dual agency, institutional consistency, and design effectiveness. Furthermore, it lays the foundation for operationalizing these concepts in the analysis of real-world cases.

2.1 Metropolization and Multilevel Governance

2.1.1 Fragmentation and Coordination.

The process of *metropolization*—that in this research is proposed to be defined as the expansion and functional integration of urban areas beyond municipal boundaries—has profoundly reshaped the geography of public policy. Urban growth now routinely spans multiple jurisdictions, blurring the lines between core cities, peripheral municipalities, and rural surroundings (Andersson, 2017). As a result, administrative boundaries have become increasingly disconnected from the lived realities of urban regions, creating what Brenner (1999) effectively called a "scalar mismatch" between urbanization and governance structures.

This mismatch is not merely spatial, but deeply institutional. In many regions—particularly in the Global South—governance frameworks have failed to evolve at the pace of urban expansion, resulting in fragmented authority, overlapping competences, and unclear mandates (Cataldo et al., 2023; Elinbaum et al., 2024; Hensengerth et al., 2024). While urban agglomerations demand cross-jurisdictional coordination in planning, service delivery, and environmental management, the tools and incentives to achieve such coordination are frequently absent or underdeveloped (Da Cruz et al., 2020; Elinbaum et al., 2024; Orellana et al., 2016). This is especially problematic for policy domains that depend on metropolitan-scale coherence, such as housing, transport, and land use.

One of the central insights from the literature review is that governance failures in metropolitan areas are not simply technical issues; rather, they are rooted in deeper institutional design problems. For instance, even when coordination mechanisms such as interjurisdictional agreements or metropolitan authorities exist, their performance is highly context-dependent and frequently limited by political resistance, lack of statutory authority, and fiscal asymmetries (Abbott, 2018; Bird & Slack, 2007; Andersson & Ghesquiere, 2020; Damurski & Andersen, 2022). In decentralized systems, the autonomy of local governments often encounters the need for coordinated action, making obvious a growing dilemma: while decentralization increases local empowerment, ownership, and autonomy, it also complicates horizontal and vertical

coordination (Barba et al., 2024; Cataldo et al., 2023; Rodriguez-Acosta & Rosenbaum, 2005).

Despite global interest in designing more effective metropolitan institutions—whether through statutory authorities (e.g., São Paulo, Portland), informal arrangements, or collaborative governance—no single model has proven universally successful (Andersson & Ghesquiere, 2020; Cataldo et al., 2023; Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016; United Cities and Local Governments, 2017; Vera et al., 2024). The current literature shows that institutional inconsistency¹—the lack of coordination and political interplay—is a key variable limiting policy coherence and implementation capacity (Peters & Zittoun, 2016; Nelles et al., 2018; Frank, 2012). Considering that a governance mode is the product of a coordination model (at the intra-state level) and a model of political interplay (between the state, society, and the market), or policy style (Fontaine et al., 2023), the metropolitan context and its potential institutions have a critical role to play.

This analytical lens is particularly important in Latin America, where rapid urbanization has not been accompanied by adequate legal and institutional adaptation. As highlighted in multiple studies, more than half of the metropolitan areas with over one million inhabitants in the region are not governed by a unified or coordinating institution (Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016), and the ones that exist, often lack the autonomy, capacity, or legitimacy to act effectively. Colombia exemplifies this contradiction: despite having legal instruments such as Law 1625/2013 on metropolitan areas, many urban regions remain fragmented in practice, with planning and investment responsibilities dispersed across uncoordinated municipalities (Leyva et al., 2020; Buelvas Ramírez, 2014).

In this context, the concept of dual agency—where local governments must respond simultaneously to national agendas and local demands—becomes analytically powerful. It captures the tensions local actors face when institutional structures are poorly aligned, competences are blurred, and coordination mechanisms are weak or politicized. As this section demonstrates, addressing these challenges

¹ A term coined by Guilleme Fontaine, B. Guy Peters and Ishani Mukherjee in the context of a Panel on Policy Design at a Crossroad: The Problem of Institutional Consistency in Governance in the International Conference in Public Policy – ICPP6 organized by the International Public Policy Association – IPPA.

requires more than administrative reform: it demands a reconceptualization of how institutional arrangements, legal boundaries, and governance frameworks interact with urbanization processes and shape the actual capacity of local governments to implement effective public policy.

2.1.2 Fragmented Capacity in an Urbanized Region: Latin America and the Caribbean.

Latin America is one of the most urbanized regions in the world, with over 75% of its population living in cities (UN-Habitat, 2022). Yet this urban maturity has not been matched by equally consolidated governance frameworks. While metropolization in the region is deeply advanced—creating large functional territories that transcend municipal borders—most national and subnational governance systems have failed to adequately adapt. The result is a persistent institutional misalignment, in which metropolitan areas operate as integrated social and economic spaces but continue to be managed through fragmented political-administrative structures (Lanfranchi & Bidart, 2016; Andersson, 2015). This is critical when we consider that this dynamic, in which the growth of urban extents surpasses local administrative borders, is a constant in the region.

In this context, the absence of robust, unified metropolitan authorities is a major obstacle to effective governance. According to Lanfranchi and Bidart (2016), fewer than half of the region's 64 largest metropolitan areas have governing bodies that cover their full territory, and those that do often rely on fragile inter-municipal agreements or *ad hoc* legal constructs. Even where metropolitan institutions exist—such as in São Paulo or Mexico City—their mandates tend to be narrow (focused on transport or infrastructure) and frequently lack the fiscal, political, or legal authority to lead planning and coordination across sectors (Abbott, 2018; Andersson & Ghesquiere, 2020; Bird & Slack, 2007; Damurski & Andersen, 2022) .

This institutional fragility is compounded by political resistance. As Orellana (2016) documents in the Chilean case, metropolitan authorities often face skepticism from national legislatures, local governments, and civil society actors, who fear redistribution of resources and political power. These dynamics are signs of dual agency tensions faced by cities in the region, since local governments must navigate

national policy expectations and global agendas—such as the SDGs—while remaining politically accountable to their own constituents, often with conflicting interests and mandates (Lefèvre, 1998; OECD, 2016).

The lack of a consolidated institutional model across the region should not be interpreted as mere administrative inertia or path dependence. Rather, it highlights the profound challenges of building governance structures that align with the functional scale of urbanization. Efforts to create coordination mechanisms without addressing underlying competence distribution or political legitimacy have proven ineffective. As emphasized in the most recent studies on the matter, institutional fragmentation—legal, administrative, and fiscal—is a primary barrier to effective metropolitan governance, particularly in regions like Latin America where policy implementation relies heavily on local-level action (Barba et al., 2024; Cataldo et al., 2023; Elinbaum et al., 2024; Hensengerth et al., 2024; Vera et al., 2024, 2024).

2.1.3 The Colombian Case: Between Legal Innovation and Practical Fragmentation.

Colombia presents an especially compelling case of metropolitan governance innovation constrained by institutional inconsistency. The country's urban population has expanded dramatically over the last century, with over 76% of Colombians living in cities, according to the latest census of 2018, (DANE, 2018) and this figure projected to reach 83% by 2045 (Angel et al., 2016; Galarza et al., 2019) (Angel et al., 2016). Despite this urbanization, the institutional apparatus for managing metropolitan regions has not kept pace with functional needs. The country is home to at least 24 metropolitan areas with more than 250,000 inhabitants, yet only a handful have adopted formal metropolitan governance instruments (Leyva et al., 2020).

Colombia's legal framework², notably Law 1625 of 2013, provides a pathway for the creation of metropolitan areas with formal governance structures. However, the execution and enforcement of this law have been partial, inconsistent, and geographically uneven. This reflects a broader governance paradox: although Colombia has embraced decentralization since the 1991 Constitution, it has not developed a coherent system for metropolitan coordination. As a result, cities remain

² A detail explanation of the country's legal framework will take place in section II.

caught between local autonomy and national mandates, with overlapping competences and weak horizontal coordination (Cordoba & Gonzalez, 2017; Buelvas Ramírez, 2014).

At the root of this issue lies a dual agency dilemma. Local governments are legally autonomous but functionally interdependent. They are expected to implement national development plans and respond to urban challenges that cut across multiple jurisdictions—such as housing, mobility, and land use—yet they often lack the institutional tools, fiscal means, or intergovernmental support to do so in a coordinated manner. As highlighted in the literature, these tensions are exacerbated by vertical misalignments (between national and local governments) and horizontal fragmentation (between municipalities), both of which lead to implementation delays, conflicting plans, and diluted accountability (Leyva et al., 2020; Andersson, 2015).

Furthermore, while decentralization was intended to empower local actors, in practice it has often resulted in fragmented governance arrangements that hinder integrated supramunicipal management arrangements. The use of metropolitan instruments is growing, but without a national framework to guide or harmonize them, they remain isolated innovations rather than systemic solutions. This disjunction between legal innovation and institutional coordination underscores the need to examine not just *what instruments exist*, but *how competences are distributed*, *how roles are defined*, and *how coordination is incentivized or blocked*—core questions addressed by this thesis through the specific case studies.

Colombia thus serves as both a case of normative ambition—with one of the most comprehensive legal bases for metropolitan governance in the region—and practical fragmentation, where implementation remains lagged by institutional inconsistency and political misalignment. These conditions make it a particularly relevant empirical setting in which to apply the analytical framework developed in this chapter.

2.1.4 An Additional Note on Governance Challenges at the Metropolitan Level.

Metropolitan governance failures are frequently presented as coordination or implementation challenges. However, a close review of the literature reveals that such

failures are not primarily technical in nature; instead, they derive from deeper problems in the institutional design of governance systems. As urbanization processes increasingly extend beyond traditional municipal boundaries, cities become embedded in complex, functionally integrated regions (Bird & Slack, 2007). These metropolitan spaces involve multiple overlapping jurisdictions, making coordination both a necessity and a challenge when institutional arrangements remain fragmented or outdated (Elinbaum et al., 2024).

Indeed, several authors point to a mismatch between the functional realities of metropolitan areas and the institutional frameworks meant to govern them. Elinbaum et al. (2024) describe this as a structural misalignment that produces inefficiencies in service delivery, planning, and housing. Similarly, Da Cruz, Rode, and Badaoui Choumar (2020) show that even when mechanisms for metropolitan governance exist, they often lack coherence in mandates, fiscal resources, and accountability, reducing their ability to generate coordinated outcomes. In their comparative analysis of metropolitan areas across the OECD and the Global South, they find that fragmentation persists even in institutional environments that formally support coordination, suggesting that the problem lies not in the absence of tools, but in how these tools are embedded within institutional systems.

Damurski and Andersen (2022) go further, arguing that the very definition of the metropolitan scale is politically contested and institutionally unstable, leading to inconsistent governance arrangements. They highlight that no universal definition of the metropolitan exists, and that institutional arrangements vary significantly across contexts—often without adequate mechanisms to adapt to functional urban dynamics. The consequence is a proliferation of ambiguous jurisdictions and overlapping competences, which make coordinated decision-making difficult.

These observations are echoed by Frank (2012) and Orellana et al. (2016), who emphasize that boundaries are not just administrative constraints but political constructs that shape the ability of actors to collaborate. When institutional roles are unclear or contested, local governments face conflicting incentives, particularly in decentralized systems where they are simultaneously accountable to central government goals and to local constituencies—what the thesis identifies as a dual

agency dilemma. This dilemma is exacerbated when institutional configurations are not designed to recognize or manage multi-level interdependencies, as seen in many Latin American cases (Leyva et al., 2020; Cordoba & Gonzalez, 2017).

Nelles et al. (2018) take this further by demonstrating that even well-intentioned metropolitan coordination mechanisms often underperform because of how competences are distributed. When mandates, resources, and authority are not aligned across levels of government, institutional gaps emerge that undermine implementation capacity. In short, coordination mechanisms alone are insufficient if they operate within systems characterized by institutional inconsistency.

Finally, Peters and Zittoun (2016) make the theoretical case that policy effectiveness in multilevel governance contexts is directly linked to how institutional frameworks are designed. They argue that institutions not only distribute authority but also configure incentives, norms, and capacities. Where these elements are misaligned, implementation gaps are not a matter of technical malfunction, but of institutional dysfunction.

Taken together, these findings make it evident that the persistent shortcomings in metropolitan governance—especially in housing, land use, and spatial planning—cannot be adequately understood or addressed through managerial or procedural fixes alone. Instead, they reflect fundamental flaws in how institutions are structured, how competences are distributed, and how coordination is (or isn't) incentivized. In this sense, it becomes clear that governance failures in metropolitan areas are not simply technical issues, they are rooted in institutional design problems.

2.2 Institutionalism and Institutional Design

2.2.1 Institutional Design, Competences Distribution and Policy Effectiveness.

Institutional design is central to understanding why public policies succeed or fail, particularly in decentralized and metropolitan contexts where multiple actors and overlapping jurisdictions shape policy implementation. This section draws from both classical and new institutionalist traditions to explain how formal and informal rules structure political behavior, distribute authority, and affect state capacity. While

classical institutionalism focused on the formal-legal rules and bureaucratic arrangements of government, new institutionalism reoriented attention to how institutions operate through norms, incentives, and actor strategies across different governance levels (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013).

At its core, institutionalism holds that institutions are not neutral containers of political action; on the contrary, they shape and constrain choices, structure interactions, and produce specific governance outcomes (Howlett, 2020; Peters & Zittoun, 2016). These outcomes, however, are not guaranteed. It is therefore critical that the institutional context is aligned with both the goals of a policy and the capabilities of the actors implementing it. This is why institutional design is essential, because it refers to the deliberate structuring of roles, competences, and coordination mechanisms in pursuit of effective policy delivery.

One key concept emerging from recent literature, as already mentioned, is institutional consistency—the degree to which institutional arrangements are coherent, aligned, and capable of supporting the mission of a policy (Capano & Woo, 2018; Breznitz et al., 2018). Although not always explicitly defined, consistency is often operationalized in terms of goal alignment, capacity matching, clarity of mandates, and integration of tools and oversight mechanisms (Howlett et al., 2020; Peters, 2000). When these elements align, institutions are more likely to produce robust and adaptable policies. Conversely, institutional inconsistency—marked by vague responsibilities, overlapping competences, or asymmetrical resource distribution—can undermine implementation and lead to persistent policy failure (Virani, 2019; Bali et al., 2019).

In the context of metropolitan governance, institutional inconsistency is evident, especially when governance arrangements involve multiple overlapping institutions. The literature shows that while decentralization increases autonomy and proximity to local needs, it often complicates coordination unless accompanied by clear competence distribution and multilevel integration mechanisms (Howlett & Kuan, 2019). Research by Da Cruz et al. (2020) and Elinbaum et al. (2024) documents how overlapping jurisdictions and fragmented mandates in metropolitan regions hinder strategic planning and service delivery. These inconsistencies are not mere technical

flaws but rather institutional pathologies that emerge from poorly aligned governance frameworks.

The importance of institutional design lies in the fact that it affects not only what actors can do, but how they relate to one another. The distribution of competences across levels of government—what institutions do, who is responsible, and how resources flow—directly influences policy coherence and implementation capacity (Capano et al., 2018a; Mukherjee et al., 2021). In decentralized systems, local governments often face contradictory pressures. On one hand, they are empowered to act; on the other, they are constrained by higher-level mandates or resource gaps. This tension constitutes what this research terms a dual agency problem, where local authorities must navigate dual accountability to local constituencies and national or supranational directives. This dynamic becomes particularly pronounced in metropolitan contexts—a central concern of this research. As institutionalist theory suggests, these problems become particularly critical when design choices do not adequately reflect actor capacities or functional policy needs (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013).

Another crucial insight from the policy design literature is that robust implementation requires more than clear formal rules. It depends on mechanisms of oversight, stakeholder engagement, and institutional adaptability (Lippincott & Stoker, 1992; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018). Institutional robustness characterized by polycentricity, redundancy, and modularity, can help systems absorb shocks and adapt under uncertainty (Capano & Woo, 2018). However, such robustness presupposes well-calibrated institutional interfaces, where competences, incentives, and tools reinforce—rather than contradict—each other.

Despite the growing body of conceptual work, empirical studies on how competence distribution influences policy effectiveness remain limited, especially in the Global South. The research to develop this framework supports the identification of a clear theoretical gap in operationalizing and testing how institutional capacity and competence distribution translate into successful implementation (Elicit, 2024). This research seeks to fill that gap by examining how institutional consistency—or its

absence—affects territorial planning and housing policy implementation in Colombia's metropolitan regions.

In short, institutional design matters because it shapes the rules of engagement for public policy. It determines who governs, how they do so, and with what resources. Whether policies succeed in their aims depends not only on political will or technical design, but on how institutions enable or obstruct effective coordination. This section provides the conceptual grounding to analyze these dynamics, setting the stage for the next chapter, where the analytical framework on institutional consistency **and** dual agency is applied to real-world metropolitan governance scenarios.

2.2.2 Views from Classical and New Institutionalism.

Classical institutionalism, which prevailed until the mid-20th century, conceived institutions as formal-legal structures—such as constitutions, laws, administrative hierarchies—that were responsible for structuring political life through normative and legal constraints. It emphasized the *durability, rationality, and legality* of institutions, assuming that clearly defined structures would yield predictable behavior and outcomes (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013).

New institutionalism, however, emerged from dissatisfaction with this narrow view. It shifted focus from institutions as static formal rules to dynamic systems of norms, practices, and strategic interaction. Institutions were no longer just constraints but also carriers of meaning, power relations, and routines, shaped by historical paths and actor agency. Three dominant strands of new institutionalism emerged: sociological, rational choice, and historical institutionalism. These perspectives highlight how behavior is shaped respectively by norms and identities, strategic calculations, and path-dependent processes (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013; Peters & Zittoun, 2016).

Understanding why policies succeed or fail requires looking beyond their content or stated goals to examine the institutional architectures in which they are embedded. Institutions—both formal and informal—shape the behavior of actors, define the allocation of authority, and establish the incentives and constraints under which public decisions are made and implemented. Moreover, *the alignment between*

formal structures, informal practices, and actor incentives is what determines whether institutions enable or hinder effective policy delivery.

2.2.3 Institutional Design and Its Impact.

Institutional design refers to the intentional structuring of institutional arrangements. In the context of this research, it refers to how institutions are structured to achieve desired policy outcomes or, better yet, how that design impacts policy outcomes. Institutional design encompasses how authority is distributed, how responsibilities are defined, how coordination is managed, and how resources are allocated across multiple actors and levels of government (Peters, 2000). An effective institutional design is not only internally coherent but also congruent with policy goals, operational environment, and implementation demands (Capano & Woo, 2018).

One of the most important insights emerging from the literature is the idea of *institutional consistency*. Although not always defined with precision, it refers to the extent to which institutional components—mandates, resources, responsibilities, and decision-making procedures—are aligned and mutually reinforcing (Howlett et al., 2020). Consistency is a necessary condition for ensuring that public policies are effectively implemented, especially in complex governance environments where responsibilities are distributed among multiple actors. More specifically and as stated by Fontaine et al (2023):

A governance mode is the product of a coordination model (at the intra-state level) and a political interplays model (between the state, society and the market), or policy style. While intra-state coordination can be centralised or decentralised, political interplays can be collaborative or competitive, according to [a] government's policy style. There is arguably a relationship between coordination and political interplays, insofar as the government's will and capacity to attend social demands depend on the coordination model favored by this government. However, this is no straightforward causation, so we'd rather deal separately with each one to avoid endogeneity. Which raises the problem of institutional consistency. At the very best, the institutional design articulates coordination and political interplays in a consistent governance mode. Yet there can also be an inconsistency (in institutional terms) between coordination and political interplays, which might eventually explain the outbreak of an implementation gap. (Fontaine et al., 2023)

By contrast, institutional inconsistency, already defined above, is characterized by overlapping mandates, vague roles, and uneven and inefficient resource distribution, and can lead to policy failures even when intentions and technical solutions are sound. It creates spaces of conflicting incentives, contradictory accountability structures, and implementation paralysis—especially in multilevel governance contexts (Da Cruz et al., 2020; Elinbaum et al., 2024).

2.2.4 Competence Distribution and Institutional Effectiveness.

A central mechanism through which institutional design influences implementation is competence distribution, that is, how responsibilities and powers are allocated across levels and actors. The literature reviewed highlights that competence distribution must be aligned with organizational capacity, the mission of each institution, and the nature of the policy problem (Breznitz et al., 2018; Bali et al., 2019). When competences are misallocated (for example, when a local government is responsible for a policy domain but lacks fiscal or legal authority institutional inconsistency) as a structural constraint on effectiveness emerges.

Despite its relevance, the relationship between institutional design and competence distribution remains under-theorized and under-tested, particularly in empirical studies of the Global South. There is a gap in systematically evaluating how alignment (or misalignment) between competences and institutional settings shapes policy outcomes (Bali et al., 2019). This thesis addresses that gap by focusing on metropolitan governance, where these inconsistencies are magnified due to spatial-functional mismatches and fragmented legal authority.

The case of metropolitan areas is particularly illustrative. As seen in Da Cruz et al. (2020), effective coordination requires horizontal cooperation between local governments, and vertical coherence between national and subnational institutions. However, fragmented institutional design often means that cities are given increasing responsibilities—for instance, in housing or land-use planning—without the corresponding resources or formal competences. The result is policy incoherence, duplicated efforts, and implementation delays, especially in contexts of rapid urbanization (Leyva et al., 2020).

2.2.5 Institutional Design, Dual Agency, and Multilevel Tensions.

These dynamics are further complicated by what this thesis terms “the double agency problem.” In decentralized contexts, local governments are not only principals but simultaneously agents of higher-level governments (tasked with implementing national programs) and political entities in their own right (with locally defined mandates and constituencies). In such cases, when several principals with diverging interests attempt to influence a single agent, the situation corresponds to what Tommasi and Weinschelbaum (2003) define as the “common agency” problem, resulting in overlapping demands, weakened accountability mechanisms, and coordination failures that make double agency even more complex. In this sense, when institutional design fails to clarify roles, align incentives, or balance authority and resources, double agency becomes a source of implementation friction rather than a driver of innovation.

This problem is especially acute in Latin American cities, where decentralization reforms have outpaced the development of coordination mechanisms, and where legal and fiscal fragmentation undercut institutional coherence (Orellana, 2016; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). As Lippincott and Stoker (1992) argue, coordination cannot be assumed. Rather, it must be designed into the system through oversight mechanisms, shared planning forums, and formalized interjurisdictional agreements.

Moreover, the design of robust institutional arrangements should include polycentricity, redundancy, and modularity, which make systems more resilient and adaptable (Capano & Woo, 2018). However, in many Global South contexts, institutional proliferation without coherence leads not to robustness but to bureaucratic complexity and political obstructionism.

2.2.6 Toward a Diagnostic Framework.

Institutionalism thus provides a powerful lens through which to understand the policy implementation gap. It shows that effectiveness is not solely about having the right policy tools or strong leadership, but also about whether institutional arrangements are internally coherent, contextually appropriate, and strategically aligned with functional governance needs.

This section has outlined how institutional design—through competence distribution, capacity alignment, and coordination mechanisms—conditions the ability of local and metropolitan governments to implement sustainable development policies. It also shows how institutional inconsistency and dual agency offer a critical framework to better understand policy effectiveness in complex multilevel governance systems.

The following section will now turn to policy design theory to explore how these institutional conditions interact with the content and instruments of public policy, further shaping outcomes on the ground.

2.3 Policy design, implementation and effectiveness

2.3.1 Policy Design and Effectiveness: Instrumentation, Governance, and Implementation Challenges.

The final dimension of the analytical framework brings policy design theory into conversation with institutional and governance dynamics to assess how public policies are formulated, but most of all implemented, and then judged as effective or not. At its core, policy design refers to the process of crafting public policies and instruments to match policy problems and contexts (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2018). Drawing on a wide body of scholarship (Peters, 2015; Capano & Woo, 2018; Howlett, 2004; 2009), this section considers effectiveness as the criteria to determine policy success. By doing that, it facilitates while problematizing the gap between formal policy intentions and practical implementation, especially in the decentralized and metropolitan governance systems that this thesis analyzes.

Policy design theory emphasizes that successful policies require a fit between policy goals, instruments, and the institutional settings in which they operate. This entails three interrelated forms of alignment: (1) coherence of goals and objectives; (2) consistency across instruments and implementation preferences; and (3) congruence between policy tools and contextual constraints (Howlett, 2009; Howlett & Mukherjee, 2014).

These three layers—coherence, consistency, and congruence—represent the analytical core of design thinking, as they help unpack how and why some policy

instruments achieve desired results, while others falter due to misalignment or poor contextual calibration. When any of these levels of alignment is broken—due to fragmentation of authority, unclear actor responsibilities, or lack of capacity—policy failure becomes more likely, not because of poor policy content, but because of misalignments between design and context (Domorenok et al., 2021).

The literature on policy instruments, what tools are selected and how they are deployed, offers further insight. Scholars such as Hood (1986), Howlett (2004, 2019), and Salamon (2002) distinguish between substantive instruments (e.g., regulation, subsidies, public enterprises) and procedural instruments (e.g., consultations, hearings, participatory processes). Substantive tools directly affect resource allocation and service delivery, while procedural tools govern how decisions are made, actors are included, and legitimacy is built. Understanding how these tools are selected and combined, what Howlett (2009) terms “instrument mixes”, is essential for analyzing implementation dynamics. A mismatch between governance mode and instrument type, for instance, using top-down regulation in a context requiring horizontal negotiation, often leads to resistance, inefficiency, or failure.

Moreover, policy instruments operate within governance modes, which shape how authority and discretion are distributed across actors (Howlett, 2009; Fontaine et al., 2020). In centralized, hierarchical governance, instruments tend to rely on authority and control, while networked governance relies more on information sharing and negotiated coordination. This is important, because the effectiveness of a policy tool depends on its compatibility with the governance mode in which it operates (Considine & Lewis, 2003; Lewis et al., 2021). Many policies in the Global South fail not for lack of ambition but because the tools employed are not suited to the fragmented, multilayered, and often weakly coordinated systems in which they are expected to work.

Implementation is therefore a critical aspect of public policy design. It is not merely the mechanical execution of a plan, but a deeply political and institutionalized process. According to Tosun & Treib (2018) and Howlett (2004), implementation depends on four dimensions: the structure of implementing agencies, the discretion they have, the behavior of target groups, and the observable outcomes.

Implementation styles—such as direct provision, regulatory corporatism, directed subsidization, or institutionalized voluntarism—reflect the interaction between state capacity and the nature of policy targets. The appropriateness of a style is determined by the degree of state constraint and the collective characteristics of policy recipients (Howlett, 2004).

In practice, implementation structures may be centralized or decentralized, and this is critical because fragmented implementation increases the likelihood of misalignment between policy goals and outcomes. Coordination failures, unclear mandates, and weak incentives for inter-agency collaboration often result in poor service delivery and unmet objectives (May, 2015; McCann, 2013).

These implementation challenges are particularly evident in policy domains such as territorial planning and housing—core focus areas of this thesis. These sectors involve multiple levels of authority, overlapping jurisdictions, and contentious trade-offs between social, economic, and environmental objectives. In addition, these realities are exacerbated by urbanization process that push urban extent growth and metropolitan populations beyond single municipalities boundaries. In such contexts, dual agency problems, where local governments must reconcile vertical mandates with horizontal pressures are a recurring source of friction. Policy coherence suffers when municipalities are tasked with achieving ambitious goals without adequate competences, fiscal capacity, or institutional support. The result is often partial or symbolic implementation, regulatory layering without enforcement, or high transaction costs in intergovernmental negotiations (Domorenok et al., 2021; Peters & Zittoun, 2016).

This brings into focus the importance of design capacity—the ability of policy actors and institutions to generate, select, calibrate, and adapt policy instruments effectively. According to Wu, Ramesh & Howlett (2015), design capacity exists at three levels: systemic (legal and procedural structures), organizational (coordination and staffing), and individual (technical and political skills). In contexts with fragmented authority and weak institutional frameworks, design capacity is often uneven and fragile. Policymakers may lack access to reliable data, analytic skills, or institutional memory. More critically, political incentives may not align with long-term planning

goals, leading to reactive rather than strategic design choices (Howlett & Ramesh, 2015).

In sum, policy design is not just about selecting the right tools—it is about aligning them with institutional realities, actor incentives, and governance modes. In decentralized and metropolitan contexts marked by institutional inconsistency and dual agency, the probability of design failure increases unless these alignments are carefully managed. This section has provided the theoretical tools to understand how these failures emerge and why improved institutional coordination and design capacity are essential for sustainable and inclusive policy outcomes. It sets the stage for the empirical sections that follow, where the analytical concepts of institutional consistency and dual agency will be operationalized to assess real-world cases in Colombian metropolitan regions.

2.4 Closing Remarks

The three sections of this chapter—on metropolization, institutional design, and policy effectiveness—have converged around a shared analytical concern: the gap between urban governance challenges and the institutional arrangements meant to address them. This gap is not merely administrative or technical. As the literature on institutional design and governance effectiveness makes clear, there is a persistent theoretical and empirical gap in understanding how fragmented authority, overlapping mandates, and poorly distributed competences influence coordination and implementation across multilevel governance systems. While substantial literature exists on policy tools, decentralization, and state capacity, very few frameworks systematically explain how inconsistencies in institutional design interact with urban dynamics to shape policy outcomes.

This chapter has proposed a pathway to bridge that gap. The concept of institutional consistency emerges as a critical explanatory variable to understand implementation gaps. But alignment alone is not sufficient to understand the complex realities of local governance in metropolitan areas, where governments play different roles and multiple institutions are created. It is in this context that the concept of dual agency gains analytical strength. As the research has shown, few studies explore how

local governments navigate the tension of being simultaneously autonomous political actors and subordinate agents of national or supranational mandates.

Dual agency is not just a political dilemma, but a structural condition of modern urban governance. It is precisely in fragmented settings, where legal boundaries do not align with functional territories, and where resources and authority are distributed unevenly, that the contradictions of dual agency become most visible. Local governments must implement national programs without adequate instruments, compete for resources with other jurisdictions, and respond to diverse and sometimes conflicting constituents. This tension helps explain why well-designed policies often fail in practice, especially in policy areas like territorial planning and housing.

The analytical framework developed in this chapter—linking metropolization, institutional design, and policy effectiveness—offers an innovative lens through which to diagnose and interpret these failures. It also positions dual agency as a central concept for understanding why coordination breaks down, why capacities remain underused or overwhelmed, and why implementation gaps persist despite formal reforms. This framework does not aim to resolve all ambiguities, but it does offer a grounded and adaptable tool for analyzing governance in motion, especially in the complex and evolving urban contexts of the Global South.

The next chapter will operationalize these concepts in empirical settings, providing a diagnostic of how institutional consistency and dual agency shape policy implementation outcomes in selected Colombian metropolitan areas. By doing so, it moves from abstract theorization to grounded analysis—continuing the effort to make sense of how institutions enable, constrain, and ultimately determine the quality of policy outcome in urban settings.

3. Institutional Inconsistency and Dual Agency: An Analytical Framework

This chapter introduces the concept of *dual agency* as a theoretical and analytical innovation to understand the institutional and operational constraints faced by local governments in complex governance settings to successfully implement policies. Building upon Principal-Agent theory and the broader literature on metropolization, institutional design, and policy implementation, this chapter argues that traditional frameworks fall short when multiple principals and agents operate within decentralized, fragmented and often overlapping structures of authority. Indeed, this is the case in several countries in the Global South.

The core objective of this research is precisely to develop an analytical framework that deepens the understanding of the implementation challenges local governments face in contexts of metropolization and fragmented institutional arrangements. Specifically, the study seeks to explore how institutional inconsistencies and overlapping mandates—conceptualized here as “dual agency problems”—impacts the effective implementation of public policies at the local level.

To this end, the chapter proposes to integrate the principal-agent model with institutional design theory, not simply to describe governance failures, but to map out the structural bottlenecks that arise from misaligned competences across levels of government. The framework aims to identify and categorize instances where local governments operate under competing or contradictory expectations from multiple principals (i.e. national, supramunicipal authorities), and to assess how these tensions shape the feasibility, coherence, and effectiveness of local implementation efforts.

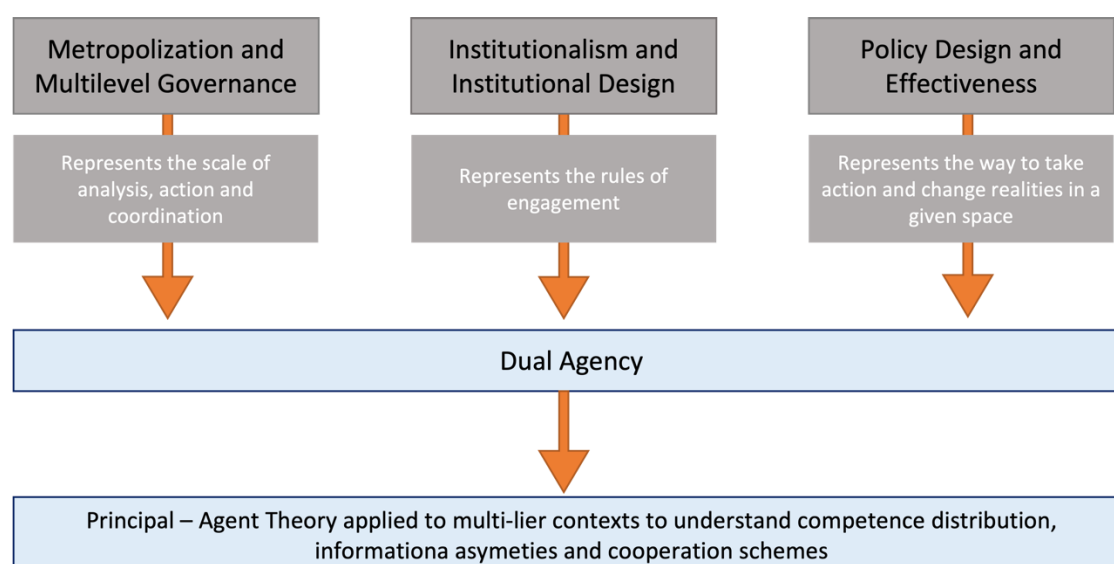
To do so the chapter: (1) points out the relation between and gaps in the current literature on metropolization, governance, institutional design and policy implementation; (2) explores the theoretical foundation of the concept; (3) identifies the conditions under which dual agency problems arise; and (4) proposes how the concept can be operationalized for empirical analysis. By linking dual agency to institutional consistency and implementation gaps, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of why policy failure often persists despite formal authority and legal mandates. It ultimately aims to equip policymakers and researchers with a tool to map

the distribution of competences, recognize institutional bottlenecks, and assess the feasibility and coherence of public policy implementation in multilevel governance systems.

3.1 Metropolization, Institutional Design, Policy Implementation and Dual Agency

The last chapter laid out the conceptual framework of this thesis and established how a new analytical framework might be proposed to better understand how these three themes intersect.

Figure 1. Interaction Between Theoretical Framework Themes and New Concept



Source: own work

The literature review on metropolization and multilevel governance suggests that in metropolitan contexts, local governments are often caught between responding to their own agendas and mandates while also fulfilling duties and responsibilities imposed by higher levels of government or interjurisdictional arrangements (Da Cruz et al., 2020; Damurski & Andersen, 2022; Rodriguez-Acosta & Rosenbaum, 2005). This dual role creates overlapping authority, ambiguous accountability, and conflicting incentives. Based on the conceptual framework, we can argue that the fragmented and multilayered nature of governance in metropolitan areas makes it difficult to coordinate policies effectively, leading to implementation gaps, policy inconsistencies,

and institutional inefficiencies (Angel, 2017). Thus, metropolization not only intensifies the need for coherent institutional design, but also highlights the analytical usefulness of the dual agency concept to identify, map, and understand these challenges.

In the previous chapter, we established that institutionalism and institutional design shape how responsibilities and incentives are distributed across levels of government and within government agencies. When poorly coordinated, they create the conditions for dual agency to emerge. Institutions are not neutral containers, but structures that both constrain and enable action. From the perspective of new institutionalism, institutions generate path dependencies, shape actor behavior, and influence how policies are formulated and implemented. In multilevel systems, especially in rapidly urbanizing regions, the lack of coherence between formal rules and real governance dynamics gives rise to institutional inconsistencies.

These inconsistencies become especially problematic when a single local actor is subject to multiple and often contradictory mandates. For example, a local government can be responsible for both implementing national policies and pursuing local development strategies with limited autonomy. This results in conflicting accountabilities and unclear hierarchies, which are the core of the dual agency problem. The literature review and conceptual framework concludes that understanding and reforming institutional design is key to identifying and resolving dual agency dilemmas in public policy implementation.

In the same line, when the discussion covered policy design and effectiveness, studies demonstrated that policy design requires alignment between instruments, objectives, and institutional contexts. But in decentralized or multilevel governance systems, this alignment is undermined by fragmenting responsibilities and conflicting incentives (Howlett, 2019; Marsh et al., n.d.; Peters, 2000). Therefore, while policy design ideally links problems, goals, and instruments in a coherent and rational way, the reality of institutional fragmentation and overlapping competences in metropolitan contexts leads to significant implementation challenges. In particular, dual agency emerges when local actors are subject to multiple principals each with different expectations and accountability structures.

This fragmentation causes gaps between design and delivery, where even well-crafted policies may fail due to mismatches between who decides, who implements, and who is held accountable. Analysis of the intersection of these three topics leads to the conclusion that to ensure policy effectiveness, it is essential to recognize and address the institutional inconsistencies that give rise to dual agency problems, especially in settings with complex territorial governance arrangements.

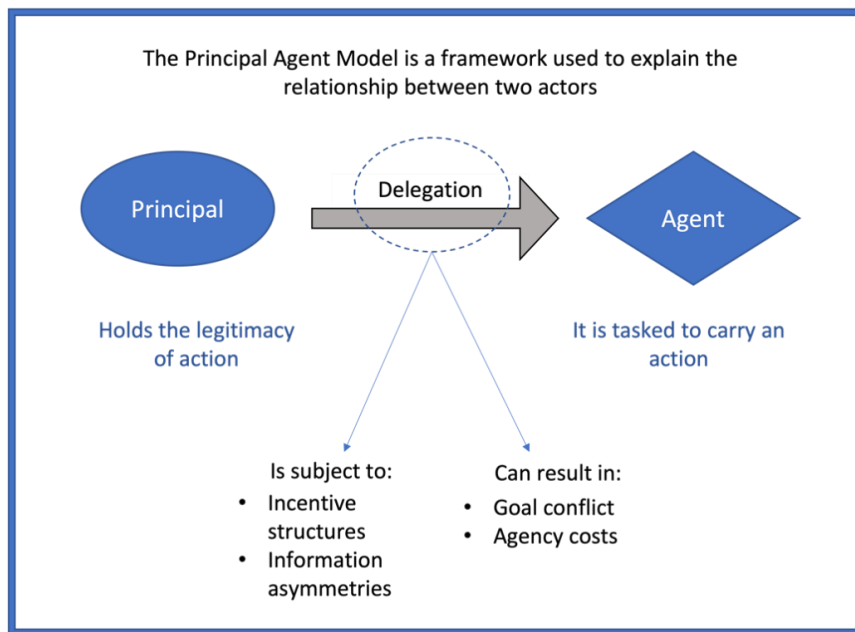
3.2 The Principal Agent Model

The Principal-Agent (PA) Model is a theoretical framework that originates from economics and institutional theory, particularly from the field of contract theory and corporate governance (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gailmard, 2014; Moe, 1984). From its origin until now it has been widely applied in political science and public administration to analyze delegation relationships and problems of control and accountability (Gailmard, 2014; Lane, 2013). At its core, the PA model conceptualizes a situation in which one actor, the principal³, delegates authority or responsibility to another actor, the agent⁴, to perform a task on their behalf. This delegation process comes with inherent challenges derived from information asymmetry and divergence of interests (Eisenhardt, 1989). These conditions may result in situations where the agent acts in ways that serve their own preferences or where behavior that deviates from what the principal would have preferred if they have had full information and control.

³ The principal could be a policymaker, elected official, or central government authority

⁴ The agent could be bureaucrats, implementing agencies, or subnational actors

Figure 2. Summary of Principal Agent Model Main Conditions



Source: own work based on information extracted from (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gailmard, 2014; Moe, 1984; Waterman et al., 2004; Waterman & Meier, 1998)

The PA model has precedents in the work of Coase (1937) and by Berle (1948). The introduction of transaction costs and the idea of the importance of institutional structures for efficiency and outcomes (Coase, 1937), in addition to the contribution on separation of ownership and control (Berle & Means, 1948), were foundational influences on Principal-Agent theory. The theory was first formalized in the 1970s and 1980s through the work of scholars like Stephen Ross and Barry Mitnick in economics, and later adopted in political science by Moe (1984) and others who sought to explain bureaucratic behavior, institutional design, and problems in policy implementation. By 1989, Kathleen Eisenhardt published a work that is widely recognized as a foundational and influential piece in the development and synthesis of agency theory. It provided a clear framework that helped standardize how scholars use and understand the Principal-Agent Model.

The model's logic assumes rational actors pursuing utility maximization and rests on two primary variables: the agent's discretion and the principal's capacity for oversight. Within the model, there are formal contracts, monitoring mechanisms, incentive structures, goals, and agency costs (Eisenhardt, 1989). The incentive

structure considers both rewards and sanctions, and there are strategies around goal alignment to prevent or lower agency costs (Eisenhardt, 1989). As this model was brought to public policy, it provided a powerful lens for understanding and explaining different relationships and behaviors around policy action, including relations within bureaucracies, between politicians and government officials, or across levels of government. It has also been used to analyze performance management and the delegation of tasks to non-state actors in the implementation of public policies. Furthermore, it has been used to understand policy implementation gaps and to design accountability mechanisms as oversight committees, or performance indicators, which seek to avoid policy failures attributable to misalignment or shifts in the relationship between the main actors (principal and agent).

However, its application has exposed some limitations and therefore been subject to some critiques. One of the most common criticisms refers to the oversimplification of relationships by assuming unidirectional authority and stable roles. In this same realm, there is another persistent critique on the unidimensional view of human behavior around self-interest and individual maximization, casting aside other, more complex dimension of individuals, such as sense of duty, ethics and institutional belonging (Gailmard, 2014; Waterman et al., 2004). This stems from the fact that many public officials also act based on public service ethics, professional standards or commitment to greater causes and communities.

An additional critique derives from the general assumption of a binary relation between principal and agent, in the sense that the model benefits a reality where there is one principal interacting with one agent at a time. But public policies are implemented in complex governance systems where several principals coexist with multiple agents. Further adding to this complexity, agents are often accountable to more than one actor simultaneously, creating coordination challenges and fragmented authority. In several contexts, there are conditions that complicate the establishment of precise contracts and enforceable accountability, since tasks can be ambiguous, goals contested and institutional environments unstable (Peters & Zittoun, 2016).

Over time, scholars have extended and adapted the PA model to better fit the complexities of reality. Some have developed multi-principal models, different agency

perspectives, or incorporated behavioral insights into agent motivations (Gailmard & Patty, 2007). Others have explored hybrid models like the Principal–Steward model, introduced by James Davis, F. Schoorman, and L. Donaldson in the late 1990's (Caers et al., 2006; Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2020). This model, for instance, conceives agents as stewards, motivated by intrinsic goals, organizational mission, and trust in the principal (Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2020). This is a shift towards a collaborative, open to dialogue and capacity-enabling management style, in which principal and steward share goals, have mutual trust and use non-intrusive oversight (Schillemans & Bjurstrøm, 2020).

Also, recent research developments in the field of policy design and effectiveness (Capano et al., 2018; Peters & Zittoun, 2016) have pointed out the limits of control based delegation models, opening up the debate to more adaptive, participatory and collective forms of governance.

The Principal-Agent Model is a key analytical tool for understanding delegation, accountability, and organizational behavior in public administration. Its strength lies in revealing the structural tensions between control and autonomy in complex systems. However, the traditional formulation of this model needs significant adaptation to address the pluralistic, ambiguous, and multi-actor nature of modern policy-making. As policy issues become increasingly complex and require collaborative implementation across various sectors and levels, the Principal-Agent Model should be supplemented with more additional developments that consider cooperation, trust, discretion, and the institutional context of the policy process.

3.3 From Principal-Agent to Dual Agency Model

As already stated and recognized by several academics (Eisenhardt, 1989; Gailmard, 2012; Peters & Zittoun, 2016; Waterman & Meier, 1998), the Principal-Agent model has contributed to the understanding of public policy implementation practices and theory. It has been widely used to understand and explain delegation mechanisms, control instruments, the risk of agency drift and policy gaps. However, despite its analytical strengths and as already mentioned in the past section, the PA model struggles to capture the institutional fluidity and competence ambiguity that characterize many decentralized governance systems, especially in the Global South.

As noted by Peters and Zittoun (2016), traditional PA models⁵ often overlook how institutional design, path dependency, and informal norms shape the policy process. They also tend to assume stable preferences and well-defined roles. These conditions are rarely met in fragmented or evolving governance arrangements. This is particularly true in Colombia, where decentralization reforms have multiplied subnational responsibilities without fully clarifying institutional boundaries or resource allocations. As a result, public officials often act as agents to more than one principal, operating within a framework of misaligned incentives and contradictory expectations.

In addition, previous development of multiple-principal models also falls short of explaining fragmented authority, and multi-level governance contexts, and their impacts on public policy effectiveness. For example, the Common Agency Model (Laffont & Martimort, 2001) is a type of Principal-Agent relationship in which a single agent is simultaneously subject to multiple principals, with the aggravating factor of having potentially divergent objectives. Undoubtedly, this contributes to a better understanding of some realities, but it still focuses on principals that are at the same hierarchical level, such as different ministries.

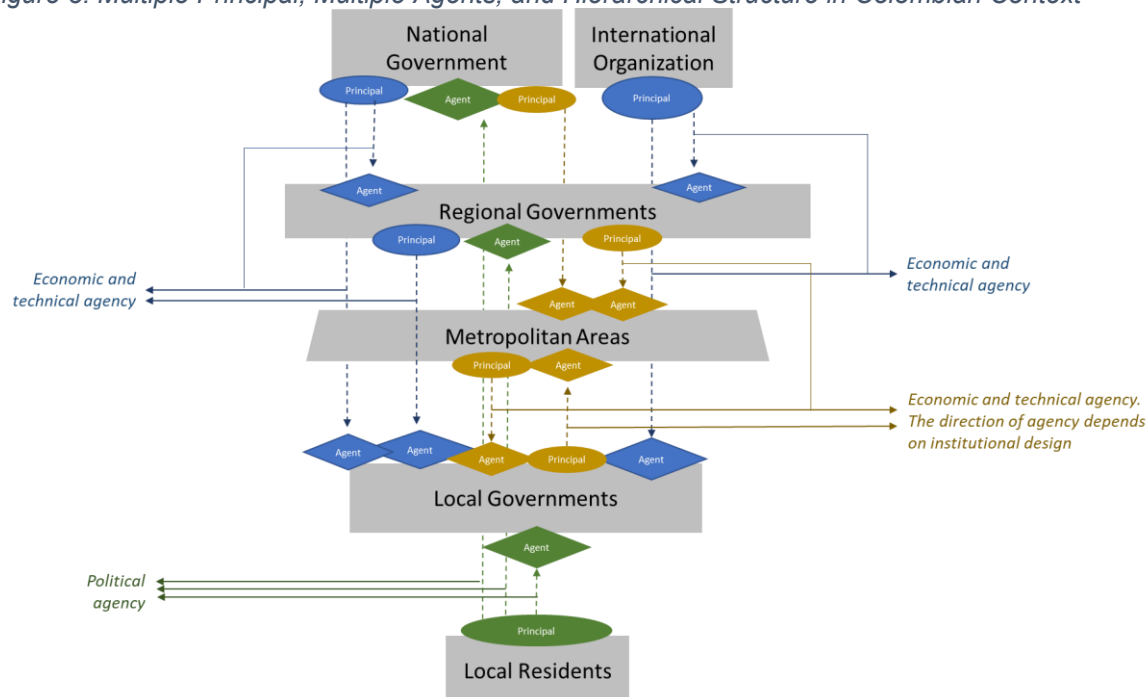
The concept of dual agency emerges from the need to analytically capture the experience of local governments that are simultaneously accountable to multiple institutional logics. It moves beyond the classic PA binary and instead focuses on the conflicting demands, mandates, and dependencies that define intergovernmental relations in practice. It considers not only multiple agents, but the different hierarchical levels they are embedded in, as well as the overlapping mandates and unclear competence distributions.

More specifically, dual agency occurs when a local or intermediate government (such as a supramunicipal authority) is the agent of multiple principals that are at different hierarchical levels. This can include the national government, the regional government, metropolitan authorities, and local residents, with all their overlapping

⁵ It is important to note that the critiques and limitation are to the PA Model not to the Theory. Understanding that the Model refers to a formal framework or describe the relationship between *principal* (who delegates) and agent (who acts on the principal's behalf). The Principal Agent Theory is a broader conceptual framework that encompasses multiple models, empirical applications, assumptions, and evolving interpretations. This chapter will contribute to broaden that theoretical framework.

mandates and competences, as well as poor coordination of policy instruments. The following figures illustrate this concept in the Colombian case, where local governments can be agents for many different principals.

Figure 3. Multiple Principal, Multiple Agents, and Hierarchical Structure in Colombian Context



Source: Own work

Clearly, this situation is not just a problem of “multiple principals”. Rather, it is a challenge for different levels of authority complemented by a contradictory delegation system, driven by confusing legal frameworks, uncoordinated planning instruments, and contested development indicators. These variables create an agency tangle where compliance with one directive may cause a breach of another, and where resources are allocated through fragmented channels.

Examples from Colombia illustrate this quite vividly. For instance, local planning offices are required to align with the Ministry of Housing and Ministry of Planning General Guidelines on territorial development and land use, and with the regional environmental authority and supramunicipal authorities on territorial development goals. Yet, the instruments for coordination (e.g., POTs⁶, POD⁷s, Environmental

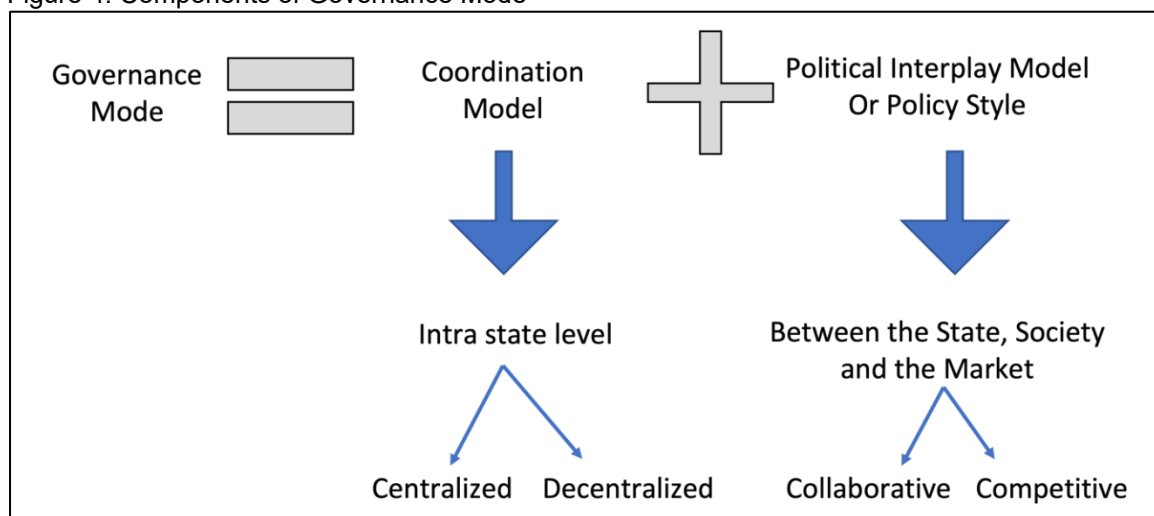
⁶ Territorial Organization Plans also known as POT for its acronym in Spanish (Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial)

⁷ Departamental Organization Plans also known as POD for its acronym in Spanish (Planes de Ordenamiento Departamental)

Plans) operate on misaligned cycles, logics, and budgets. Local officials, thus, navigate conflicting timelines, criteria, and evaluation indicators.

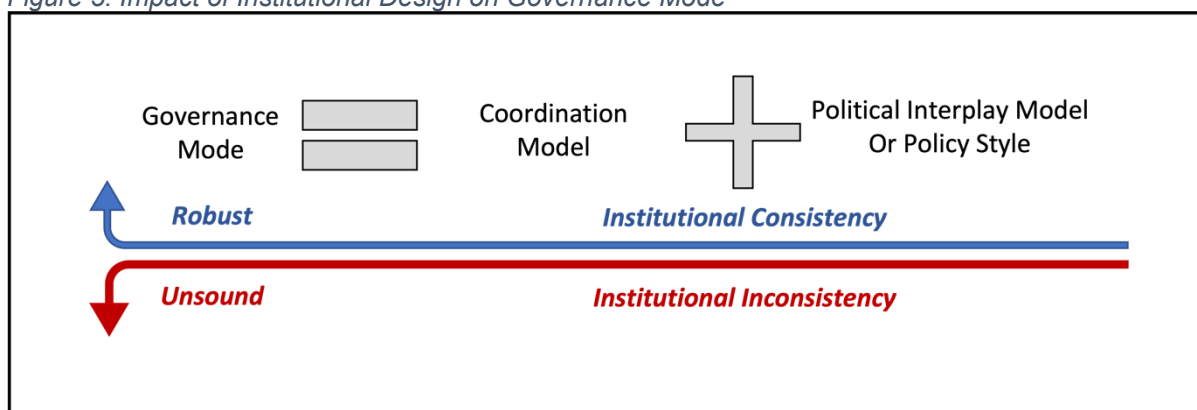
Dual agency is an inherent condition of local governments since they must respond both to higher levels of government and to their own constituents, however it becomes more pronounced in contexts of institutional inconsistency, which directly undermines policy effectiveness. Institutional consistency and inconsistency, refer to the impact institutional design can have in the governance mode of public policies and thus in their implementation. Institutional design can articulate coordination and political interplay in a consistent way or not, giving space to institutional consistency or inconsistency. But more specifically, institutional design is the vehicle through which key policy variables are articulated. In particular, the way formal competences, operational instruments, and implementation capacities are distributed has a direct impact on policy implementation (Capano et al., 2018; Lowndes & Roberts, 2013). The following figures detail the components of the governance mode of a policy and the impact institutional design can potentially have on it.

Figure 4. Components of Governance Mode



Source: own construction based on (Fontaine et al., 2023)

Figure 5. Impact of Institutional Design on Governance Mode



Source: own construction based on (Fontaine et al., 2023)

In Colombia, these inconsistencies are particularly acute in the domains of territorial planning and housing. As will be described in the methodology chapter, urban expansion has often exceeded the capacity of local governments to regulate land markets or deliver adequate housing. The result is a paradox: local governments are formally empowered, but practically constrained.

In this sense, dual agency is not just a descriptive label, but a diagnostic category. It identifies when and how the lack of institutional alignment becomes a barrier to effective policy implementation

3.4 Analytical Uses of Dual Agency: A Framework

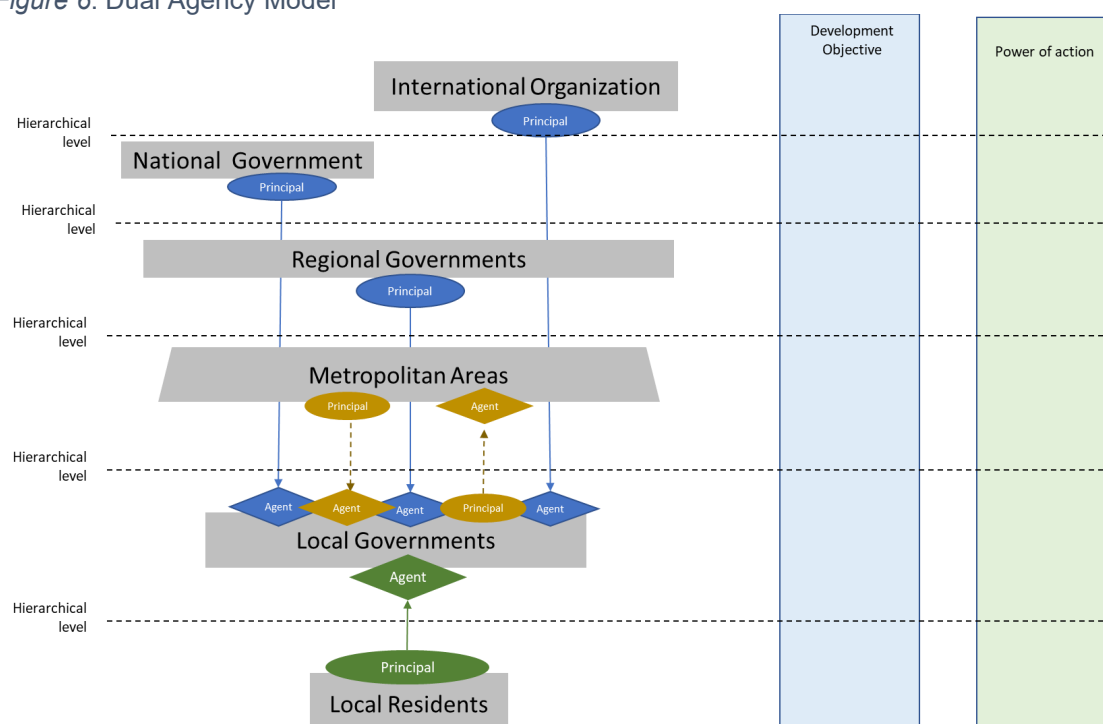
The Dual Agency Model refers to the operationalization of the concept of *dual agency*, understood as a natural governance condition in which local governments are simultaneously subjected to multiple, overlapping, and often conflicting relationships of delegation. This model captures the institutional complexity that arises when various principals—such as national governments, metropolitan bodies, international organizations, and local residents—delegate authority and impose mandates on the same local actor.

In such settings, the local government becomes an agent of several entities, each with their own priorities, procedures, and accountability mechanisms. Nevertheless, this agency delegation occurs in a context of unclear competence distribution and allocation, fragmented authority, and limited coordination across levels

and sectors of government. As a result, local governments face contradictory demands, administrative overload, and implementation constraints that significantly undermine policy coherence and effectiveness at the local level.

The dual agency model thus provides a diagnostic lens through which to identify how institutional inconsistency, overlapping mandates, and multi-principal delegation generate structural bottlenecks in policy execution at the local level. The following figure portrays the entire operationalization of the model.

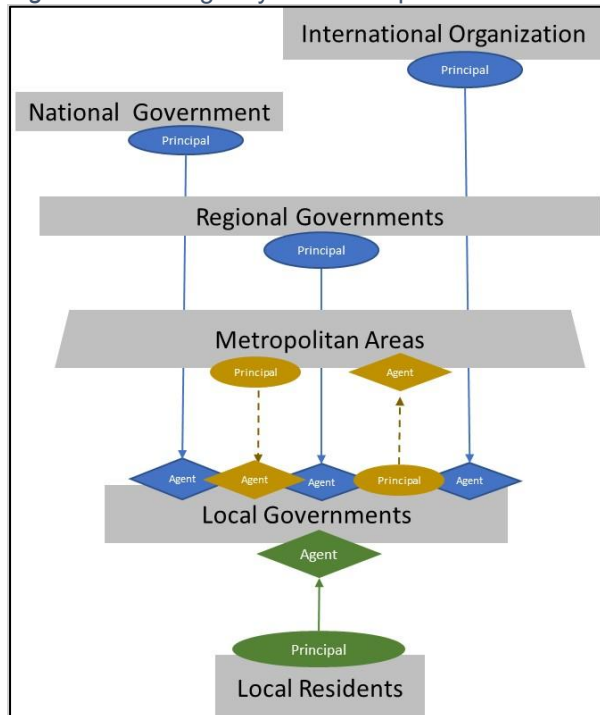
Figure 6. Dual Agency Model



Source: Own Work

This section proposes a set of analytical dimensions through which dual agency can be operationalized as a tool to assess implementation challenges. The first analytical step is identifying the multiplicity of actors that act as principals and the different directions these relations can take. The main question to answer at this moment is whether local actors are receiving instructions from more than one entity, whether these instructions align or conflict, how delegation relations are established and in which direction. The following figure zooms in on Step1 of the model.

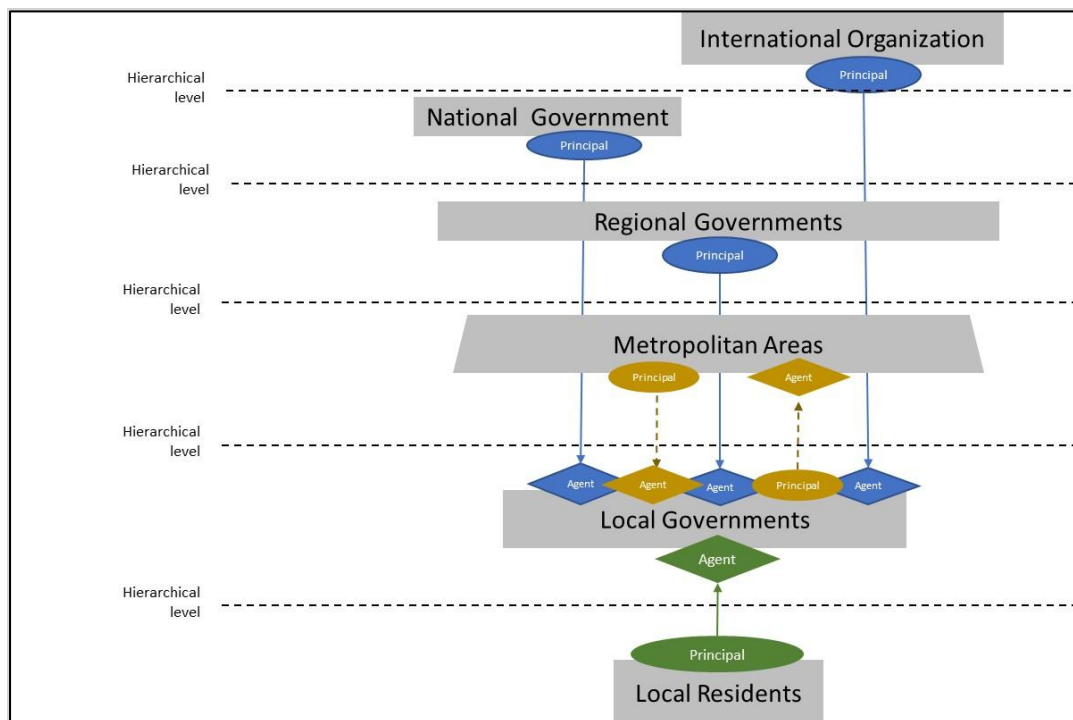
Figure 7. Dual Agency Model Step 1.



Source: Own work

The second step refers to the hierarchical level each of the principal identified is located at. This will complement the map and help understand roles, power and interests. More importantly, it will help determine to whom local governments are accountable, and how performance is measured. The following figure shows the establishment of the hierarchical levels.

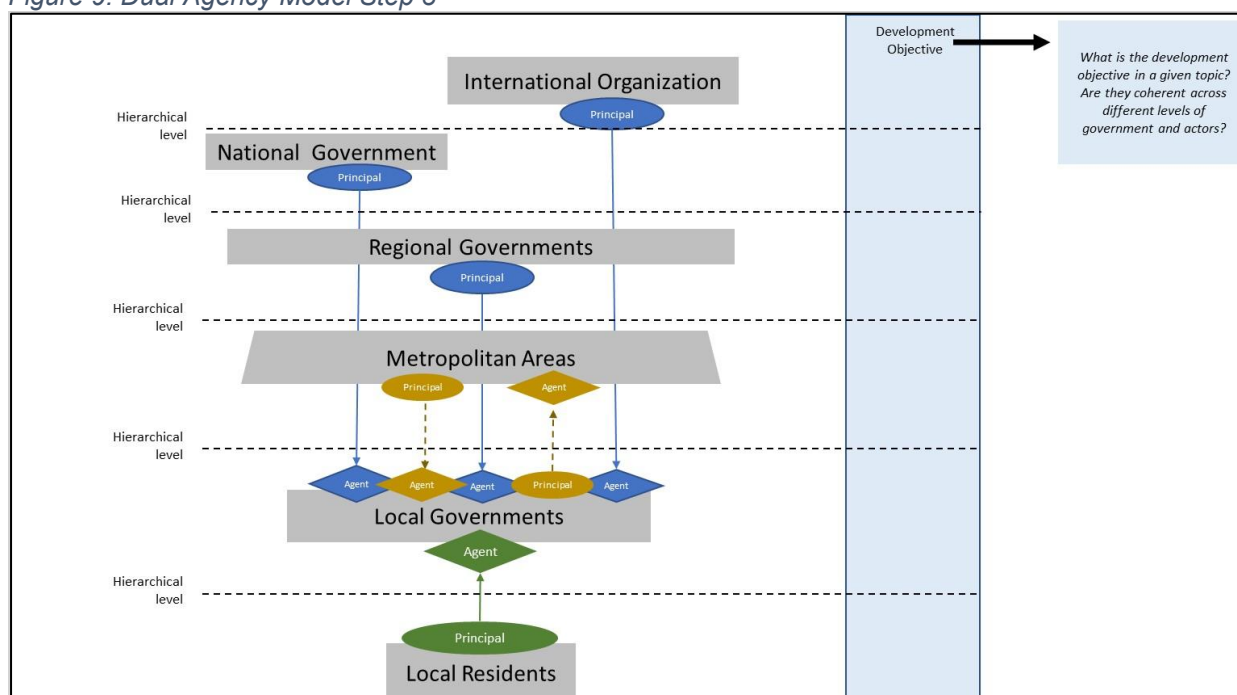
Figure 8. Dual Agency Model Step 2.



Source: Own Work

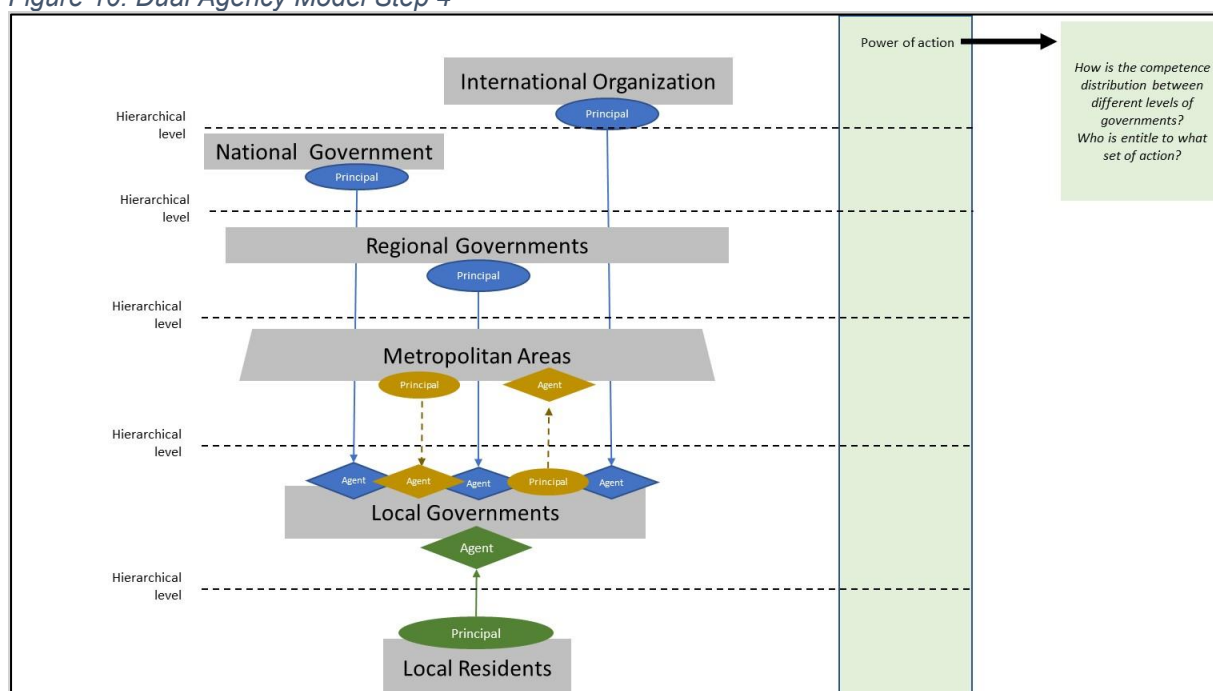
Steps 3 and 4 look for a deeper understanding of the objective, the instruments, and the competences. In this sense, there is one step dedicated to understanding, in each of the policy topics subject to analysis, what the development objective is for each principal and agent, and more importantly, whether these objectives are coherent across different levels of government and actors. Step 4 examines delegation of competences, in other words, the actual power of taking actions. So, the guiding questions here are identifying the competence distribution between different levels of government, and who is entitled to what set of actions. The following figures shows this in detail.

Figure 9. Dual Agency Model Step 3



Source: Own Work

Figure 10. Dual Agency Model Step 4



Source: Own Work

These dimensions can be used as a diagnostic checklist when analyzing specific policies. In the subsequent empirical chapters, they will be applied to the domains of territorial planning and housing policy in selected Colombian cities.

To identify when dual agency is occurring in practice, one should observe:

- Contradictions between different institutional mandates received by the same actor.
- Incoherences in timelines, evaluation criteria, or procedural steps between national and local instruments.
- Complaints or resistance from local implementers citing ambiguity, burden, or conflict in fulfilling their functions.
- Patterns of delayed, fragmented, or failed implementation where no single cause is evident, but overlapping competences and accountability are present.

A key contribution of this framework is that it links governance architecture (institutional design) with policy effectiveness (implementation outcomes). It helps identify where precisely the breakdowns occur: Is the problem in the legal framework, the coordination instruments, the political incentives, or the administrative capacity?

Conceptually, the dual agency model contributes to three strands of public policy literature:

- **Institutionalism:** By showing how formal rules and organizational logic interact, often dysfunctionally, in multilevel settings.
- **Policy Implementation:** By moving beyond delivery failures to uncover the structural roots of misalignment.
- **Policy Design:** By introducing a tool to assess design feasibility in contexts of institutional complexity (Howlett et al., 2018).

Practically, this framework has diagnostic and prescriptive value. It allows policymakers and analysts to map misalignments, anticipate coordination failures, and redesign institutional arrangements to enhance clarity and coherence for policy effectiveness. For instance, it suggests that reforms should not merely delegate more competences to local governments, but must ensure alignment of mandates, instruments, and resources.

3.5 Closing Remarks

This chapter presented the dual agency concept as an evolution of the Principal-Agent model to capture the complexities of fragmented authority and multilevel governance. This updated concept, serves as the groundwork for the empirical analysis of Colombia's territorial planning and housing policies in the chapters that follow.

By integrating the intricacies of multilevel governance, competence delegation, institutional design, and policy implementation studies, the dual agency concept serves as both an analytical framework, and a practical lens to understand how and why public policies lose strength and momentum in decentralized contexts. It reveals where agency problems arise and how institutional inconsistency perpetuates them.

Ultimately, addressing dual agency challenges is not just about better coordination; it is also about proposing clearer competence distributions and supporting these in a governance system that enables implementation capacities at all levels. This insight will guide the operationalization of the concept in the empirical sections of this thesis.

4. Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological approach adopted to explore how institutional design, decentralization, and urban dynamics intersect to shape the effectiveness of local public policy implementation in metropolitan areas. The thesis is grounded in the observation that urban growth increasingly transcends administrative boundaries, generating coordination challenges that are exacerbated by fragmented competences and overlapping jurisdictions. In this context, the research seeks to understand how institutional (in)consistency and the emergence of dual agency problems affect local governments' ability to deliver coherent and effective policy outcomes. Colombia serves as a strategic case to examine these questions, given its advanced yet uneven decentralization process and the prominence of metropolitan areas in its urban landscape.

To address the complexity of these issues, the research adopts a mixed methods design, combining quantitative analysis of public policy performance indicators with qualitative inquiry into the views of key actors and institutional dynamics. This methodological choice responds to the need for an integrated analytical lens capable of capturing both the measurable effects of policy implementation and the underlying governance arrangements that shape them. By triangulating diverse sources of evidence across different levels of government and actor perspectives, the research aims to produce a robust and context-sensitive understanding of how governance frameworks, institutional incentives, and urbanization trends interact in decentralized settings. The following sections detail the research design, data collection methods, sampling strategy, analytical tools, and ethical considerations that structure this inquiry.

4.1 Research Design

This thesis adopts a mixed methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively investigate the effectiveness of public policies at the local level. The decision to employ a mixed methods strategy is grounded in the complexity of the research problem, which requires both the measurement of policy outcomes and an exploration of contextual,

institutional, and subjective dimensions such as stakeholder perspectives and governance arrangements (Almeida, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

The selection of this design is aligned with the understanding that no single methodological tradition is sufficient to fully address multifaceted social phenomena. As noted by some scholars (Queirós et al., 2017), on the one hand, qualitative research is particularly well-suited for capturing the opinions, behaviors, and expectations of stakeholders and policy actors within a given setting, making it indispensable for analyzing institutional design and perceptions. Quantitative research, on the other hand, allows for the measurement of policy performance and behavioral patterns through structured data collection and statistical analysis, making it critical for evaluating effectiveness and identifying key correlations and trends (Almeida, 2018) (Tobi & Kampen, 2018).

This research follows a sequential explanatory design, a two-phased mixed methods approach in which the collection and analysis of quantitative data is followed by qualitative data collection and interpretation. This design is particularly relevant when quantitative results require deeper explanation or when numerical trends prompt further investigation into underlying causes or mechanisms (Almeida, 2018, p. 144). As such, the first phase involves gathering and analyzing data on policy outcomes and local development indicators to assess policy effectiveness. The second phase consists of semi-structured interviews, focus groups and document analysis aimed at understanding how institutional arrangements and actors' interpretations influence policy implementation and its perceived success.

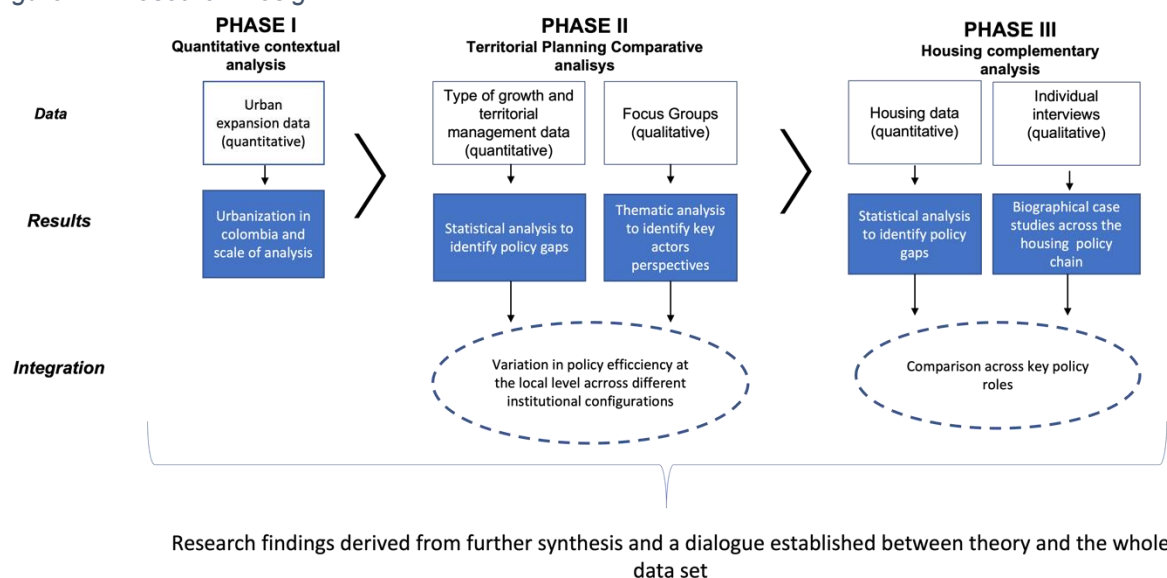
Mixed methods are now considered a well-established paradigm within the research community and are particularly suitable for interdisciplinary studies where different forms of knowledge must be integrated (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). They not only allow for convergence and triangulation of findings but also ensure that quantitative patterns are interpreted within their social, institutional, and political context, thus enhancing the explanatory power of the research (Almeida, 2018, p.147). By embracing this approach, this thesis aims to combine empirical rigor with contextual depth, giving way to an analysis that is sensitive to both the measurable outcomes

and the lived realities of actors involved in the governance and implementation of public policies at the local level.

Given the complexity of the research question: what dual agency problems do local governments face amid urbanization, and how do these challenges affect the efficiency of local public policy implementation? A mixed methods approach is most appropriate. This design combines quantitative analysis to identify and map where coordination problems arise, with qualitative methods to explore how these challenges are perceived and navigated by key actors. Such integration allows the research to address both the descriptive (“what”) and explanatory (“how”) dimensions of the problem (Woolley, 2009). Specifically, the study adopts a sequential explanatory design, where statistical analysis of urban growth and policy indicators informs the selection and focus of qualitative data collection. This allows deeper investigation into the mechanisms driving policy inefficiencies, especially in metropolitan contexts. By linking empirical patterns with actor perspectives and institutional arrangements, the research generates a more comprehensive understanding of how urbanization and institutional design interact in shaping implementation outcomes (Woolley, 2009).

The research design is composed of three interrelated phases. The structure reflects a complementary integration strategy, whereby each phase builds upon the previous one to deepen the understanding of the challenges faced by local governments in the context of urbanization, particularly in relation to policy implementation in territorial planning and housing. The following figure summarizes the research design.

Figure 11. Research Design



Source: Own work

The initial phase of the study, titled “Quantitative Contextual Analysis,” seeks to explore the broader implications of urbanization in Colombia and to define urban expansion as the key dependent variable. This phase employs statistical methodologies to determine the analytical scope by assessing the dynamics of urban settlements across the country. The results from this analysis offer a solid empirical basis for the research, as urban growth dynamics are central to the investigation. Additionally, the study identifies some ways in which the inefficiencies of local land management and housing policies may influence patterns of urban expansion.

Once Phase I is concluded, the research moves on to Phase II, which involves a comparative analysis of territorial planning policies. This phase demonstrates the limited coordination in territorial development planning in Colombia by identifying the dual agency problems and implementation challenges faced by local governments that are pursuing Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). To achieve this, Phase II begins with quantitative data on the type of growth experienced, and through statistical analysis, it assesses policy effectiveness at the local level.

To further understand this phenomenon, two focus groups were conducted with experts, practitioners, and public servants. Thematic analysis of this qualitative data helped capture the perspectives of key policy actors and explore the mechanisms contributing to the observed policy inefficiencies. As we shall see, a major finding from

this phase concerns the critical role of housing as a driver of urban expansion. Thus, addressing housing as a problem associated with land-use planning is essential for a better understanding of dual agency and policy ineffectiveness in land management, which also complements the overarching aim of the thesis.

As a result, Phase III involves an in-depth analysis of housing policy, specifically aimed at exploring the dual agency problems and implementation challenges faced by local governments. This phase employs a similar approach to Phase II, using statistical analysis of housing data (supply, demand, quality) to identify policy gaps, complemented by interviews with key actors to trace experiences across the housing policy chain. The purpose is to examine how roles and responsibilities are distributed and experienced across various institutional settings. These narratives provide insight into how dual agency operates within different institutional contexts in housing delivery, contributing to the analysis of implementation challenges.

In this thesis, dual agency in policy implementation is understood to exist when there is a mismatch between the coordination model of the policy (at the intra-state level) and the policy style (interplay model between the state, society and the market), which is further complicated by a complex distribution of power.

Finally, findings from each of the research phases will be integrated and interpreted comparison and iteration with the theoretical framework. This final synthesis ensures that findings are not presented in silos but placed within a coherent understanding of the dual agency problem, urban and metropolitan governance and the scalar complexities of public policy implementation. As stated by Woolley, this integration allows for the development of a richer understanding, where quantitative patterns and qualitative interpretations inform one another to build a fuller picture of the research problem (Woolley, 2009, p.9).

4.2 Topic Selection

The research design and case selection is optimized to approach two main topics: territorial planning and housing. Colombia provides a compelling empirical ground to investigate the relationship between territorial planning, housing policy, and the challenges posed by institutional fragmentation and overlapping competences—

what this thesis conceptualizes as dual agency problems. The choice to focus on these two domains is not incidental. Rather, it is based on the centrality they occupy in shaping urban development trajectories and on their high dependence on coordinated, multi-level governance.

As demonstrated in the development of this research (Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022), Colombian cities have experienced extensive and often unanticipated urban expansion, with the urban footprint growing faster than population rates, resulting in declining densities, inefficient land use, and elevated urban informality. Territorial planning instruments such as the *Plan de Ordenamiento Territorial* (POT) are legally mandated to guide this growth, yet in practice they consistently fail to anticipate land needs or coordinate across municipalities within metropolitan areas. This reflects not just technical deficiencies but deeper institutional inconsistencies—revealing that the apparent decentralization of spatial planning is undermined by a lack of enforcement power, limited technical capacities, and fragmented interjurisdictional governance.

Similarly, housing policy in Colombia has become a key tool for the operationalization of development and redistribution goals. However, despite an expanding normative framework (e.g., Law 2079/2021) and increased investment, the delivery of adequate housing remains hampered by ambiguous responsibilities across levels of government, insufficient alignment with land-use planning, and weak coordination among actors involved in housing production and regulation. In short, housing policy implementation reveals the same misalignment between formal mandates and practical capacity as urban planning, especially in complex metropolitan territories. By selecting territorial planning and housing policy as entry points, this research aims to empirically observe how institutional design—particularly in decentralized systems—translates into implementation gaps, and how these gaps are shaped or exacerbated by the coexistence of multiple principals and agents acting across levels and jurisdictions. These two sectors are not only critical to the sustainability and equity of urban development but also structurally prone to governance challenges that expose the core mechanisms of dual agency: overlapping

competences, ambiguous authority, conflicting incentives, and fragmented accountability.

Furthermore, these policy areas are highly visible in national and international development agendas (e.g., SDGs, Paris Agreement, New Urban Agenda), which increases the pressure on local governments to deliver results without necessarily enhancing their institutional capacity or autonomy. As discussed in the Introduction to this dissertation, this discrepancy between expectations and capacity underscores the urgency of rethinking governance models for urban development. Studying these two sectors within the Colombian context—characterized by rapid urbanization, advanced but inconsistent decentralization, and growing metropolitanization—provides an analytically rich setting to test and refine the concept of dual agency in urban governance.

Ultimately, this dual focus allows the thesis to engage directly with foundational questions in public policy and urban governance: What do cities need—not just in terms of infrastructure or finance, but in institutional design and political authority—to effectively implement transformative agendas? And how can we develop conceptual tools that illuminate the invisible frictions that impede policy efficiency in complex territorial systems?

4.3 Case Study Selection

Now we move into the case study selection, that for this case are the urban settlements configuration in which the research will concentrate the data gathering for the quantitative aspects. To start the selection process, the starting point was the fact that in 2018, Colombia had 43 cities and metropolitan areas (Angel et al., 2021; Saavedra et al., 2022). More specifically, out of these 43 urban centers, 15 are metropolitan areas and urban agglomerations⁸ and 28 are self-standing cities. This universe of urban centers represents the full extent of subjects with population above 100.000 that exist in Colombia. The 15 agglomerations are composed by a total of 62

⁸ The 15 metropolitan areas and agglomeration are composed by 62 municipalities.

municipalities and that added to the other 28 make and universe of 90 municipalities that concentrate the urban dynamics in Colombia.

Table 1. List of the 43 Cities that Make the Urban Centers Universe

Agglomerations (15)	Self-standing Cities (28)	
	Main Cities (13)	Secondary Cities (15)
Barranquilla	Florencia	Aguachica
Bogota	Monteria	Apartado
Bucaramanga	Neiva	Barrancabermeja
Cali	Popayan	Buenaventura
Cartagena de Indias	Riohacha	Cienaga
Cartago	Santa Marta	Fusagasuga
Manizales	Sincelejo	Jamundi
Medellin	Valledupar	Maicao
Pereira	Villavicencio	Ocana
Girardot	Yopal	Palmira
Armenia	Ibague	Piedecuesta
Cucuta	Pasto	Rionegro
Duitama	Quibdo	Tulua
Sogamoso		Zipaquirá
Tunja		Guadalajara de Buga

Source: (Angel et al., 2021, p.181)

There have been attempts in the past to study the overall state of the urban fabric in Colombia following the NYU Marron Institute methodology on urban extent mapping and measurement. In 2018, The Colombian Atlas of Urban Expansion⁹, studied a representative sample of cities of the universe off all urban settlements in Colombia regardless of their population size (Galarza et al., 2019). In addition to the main findings on the high density Colombian cities have and the lack of open spaces (Galarza et al., 2019, p18), the study introduced an approach for grouping cities based on population size so that comparisons can be made within similar subjects. Cities in Colombia vary enormously in size: a few large cities concentrate a lot of people, while many small cities have much fewer inhabitants. Grouping cities controls for these differences and avoids bias. The study identified the 4 larger cities of the sample that concentrated 44% of urban population and with the remaining cities introduced a

⁹ <https://www.atlasexpansionurbanacolombia.org/>

multiplier (or weighting factor) to ensure that each city in the sample represents not just itself, but a fair proportion of similar cities in the entire country. The multiplier factor was 1.400.000 and the groups were built based on a concept of doubling the base unit: 1 – 2 – 4 – 8. So there were 5 group in total, the group of the self-represented cities and the four groups built base on population size(Galarza et al., 2019, p.7).

This is a good precedent to correctly represent the country's urban dynamics and to avoid biases when analyzing urban expansion trends. A latter development of this methodology was used by the same authors in a study aimed to understand the importance of including urban expansion as a component of housing policy in Colombia (Angel et al., 2021). In this study, the authors took as universe the 43 urban centers in Colombia with population higher than 100.000. In this universe there is also a significant concentration of the urban population in a small subset of cities. Specifically, the six most populated metropolitan areas comprise 52% of the country's total urban population, with Bogotá alone accounting for nearly a quarter (24%). Medellín represents 11%, while Cali, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, and Cartagena collectively account for 17%. This concentration motivated the division of the cities into groups to better reflect variations across different urban profiles (Angel et al., 2021, p.182).

The grouping in this newer study replicates the same logic used in Colombian Atlas of Urban Expansion, the larger city -in this case Bogotá – is treated as a separate group due to its dominant size an influence and the remaining 42 cities were sorted by population size and organized into four groups. In this newer version of the stratified grouping the multiplier factor was 1.286.000 and the groups were structured to allocate: 1/15 of the total population to the group with the smallest cities, 2/15 to the next group, 4/15 to the second-largest group, and 8/15 to the group containing the largest cities. The following table summarizes the grouping exercise.

Table 2. Grouping Structure for the Universe of 43 Urban Clusters in Colombia

Universo de Ciudades de más de 100.000 en Colombia				
Group	# of Cities	Total Population	Population Range	Average Population Size
0	1	8.758.865	Más de 4M	8.758.865
1	5	10.281.868	950k – 4 M	2.056.374
2	10	4.921.131	300k – 949k	492.113
3	15	2.787.079	119k – 299k	185.805
4	12	1.301.690	100K – 119k	108.474
Total	43	28.050.633		652.340

Source (Angel et al., 2021, p.182)

To operationalize the grouping methodology described above, Table 3 presents the resulting classification of the 43 Colombian cities and metropolitan areas (with over 100,000 inhabitants) into the groups.

Table 3. List of Cities in each Group

Grupo 0		Grupo 1		Grupo 2		Grupo 3		Grupo 4	
Bogotá	8.8M	Medellin	3.9M	Cucuta	909K	Armenia	288K	Maicao	118K
		Cali	2.3M	Pereira	618K	Palmira	277K	Quibdo	117K
		Barranquilla	2.0M	Santa Marta	502K	Popayan	276K	Piedecuesta	116K
		Bucaramanga	1.0M	Ibague	494K	Sincelejo	252K	Fusagasuga	115K
		Cartagena	955K	Valledupar	464K	Buenaventura	240K	Ocana	114K
				Villavicencio	457K	Tulua	181K	Zipaquira	110K
				Manizales	445K	Barrancabermeja	179K	Cienaga	110K
				Monteria	378K	Tunja	177K	Aguachica	107K
				Pasto	328K	Yopal	152K	Guadalajara de Buga	105K
				Neiva	327K	Riohacha	143K	Apartado	100K
						Girardot	134K	Rionegro	100K
						Sogamoso	126K	Jamundi	100K
						Florencia	121K		
						Duitama	120K		
						Cartago	120K		

Source (Angel et al., 2021, p.183)

This stratified approach is particularly well-suited for the selection of case studies in this thesis. By categorizing cities based on population size and cumulative demographic significance, it allows for the identification of distinct urban dynamics, governance challenges, and land use pressures across different types of cities. For this specific research I am going to concentrate in gathering and analyze data on the

formal metropolitan areas that are divided between group 1 and 2. The Ministry of Interior is the national entity that recognized formal Metropolitan Areas once the municipalities that form it have completed all requirements stated in Law 1625 of 2013. There are 5 formal metropolitan areas in Colombia: Medellín, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cucuta and Pereira. These areas account for almost one third of the total urban population of the country, 36% of the population of large cities¹⁰ and almost 50% of the population of the 15 conurbation that make the 43 main urban cluster of the country. The following table presents the selected cities to be studied in this research.

Table 4. List of Selected Cities

Grupo 1	Grupo 2
Medellin Barranquilla Bucaramanga	Cucuta Pereira

Source: Own Work

4.4 Data Collection and Analysis Methods

This section outlines the data collection and analysis strategies employed to address the central research question of this thesis following the mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative techniques across multiple sources and levels of analysis. Given the multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon—encompassing spatial, institutional, and political dynamics—this study adopts five core methods that guide the empirical work: (i) satellite imagery collection and analysis, (ii) statistical analysis, (iii) focus groups, (iv) semi-structured interviews, and (v) document analysis. Together, these methods enable a multi-scalar and multi-source analysis of the institutional inconsistencies and coordination challenges that shape public policy outcomes in metropolitan areas.

4.4.1 Satellite imagery collection and analysis

To measure and analyze urban expansion in Colombian urban areas, this research incorporates a geospatial methodology based on the classification and interpretation of Landsat satellite imagery and urban morphological. This methodology

¹⁰ Large city > those with at least 100,000 inhabitants.

originally developed by the NYU Marron Institute (Angel, 2016), and later used in the Colombian Atlas of Urban Expansion (Galarza et al., 2019) and several complementary studies (Angel et al., 2021; Saavedra et al., 2022), compares the imageries in different points in time depending on availability and resolution. For this study, the data was available across key time points: approximately 1990, 2000, 2010, and 2020. This method allows for the observation of changes in the urban footprint, density patterns, spatial fragmentation, and expansion dynamics over time (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.122).

Now to assess the directionality of urban expansion I used a cartesian plane methodology used in similar research (Rimal et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016). By generating an influence zone around the administrative centroid and dividing it into 16 equal radial sectors (every 22.5°), the method allows for a precise measurement of how urban growth radiates from the center (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 126). The intersection between these sectors and the classified urban extents from each time period produces a segmented spatial profile. These segments are analyzed to quantify and visualize the extent and direction of expansion, offering insights into territorial pressure, land use conflicts, and strategic planning implications.

This integrated geospatial methodology provides robust evidence for assessing spatial mismatches between institutional structures and urban dynamics, a core concern of this thesis. It enables the detection of uncoordinated urban expansion, low-density development, and the institutional blind spots that emerge when growth exceeds the scale and scope of existing planning and governance frameworks. The details of these methods will be explained in the correspondent chapter where the results are presented.

4.4.2 Statistical analysis

Statistical analyses were employed to derive initial insights from the spatial data generated through satellite imagery analysis. By applying basic descriptive statistical methods—such as means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions—the research quantified patterns of urban expansion, levels of density, and degrees of fragmentation across selected municipalities. These indicators served as proxies for evaluating urban form and its evolution over time, allowing for preliminary observations

about how territorial development has unfolded in different institutional settings. The use of simple, transparent statistical techniques is intentional, as it ensures replicability and allows for clear interpretation of results in connection to territorial planning outcomes.

Building on this foundation, statistical analysis was then used to assess the relationship between institutional features, decentralization variables, and policy performance indicators, particularly at the municipal and metropolitan level. These variables include, but are not limited to, the legal status of local governments, their fiscal autonomy, inter-municipal coordination mechanisms, and indicators of public service delivery (e.g. housing output, infrastructure coverage). The objective is to identify whether and how institutional arrangements influence local governments' ability to implement public policy effectively within contexts of rapid urban growth. This phase enabled the identification of patterns that justify deeper qualitative exploration in subsequent stages of the research.

4.4.3 Focus groups

As part of the broader mixed methods research design, specifically following a sequential explanatory design, focus groups were employed as a key qualitative data collection method. Focus groups were utilized to explore the underlying mechanisms and institutional dynamics relevant to the research problem. Focus groups are defined as controlled group discussions designed to obtain perceptions on specific topics (Smithson, 2000). What fundamentally distinguishes focus groups from other methods, such as individual interviews, is the explicit use of group interaction as a core part of the research data (Smithson, 2000, p.104). Participants engage in discussion with one another, and it is through this interaction that valuable data is generated (Smithson, 2000, p.104).

In the context of this study, focus groups were used to facilitate the identification of collective narratives and institutional logics within specific planning or policy contexts relevant to local public policy implementation in metropolitan areas. Specifically, four distinct focus groups were conducted. One focus group consisted of 10 participants, and the other had 8 participants. The participants in these focus groups were carefully selected and included experts, practitioners, and public servants

who had participated in key roles related to the policies under study. These participants offered crucial perspectives on the challenges contributing to observed policy inefficiencies. The following table shows the participants and their relevance for the study.

Table 5. Focus Groups Participants and Relevance

Group Number	Participants	Current or Former Position	Date
Focus Group 1	1. Ignacio Gallo	Managing Partner and Lead Consultant at Plan-IN Planeación Inteligente, supporting public entities in Colombia.	Feb 17 2022
	2. José Mario Mayorga.	Consultant for the review of the Land Use Plan (POT) of Cartagena, Colombia, and university professor specializing in territorial planning.	
Focus Group 2	1. José Salazar	Professor at the National University of Colombia, focusing on urban planning and territorial development.	Feb 16 2022
	2. Bibiana Rodríguez Campos	Director of Sustainable Urban Development at ProBogotá Región.	
	3. Erik Vergel	Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture at Universidad de los Andes.	
	4. Gloria Henao	Lawyer and Director of the Specialization and Master's Program in Urban Management Law at Universidad del Rosario.	
	5. Dolly Cristina Palacio Tamayo	Research Professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Externado de Colombia, and member of the research group "Territories and Environment."	
	6. Thierry Lulle	Research Professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Externado de Colombia, and Director of the research group "Territories and Environment."	
Focus Group 3	1. Antonio Avendaño	Deputy Secretary for Information and Strategic Studies at the District Planning Secretariat of Bogotá.	Jan 13 2022
	2. Ana Milena Vallejo	Technical Deputy Director of the Territorial Management Subdirectorates at the District Institute of Cultural Heritage (IDPC).	
	3. Phillippe Chenut Correa	Research Professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Externado de Colombia, in the Geography Program – Research Area: Social Processes, Territories, and Environment.	
	4. Luis Felipe Guzmán	Research Professor at the Faculty of Law, Universidad Externado de Colombia, affiliated with the Environmental Law and Territorial Environmental Planning Program.	

Group Number	Participants	Current or Former Position	Date
	5. Pablo Sanabria Pulido	Research Professor at the School of Government, Universidad de los Andes.	
Focus Group 4	1. Juan Francisco Rodríguez Vita	Founding Partner of Geografía Urbana S.A.S., where he has served as director in numerous consultancies related to urban and territorial planning and management in various countries, including the formulation of 13 land use plans under the “Modern POTs” program.	Jan 12 2022
	2. Germán Camargo	Director of the Guayacanal Biological Station Foundation and of Guayacanal S.A.S., a consulting and research group focused on applied ecological research, ecosystem restoration, urban ecology, territorial planning, and the relationship between culture and the environment.	
	3. Diego Silva Ardila	Professor in the Urban Management and Development Program at Universidad del Rosario.	

Source: Own work

To analyze the focus group data the groups were treated as the main unit of analysis, rather than the individual participants. Although, a couple of participants – due to their roles and knowledge – were later invited to individual semi structured interviews. By treating the group as a unit of analysis there was a significant amount of attention given to how viewpoint emerge from the collective discussion. This involves examining how participants respond to each other, build upon ideas, express agreement or disagreement, and navigate different perspectives (Kitzinger, 1994). Thematic analysis was applied to the qualitative data obtained from these focus groups. This process aimed to capture the perspectives of key policy actors and explore the mechanisms contributing to policy inefficiencies by identifying recurring themes, contradictions, and institutional framings relevant to the research. By analyzing the discussions with sensitivity to the group interaction, insights were gained into the collective narratives and institutional logics at play.

4.4.4 Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interview (SSI) is an intermediate qualitative research method that bridges the gap between highly structured surveys and less structured focus groups (Adams, 2015, p. 492). SSI are conducted as a conversation with one respondent at a time, this method utilizes a blend of closed- and open-ended

questions, often accompanied by follow-up 'why' or 'how' questions (Adams, 2015). As stated in this methodology, semi-structured interviews serve as a complementary tool to support the fulfillment of the study purpose. They were employed to explore “puzzles” that emerge and remain after other data analysis, including quantitative findings and even focus groups (Adams, 2015). This aligns with the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, where qualitative data collection, including SSIs, follows initial quantitative analysis to provide deeper explanation for numerical trends or investigate underlying causes or mechanisms. SSIs are one of the five core empirical methods supporting this research. It is utilized in the second and third phases to understand how institutional arrangements and actors’ interpretations influence policy implementation and its perceived success.

In context of this research, the SSIs were conducted with 10 key informants who have participated in significant roles related to the different policies under study. This includes individuals such as national-level decision-makers, street-level bureaucrats, representatives from local government (who are both beneficiaries and implementers), international organizations, and local academia. Interviewing this diverse group across different tiers of government allows for a multi-scalar and multi-source analysis²⁰ and tracing experiences across the policy chain. The interviews were planned to be between thirty and forty minutes long, which is within the typical range to minimize fatigue (Adams, 2015). The set of questions were divided into three key realms: exploring how interviewees perceive challenges in policy effectiveness at the local level; how they perceive the impact of institutional design and the distribution of competences on this issue; and their specific role and insights concerning territorial planning and housing policies. These realms directly align with the research’s goal to understand the interplay between governance frameworks, institutional incentives, and urbanization trends, and specifically how dual agency operates within different institutional contexts in policy delivery, complementing the previous quantitative analysis.

Table 6. List of Interviewees and their relevance to the study

	Name	Institution	Current or Former Position	Represented Sector
1	Antonio Avendaño	Mayor's Office of Bogotá. District Secretariat of Planning	Undersecretary of Information and Strategic Studies	Local Government
2	Carlos Felipe Reyes	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	Director of the Housing System, Ministry of Housing	National Government
3	Fabio Sánchez	Universidad de los Andes, Faculty of Economics	Research Faculty Member	Academia
4	Javier Antonio Villareal	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	Deputy Director of Promotion and Technical Support for Social Interest Housing Investments	National Government
5	Johan Dilak Julio Estrada	Mayor's Office of Bogotá. District Secretariat of Habitat	Undersecretary of Habitat Financing	Local Government
6	Juan David Ching	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	Legal Advisor Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	National Government
7	Julián Andrés Santiago Villareal	National Planning Department (DNP)	Deputy Director of Decentralization	National Government
8	Karen Ortega Burgos	Colombian Chamber of Construction (CAMACOL)	Head of Strategic Information and Regional Studies	Private Sector – Construction Guild
9	María Juliana Ruiz	United Nations Development Program (UNDP)	UNDP Project Manager. Project Manager for the Decentralization Mission	NGO (Non-Governmental Organization)

Source: Own work

All interviews were recorded and transcribed. To analyze them, one approach used was to consolidate themes found in multiple answers. In addition and taking into account that SSIs help address the "how" component of my research question—exploring how dual agency challenges are experienced and confronted by key actors and how this influences policy implementation on the ground - content analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to identify recurring themes, contradictions, and institutional framings relevant to the research.

4.4.5 Document analysis

The last data collection and analysis method is document analysis. This is a qualitative research method that involves systematic review, interpretation, and coding

of documents to gain insight into a particular phenomenon. It is especially useful for studying institutional structures, legal frameworks, planning instruments, and policy discourse, making it highly suitable for research in public policy and governance. According to Bowen (Bowen, 2009), document analysis involves three main tasks: skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation. Documents can be analyzed on their own or in combination with other qualitative data (e.g., interviews), serving both as primary data sources and as a basis for triangulation. This method is particularly useful when analyzing historical changes, legal mandates, or policy inconsistencies—as is the case in this thesis.

To carry out the document analysis, I first identified and collected relevant documents, which included legislation, policy plans, official guidelines, development plans, municipal statutes, court rulings, or institutional reports. These documents were then subject to a manual coding process, in which key themes, terminologies, patterns, and inconsistencies were identified. Bowen (Bowen, 2009) and Prior (Prior, 2003) emphasize that documents should not be treated as transparent representations of reality; rather, they are constructed artifacts that reflect institutional agendas, bureaucratic processes, and power dynamics. This interpretive lens is essential for understanding how certain problems are framed, how responsibilities are distributed, and how coordination mechanisms are either enabled or constrained.

For this thesis—*Understanding dual agency challenges in metropolitan contexts*—document analysis is particularly relevant because it allows to reconstruct and critically examine the formal architecture of decentralization and territorial governance in Colombia. By analyzing legal instruments (e.g., Law 388 of 1997, Law 1454 of 2011, Law 2079 of 2021), national and local planning documents, and policy evaluation reports, I can trace how competences are distributed across government levels and whether this distribution aligns with urbanization dynamics. As Scott (Scott, 2001) and Lowndes & Roberts (Lowndes & Roberts, 2013) point out, institutions are not only material arrangements but also normative systems, and document analysis enables researchers to uncover how such systems are codified, formalized, and challenged.

Furthermore, in fragmented metropolitan settings, the absence of coordination is often visible in overlapping or conflicting mandates, ambiguous definitions of roles, or the omission of metropolitan scales in national legislation—all of which are detectable through systematic document review. This method complements the broader mixed-methods design by offering contextual depth and institutional specificity, supporting the evaluation of the implementation gap and dual agency problems in urban governance.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

This doctoral research has been carried out in compliance with the highest academic standards regarding ethical integrity, transparency, and intellectual responsibility. A significant portion of the empirical and analytical material used in this thesis has been generated through the author's professional activities during the PhD period, in roles held within academic institutions, think tanks, and international organizations, including CIDEU, Fedesarrollo, IOM, UNHCR, and the Marron Institute of Urban Management (NYU). These roles involved applied research, policy development, and technical coordination on topics directly related to the object of study of this thesis.

While this overlap between academic and professional activities constitutes a strength—providing privileged access to institutional realities, actors, and high-quality information—it also entails a potential risk of bias, particularly regarding interpretation and positionality. To mitigate this risk, the thesis has followed a rigorous process of data triangulation and counterchecking, ensuring that all findings are verified through multiple sources and perspectives. Moreover, when professional outputs are integrated into the thesis, they are clearly cited, attributed, and situated within the broader academic framework, avoiding any conflict between institutional mandates and scholarly conclusions.

This research adopts a reflexive stance, acknowledging that the boundary between academic inquiry and professional practice was not unidirectional. Much of the work carried out during the PhD influenced the thesis, but conversely, the conceptual and methodological reflections developed in the thesis also informed the design, analysis, and implementation of real-world projects. This recursive relationship

is embraced as a methodological asset, consistent with contemporary calls for engaged and practice-oriented research, especially in the field of public policy and urban governance.

All data collection involving human participants has followed established ethical guidelines. When interviews or testimonies were conducted specifically for this research, participants were informed of the purpose, gave their voluntary consent, and their anonymity or institutional confidentiality has been respected where requested. This thesis adheres to the ethical protocols of the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona and aligns with international standards regarding research with human subjects.

In summary, this research integrates professional experience and academic inquiry in a reflexive, transparent, and methodologically sound manner. Rather than concealing the dual role of the author, it is treated as a source of analytical depth and contextual understanding, while ensuring that ethical safeguards and scholarly rigor are maintained throughout.

Section II. Urban Expansion and Institutional Expansion: Limited Coordination in Territorial Development Policy

Section II marks the beginning of the empirical core of the thesis, applying the analytical lens developed in Section I to investigate how urban expansion interacts with institutional arrangements in Colombia's territorial development policy. This section examines the dynamics of spatial growth and governance, focusing on how dual agency challenges and implementation gaps materialize in local governments' efforts to achieve sustainable development through territorial planning.

Drawing from the research design detailed in the chapter on methodology, this section analyzes how patterns of population growth, land consumption, and urban typologies generate new planning pressures. It then examines the institutional frameworks that underpin territorial planning, including the distribution of competences, legal mandates, and the policy instruments available to different levels of government. Through this exploration, the section interrogates the coherence—or lack thereof—between national planning frameworks and local implementation realities.

The final chapter in this section evaluates whether current mechanisms for managing urban growth are effective in aligning territorial planning with actual development patterns. It identifies the frictions between observed and planned urban expansion, revealing how institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates contribute to the persistence of implementation challenges. Ultimately, Section II illustrates how institutional design and coordination deficits constrain the ability of local governments to steer urban development towards sustainability goals, setting the stage for the subsequent exploration of housing policy in Section III.

5. Urban trends and expansion patterns in Colombia: an arising new challenge¹¹

Urbanization has emerged as a global demographic megatrend with transformative effects on the built environment. While urban growth has long been associated with development, recent trends reveal that the physical expansion of cities is outpacing population growth. In both developed and developing countries, urban land consumption continues to accelerate, pointing to a shift toward increasingly expansive urban forms. This phenomenon—where cities expand outward more than they grow upward—raises critical questions about sustainability, efficiency, and governance. As cities grow, they demand more land for housing, infrastructure, and economic activity, leading to spatial patterns that often exceed planned or anticipated growth trajectories (Angel et al., 2016; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022).

These patterns of urban expansion carry significant implications. The mismatch between land consumption and population growth contributes to urban sprawl, increased energy use, and greater greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, this dynamic intensifies environmental pressures, deepens spatial fragmentation, and exacerbates socio-economic segregation. Consequently, there is a growing academic focus on understanding the spatial and temporal dynamics of urban growth. In Colombia, this challenge is particularly pronounced, as metropolitan regions experience rapid expansion that often escapes formal planning mechanisms—posing a pressing concern for territorial governance and sustainable development (Angel et al., 2016; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022).

Colombia is experiencing rapid and complex urban growth, posing significant challenges for urban governance and public policy. In the past three decades, Colombian cities have expanded at an unprecedented rate, leading to the development of vast urban areas that often span multiple local jurisdictions. This rapid urbanization has resulted in a complicated interplay between local and metropolitan authorities, creating the need for a coordinated approach to governance, resource management, and policy implementation. Understanding these current urbanization

¹¹ The information on this chapter was published as a chapter on the book: Diagnóstico y Recomendaciones sobre el Ordenamiento Territorial en Colombia: Propuestas para el cumplimiento de los Acuerdos de París

trends is crucial to assess whether the existing decentralization framework effectively responds to ongoing urbanization processes and the challenges they pose.

As expressed throughout Section I, the problem at the core of this research lies at the intersection of metropolization, institutional design and policy effectiveness. Urbanization has led to the emergence of conurbations, where urban extents spread across multiple municipalities, creating governance complexities that transcend traditional administrative boundaries. Exploring the magnitude and form urbanization has taken in Colombia can help determine whether the effectiveness of local public policies in achieving better living standards is being compromised by the growing contradiction between policy goals and the means available to achieve them.

5.1 General Overview of Urban Trends

Colombia, like many other countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, has been urbanizing rapidly in recent decades. Its urban population tripled between 1950 and 1970, from 3.9 to 11.7 million, growing at 5.5% per year; it doubled from 1970 to 1990, increasing to 22.7 million and growing at 3.3% per year; and increased by two-thirds, to 37.9 million, between 1990 and 2015, growing at 2.0% per year. In 1950, only 33% of the population of the country lived in cities. That percentage rose to 55% by 1970 and to 68% by 1990 and by 2015 stood at 76%, such that more than 3 out of 4 citizens now live in cities (Angel et al., 2016).

To put these numbers in a global perspective, according to the Atlas of Urban Expansion of the 53 large countries in the world, among countries that had more than 20 million people in 2015, Colombia ranked 16th in terms of the share of its population living in cities. That said, with 76% of its population living in cities, it was the least urbanized among the large countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, trailing behind Argentina (92%), Venezuela (89%), Brazil (86%), Mexico (79%), and Peru (79%). The annual rate of growth of the urban population is typically inversely proportional to the share of the population in the country living in cities. Colombia—with its projected annual growth rate of 1.04% between 2015 and 2045—ranked 37th among the world's 53 large countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean, it ranked second, after Peru with its slightly higher growth rate of 1.11% per year during this period (Angel et al., 2016). It is important to note that differences in the statistical

definition of 'urban' across Latin American countries may partially explain discrepancies in levels of urbanization reported by international datasets. While this thesis relies on UNDESA (2019) and Atlas of Urban Expansion criteria (Angel et al., 2016; Galarza et al., 2019), variations in national definitions should be considered when making cross-country comparisons.

In the country, most cities have doubled their urban extent in the last ten years. Data from the Atlas of Urban Expansion shows that the population in Colombian cities has grown by a factor of 1.6 and in the same period the urban extent has expanded by a factor of 2.1, indicating a higher consumption of land per capita (Galarza et al., 2019). In addition, it is important to consider that, while the growth rate of the urban population in Colombia has slowed down, it continues to grow. If cities and metropolitan areas in Colombia are to plan for their long-term expansion, their planning horizon should be of the order of 30 years. Between 2015 and 2045, the urban population of Colombia is expected to grow by 37% to 51.7 million, at an average annual rate of 1%¹². By 2045, the share of Colombia's population living in cities is expected to increase to 83%¹³. One of the challenges that arise for the country as stated by Cordoba and Gonzalez is how to enhance and materialize the potential benefits of agglomeration (Córdoba Martínez & González, 2017).

Although the rate of urbanization in Colombia has slowed compared to previous decades, there is still a sustained demand for land driven by demographic growth, and housing needs, that resulted in the development of large urban extents cutting across several local governments. These extents are not only larger in physical size but also more dispersed and less cohesive. Such patterns of growth pose significant challenges for urban planning, infrastructure development, and the provision of services, especially in metropolitan regions where multiple local governments must coordinate their efforts. In the context of this research, this chapter aims to showcase these urban trends and expansion patterns. More specifically, the purpose is to understand where and how physical growth has occurred and its impact on administrative boundaries and power distribution. Making it clear why having an updated framework to navigate the intersection between public policy, multilevel

¹² United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects: The 2014 Revision, files 2-4

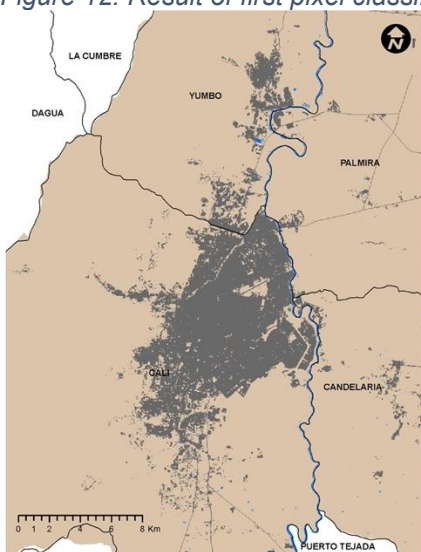
¹³ Colombian National Statistics Department. 2018 Census Projections.

coordination, and the dual agency is key for Colombia and for countries in the global south experiencing a similar rate and typology of growth.

5.2 Analytical approach

As mentioned in Chapter 4 of Section I, this research incorporates a geospatial methodology based on the classification and interpretation of Landsat satellite imagery and urban morphology. This section aims to explain the process in detail. It begins with the supervised classification of Landsat imagery, distinguishing three basic land cover categories: built-up areas, open spaces, and water bodies. This classification is carried out through pixel-level analysis, supported by sampling strategies and calibration using high-resolution imagery to validate the accuracy of the classification results (Saavedra et al., 2022). The following figure shows built-up areas in grey, open spaces in ochre, and water bodies in blue.

Figure 12. Result of first pixel classification



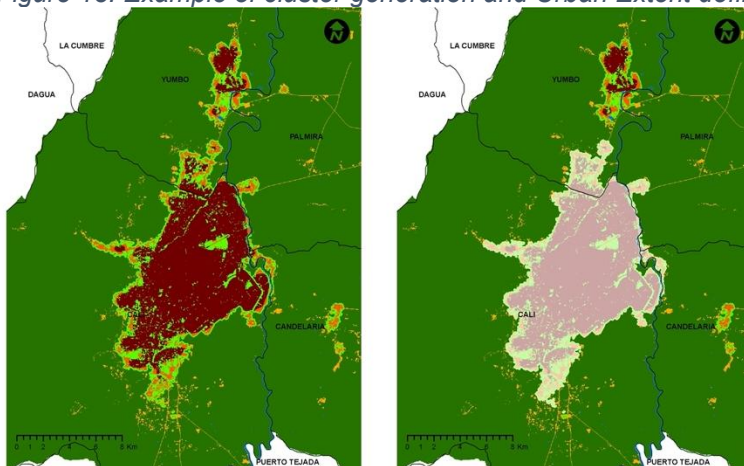
Source (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 123) (Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022, p. 730)

Each pixel is assigned a land use class, and its status (urban, suburban, or rural) is determined based on the intensity of construction observed. After this classification, pixels are grouped based on spatial proximity to form urban clusters. These clusters are then used to define the urban extent or urban footprint of each city. A primary cluster, usually anchored around the historical or administrative center of the city, and based on a proximity rule buffer equivalent to 25% of its area is drawn, and any other clusters that intersect with this buffer are included as part of the city's

urban footprint. This method ensures a consistent and spatially grounded definition of urbanization that goes beyond administrative boundaries and reflects actual land development patterns (Angel et al., 2016; Galarza et al., 2019; Saavedra et al., 2022; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022).

Figure below shows the classification based on land use (urban brown, suburban orange and rural yellow) and the generation of clusters on the left, while the evolution of the cluster to the urban extent based on the proximity rule is depicted on the right. This figure was made with Cali and its surrounding municipalities, and it allows us to see how urbanization has evolved, the urban extents that are formed and how they surpass administrative boundaries.

Figure 13. Example of cluster generation and Urban Extent definition

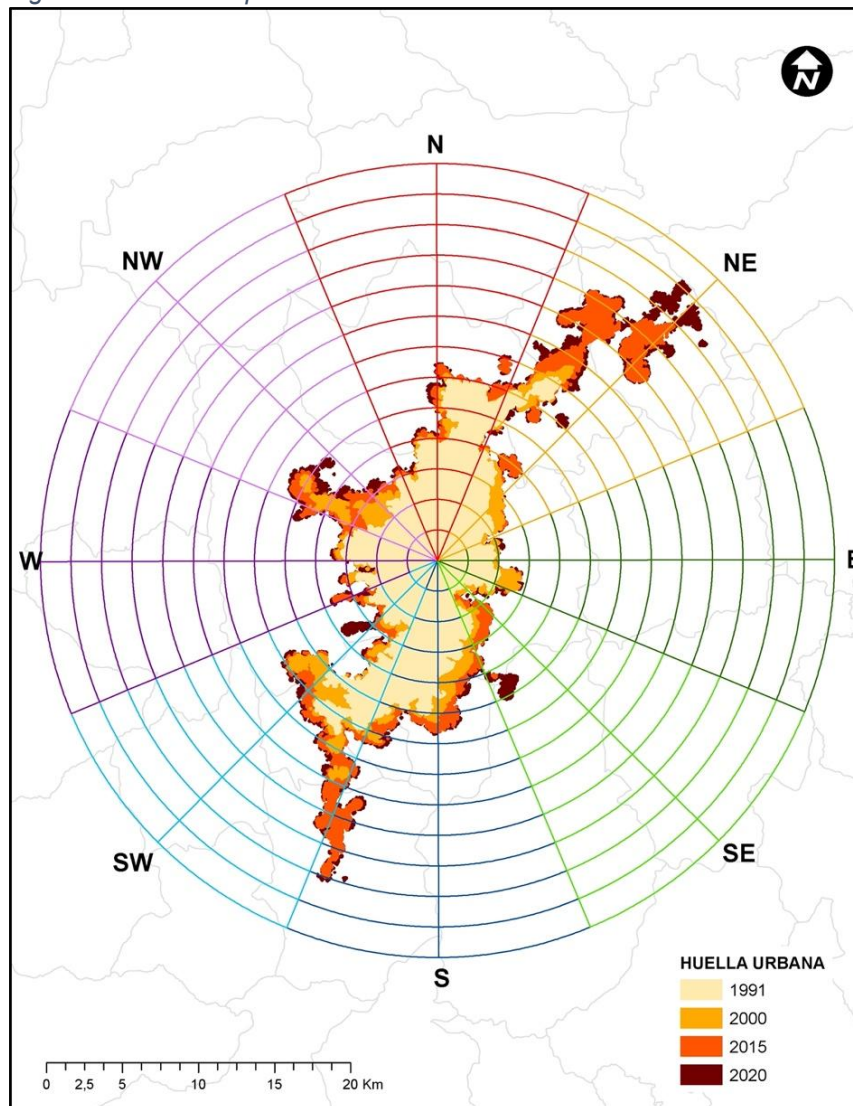


Source (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 123) (Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022, p. 730)

To assess the direction of growth, as mention in chapter 4 section I, a methodology already proved in similar research was used (Rimal et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2016). A Cartesian plane methodology offered an opportunity to understand the directionality of growth and therefore offer insights around pressures or incentives that might explain the tendency. This methodology involves generating an influence zone around the center point of the administrative area being studied. Then this area is divided into 16 equal radial sectors (every 22.5°) allowing for a precise measurement of how urban growth radiates from the center (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 126). The intersection between these sectors and the classified urban extents from each period produces a segmented spatial profile. These segments are analyzed to quantify and

visualize the extent and direction of expansion, offering insights into territorial pressure, land use conflicts, and strategic planning implications. The following figure portrays this method.

Figure 14. Urban Expansion Direction



Source (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 126)

This integrated geospatial methodology provides robust evidence for assessing **spatial mismatches between institutional structures and urban dynamics**. It enables the detection of uncoordinated urban expansion, low-density development, and the institutional blind spots that emerge when growth exceeds the scale and scope of existing planning and governance frameworks.

It is important to note that the study examines cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants. According to the 2018 Population and Housing Census, Colombia had 69 municipalities with a total population exceeding 100,000 inhabitants. These 69 municipalities are in 25 departments, including Bogotá, and have a total of 29,784,012 inhabitants, which is equivalent to about 62% of the country's total population. In Annex 1 there is a detailed list of the municipalities that are part of this group.

This original list was extended to include 25 additional municipalities. The criteria used to add these study areas correspond to the urban growth analysis methodology used by New York University (Angel et al., 2016; Galarza et al., 2019) and replicated in this thesis. More specifically, as already stated, in the agglomeration analysis developed by the NYU Marron Institute, the urban footprint of the city is not conditioned by its administrative political limits but by its continuity in space. In this sense, for cities that experience conurbation processes and high spatial and economic interdependence, larger study areas are considered to corroborate the real size of the urban footprint. For example, in the case of Barranquilla, the municipalities of Malambo, Soledad, Puerto Colombia and Galapa are considered as the study area. While the latter two have populations of less than 100,000 inhabitants, they are nonetheless fundamental to understanding the metropolitan dynamics of Barranquilla. Therefore, the study is initially carried out on an adjusted universe of 96 municipalities.

The mapping and measurement of Urban Expansion quantify key attributes – urban extension, average built-up density, fragmentation of the built area of cities due to the existence of open spaces, compactness of the shape of the urban footprint – along four periods (circa 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020), which means it is not only a measurement of reach but also facilitates an understanding of how urban conditions change over time.

5.3 Data and Results

The first and most important finding is that, despite the decentralized structure of Colombian political administration that divides the country in 1.102 municipalities, there is a clear urbanization dynamic of concentration. Indeed, 73% of the urban population of the country is concentrated in 43 conurbation and self-standing cities.

Table 7. List of the 43 Cities that Make the Urban Centers Universe

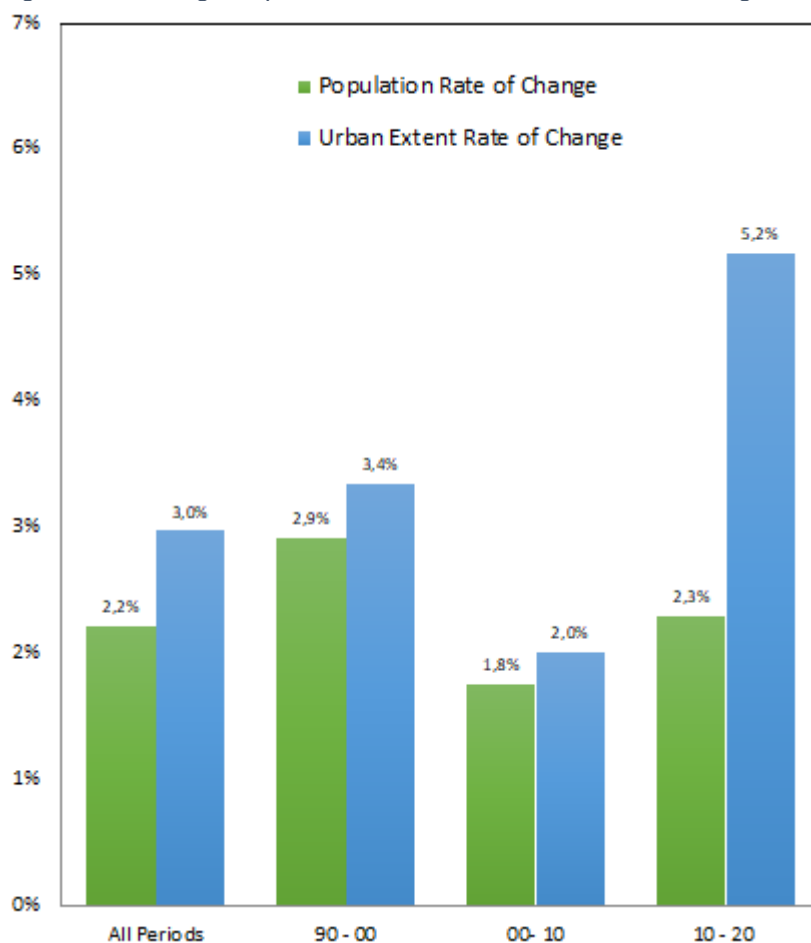
Agglomerations (15)	Self-standing Cities (28)	
	Main Cities (13)	Secondary Cities (15)
Barranquilla	Florencia	Aguachica
Bogota	Monteria	Apartado
Bucaramanga	Neiva	Barrancabermeja
Cali	Popayan	Buenaventura
Cartagena de Indias	Riohacha	Cienaga
Cartago	Santa Marta	Fusagasuga
Manizales	Sincelejo	Jamundi
Medellin	Valledupar	Maicao
Pereira	Villavicencio	Ocana
Girardot	Yopal	Palmira
Armenia	Ibague	Piedecuesta
Cucuta	Pasto	Rionegro
Duitama	Quibdo	Tulua
Sogamoso		Zipaquirá
Tunja		Guadalajara de Buga

Source: (Angel et al., 2021, p.181)

5.3.1 Land consumption and population growth

Now once we dive into the data on how those 43 urban centers have grown over time, we notice several trends. The first has to do with land consumption and population growth. Over the last 30 years, the urban population grew at a multiple of 1.6 while the urban footprint grew at a multiple of 2.1 on average. That is, the urban extent growth was significantly higher than the population growth, indicating higher land consumption per capita in the municipalities analyzed.

Figure 15. Average Population and Urban Extent Growth Change Between 1990 – 2020



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022)

This phenomenon, in which land consumption is higher than population growth, has been a constant in the last 30 years in the country. However, in the last 10 years the phenomenon has taken on a greater statistical difference, which means that land consumption has increased at even faster rates. This condition is fundamental when considering implications for territorial planning and the densities of Colombian cities.

In terms of population growth, it was found that on average, Colombian cities are growing more slowly than cities in the rest of the world. While the average population growth of cities with more than 100,000 was 2.22% for the observed period, the world average was 3.42%. If we look in detail by city size, Colombian cities with a population between 100,000 and 120,000 inhabitants are those that present the highest population growth rate, reaching 2.83% annual average. But even so, the recorded rates are lower than the world average.

Compared to land consumption and urban extent growth, this is also lower than the world average. While the average annual urban extent growth in Colombia is 2.98%, the world average is 4.84% (Angel et al., 2016). That is to say, in general the population of Colombian cities and their urban areas grew more slowly than the world average. It is worth noting that all cities in Colombia experienced some spatial expansion, a phenomenon that aligns with global trends (Angel et al., 2016; Galarza et al., 2019).

It is also important to highlight that it was found that some cities present accelerated growth compared to the national average. In the set of cities studied, 16¹⁴ cities were identified with faster growth than the national average, 6¹⁵ of which are growing at the same rate or faster than the world average. These cities, which are mostly intermediate cities and second-tier cities in their respective regional urban system, deserve special attention, especially to understand the challenges they will have for the next 30 years.

5.3.2 Density

Urban density is typically calculated as the total population that occupies an area, divided by the size of the area itself. There are, however, more elaborate constructions which incorporate factors affecting the intensity with which a given space is used. For our analysis, density was measured in two ways: i) *Urban Extent Density* and, ii) *Built-up Area Density*. The difference between these two types of measurements is the area considered. On the one hand, the density of the Urban Extent refers to the built-up urban area in addition to the open spaces within the entire urban footprint. On the other hand, built-up areas focus solely on the built-up area, i.e. buildings and impervious surfaces. In this sense, the density of the Urban Footprint comprises a greater total area and, therefore, is always less than the density of the built area.

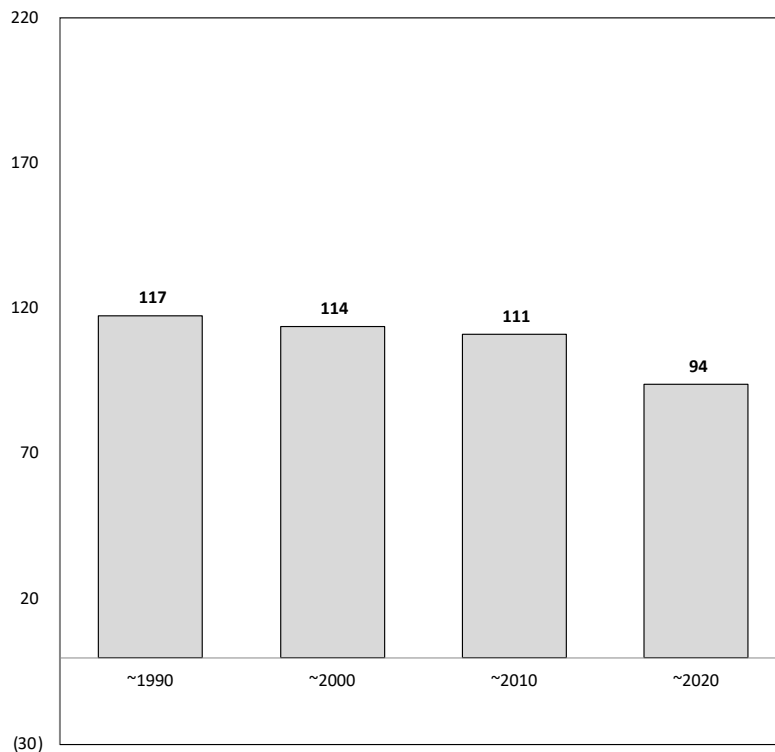
Regarding the urban extent density, this indicator in cities with more than 100,000 dwellers has decreased by 20% in the last 30 years. In other words, the

¹⁴ Fusagasugá, Jamundí, Maicao, Montería, Piedecuesta, Popayán, Rio Negro, Santa Marta, Villavicencio, Yopal, Zipaquirá, Pereira, Girardot, Cúcuta, Sogamoso y Quibdó.

¹⁵ Fusagasugá, Jamundí, Rio Negro, Villavicencio, Sogamoso y Quibdó.

average density of Colombian cities decreases by 0,75% per year on average, and with it, per capita land consumption increases. On average, in 1990 Colombian cities had an Urban Extent density of 117 people per hectare, while by 2020 this density is 94 people per hectare. However, despite the constant decrease in density, Colombian cities are still above the world average, which for the last period observed was 72 people per hectare (Angel et al., 2016).

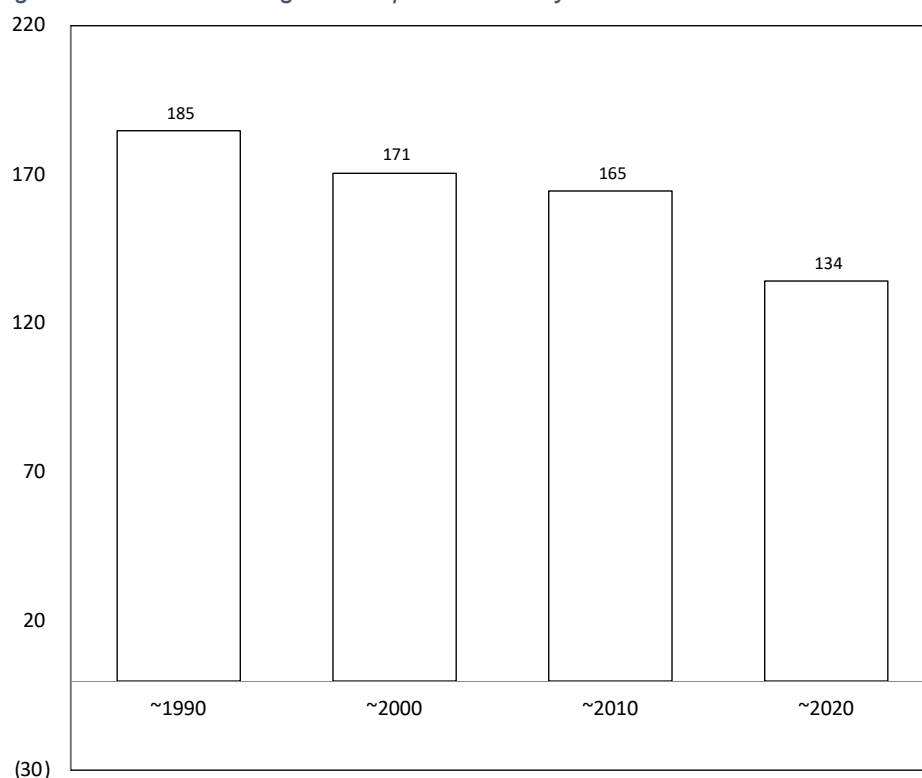
Figure 16. Annual Average Urban Extent Density 1.990 - 2.020



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.130)

In terms of the Built-up Area density, this indicator also experienced a decline in the cities analyzed but it is characterized by a faster pace, declining at an average of 1% annually. Between 1990 and 2020 there was a total decrease of 27%, going from 185 people per hectare to 134 people per hectare today. Despite this, as in the Urban Extent density, Colombian cities maintain averages higher than those observed worldwide, which for this measurement are 91 people per hectare (Angel et al., 2016).

Figure 17. Annual Average Built-up Area Density 1.990 - 2.020



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.131)

Despite these decreases in density, Colombian cities continue to demonstrate high densities compared to world standards. In general, larger cities are denser than smaller cities, and major Colombian cities are consistently denser than comparable cities in the Latin American and Caribbean region. Additionally, when the entire urban extent is considered, the densest cities in the country are the metropolitan areas. Bogotá and Medellín lead with averages higher than the world average and are followed by Bucaramanga, Cali and Barranquilla.

According to data from the Global Atlas of Urban Expansion 2016 version (Angel et al., 2016), cities such as Buenos Aires (72 pph), Guatemala City (71 pph), Mexico City (85 pph), Sao Paulo (93 pph), Leon (71 pph) maintain densities in the urban extent that are higher or in line with the observed world average of 72 people per hectare. If these totals are compared with the densities of the densest agglomerations in Colombia such as Bogotá (137 pph), Medellín (142 pph), Bucaramanga (133 pph), Cali (124 pph) and Barranquilla (126 pph) it is evident that although they have been losing density at a faster rate, they are still quite dense.

5.3.3 Urban Form: Fragmentation and Compactness in the Urban Extent

Fragmentation or dispersed development refers to the relative quantity and structure of open spaces fragmented by the non-continuous expansion of cities. In other words, talking about fragmentation allows us to understand the degree of consolidation of a city, the open spaces it has, and their relationship measured in terms of accessibility. For this, two indicators are used: saturation and the openness index.

Thanks to the data obtained in the analysis of cities, we can compare the built area over the total urban extent, which allows us to identify and quantify the degree of saturation that exists in cities and its change over time. This saturation indicator then refers to the amount of open space contained within a given urban extent. As cities grow and change over time, open spaces are filled or built upon. Newly developed areas have more open space than areas that are older, where less time has passed for this filling to take place. Over time, the amount of open space decreases, and some cities may become mostly built-up areas and have high levels of saturation.

Large Colombian cities have considerable land consumption. The worrying thing is that this consumption is not accompanied by better planning processes in which open spaces are abundant and accessible and where compactness is prioritized, and people are better interconnected. Proof of this is that the large cities of Colombia increased their saturation at a rate of 0.30% annually, going from a concentration index of built spaces of 0.64 to 0.7. This places Colombian cities above the global average, which is 0.66. In terms of accessibility of open spaces, large Colombian cities experienced a decrease in the same period, going from 0.37 to 0.28, which means that cities have fewer open spaces, and that these are increasingly difficult to access.

A loss in cohesion and proximity was also observed over the same period. These two indicators project the compact shape of the city, especially in terms of proximity to the city center and proximity between different points of the city. In these two measurements, large Colombian cities also declined, decreasing by close to 1% annually. This is a particularly salient point, considering that cities in Colombia are growing fast and losing attributes typically associated with a higher quality of life.

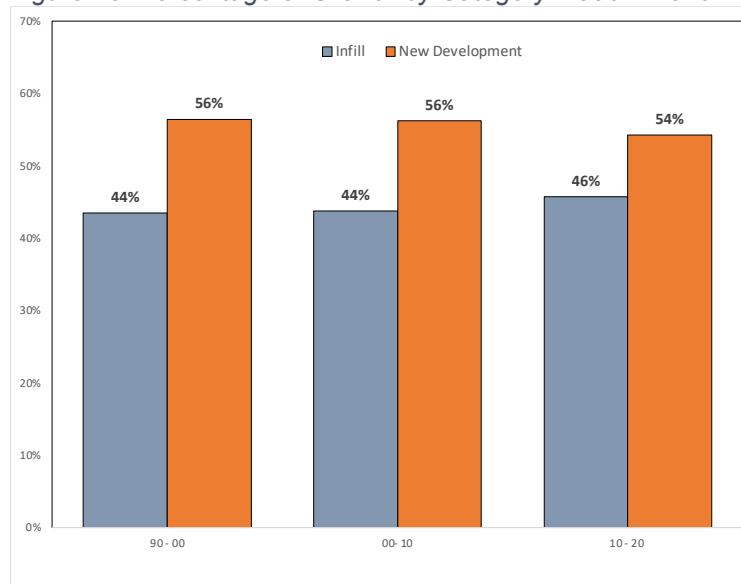
5.3.4 Urban Growth: Expansion and Densification

Using the same satellite images, it is also possible to identify where the new growth of the urban extent is occurring. There are four established ways in which cities grow (Angel et al., 2016):

- Infill: Refers to infilling existing open spaces within the urban extent.
- Inclusion: Refers to the incorporation of already existing urban clusters.
- Extension: Refers to growth through the continuous development of the Urban Extent.
- Discontinuous growth or leapfrogging: Refers to growth through development disconnected from the Urban Extent or main urban nucleus. (Angel et al., 2016)

Based on these typologies of growth, two categories of aggregation are established to understand growth through “densification”. These are infill and “new development,” which brings together growth in extension and discontinuous growth. The inclusion category is not considered because it measures construction processes that had already been mapped. In other words, they are not new; all that changes is that these previously existing areas are included in the footprint.

Figure 18. Percentage of Growth by Category 1.990 - 2.020



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.134)

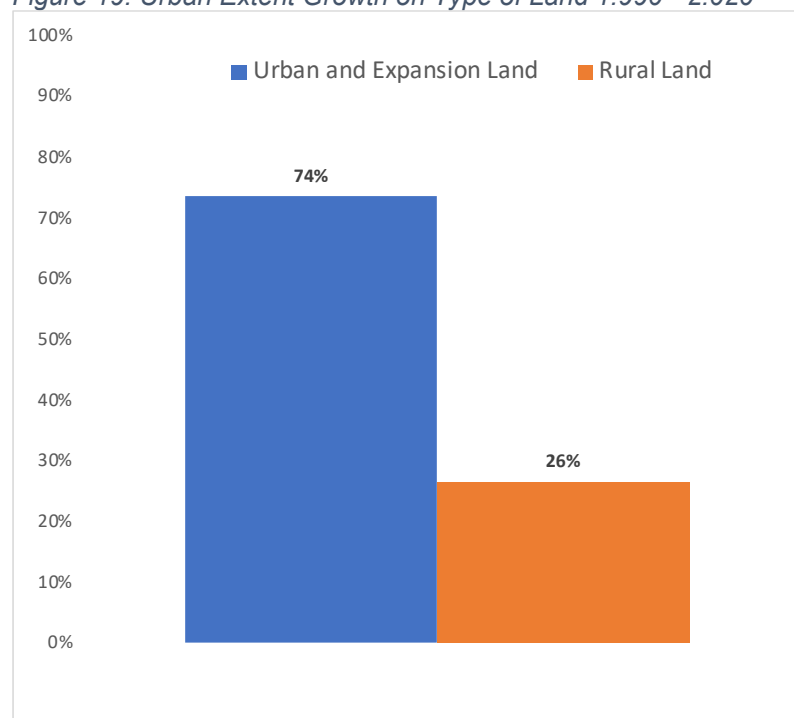
In the universe of cities considered, urban development occurs to a greater extent through extension and discontinuous growth. If you look at the total of the 30

years examined, 59% of the growth was through new development and only 41% through infill. Thus, in Colombia, horizontal and expanding growth have taken over vertical and infilling growth, i.e., they are growing less and less through densification.

Once the type of growth is identified, it is important to know, overall, where this growth is taking place. For this, the information on land classification contained in the Territorial Organization Plans is superimposed on the image of the urban footprint of each of the cities. This made it possible to identify the urban, rural and expansion land that each planning instrument had planned for each of the cities and agglomerations of the study and to account for the growth of the urban extent that occurred in each of these categories.

This analysis shows that, on average, for cities and agglomerations with more than 100,000 inhabitants, 74% of the growth occurred on land that was planned for development. That is, of the 132,000 hectares that were added to the urban landscape in these cities, 97,000 were located on urban or expansion land. However, an alarming figure of 35,000 hectares was located on rural land, which is not planned to accommodate this type of development.

Figure 19. Urban Extent Growth on Type of Land 1.990 - 2.020



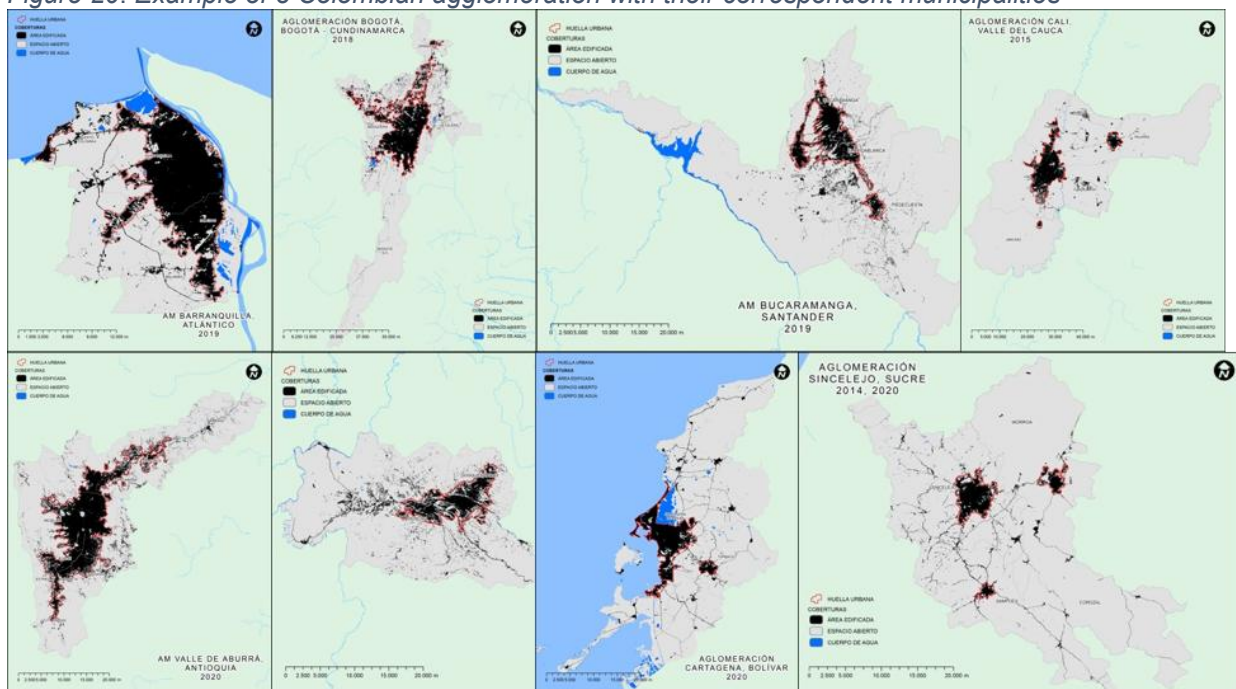
Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.135)

5.4 New Scale of analysis

So far, this analysis suggests that land consumption has increased in cities in Colombia. This increased consumption has mainly taken the form of horizontal expansion, sometimes to land that is not planned for development. For the purposes of this thesis, a follow-up question arises: *are these new consolidated urban extents spreading outside municipalities' administrative boundaries?*

The proliferation of conurbations would appear to suggest that this is the case. By conurbations, we are referring to both a process and a unit of analysis, when urban extents spread across multiple municipalities (Angel et al., 2016; Galarza et al., 2019). As a result of the observed urban growth patterns in Colombia, several conurbation processes have been identified. These processes can potentially result in formal associations, such as metropolitan areas, or in informal coordination schemes. In either case, what is evident is that conurbation is one of the principal typologies of growth in the country and it is concentrated in the largest cities.

Figure 20. Example of 8 Colombian agglomeration with their correspondent municipalities



Source: Own work

However, to talk about this specific typology, it is necessary to understand what scale is being reviewing, what is understood as conurbation and what similar concepts

exist in Colombian territorial planning. Below is a list of relevant methodological clarifications and legal references:

- In Colombia the concept of **functional areas** was introduced by the Cities Mission promoted by the World Bank. This definition refers to jurisdictions that have consolidated processes of interdependence either due to high commuting flows or due to the integration of the labor or housing market. This was a form of identifying the concentration of urban activities regardless of the administrative boundaries tied to the municipal level.
- In Colombia, **metropolitan areas** have legal implications. They are administrative entities made up of two or more municipalities in compliance with the provisions of Law 1625 of 2013. To form a metropolitan area it is required to share one metropolitan phenomenon. In the following chapter this will be explained in detail.
- Municipalities are the basic political-administrative unit of territorial and socio-economic planning in Colombia. For this study, they constitute the basis from which the urban extent analysis carried out.
- The urban extent, the main quantitative method used in this chapter, is a multi-temporal analysis determining the extension of the city from the built-up continuum. It does not consider political-administrative limits when defining the size of the city.
- Conurbation refers to those places where the urban footprint extends over more than one municipality. In the context of the present study, it represents the most obvious and palpable metropolitan phenomenon because it has a direct representation in the territory.
- Agglomeration is also understood as a consolidation process where urban activities occur in a micro-universe composed of a core municipality and other surrounding municipalities. Therefore, agglomeration also has an informal connotation and the difference with the conurbation is that conurbation is referring specifically to the municipalities included in the urban extent.

As stated before, in cities in Colombia with more than 100,000 inhabitants comprise 77% of the country's urban population. Within this universe, there are 15 identified agglomerations that comprise 62% of the urban population of the country. Therefore, the individual conditions of these conurbations are important to understand whether and how public policies at the local level are effective in improving living conditions. Understanding this will help grasp challenges for future planning. The following table shows in detail the total of 62 municipalities that make up this new scale of analysis.

Table 8. List of Agglomeration and its composition

Principal City	Municipalities
Armenia	Armenia, Calarcá
Barranquilla	Barranquilla, Puerto Colombia, Soledad, Malambo y Galapa
Bogotá	Bogotá, Soacha, Sibate, Chía, Mosquera, Madrid, Cota, Cajicá, La Calera, Facatativá, Funza, Sopo y Tenjo
Bucaramanga	Bucaramanga, Floridablanca, Girón y Piedecuesta
Cali	Cali, Yumbo, Palmira y Candelaria
Cúcuta	Cúcuta, Villa del Rosario, Los Patios, San Cayetano
Cartagena	Cartagena, Turbaco
Cartago	Cartago y Pereira
Girardot	Girardot, Ricaurte y Flandes
Manizales	Manizales y Villamaría
Medellín	Medellín, Bello, Copacabana, La Estrella, Girardota, Itagüí, Caldas, Sabaneta, Barbosa y Envigado
Pereira	Pereira, Dosquebradas
Tunja	Tunja, Combita, Oicatá
Duitama	Duitama y Santa Rosa de Viterbo
Sogamoso	Sogamoso, Tibasosa, Nobsa, Topaga

Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.138)

It is important to clarify that the urban extent methodology used to define conurbations prioritizes built-up continuity. As a result, some cities are already part of an agglomeration dynamic without necessarily being reflected in the current urban extent. However, the continuous urban growth that the country will continue to experience will increase the reach of the current urban extents and form new ones. Out of the 28 self-standing cities in the study's universe, 5 will be included in existing urban extents and 5 will create 4 new conurbations involving a total of 10 municipalities, as depicted in table below:

Table 9. List of Cities of the Universe that Will be Included in Urban Extents

Cities to be Included in Existing Conurbation		Cities forming New Conurbations	
City	Conurbation	City	Conurbation
Palmira	Cali	Santa Marta	Santa Marta
Jamundi		Cienaga	
Rionegro	Medellin	Monteria	Monteria
Piedecuesta	Bucaramanga	Sincelejo	Sincelejo
Zipaquirá	Bogotá	Apartado	Uraba

Source: Own Work

As noted, Colombia has at least four metro regions of more than two million inhabitants, six metro areas with more than a million, and several more than 250,000 people. (Leyva, Sanabria-Pulido, & Rodriguez-Caporalli, 2020). In recent history in Colombia, it is possible to witness a growing use of metropolitan instruments that address problems that go beyond municipal boundaries. However, these instruments are unevenly distributed and used. Also, they present a lack of coherence with underlying structures, becoming an obstacle for policy consolidation. There's an evident lack of a national policy framework to address metropolitan governance and inter-jurisdictional collaboration (Leyva, Sanabria-Pulido, & Rodriguez-Caporalli, 2020).

5.5 Closing Remarks

This chapter has shown that urban expansion in Colombia is extensive and misaligned with institutional capacities and planning instruments. The mismatch between population growth, land consumption, and the governance tools intended to manage them suggests a structural vulnerability in how urbanization is being steered. Patterns of low-density expansion, spatial fragmentation, and informal growth reflect a broader issue: local governments often lack the authority, resources, and coordination mechanisms necessary to respond effectively to urban dynamics. These trends are not isolated anomalies but the result of persistent institutional and policy misalignments.

Crucially, the urban trends identified here set the stage for understanding the dual agency problems that emerge when local governments are simultaneously accountable to multiple, and often conflicting, institutional logics. As discussed in the

analytical framework, dual agency arises from fragmented authority, unclear competence distribution, and overlapping mandates—all conditions that are clearly present in Colombia's territorial planning system. In this context, local governments become agents of various principals at different levels (national ministries, regional authorities, metropolitan entities, and local populations), each with diverging goals, instruments, and evaluation frameworks. This fragmented delegation structure constrains the capacity of local actors to implement coherent and effective policies, particularly in territorial development and housing—two domains where urban expansion is both cause and consequence.

The next chapters analyze these two policy domains in greater depth. They demonstrate how the lack of institutional coordination and the presence of dual agency concretely affect policy effectiveness. The findings from this chapter—namely, that urban growth increasingly escapes the bounds of formal planning and regulation—highlight the urgency of addressing these governance failures. By bringing together urban trends and institutional diagnostics, the analysis will show how policy outcomes are shaped not only by technical planning instruments but by the underlying political and institutional architectures that enable or obstruct them.

6. Territorial Planning in Colombia: Distribution of Competences and Policy Framework

The analysis conducted in the previous chapter demonstrated accelerated outward urban growth expansion over rural lands not planned for this type of development. This phenomenon, together with the conurbation and metropolization processes outlined, places at the center of the debate the tension between the political-administrative competencies of each local government¹⁶ and the urban and metropolitan reality confronting the analyzed municipalities. This situation transcends the boundaries of territorial governance and reflects the importance of institutional consistency—the degree to which institutional arrangements are coherent, aligned, and capable of supporting a policy's mission (Capano & Woo, 2018; Breznitz et al., 2018).

With the objective of understanding the degree of institutional consistency or inconsistency—characterized by vague responsibilities, overlapping competencies, or asymmetric distribution of resources (Virani, 2019; Bali et al., 2019)—this chapter introduces and analyzes the normative framework governing territorial planning, the actors that interact in the policy, as well as the instruments and allocation of competencies. The chapter seeks to develop a reflection on the various tensions that exist in institutional design and the administrative distribution of power and competencies.

Additionally, this analysis revealed the dual agency phenomenon, supported by inconsistencies in the legal framework and disparities in the assignment of competencies.

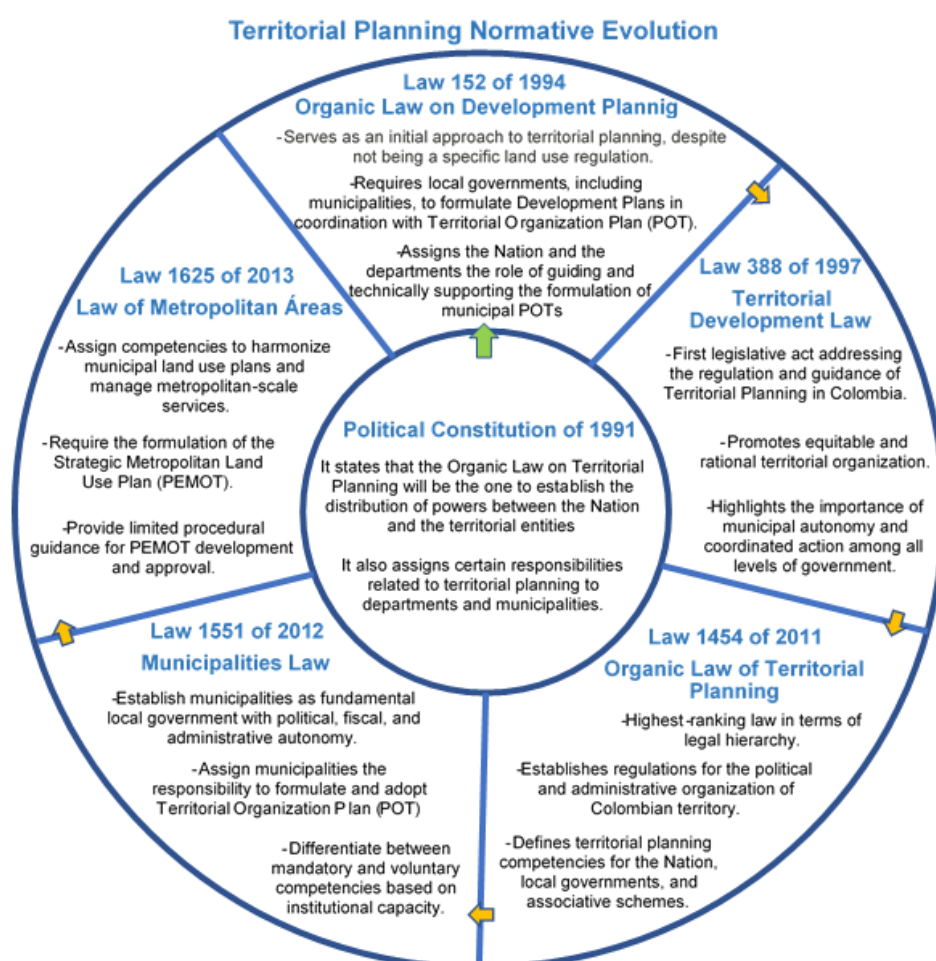
¹⁶ When we refer to local government, we are referring to a territory with a political and administrative organization that in the legal framework is known as a territorial entity.

6.1. Evolution of Normative Foundations for General Territorial Planning in Colombia

The normative framework for territorial planning in Colombia encompasses, among many others, five main laws that establish guidelines for the recognition of local governments and associative schemes as relevant actors in territorial planning, as well as the respective principles and competences that shape their actions in territorial planning exercises.

The diagram below presents the Political Constitution as the foundation of the regulatory framework for territorial planning, from which a broad legal development emerges. For the purposes of this analysis, five key laws derived from this framework are highlighted.

Figure 21. Territorial Planning Normative Evolution.



Source: Own elaboration based on information from Political Constitution, Law 152/1994, Law 388/1997, Law 1454/2011, Law 1551/2012 and Law 1625/2013

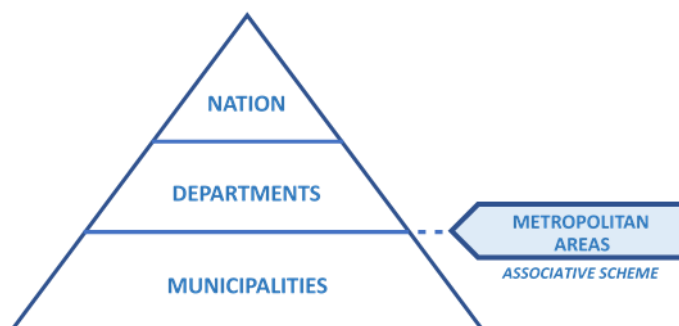
6.1.1 Political Constitution of 1991

The Political Constitution of 1991 was a turning point in Colombian institutionality, defining Colombia in its first article not only as a social state of law, but as a unitary, decentralized republic that promotes the autonomy of local governments.

The Constitution, within its framework of territorial organization, recognizes departments, districts, municipalities, and indigenous territories as local governments, granting them autonomy to manage their own affairs. Additionally, it acknowledges metropolitan areas and administrative and planning regions as associative schemes within the territorial planning system, arising from economic, social, and physical relationships between two or more local governments of the same level (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991, Articles 286 and 287).

This recognition of different politico-administrative levels is accompanied by a hierarchical structure that defines their capacity for action, based on legally assigned competences and degrees of autonomy. To better illustrate this dynamic, the present study introduces a Kelsenian pyramid that reflects the selected levels of government under analysis.

Figure 22. Government Levels in Colombia.



Source: Own elaboration based on Law 388/1997

It is important to clarify that, in this pyramid, the higher a level of government is positioned, the greater its importance within the normative framework. However, this does not necessarily imply that it holds more functions or competences.

The Constitution establishes in article 288 the need for an organic law of territorial planning, which will be responsible for establishing competences between the Nation and local governments, and which must be exercised under the fundamental principles of coordination, concurrence, and subsidiarity. This presents a delegation of power to a subsequent law that is hierarchically a regulation of lesser importance than the constitution.

6.1.2 Law 152 of 1994. Organic Law of the Development Plan

Although it is not specifically framed within territorial planning, Law 152 of 1994 was issued as a first approach to territorial planning and planning exercises by local governments. The Organic Law of the Development Plan establishes procedures and mechanisms for the elaboration, approval, execution, monitoring, evaluation, and control of development plans under the principles of autonomy, ordering of competences, coordination, consistency, priority of public social spending, continuity, participation, environmental sustainability, harmonious development of regions, planning processes, efficiency, viability, coherence, and formation of development plans.

This law predates the normative framework that formally created the territorial planning instrument and serves as a significant precedent by highlighting the importance of planning and organizing territorial development from a comprehensive perspective. It emphasizes socio-economic considerations beyond a narrow focus on land use.

In the planning exercise of local governments, for the case of municipalities, the law establishes that in addition to development plans, these local governments must have the territorial organization plan (POT), and the Nation and departments will be responsible for orienting and providing technical support for their elaboration. (Law 152, 1994. Article 41)

Although the need for harmonizing actions and organizational instruments can be inferred, a primary major discrepancy becomes evident: the organizational and development instruments respond to different timelines that make it difficult to conceive a joint and coordinated updating process for both documents. Ideally, the

Development Plan should be able to contemplate investments based on what is expected from territorial organization.

6.1.3 Law 388 of 1997. Territorial Development Law

In 1997, Law 388: Territorial Development Law was created as the first legislative act focused on regulating and guiding Territorial Planning in Colombia. This regulation consolidated a specific territorial planning regime for municipalities, establishing mechanisms for territorial planning as instruments to promote equitable and rational territorial planning according to their autonomy; the harmonious concurrence of the Nation, local governments, and administrative and planning authorities; in addition to the coordination of urban policy among different local governments in territorial planning exercises (Law 388 of 1997, Article 1).

Within these mechanisms, the law presents in its article 9, the Territorial Organization Plan (POT) as the basic instrument for developing the process of territorial organization, which must be adopted by municipalities within the framework of this governing regulation. This law contemplates three types of Territorial Organization Plan (POT) according to the number of inhabitants in the municipality:

Table 10. Types of Territorial Organization Plan (POT)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT	POPULATION	SPATIAL-PLANNING INSTRUMENT
Districts and municipalities	More than 100,000 inhabitants	Territorial organization plan, – (POT In Spanish)
Municipalities	From 30,000 to 100,000 inhabitants	Territorial organization basic plan, TOBP – (PBOT)
Municipalities	Fewer than 30,000 inhabitants	Territorial organization scheme, TOS – (EOT)

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 388/1997

As another mechanism for territorial planning and organization, this law also provides the definition of the 3 types of land into which municipalities and districts may classify their territory, in addition to corresponding subcategories (Law 388 of 1997, Article 30). This input is considered fundamental for territorial planning development, considering that many of the competences of local governments relate to land management and classification.

Table 11. Land Classification by Law 388/1997

LAND CLASSIFICATION			
CLASSIFICATION	NAME	DEFINITION	KEY CONDITIONS
TYPE	Urban Land	Areas designated for urban use, equipped with road infrastructure and primary utility networks (water, electricity, sewage).	Includes fully urbanized areas, zones undergoing urbanization, and those where there is room for retrofitting and renewal. Must be delimited by an urban perimeter.
TYPE	Urban Expansion Land	Portions of municipal territory designated for future urban growth during the validity period of the Territorial Organization Plan (POT)	Development is subject to infrastructure availability and implementation programs. This may incorporate zones for collaborative development initiatives
TYPE	Rural Land	Areas unsuitable for urban use due to their intended purpose for agricultural, forestry, livestock, or similar activities.	Designated for non-urban uses based on land characteristics or development priorities.
CATEGORY	Suburban Land	Transitional areas within rural land, where urban and rural lifestyles and land uses coexist.	Development is allowed under restrictions. Requires self-sufficiency utilities. Urban activities are prohibited unless incorporated into urban land through legal process.
CATEGORY	Protected Land	Areas within any of the aforementioned land classes that are restricted from urbanization due to geographical, environmental, landscape, or public utility considerations.	Includes areas with environmental protection status, high-risk zones, or land designated for the provision of public infrastructure or utilities.

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 388/1997

Regarding the principles that guide territorial planning, it is relevant to mention that article 2 of Law 388 of 1997 defines the social and ecological function of property; the prevalence of general interest over particular interest; and the equitable distribution of burdens and benefits as these guiding principles (according to the law's objectives). However, in the exercise of comparison and conceptual homogenization to provide greater clarity in territorial planning, the principles of autonomy, concurrence, and coordination are identified as intrinsic and recurrent in territorial planning exercises.

6.1.4 Law 1454 of 2011. Organic Law of Territorial Planning (LOOT)

Fulfilling the constitutional mandate, in 2011 the 1454 Ley Orgánica de Ordenamiento Territorial (LOOT) or Organic Law of Territorial Planning was issued. A law of greater level of importance and relevance than ordinary laws, due to its

character allowing it to regulate aspects such as the organization of public powers, the structure and organization of territorial entities, and the regulation of some fundamental rights.

This law establishes territorial planning as an instrument for planning and management of local government based on a series of principles: sovereignty and national unity, autonomy, decentralization, integration, regionalization, sustainability, participation, solidarity and territorial equity, diversity, graduality and flexibility, prospective vision, peace and coexistence, associativity, responsibility and transparency, social equity and territorial balance, economy and good governance, and multiethnicity.

In the same exercise of conceptual homogenization of principles, according to their definition and scope, it is possible to relate integration and solidarity with the principles of concurrence and subsidiarity, framing them within the general principles that provide guidelines for existing dynamics in territorial planning according to the constitution.

Within the framework of this analysis, it is pertinent to highlight the contribution of the LOOT¹⁷ in defining territorial associative schemes and regulating supra-municipal planning. Associative schemes are defined as a free formation between two or more local governments for the joint provision of public services, administrative functions, works of common interest, planning functions, and integral development of territories. The regulation establishes the following:

Table 12. Associative Schemes by Law 1454/2011

ASSOCIATIVE SCHEMES		
ASSOCIATIVE SCHEME	TERRITORIAL LEVEL	DEFINITION
PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT REGIONS (RPG)	Interdepartmental or Intermunicipal	Association of related local governments that apply the principles of complementarity, concurrence, and subsidiarity in the exercise of their responsibilities.
DEPARTMENT ASSOCIATIONS	Departmental	Administrative and political association of two or more departments to jointly provide public services, execute regional infrastructure projects, and perform shared administrative functions.

¹⁷ Acronym of Ley Orgánica de Ordenamiento Territorial in Spanish - LOOT

ASSOCIATIVE SCHEMES		
ASSOCIATIVE SCHEME	TERRITORIAL LEVEL	DEFINITION
ASSOCIATIONS OF SPECIAL DISTRICTS	District	Association of two or more special districts to jointly organize the provision of public services or the execution of public works of mutual interest.
ADMINISTRATIVE AND PLANNING PROVINCES	Municipal (within a department)	Association of two or more geographically contiguous municipalities within the same department, aimed at jointly managing public services or executing public works, initiated by local authorities or a portion of the electorate.
MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATIONS	Municipal	Association of two or more municipalities to coordinate the provision of public services and the execution of infrastructure projects under a joint planning framework.
METROPOLITAN AREAS	Municipal (urban)	Territorial integration schemes among municipalities with urban continuity, intended to foster coordinated municipal development and shared service provision.

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 1454/2011

As part of its institutional mechanisms, the LOOT creates the Territorial Planning Commission (COT) as a technical advisory body whose function is to evaluate, review, and suggest to the National Government and the Special Commissions for Monitoring the Decentralization and Territorial Planning Process of the Senate of the Republic and the House of Representatives considerations for improving the territorial organization of the State (LOOT Law 1454, Article 4). The National Planning Department (DNP) is the entity responsible for exercising the Technical Secretariat of the COT.

This organic law establishes, in addition to the norms for the political-administrative organization of Colombian territory, the assignment of competences according to different levels of territorial and administrative organization (the Nation, territorial entities, and metropolitan areas), competences that will be presented later.

6.1.5 Law 1551 of 2012: Law for the Strengthening and Modernization of Municipalities

With the objective of modernizing and updating the municipal regime in Colombia, Law 1551 of 2012 specifically delineates the rights, principles, competencies, functions, and attributions that the law confers upon local municipal governments. This legislation reaffirms municipal autonomy and establishes mechanisms for the development of their functions.

Regarding territorial planning, this law establishes the duty of municipalities to formulate, adopt, and implement Territorial Organization Plan (POT) in coordination with national policies and Development Plans. Furthermore, it establishes a twelve-year timeframe as the period within which municipal authorities must manage the revision of territorial planning instruments that govern territorial organization at any given time (Law 1551 of 2012, Article 9).

To achieve articulated and harmonized development in the formulation and adoption of Territorial Organization Plan (POT) the law establishes as guiding principles for municipalities: coordination, concurrence, subsidiarity, complementarity, efficiency, participation, accountability, and transparency (Law 1551 of 2012, Article 3).

It is important to note that while the principle of concurrence is grounded in cooperation and joint work among territorial actors with a common objective, it does not establish clear guidelines regarding the hierarchy or precedence of decisions in cases where differences arise during the shared exercise of competencies between municipalities, local governments, or associative schemes.

6.1.6 Law 1454 of 2011. Organic Law on Territorial Planning

Law 1625 of 2013 constitutes the current legal framework that regulates and defines the competencies, functions, and mechanisms for territorial governance of metropolitan areas in Colombia. These areas are understood as supra-municipal administrative entities of associativity, allowing multiple conurbated municipalities to jointly manage common territorial issues based on metropolitan facts.

In this regard, the law establishes that metropolitan facts shall be defined according to the following criteria:

1. **Territorial scope:** This criterion accounts for the spatial dimension, thereby determining the territorial extent of implementation, execution, and metropolitan impact of a given project, function, service, or decision.

2. **Economic efficiency:** Supports the evaluation of the impact of the project, function, service, or decision in terms of economies of scale and/or agglomeration within the metropolitan area.
3. **Financial capacity:** Assesses the ability to finance each project, function, service, or decision.
4. **Technical capacity:** Determines the institutional capability to implement, execute, and assess the metropolitan impact of a project, function, service, or decision.
5. **Political-administrative organization:** Evaluates the consistency of the project, function, service, or decision with the political-administrative structure of the associated administrative entities.
6. **Social impact:** Measures the effects on social and cultural variables affecting the metropolitan population (Law 1625 of 2013, Article 11).

Furthermore, this law reflects the role of metropolitan areas as coordinating entities of territorial planning, endowed with the capacity to influence the physical planning of the territory, the provision of infrastructure, and the delivery of utilities that directly affect the lives of citizens. This is grounded in the principle of administrative and fiscal autonomy, along with the authority to adopt binding decisions for their member municipalities.

6.2. Principles for Territorial Planning in Colombia

Following the analysis of the normative evolution that underpins territorial planning in Colombia, it became evident that each of the analyzed laws establishes its own principles that it considers important and relevant for achieving territorial planning objectives.

Among the principles presented in the analyzed regulations, some are oriented toward regulating the purpose of competency exercise and the manner in which territorial actors should operate, while others have a more characteristic or descriptive function regarding the nature or quality of relationships between government levels. The following table classifies these principles according to their orientation (governing

the purpose of actions or defining relationships between actors), while also stating the law that contains them:

Table 13. Territorial Planning Principles in Colombia

TERRITORIAL PLANNING PRINCIPLES IN COLOMBIA: TYPE AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK								
PRINCIPLE	TYPE OF PRINCIPLE	POLITICAL CONSTITUTION 1991	LAW 152/1994	LAW 388/1997	LAW 1454/2011	LAW 1551/2012	LAW 1625/2013	TOTAL LAWS
AUTONOMY	Purpose	✓			✓	✓		3
COORDINATION	Relation	✓	✓	✓	✓			4
PARTICIPATION	Purpose	✓	✓		✓			3
DECENTRALIZATION	Purpose	✓			✓	✓		3
CONCURRENCE	Relation	✓			✓			2
SUBSIDIARITY	Relation	✓			✓			2
SUSTAINABILITY	Purpose		✓		✓			2
ASSOCIATIVITY	Relation				✓		✓	2
EFFICIENCY	Purpose		✓				✓	2
SOLIDARITY AND TERRITORIAL EQUITY	Purpose				✓			1
RESPONSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY	Purpose				✓			1
SOCIAL EQUITY AND TERRITORIAL BALANCE	Purpose				✓			1
ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE	Purpose				✓			1
MULTI-ETHNICITY	Purpose				✓			1
PEACE AND COEXISTENCE	Purpose				✓			1
FORESIGHT	Purpose				✓			1
DIVERSITY	Purpose				✓			1
GRADUALISM AND FLEXIBILITY	Relation				✓			1
INTEGRATION	Relation				✓			1
REGIONALIZATION	Relation				✓			1
NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY AND UNITY	Purpose				✓			1
SOCIAL AND ECOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF PROPERTY	Purpose			✓				1
PREVALENCE OF THE GENERAL INTEREST	Purpose			✓				1
FAIR DISTRIBUTION OF BURDENS AND BENEFITS	Purpose			✓				1
COMPLEMENTARITY	Relation						✓	1

Source: Own Elaboration based on The Political Constitution, Law 152/1994, Law 388/1997 and Law 1454/2011, Law 1551/2012 and Law 1625/2013.

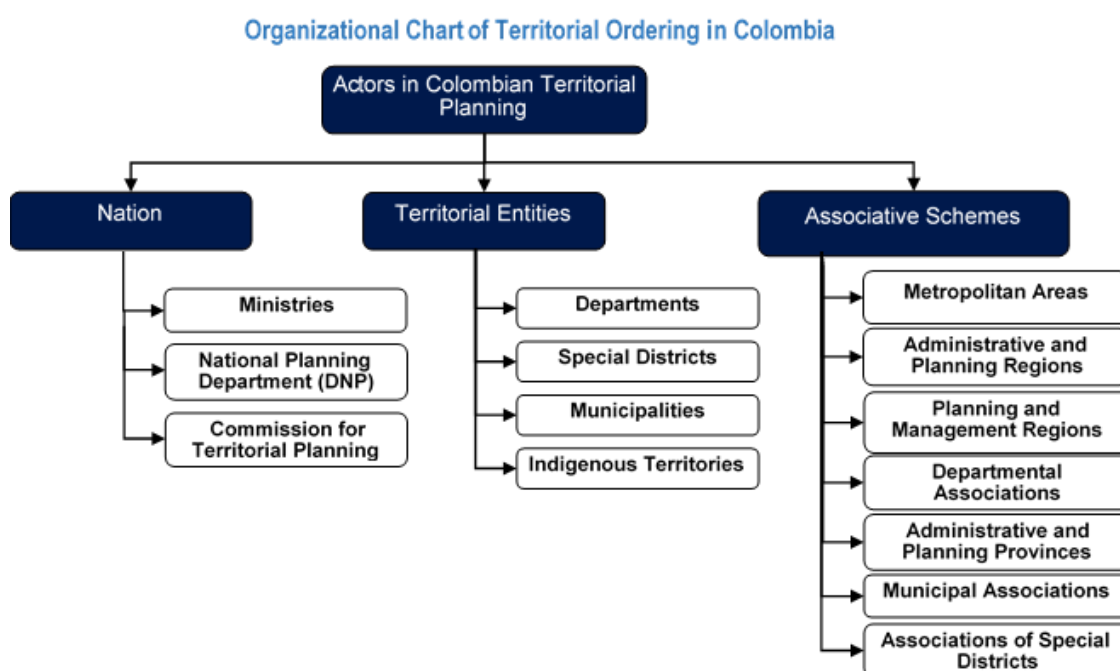
The independent definition of principles reveals a normative imprecision that can lead to fragmented interpretations, contributing to institutional inconsistency and enabling the justification of the dual agency phenomenon. Despite the diversity of principles, it is possible to identify a core set that—due to their recurrent presence, normative weight, and structural role—function as transversal guidelines for ensuring coordinated and effective management. These principles promote collaboration and harmonization of actions among the various actors involved in territorial planning and governance. They are established by the Political Constitution.

- **Autonomy:** Refers to the political, administrative, and fiscal autonomy held by different territorial entities, within the limits established by the Constitution and the Law.
- **Coordination:** Understood as the articulation and harmony between the actions of each territorial entity for the fulfillment of State objectives, in an effective and efficient manner.
- **Concurrence:** This principle governs the relationship of joint work between territorial entities of different levels in the exercise of the same competence.
- **Subsidiarity:** This principle allows for the intervention of higher-level entities or institutions in situations that cannot be resolved by lower-level entities or institutions.
- **Decentralization:** The distribution of competencies between the Nation, territorial entities, and associative schemes shall be accomplished by transferring the corresponding decision-making power from central State organs to the pertinent territorial level. (Political Constitution 1991)

6.3. Territorial Planning Actors in Colombia

Once the principles that govern relations between all government levels within the framework have been established, it is time to identify and present all the actors involved in territorial planning. The purpose is to understand the competencies that the law grants each one of them and their institutional consistency or inconsistency. The following organizational chart outlines the actors that currently interact in the exercise of territorial planning in Colombia, in accordance with Law 1454 of 2011.

Figure 23. Organizational Chart of Territorial Ordering in Colombia



Source: Own elaboration based on the Political Constitution, Law 388/1995 and Law 1454/2011

As illustrated in the diagram, the Ministries, the National Planning Department (DNP), and the Territorial Planning Commission (COT) are actors representing the national level in territorial planning activities. Here is a detailed description of their role and scope in territorial planning.

Ministries: Of the ministries that comprise the executive branch, three have active and significant participation in territorial planning:

- ✓ **Ministry of the Interior:** Among its functions, it must serve as a liaison and coordinator between national-level entities and local governments. Furthermore, it must promote the integration of the Nation with the territory and territorial development through the deepening of decentralization, territorial planning and autonomy, as well as the coordination and harmonization of agendas across various administrative sectors, within its competencies, in pursuit of this objective (Ministry of the Interior, Functions and duties, Function 3, n.d.).
- ✓ **Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development:** It is responsible for formulating and implementing the national environmental and natural resource management policy. It must establish rules and criteria for environmental land

use planning, to ensure the conservation and sustainable use of renewable natural resources and the environment (Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development, Objectives and functions, Function 1, Art. 2, Decree 3570).

- ✓ **Ministry of Housing, City and Territory:** This is perhaps the ministry with the greatest level of influence in territorial planning activities, with functions that include the formulation, implementation and coordination of policies, plans, programs and regulations regarding housing, housing financing, urban development, territorial planning and land use. It also encompasses competencies in water and basic sanitation, as well as the definition of normative instruments for their implementation (Ministry of Housing, City and Territory, Functions, n.d.).

National Planning Department (DNP): As a technical entity, it is responsible for coordinating, designing and supporting the implementation and planning of territorial public management in Colombia. Its participation in territorial planning is evident through the General Sub-directorate of Decentralization and Territorial Development. This sub-directorate, which equals a vice-ministry, has the function of proposing the policies, plans, programs, projects, mechanisms and instruments for regional development, territorial planning and public management, strengthening fiscal, administrative and political decentralization, and territorial administration systems. This sub-directorate is composed of the Directorate of Decentralization and Fiscal Strengthening, the Directorate of Territorial Planning and Development, and the Directorate of Regional Strategy (National Planning Department (DNP), 2025).

Territorial Planning Commission (COT): Is a technical body attached to the DNP, and its function is to evaluate, review and suggest to the National Government the adoption of policies, legislative developments and criteria for better organization of the State within the territory (National Planning Department (DNP), Directorate of Territorial Planning and Development, About the Commission, Law 1454/2011, Art. 4°, March 10, 2025).

To present and analyze the actors from local governments and associative schemes, the following section will present those actors that are relevant to the present

study and the competencies that each of the general regulations grants them, in order to identify possible institutional inconsistencies that may foster the phenomenon of dual agency.

6.4. Territorial Planning Competences in Colombia

Once all the main actors have been identified and it is clear the way the system is organized, now it is time to see what competences they have based on the main regulation that has already been explained in section 6.1. Initially, the Political Constitution (Title XI), while effectively designating competences for the exercise of territorial planning, does so only for two local governments specifically—departments and municipalities—as follows:

Table 14. Competences Designated by Political Constitution

CONSTITUTIONAL COMPETENCES IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING			
LOCAL GOVERNMENT	COMPETENCE	DESCRIPTION	CONSTITUTIONAL ARTICLE
DEPARTMENTS	Administration, planning, and promotion of sectional affairs	Departments have autonomy for managing their own affairs and promoting economic and social development within their territory.	Art. 298
	Planning of territorial ordering	Through their collegiate bodies, departments issue provisions on planning, development, financial support to municipalities, tourism, transportation, environment, public works, and border zones.	Art. 300
	Creation and suppression of municipalities	Departments may create or suppress municipalities, reorganize their territories, and establish provinces, according to legal requirements.	Art. 300
	Constitution of administrative regions	Two or more departments may form administrative and planning regions with legal personality and autonomy to promote joint economic and social development.	Art. 306
MUNICIPALITIES	Ordering territorial development	Municipalities are responsible for providing utilities, carrying out works required by local progress, and guiding territorial development.	Art. 311
	Regulating land use	Municipalities can regulate land use and supervise construction and real estate activities, within the limits of the law.	Art. 313
	Metropolitan area organization	When municipalities form a metropolitan area, they may create an administrative entity for coordinating integrated development and public services.	Art. 319

Source: Own elaboration based on the Political Constitution of Colombia (1991, Articles 298, 300, 306, 311, 313, and 319)

For its part, Law 388 of 1997, in its Article 7, establishes the distribution of competences in territorial planning matters at the national, departmental, metropolitan, and municipal levels.

Table 15. Competences Designated by Law 388/1997

DISTRIBUTION OF TERRITORIAL PLANNING COMPETENCES (LAW 388 OF 1997, ARTICLE 7)		
TERRITORIAL LEVEL	GENERAL COMPETENCE	SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS
NATIONAL	Establish and define the general policy for territorial ordering in matters of national interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage national parks and protected areas. • Determine the location of major infrastructure projects. • Define general land use forms based on productive capacity and environmental guidelines. • Delimit security and defense restricted areas. • Provide guidelines for urbanization and the national system of cities. • Establish criteria to ensure equitable distribution of utilities and social infrastructure.
DEPARTMENTAL	Define guidelines and orientations for the ordering of all or part of the departmental territory, especially in conurbation areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define land use and occupation based on environmental potential and development goals. • Establish population settlement and urban center policies aligned with national directives. • Guide the location of infrastructure to promote regional equity and competitiveness. • Integrate and align departmental, municipal, and indigenous territorial plans with national and regional strategies.
METROPOLITAN	Prepare Comprehensive Metropolitan Development Plans with general and mandatory territorial planning norms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide territorial guidelines addressing metropolitan dynamics. • Define long- and medium-term urban-rural structures. • Locate transport infrastructure, utilities, metropolitan spaces, and environmental protection areas. • Set policies for social housing location and compensation mechanisms among municipalities. • Issue general norms establishing objectives and criteria to be adopted by municipalities in their Territorial Organization Plan (POT)
MUNICIPAL	Formulate and adopt Territorial Organization Plan (POT) as per the Organic Law of the Development Plan and Law 388 of 1997.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulate land use in urban, expansion, and rural areas. • Optimize land use and coordinate sectoral plans in line with national, departmental, and metropolitan guidelines.

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 388 of 1997, Article 7.

However, the definition of what constitutes a "competence" is established only upon promulgation of the Organic Law of Territorial Planning 1454 in 2011, 20 years after the 1991 Political Constitution and 14 years after the 1997 Territorial Planning

Law, despite the fact that prior to this law, different normative frameworks had assigned competences without having a clear definition of the concept and its scope.

Law 1454 in Article 26 defines competence as the faculty or legal power that the Nation, territorial entities, and associative schemes have to manage and attend to state responsibilities in a general manner. Regarding territorial planning, this law in Article 29 presents the distribution of competences according to the different local governments involved in territorial planning exercise.

Table 16. Competences Designated by Law 1454/2011

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCES IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING (LAW 1454 OF 2011, ARTICLE 29)		
TERRITORIAL LEVEL	GENERAL COMPETENCE	SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS
NATIONAL	Establish the general territorial planning policy on matters of national interest.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate major infrastructure projects. • Determine areas restricted for use due to security and defense reasons. • Establish guidelines for the urbanization process and city system • Define criteria to guarantee equitable distribution of public services and social infrastructure in the regions. • Conserve and protect areas of historical and cultural importance • Define minimum principles of economy and good governance to be fulfilled by territorial entities and associative alternatives.
DEPARTMENTAL	Define guidelines and orientations for planning all or part of the departmental territory, especially in conurbation areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define population settlement and urban center policies. • Guide the location of physical and social infrastructure to promote equity among municipalities and take advantage of regional competitiveness. • Integrate and orient the spatial projection of departmental sectoral plans, municipal and indigenous territorial entity plans. • Coordinate territorial planning policies with plans, programs, or projects, adopting Territorial Organization Plans (POT) for all or part of its territory. • Establish guidelines for municipalities that are part of a metropolitan area. • Implement special protection programs for environmental conservation.
MUNICIPAL	Regulate land use in urban, expansion, and rural areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulate and adopt Territorial Organization Plans (POT) • Optimize land use and coordinate sectoral plans in alignment with national, departmental, and metropolitan policies. • Divide district territory into localities according to social characteristics, assigning administrative functions accordingly. • Organize as metropolitan areas, meeting the legal requirements for this associative form.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCES IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING (LAW 1454 OF 2011, ARTICLE 29)		
TERRITORIAL LEVEL	GENERAL COMPETENCE	SPECIFIC FUNCTIONS
METROPOLITAN	Elaborate Comprehensive Metropolitan Development Plans with long-term vision, including territorial planning components and binding general norms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define objectives and criteria that municipalities must adopt in their Territorial Organization Plans (POT) regarding metropolitan phenomena.

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 1454 of 2011, Article 29.

In the Colombian legal framework, the LOOT is understood as the principal norm governing territorial planning. Therefore, priority will be given to the allocation of competences that this law grants to local governments in the matter at study. However, to have greater clarity about the specific competences of each subnational government, the following compilation presents what the specific regulations governing each of them establish.

6.4.1 Municipalities' Own Competences

Regarding municipal competences, Article 2 of Law 1551 of 2012, on municipal rights, establishes that municipalities have the right to exercise competences that correspond to them, according to what is established in the Constitution and Law. This gives relevant and transcendental importance to the execution of competences.

On the other hand, Article 8 of the same law presents and explains the diversification of municipal competences, attributing two types of competences to municipalities:

- **Voluntary competences:** All those in which municipalities express interest in assuming them according to their technical and administrative capacity
- **Mandatory competences:** Those that have been assigned by the Constitution or Law (Law 1551 of 2012, Article 8)

These articles reflect the autonomy and support that municipalities have to exercise their competences, allowing them to have a broad scope of action based on their institutional capacities and with a degree of discretionary action. In the specific topic of Territorial Planning, this autonomy can also be evidenced in the definition of voluntary competences that municipalities consider, according to their capacities.

Nevertheless, regarding municipal scope in territorial planning matters, Article 3 of the same law grants in its function 9, the function of formulating and adopting Territorial Organization Plan (POT) determining land uses based on the utilization of available land and harmonization of sectoral plans with national policies and departmental and metropolitan plans. Additionally, it establishes that every 12 years POTs must be reviewed, reformulated and later approved by the local municipal assembly. (Article 3, Law 1551 of 2011)

While the law does not present a distinction between competences and functions, it does make clear that it is municipalities' duty to use the Territorial Organizing Plan to order their physical space and define the land occupation model. It is also clear that is their competence to ensure the review and updating of this instrument in the periodicity dictated by law.

6.4.2 Departments' Own Competences

The competences granted to Departments are expressed in Article 4 of Law 2200 of 2022 and are presented under schemes governed by principles. For the exercise that concerns this research, we will present those that have specific relations to territorial planning or that affect the administrative management of Departments in the exercise of their functions, as follows:

Table 17: Competences related to territorial planning at the department level

Under autonomy and decentralization schemes	Under coordination, concurrence, and complementarity schemes in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Road infrastructure: Construct, maintain, and recover the department's road network, guaranteeing departmental and municipal road connectivity, strengthening rural and urban links and allowing consolidation of a strategic transportation network. • Territorial associativity: Establish territorial associativity schemes such as Administrative and Planning Regions (RAP), Planning and Management Regions (RPG), or others determined by the Constitution and Law. • Territorial Autonomy: Exercise other competences derived from the principle of autonomy within the Social State of Law. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territorial Planning: Define guidelines for territorial planning partially or totally, considering environmental, geographical, economic, and cultural aspects. • High Impact Infrastructure: Determine jointly with municipalities the location of high-impact infrastructure, under regional or municipal planning schemes. • Housing Development: Work together with the Nation and municipalities in developing social and priority interest housing projects, prioritizing generation of decent housing for vulnerable households in urban and rural areas. They will implement subsidiary policies to favor and facilitate the purchase, improvement, and construction of housing, as well as property formalization processes and land allocation for social interest housing. All policies must guarantee access to utilities and appropriate

	habitat conditions according to what the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory establishes.
Under concurrence and/or subsidiarity schemes	Fulfill other functions and competences that have been attributed by the Constitution and law.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Services: Departments must ensure coverage and efficient provision of public services according to what the law says. • Home Public Services: Serve as intermediary between the Nation and municipalities, to guarantee administration, coordination, and complementation of municipal work in providing home public services continuously and adequately. • Potable Water and Sanitation: Promote, co-finance, and implement regional schemes for efficient provision of potable water and basic sanitation services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special provisions: Department competences must be developed without prejudice to municipal competences or their territorial autonomy.

Source: (Law 2200 of 2022, Article 4)

6.4.3 Metropolitan Areas' Own Competences

Law 1625 of 2013, which issues the regime for Metropolitan Areas, grants in its Article 6 the following competences that, in addition to those the law confers, Metropolitan Areas must adopt:

- **Sustainable Development:** Program and coordinate harmonious, integrated, and sustainable development of the municipalities that comprise it.
- **Public Services:** Rationalize the provision of utilities by municipalities that integrate it, and if applicable, jointly provide some of them; may participate in their provision subsidiarily, when no legal regime exists that regulates their provision or when such regulation exists, it is accepted that the metropolitan area be an official or authorized provider.
- **Road Infrastructure:** Execute road infrastructure works and develop social interest projects of the metropolitan area.
- **Territorial Planning:** Establish, in consonance with territorial planning norms, specific guidelines and orientations for territorial planning of municipalities that integrate it, to promote and facilitate harmonization of their Territorial Organization Plan (POT).

Like the municipal law, Law 1625 does not present a conceptualization that distinguishes between competences and functions. Nevertheless, within functions granted to metropolitan areas by Article 7, the following are considered of relevant importance, given their scope in territorial planning:

- Formulate and adopt the Comprehensive Metropolitan Development Plan with long-term perspective including the physical territorial planning component in accordance with current legal provisions.
- Formulate and adopt the Strategic Metropolitan Territorial Ordering Plan, as the framework to which each of the municipalities comprising the area must adhere.
- Coordinate the National Social Housing System in their respective territory and adopt policies for developing metropolitan housing programs, in accordance with current norms.
- Coordinate, rationalize, and manage utilities of metropolitan character.
- Undertake actions necessary to dispose of properties needed for executing works of metropolitan interest.
- Execute works of metropolitan character in accordance with what is established in the Comprehensive Metropolitan Development Plan, the Strategic Metropolitan Territorial Ordering Plan, and plans and programs that develop or complement them.

To understand the level of autonomy of each of these subnational governments and the potential regulatory conflicts that may arise in the exercise of their competences, the following comparative table presents the competences assigned to each territorial entity and the inter-institutional dynamics between them.

Table 18. Assignment of Competences According to the Laws of each Local Government

ASSIGNMENT OF COMPETENCES TO SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS OR COORDINATION SCHEMES UNDER THEIR RESPECTIVE LAWS				
TERRITORIAL ENTITY	COMPETENCES IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING	LEVEL OF AUTONOMY	RELATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES	CONSISTENCIES / INCONSISTENCIES
MUNICIPALITIES	Formulate and adopt Territorial Organization Plan (POT) every 12 years Define land uses- Harmonize the POT with sectoral, departmental, and national plans	High (voluntary and mandatory competences) Autonomy to define POT and its components	Coordination with departments and the national government on policies and sectoral plans	Consistent with the principle of local autonomy Risk of fragmentation if no effective multilevel coordination mechanisms exist

ASSIGNMENT OF COMPETENCES TO SUBNATIONAL GOVERNMENTS OR COORDINATION SCHEMES UNDER THEIR RESPECTIVE LAWS				
TERRITORIAL ENTITY	COMPETENCES IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING	LEVEL OF AUTONOMY	RELATION WITH OTHER ENTITIES	CONSISTENCIES / INCONSISTENCIES
METROPOLITAN AREAS	Set orientations for the territorial planning of member municipalities Formulate the Metropolitan Development Plan and the Strategic Metropolitan Territorial Plan Coordinate utilities and housing policies	High within the metropolitan perimeter Empowered to harmonize municipal POTs	Coordinates and harmonizes actions among metropolitan municipalities	Consistent with the integrative metropolitan approach Possible conflicts if municipalities resist harmonizing their POTs.
DEPARTMENTS	Define guidelines for territorial planning with a regional approach Determine location of high-impact infrastructure in coordination with municipalities- Participate in housing, utilities, and habitat policies	Medium to high Grounded in principles of coordination, concurrence, and subsidiarity	Coordinates with the Nation and municipalities in joint policy execution	Enhances a regional perspective on territorial planning Potential inconsistency due to lack of a clear hierarchy between departmental guidelines and municipal autonomy

Source: Own elaboration based on information from Law 1551/2012, Law 2200/2022, and Law 1625/2013

Hence, the comparative analysis of the competences assigned to municipalities, metropolitan areas, and departments shows a complex and multilayered territorial planning system in Colombia. While each local government enjoys a significant degree of autonomy, especially municipalities and metropolitan areas, their responsibilities often intersect, needing robust coordination mechanisms to avoid overlaps or regulatory conflicts. The principle of subsidiarity and the emphasis on coordination and concurrency seek to foster coherence, yet institutional tensions may arise when territorial guidelines lack clear hierarchical precedence—particularly between departmental and municipal planning frameworks. Therefore, the effectiveness of Colombia's territorial planning system largely depends on the strength of intergovernmental dialogue and the articulation of competences across levels of government.

6.5. Territorial Planning Instruments

To delineate the assignment of competencies in relation to territorial planning instruments and to understand the responsibility of local governments in the

development of territorial planning, the presentation of territorial planning instruments, previously defined as Territorial Organization Plans, will be organized according to each of the local governments that are the subject of this study.

6.5.1 Territorial Planning Instruments for Municipalities

Regarding the territorial planning instrument that municipalities must formulate and develop, Law 388 of 1994, in its Article 9 previously presented, establishes three different types of territorial planning plans depending on the population size of the municipalities:

Table 19. Types of Territorial Organization Plan (POT)

LOCAL GOVERNMENT	POPULATION	SPATIAL-PLANNING INSTRUMENT
Districts and municipalities	More than 100,000 inhabitants	Territorial organization plan – (POT In Spanish)
Municipalities	From 30,000 to 100,000 inhabitants	Territorial organization basic plan, TOBP – (PBOT)
Municipalities	Fewer than 30,000 inhabitants	Territorial organization scheme, TOS – (EOT)

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 388/1997

All territorial planning plans presented herein, according to Article 11 of the aforementioned law, must be developed considering three main components:

Table 20. Structure of Territorial Organization Plans According to the Article 11 Law 388/1997

COMPONENT	DESCRIPTION
GENERAL COMPONENT	Definition of objectives, strategies, and long-term structural content.
URBAN COMPONENT	Establishment of policies, actions, programs, and regulations focused on managing and administering urban physical development.
RURAL COMPONENT	Establishment of policies, actions, programs, and regulations to ensure adequate interaction between rural settlements and the municipal seat.

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 388/1997

In addition to the above listed component, the Territorial Organizing Plan must contain also:

1. **Long-term and medium-term objectives and strategies that include:**
 - a. Organization of the territory for the exploitation of comparative advantages.
 - b. Definition of strategies for economic and social development.

- c. Definition of policies for land use, occupation, and management in the long term.

2. Structural content governing urban-rural relationships:

- a. Specification of urban-rural communication systems and their articulation with regional systems.
- b. Definition of areas for natural and heritage reserve, protection, and conservation.
- c. Identification of high-risk zones.
- d. Location of basic infrastructure and equipment for proper urban-rural relationships.
- e. Land classification according to existing categories: rural land, urban land, urban expansion land. (Law 388 of 1997, Article 12)

The formulation of the Territorial Organization Plan shall be the responsibility of the municipal mayor, who will be responsible for presenting it to the Government Council for prior consultation. Once the participation and consultation phase has been completed, the mayor must present the consolidated POT to the Municipal Assembly for approval. If 60 days pass from the presentation of the POT to the local assembly without this collegiate body having made a pronouncement, the mayor, according to this law, may adopt it by decree. (Law 388 of 1997, Articles 24, 25, and 26)

6.5.2 Territorial Planning Instruments for Departments

Regarding the Departmental Organizing Planning – POD, Law 2200 of 2022 (which regulates the administrative and political management of Departments) refers in its Article 15 to the organic law of territorial planning and therefore to the instrument. However, the LOOT – as already explain above - in the article 29 does mention the competence of Department to formulate this territorial planning policy but does not specify anything more.

Given this regulatory gap regarding the Departmental Organizing Plan, the Senate Territorial Planning Commission (COT), the body responsible for evaluating, reviewing, and suggesting decentralization and territorial planning processes, issued Agreement COT No. 010/2016 to regulate the Departmental Organizing Plans (POD).

Regarding the contents of these plans, Article 1 of Agreement suggests that, in accordance with the competencies granted to departments by law, this instrument must contain:

a) Guidelines for land use and occupation, especially in conurbation areas related to:

1. Environmental protection and conservation, particularly of protected areas, ecosystems, and the department's ecological structure.
2. Disaster risk management and climate change adaptation actions, through the identification of threat areas for human settlements, and the development of regional infrastructure and equipment.

b) Policies on population settlements and urban centers that promote territorial development, related to:

1. Disaster risk management.
2. Climate change adaptation.
3. Protection and conservation of the Nation's and departments' cultural heritage.

c) Guidelines for the location of physical and social infrastructure that enable the exploitation of regional competitive advantages and promote equitable development between municipalities and regions. This includes:

1. Basic infrastructure for national and regional road networks.
2. Suburban road corridors.
3. Regional systems for potable water, basic sanitation, and energy.
4. Regional or departmental-scale equipment that can be located on rural land.

d) Guidelines for territorial integration in sectoral planning, promoting articulation between departmental sectoral plans and municipal territorial plans. (Agreement COT No. 010/2016, Article 1)

According to the same legal instrument, this Departmental Organizing Plan (POD) shall be adopted through a Departmental Ordinance, a legal provision issued by the Departmental Assembly (the department's collegiate body). (Agreement COT No. 010/2016, Article 1)

6.5.3 Territorial Planning Instruments for Metropolitan Areas

Law 1625 of 2013 contains in its Article 22 the provisions that the Metropolitan Strategic Territorial Organizing Plan (PEMOT) must include, according to the general principles of the POT:

- a) Definition of the Strategy and System for Integral Water Management.
- b) Definition of the Metropolitan System of Roads and Urban Public Transportation.
- c) Definition of the Metropolitan Equipment System.
- d) Sizing and definition of the strategy for social and priority housing in the metropolitan area and instruments for land management directed toward this purpose.
- e) Rural and suburban land management.
- f) Establishment of mechanisms that guarantee the equitable distribution of burdens and benefits generated by territorial and environmental planning.
- g) Mandatory general regulations that define the objectives and criteria to which municipalities that are part of the Area must adhere when adopting their territorial planning plans in relation to matters concerning metropolitan issues.
- h) The implementation program.

This law falls short of defining specific guidelines for the Metropolitan Strategic Territorial Organizing Plan (PEMOT), leaving unclear the plan's formulation and approval process and the timeframes corresponding to each stage. In response to regulatory conflicts and the absence of clear guidelines to promote effective coordination among territorial planning actors, the national government has developed the General Territorial Planning Policy as a guiding framework for the organization of the territory in Colombia.

6.6. General Territorial Planning Policy (PGOT)

The General Territorial Planning Policy (PGOT) is the result of analytical work, revisions, and adjustments undertaken by the national government, whose inputs have been under review since 2014. However, it was not until 2020 that the National Planning Department published the official document containing this policy.

The PGOT identifies two major problems as a guide for policy development:

- **Lack of a strategic and comprehensive agenda:** The PGOT identifies the absence of a strategic and comprehensive agenda that responds to the competencies assigned by the Organic Law of Territorial Planning (LOOT) in its Article 29. This lack of comprehensiveness overlooks, among various factors, different themes of not only national but also current international interest, such as the incorporation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the territorial implications of the Peace Agreement, and border and oceanic affairs. This problem directly impacts the efficiency of coordination mechanisms between local governments and associative mechanisms.
- **Institutional weaknesses in governance:** Within this problem, the PGOT identifies a limitation in the exercise of competencies that the LOOT grants to each of the territorial planning actors. It is evident that even at the national level, there is a lack of effectiveness in coordinating and articulating efforts with other actors who have similar objectives, resulting in duplicated efforts and fragmented capacities. This institutional weakness also evidences and acknowledges efforts in conducting diagnoses and formulating territorial planning instruments, but with limited and disorganized implementation.

Based on this, the PGOT demonstrates the importance of having national-level guidelines that enable the coordination and harmonization of territorial planning instruments and objectives in the long term (30 years). Seeking to address these issues and comply with the competencies granted by Law 1454 of 2011 to the National level, the National Planning Department defines the objective of the General Territorial Planning Policy (PGOT):

"To guide the physical, socio-spatial, and political-administrative organization of the national territory with a long-term perspective, to contribute to improving the quality of life of all inhabitants, preserve natural and cultural heritage for sustainable development, based on the capacities and potential of diverse territories, articulate various sectoral interventions, correct territorial socioeconomic and physical-ecological imbalances; recognizing cultural and

physical-geographical heterogeneity and increasing decentralization capacity."
(PGOT, 2020)

In this way, the PGOT bases its implementation on a value chain that illustrates the strategic flow and logical sequence required to fulfill its general objective and achieve the expected outcomes. Annex 2 provides a systemic visualization of the processes through which the objectives set forth by the policy for the entire national territory are translated into concrete actions and results.

Among the specific objectives that the PGOT established by subsystems, the following are highlighted for the present analysis, along with the mechanisms for their fulfillment:

Table 21. Specific Objectives and Implementation Mechanisms establish by PGOT

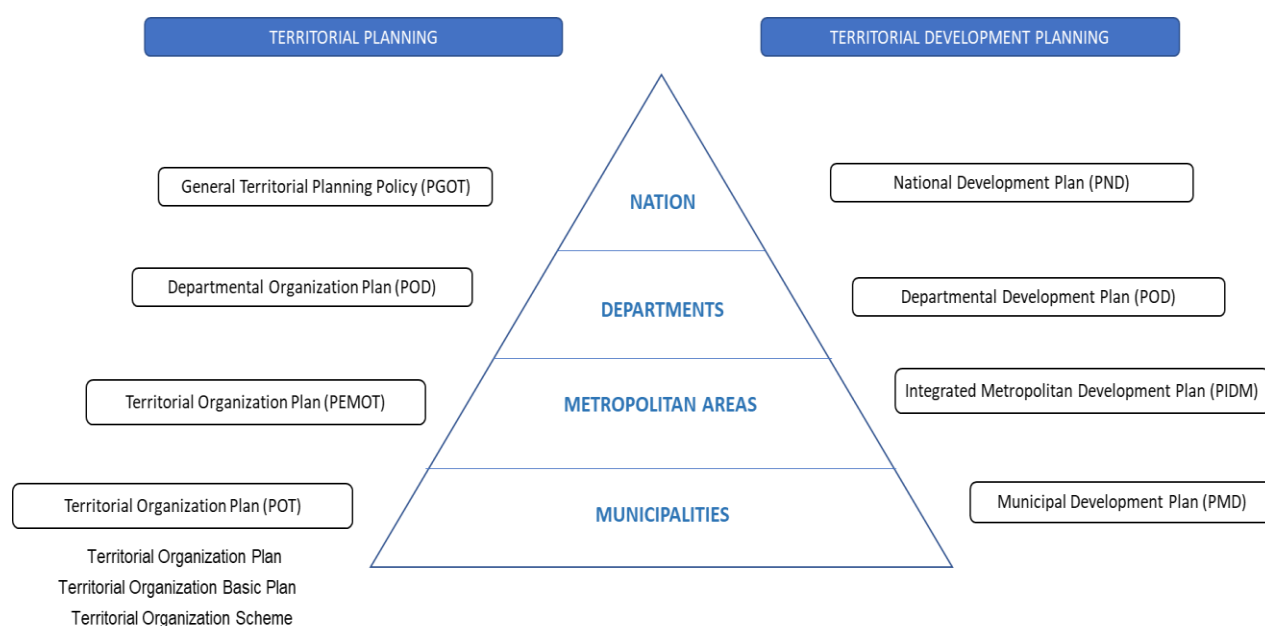
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE PGOT	
URBAN–RURAL–REGIONAL	INSTITUTIONAL–POLITICAL–ADMINISTRATIVE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guide the development of the urban-regional system through the structuring of a system of cities and sustainable human settlements that facilitates access to development opportunities in the regions. • Establish objectives and criteria that define how society should use the territory • Promote the integrated planning of continental and maritime, urban and rural territories. • Define a territorial development strategy for planning and developing intermediate and smaller strategic centers to provide urban functions for regional development. • Strengthen rural territories and improve living conditions for rural inhabitants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate actions across different levels of government in relation to territorial planning, involving civil society and territorial actors. • Promote the expansion of decentralization, planning, management, and administration capacities among integration entities and bodies. • Encourage the transfer of powers and decision-making authority from the central government to territorial levels, along with the corresponding allocation of resources. • Create dialogue platforms for decision-making between territorial entities and the nation in matters related to territorial planning. • Develop a Territorial Planning Information System to provide inputs for evaluating and making decisions regarding the territory.
IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define territorial planning guidelines based on a national development vision with a regional, participatory, gradual, flexible, and progressive approach that reflects the specific characteristics of each territory. • Develop agendas and work plans to harmonize and align zoning frameworks derived from territorial determinants and other instruments with spatial implications. • Outline necessary regulatory and legal developments to strengthen institutions, close legal gaps, and align territorial planning instruments with development planning instruments. • Establish effective coordination mechanisms between Territorial Planning Plans (POTs), the National Development Plan, and subnational territorial plans. • Define management alternatives and regulatory developments to resolve land-use conflicts and manage tensions between territorial planning instruments when policy guidelines require coordination. • Create mechanisms and spaces for implementing the PGOT with a differential approach, tailored to the specific characteristics of each territory. • Harmonize and/or develop the necessary legal frameworks to effectively implement strategies for the management and financing of territorial planning. 	

Source: Own elaboration based on PGOT

In this regard, the PGOT, beyond being the result of fulfilling a legal mandate, emerges as a mechanism of governance in response to the consequences of institutional fragmentation and the phenomenon of dual agency among actors at different levels of government and their planning instruments. It seeks to achieve overall politico-administrative harmonization in support of territorial planning for the benefit of communities.

However, the PGOT faces numerous challenges in achieving its intended objectives. Therefore, the following section presents an analysis that highlights the actual dynamics of territorial planning, the role of territorial planning policies, and their scope and effectiveness. This challenge translates into the specific coordination and articulation of local governments, associative schemes, and planning instruments, as shown below.

Figure 24. Local Government, Associative Schemes, and Associated Planning Instruments.



Source: Own work

6.7 Institutional Design and Competence Distribution Analysis

6.7.1 Temporal Gaps and Normative Disarticulation in the Territorial Planning Process

The legal framework governing territorial planning in Colombia has been developed in an isolated, uncoordinated, and inconsistent manner. Initially, it is important to highlight the extensive time periods between each of the analyzed regulations. Despite the Political Constitution establishing basic general rules for territorial planning in 1991 and, in its article 288, establishing the need for an organic law of territorial planning to determine competences between the national and subnational governments, this law was only approved 20 years later in 2011.

Similarly, the General Territorial Planning Policy (PGOT) was published in 2020, following significant time periods since the first determinations on territorial planning matters and using inputs from 2014. This delay likely resulting from multiple causes such as institutional fragmentation, extended bureaucratic processes, and changing political agendas, makes the effectiveness of what is proposed in the policy even more inconsistent and questionable, considering that if it was formulated with 2014 information and published 6 years later, it is likely that in practice many dynamics have changed, reducing its relevance and suitability for addressing current needs.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that each of the analyzed norms grant different competences and determines certain principles for territorial planning development. However, it is the Organic Law of Territorial Planning 1454 in 2011, the first regulation to provide the definition of competence: *"...competence is understood as the faculty or legal power that the Nation, territorial entities and figures of territorial integration have to generally address state responsibilities"* (Law 1454/2011, Article 26).

This definition becomes relevant as a factor that brings to discussion the importance of conceptualization in regulations, since discrepancies, gaps, or contradictions generate confusion and double interpretations. For the specific case of "competences" what was presented introduced as the definition in the political constitution as the concept of competences (the concept under which the present analysis was decided to be developed), in some regulations was established as functions and in others as duties.

The absence of consistent and concrete normative guidelines during key moments of urban growth and territorial development in Colombia allowed autonomous planning processes to emerge, often disconnected or disarticulated from each other, resulting in vain efforts and inefficient resource utilization for the same purpose. This lack of consolidated, permanent, updated, and reality-based regulations allows the phenomenon of dual agency to occur in territorial planning, in which local governments frequently find themselves trapped between responding to their own agendas and mandates while also fulfilling duties and responsibilities imposed by higher levels of government according to the competence allocation that regulations have granted them.

6.7.2 Conceptual Fragmentation of Territorial Planning Guiding Principles

Another element contributing to institutional inconsistency in territorial planning is the lack of conceptual homogenization of the guiding principles that orient it. While the Constitution and the analyzed laws (152 of 1994, 388 of 1997, 1454 of 2011, 1551 of 2012, and 1625 of 2013) establish principles such as autonomy, coordination, concurrence, and subsidiarity, there is no uniform definition of each principle nor mechanisms that guarantee adequate understanding and appropriation by territorial planning actors.

The conceptual inconsistency of principles was evidenced in that, according to their wording and scope, some are oriented to regulate the purpose of competence exercise and how territorial actors should act, while others define the nature or quality of relationships between different levels of government.

Additionally, a lack of hierarchization between principles and between levels of government interacting in territorial planning was identified. In cases where principles might conflict, or the same principle is exercised by different levels government tiers, no norm determines which of these prevails or how these tensions are resolved. Neither is the degree of influence of local government decisions clearly defined in relation to other territorial levels of government in case discrepancies arise. The lack of clarity in principle definition and in the hierarchization of their application in territorial planning exacerbates the dual agency problem, creating overlapping authority, ambiguous responsibility, and conflicting incentives.

In practice, this lack of clarity and hierarchization of principles allows for the emergence of dynamics in which power relations prevail over normative principles. The dual agency of municipalities, for instance, which respond both to higher levels of government and to their own constituents, is not always consistent with the principles that, according to the regulations, should be applied.

6.7.3 Inconsistencies in Competence Allocation and Exercise and Competent Actors

Competence distribution presents a dynamic similar to that of principles, clarifying that overlaps, gaps, and ambiguities in competence allocation have greater impact results on territorial planning and not necessarily positive impacts.

Considering the character and importance of the Organic Law of Territorial Planning 1454 in 2011, the competence allocation established by this law was prioritized. However, when comparing the competence distribution established by the Political Constitution and Law 388 of 1997, normative ambivalences and institutional inconsistencies were evidenced that, in practice, translate into disarticulated and frequently inefficient urbanization and territorial management processes.

The following table presents the relationships and possible tensions existing in the exercise of competences granted to each territorial entity within the territorial planning framework.

Table 22. Analysis Of Competences and Potential Conflicts

TERRITORIAL PLANNING COMPETENCES AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS			
LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT	MAIN FUNCTIONS IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING	RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER LEVELS	POTENTIAL TENSIONS OR GAPS
NATION (CENTRAL GOVERNMENT)	Defines the general policy regarding how national territory should be organized. This includes decisions such as the location of major infrastructure, environmental protection zones, or strategic areas for national security. It also sets overarching criteria for urban development and the distribution of public services.	Must coordinate with local and regional governments. Its decisions must respect the principles of decentralization and concurrence.	Despite the legal requirement to coordinate, in practice, many national decisions are made without sufficient consultation with territorial entities, leading to tensions.

TERRITORIAL PLANNING COMPETENCES AND POTENTIAL CONFLICTS			
LEVEL OF GOVERNMENT	MAIN FUNCTIONS IN TERRITORIAL PLANNING	RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER LEVELS	POTENTIAL TENSIONS OR GAPS
DEPARTMENT (INTERMEDIATE LEVEL BETWEEN NATION AND MUNICIPALITY)	Issues guidelines for organizing its territory, integrates municipal plans, and promotes common policies on matters such as the environment or human settlements. It may adopt territorial development plans at the departmental level.	Its role is primarily one of articulation. It does not have direct authority over municipalities but does have the ability to align regional strategies.	Departmental guidelines are not binding for municipalities, which can result in lack of coordination or territorial fragmentation.
METROPOLITAN AREAS (VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATION OF MUNICIPALITIES)	Are responsible for planning the integrated development of physically connected municipalities. They may issue general regulations that municipalities must follow on matters affecting the entire metropolitan area.	Act as a supra-municipal authority. Their decisions must be harmonized with those of the member municipalities and other territorial authorities.	In the absence of political will or clear governance mechanisms, conflicts may arise with municipalities regarding who holds the final decision-making authority.
MUNICIPALITIES (LOCAL GOVERNMENTS)	Hold primary responsibility for drafting and implementing Territorial Organization Plan (POT) which define land use and municipal growth.	Must coordinate with departments and the central government, although they also enjoy autonomy to make local decisions.	Their autonomy may come into conflict with departmental or national guidelines. Furthermore, many municipalities have limited technical capacities or possess special district characteristics.

Source: Own elaboration based on information from the LOOT

However, regarding subsequent and specific norms for each level of local government, it is striking in the case of Law 1551 of 2012, which regulates municipal functioning. In Article 8, this norm grants two types of competences: voluntary and mandatory competences, without the law delving into the scope of implementation of each of these laws.

Although the objective of this regulation is to provide greater detail of the role and scope of municipalities in territorial planning, the content regarding competences generates more confusion than certainty, since voluntary competences, according to their definition, open a very wide window of opportunities for municipalities to adopt and exercise competences they consider can carry out, without establishing how they should do so or how their institutional capacity to assume them is validated.

In addition, the law does not establish a process or mechanism to approve such voluntary competences, an institutional gap and normative ambiguity are generated that allow, and in some cases promote, territorial planning actors to assume simultaneous and possibly contradictory roles on the same topic, aggravating the dual agency phenomenon. For example, some municipalities could voluntarily launch housing programs, even though housing policy is primarily under the mandate of the Ministry of Housing. This could create overlaps and, in some cases, contradictory interventions, since municipal initiatives are not always aligned with national funding schemes or planning instruments.

Considering that this competence allocation denotes the principle of autonomy and understanding that this principle is also assigned to departments, an example of this normative clash is evidenced with the competence that the Political Constitution of 1991 grants to Departments. In Article 300, according to which Departments can create, suppress, or segregate municipalities that are part of their jurisdiction. (Political Constitution 1991 Article 300).

This normative panorama reveals a structural tension between the autonomy recognized to municipalities through voluntary competences and the power that the Constitution grants to departments. Municipal autonomy can conflict with decisions that departments make regarding their territorial planning, considering that this competence does not require the consent of the affected municipality. Thus, while municipalities claim greater autonomy to assume competences according to their own criteria, departments maintain a structural power that can nullify their existence or modify their configuration.

This lack of normative harmonization between the principle of municipal autonomy and the constitutional hierarchy of departments exacerbates the dual agency phenomenon, placing local governments in an ambiguous position between their functional self-assertion and their territorial subordination.

Another normative clash occurs between Law 1454 of 2011 (LOOT) and the Political Constitution, specifically regarding competence allocation to Departments and Municipalities, respectively. Article 29 of Law 1454 of 2011, establishes that the following are competences of the nation and local governments:

"2. Of the Department:

a) Establish directives and orientations for the planning of all or specific portions of its territory, especially in conurbation areas in order to determine scenarios of space use and occupation, according to the optimal potential of the environment and based on development objectives, potentialities and biophysical, economic and cultural limitations.

b) Define population settlement and urban center policies, in such a way as to facilitate the development of its territory.

c) Orient the location of physical-social infrastructure so that regional competitive advantages are leveraged and equity in municipal development is promoted.

d) Integrate and orient the spatial projection of departmental sectoral plans, those of its municipalities and indigenous territorial entities.

e) In developing their competences, departments may articulate their policies, directives and strategies for physical territorial planning with plans, programs, projects and actions on the territory, through the adoption of planning plans for all or specific portions of their territory.

f) The competence to establish specific directives and orientations for territorial planning in municipalities that are part of a Metropolitan Area corresponds to these, which will be exercised with observance of the principles for the exercise of competences established in this law.

g) Departments and associations they form may implement special protection programs for the conservation and recovery of the environment". -- (Bold text added)

For its part, regarding municipal competences, the Political Constitution establishes, among others, the faculty to regulate land uses and, within the limits set by law, monitor and control activities related to the construction and sale of real estate intended for housing. (Political Constitution 1991, Article 313)

If the regulation is not clear and does not fulfill the function of providing guidelines for territorial planning development in an ordered and articulated manner, nor provide mechanisms for solving possible conflicts that arise in the exercise of competences and compliance with assigned principles, the question is: to what instance or actor should one turn in the face of gaps, tensions and conflicts existing in territorial planning?

Given this overlap of competences and the absence of a hierarchy or mechanism that allows conflicts to be resolved, it becomes necessary to recognize the role of the High Courts and judges as key actors for territorial planning exercise (although they may be considered external actors (outsiders). Their decisions gain transcendence and prominence in the face of the normative gaps evidenced.

On this specific case, the Constitutional Court in Sentence C-138 of 2020 indicated as legitimate that national and departmental authorities formulate general guidelines, policies or guides in territorial planning matters, provided that these act as determinants to orient the function that the Constitution assigns to municipal and district councils. Making the caveat that no other authority can empower the National Government to modify Territorial Planning Plans (POT) or authorize urban interventions that contravene local provisions on land use. [(JFP&Associates Urban Law SAS, 2021. Analysis of jurisprudential lines regarding territorial and environmental planning)]

Regarding departments, the Constitutional Court conceives them as an autonomous entity in charge of coordinating, complementing and evaluating municipal action within the constitutional and legal framework, acting as intermediaries through their planning bodies. Likewise, Departmental Planning Plans (POD), as territorial planning instruments, should be understood as guiding tools that propose models of land use and occupation to municipalities, as a manifestation of their coordination and territorial planning function, without imposing hierarchies. [(JFP&Associates Urban Law SAS, 2021. Analysis of jurisprudential lines regarding territorial and environmental planning)]

According to the above, the Court declared constitutional the literals a) and c) of numeral 2 of article 29 of Law 1454 of 2011, in relation to the power of governments regarding land use. However, despite the Court assuming an institutional arbitrator role in the face of normative gaps in this specific case, its decision falls short by not specifying or determining a hierarchical order between competences granted to local governments, nor mechanisms for attention and resolution of intergovernmental conflicts in territorial planning.

The Court's action in this decision is limited to recognizing and managing the conflict without giving it a concrete solution, evidencing that, despite having the opportunity to address normative clashes and possible dual agency, the normative reorganization of territorial planning requires a broader analysis spectrum that considers all factors interacting in territorial planning, as well as the relationships that arise there and their possible implications.

6.7.4 Temporal and Normative Dissonances Between Territorial Planning Instruments

To achieve efficient and organized territorial planning, different regulations established territorial planning instruments as the articulating and planning mechanism for efficient territorial management.

Today, each level of government and associative scheme prioritized in this study has a specific territorial planning instrument differentiated according to the particularities of each one, which were established in different regulations and at different times.

Despite the normative effort to regularize territorial planning exercise, an institutional inconsistency is perceived that impacts the implementation of these instruments. While the Territorial Organizing Plan (POT) is defined in detail, with its components, objectives and adoption mechanisms, the Departmental Organizing Plan (POD) lacks a solid and detailed normative base that provides specificity to the instrument and the formulation process, with COT Agreement No. 0101 of 2016 being the one that, although brief, makes an approximation. And for its part, the regulation that regulates the Strategic Metropolitan Territorial Organizing Plan (PEMOT) lacks precision, leaving gaps, in this case, regarding its formulation process, its scope and its relationship or hierarchy level with respect to POTs.

Territorial planning instruments (POT, POD, PEMOT) and development planning instruments (PMD and PND) present marked temporal and methodological asynchrony, creating lack of coordination between different levels of government and hindering coherence in public policy execution as shown below.

Table 23. Comparison between instrument, scale, timeframes and scope

INSTRUMENT	TIMEFRAME	MAIN FOCUS	TERRITORIAL SCALE	LEGAL BASIS
POT (Territorial Organization Plan)	12 years (with revisions every 4 years)	Land use, territorial structure, spatial organization	Municipality / District	Law 388 of 1997
PEMOT (Strategic Metropolitan Territorial Organization Plan)	Variable (aligned with local POTs and Development Plans)	Metropolitan and regional articulation	Metropolitan Area	Law 1625 of 2013
POD (Departmental Territorial Planning Plan)	Not precisely defined in Law but aligned with local POTs and Development Plans	Regional coordination and spatial guidance	Department	Law 1454 of 2011
PMD (Municipal/Departmental Development Plan)	4 years (aligned with elected government term)	Public investment, short-term development goals	Municipality / Department	Law 152 of 1994
PND (National Development Plan)	4 years (aligned with presidential term)	National development strategy and policy priorities	Nation	Law 152 of 1994

Source: Own work

This dissonance between instruments, instead of guaranteeing comprehensive and coherent territorial planning, has hindered public policy articulation and has reinforced parallel planning processes, in many cases contradictory, allowing us to understand why policy failure persists despite the existence of formal authority and legally established mandates.

6.7.5 The General Territorial Planning Policy (PGOT)

Faced with this institutional situation of inconsistency and lack of coordination, the General Territorial Planning Policy (PGOT) formulated by the National Planning Department appears as an additional tool, general and of greater scope and hierarchy in the management and articulation of actors, competences and territorial planning instruments. However, in practice, the General Territorial Planning Policy, like previous regulations, proves insufficient and limited. Although the PGOT establishes strategic guidelines to promote the unification of criteria regarding land use, urban growth management and territorial sustainability, its scope is restricted by outdated normative

frameworks, overlapping and uncoordinated competences, disarticulated local policies and institutional weakness at different scales.

6.8 Final Remarks

The analysis carried out revealed the complexity and inconsistency of the Colombian regulatory framework on territorial planning, which is composed of the Political Constitution and Laws 152 of 1994, 388 of 1997, 1454 of 2011, 1551 of 2012, and 1625 of 2013. Based on these legal instruments, a multilevel system of competences, principles, actors, and planning instruments was presented, structured around the principles of autonomy, coordination, concurrence, subsidiarity, and decentralization. However, the analysis made evident the ambiguity in the allocation of competences and the absence of clear hierarchical mechanisms among levels of government, which hinders coordinated, effective, and efficient territorial governance in Colombia. These tensions give rise to the phenomenon of dual agency: when a single actor—typically at the local government level—is required to respond to multiple mandates that may, at times, be contradictory in both origin and objective.

7. Growth Management in Metropolitan Colombia: Reality or Myth?¹⁸

This chapter digs deeper into the empirical analysis of this thesis by examining whether local territorial development policies in Colombia have successfully guided urban growth in line with declared objectives. Composed under the overarching concern of policy effectiveness, this chapter looks into how the goals set out in municipal Territorial Organization Plans (POT in Spanish¹⁹) have materialized—or not—in the five formal metropolitan areas of Colombia: Medellín, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cúcuta, and Pereira.

Building upon the previous analytical and empirical chapters, this section deepens the inquiry into the core question of this research: how institutional design and coordination challenges, conceptualized through the lens of dual agency, affect the effectiveness of local policy implementation. Here, the focus is explicitly in territorial planning as a policy domain where the disjunction between observed urban expansion and planned growth trajectories serves as an indicator of under optimal institutional performance.

The chapter unfolds in two interrelated dimensions. First, it assesses the spatial patterns of urban expansion across the five metropolitan regions, contrasting observed growth with the guiding frameworks of their respective POTs. This comparison allows us to measure whether urban development has adhered to the principles set in each local policy instrument. Second, the chapter explores the role and articulation of the local instrument with other formal instruments—specifically the Department Organization Plans (POD²⁰ – in Spanish) that are general territorial development guidelines at the Department level²¹ and Metropolitan Organization Plans (PEMOTs²² – in Spanish) which are guidelines at the metropolitan level, where they exist. Special attention is given to the coordination (or lack thereof) between these instruments and

¹⁸ The information on this chapter was used as input for several chapters (4.a, 4c, 4d, 4e and 4f) in the book: *Diagnóstico y Recomendaciones sobre el Ordenamiento Territorial en Colombia: Propuestas para el cumplimiento de los Acuerdos de París*. As in chapter 5, it will be referenced at all times.

¹⁹ As stated before this is the English translation for Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial -POT- in Spanish.

²⁰ It stands for Planes de Ordenamiento Departamental in Spanish.

²¹ In Colombia, Departments constitute the second tier level of government.

²² It stands for Planes Estratégicos Metropolitanos de Ordenamiento Territorial in Spanish.

the municipal POTs, as well as to the institutional configurations that mediate such interplay.

Through detailed case-by-case analysis, this chapter illuminates how fragmentation, overlapping mandates, and inconsistent competence distribution can manifest in practice. In doing so, it reinforces the broader thesis argument that the misalignment between urban governance structures and the spatial dynamics of growth impacts policy effectiveness, even when formal instruments appear robust on paper.

Ultimately, this chapter not only assesses the capacity of growth management policies to steer territorial development but also advances the operationalization of the dual agency concept. By mapping institutional interactions and their outcomes in diverse metropolitan settings, it lays the groundwork for the more focused policy domain analysis in the subsequent section on housing.

7.1 Why the Metropolitan Scale is Important

Metropolitan areas are a central focus of this research because they represent the most intense convergence of urban growth, institutional complexity, and governance challenges. In Colombia, as in many countries of the Global South, cities are no longer confined within single municipal boundaries. Urban agglomerations increasingly encompass multiple jurisdictions—core cities surrounded by peripheral municipalities—that function as integrated urban systems but are managed through fragmented political and administrative structures. This spatial and institutional misalignment reveals some of the most persistent implementation challenges in public policy.

These metropolitan settings offer an ideal context to observe what the thesis defines as “dual agency problems.” Local governments in these areas often find themselves caught between several fronts: on one hand, they must fulfill the demands and expectations of their own local constituencies; on the other, they are expected to implement national and/or supralocal policies and follow international organization guidelines. This dual accountability generates overlapping mandates, unclear responsibilities, and conflicting incentives— conditions that frequently lead to policy

incoherence and implementation gaps. Metropolitan areas, therefore, become a critical site for testing and refining the dual agency framework as a tool for understanding institutional inefficiency.

The choice to focus on metropolitan areas is also grounded in their role as the epicenter of urban expansion and policy pressure. Empirical data shows that in Colombia, cities like Medellín, Barranquilla, and Pereira have experienced significant outward growth, with land consumption outpacing population growth. This has created urban forms that are more dispersed, less dense, and increasingly difficult to govern. Territorial planning instruments, such as the Territorial Organization (POT), have struggled to keep up with these changes, revealing a gap between planned development and actual urban dynamics. Metropolitan areas vividly expose this gap and help analyze whether local governments are institutionally equipped to steer growth in a sustainable direction.

Moreover, these regions are crucial to implementing international development agendas like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11, which emphasizes inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. While national and global frameworks increasingly rely on local governments to achieve these goals, the real capacity of cities to act is often limited by fragmented competences, fiscal constraints, and insufficient coordination across levels of government. Metropolitan areas, where these contradictions are most pronounced, become a valuable lens for assessing the feasibility of sustainable urban governance.

Colombia presents a particularly relevant empirical setting for this research due to the composition and evolution of its urban system. The country currently has 15 urban agglomerations; each centered around a core city with over 100,000 inhabitants. These agglomerations comprise a total of approximately 60 municipalities. However, as discussed in Chapter 5, urban expansion is ongoing, and in the short term, at least 13 additional municipalities are expected to become functionally integrated into the existing urban extents. This will effectively enlarge the current urban footprints and intensify the spatial and institutional complexity of these territories. It is important to note, as previously established, that this research distinguishes between conurbations, agglomerations, and formally constituted metropolitan areas.

To date, Colombia has only five formally recognized metropolitan areas. Notably, in 2024, the Metropolitan Region of Bogotá–Cundinamarca was established through a special legal framework designed to consolidate and coordinate the country’s most significant urban region. This region alone accounts for nearly 28% of Colombia’s urban population, underscoring its strategic importance. The creation of this institutional mechanism marks a significant milestone, as it is the first time that the national capital and its surrounding urban system have adopted a formal metropolitan governance structure to address shared challenges. In contrast, the remaining 9 existing conurbations—and at least four additional emerging ones—represent smaller but equally critical territorial expressions of complex inter-municipal interdependence.

Understanding how the five formal metropolitan areas navigate coordination challenges, overlapping mandates, dual accountability, and the resulting constraints on policy effectiveness is essential. These dynamics not only affect service delivery and planning outcomes in the territories under study but also offer important lessons for other urban centers across Colombia that are experiencing similar patterns of expansion and fragmentation. By closely examining these metropolitan configurations, the research aims to contribute to a broader reflection on how to strengthen institutional design and governance capacity in rapidly urbanizing contexts.

7.2 What is a Metropolitan Area in Colombia

In Colombia, metropolitan areas are formal supramunicipal entities established by law to promote coordination and joint planning among neighboring municipalities that share strong functional and territorial interdependencies. As defined by Law 1625 of 2013, a metropolitan area is a legal and institutional arrangement intended to improve governance in urban agglomerations that surpass the administrative limits of individual municipalities. These entities aim to articulate regional development efforts, manage shared services, coordinate infrastructure investments, and address common challenges such as mobility, environmental management, and territorial planning.

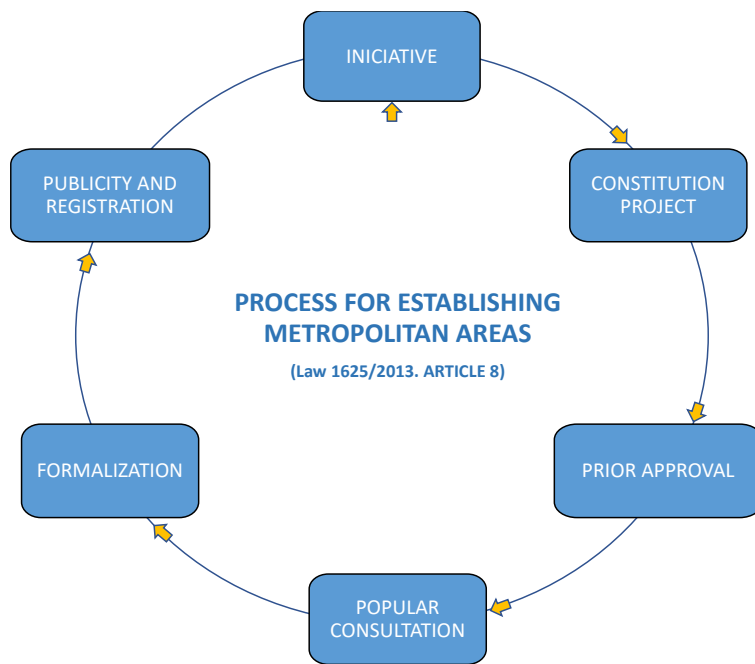
The process for constituting a metropolitan area is defined in Article 8 of Law 1625 and is characterized by a participatory and democratic structure. It involves six sequential stages: (1) initiative, (2) constitution project, (3) prior approval, (4) popular

consultation, (5) formalization, and (6) publicity and registration. This process ensures that both political and citizen actors are involved in the decision, reinforcing the legitimacy and territorial relevance of metropolitan authority. Initiatives can be presented by mayors, council members, a portion of the electorate, or departmental governors. The project must clearly identify the municipalities involved, justify the proposal, designate a core municipality, and define funding sources.

Once the constitution project is developed, it must be approved by the municipal councils, the regional environmental authority, and the council of the core municipality. Following this institutional endorsement, the project is subject to a popular consultation in each municipality. For the metropolitan area to be officially created, a majority of favorable votes is required, with a minimum voter turnout of 25% of the registered population in each participating locality. If these thresholds are met, formalization occurs within 30 days, and the new metropolitan area is registered and publicized.

The figure below summarizes the full legal and procedural pathway to establish a metropolitan area in Colombia. It provides visual aid to understand the complexity and formal rigor of the process, reinforcing the fact that metropolitan areas are not simply functional spaces but legally constituted institutions with administrative, financial, and political mandates. This stepwise formation process distinguishes Colombia from other Latin American countries where metropolitan arrangements often rely on informal or ad hoc coordination mechanisms.

Figure 25. Summary of Process for Establishing Metropolitan Areas in Colombia



Source: Own Work based on Law 1625/2023

Understanding this legal framework is critical to evaluating the institutional configuration of the five formal metropolitan areas analyzed in this chapter. It highlights how their creation reflects not only demographic or urban pressures but also deliberate political agreements and institutional commitments. At the same time, the gap between this formal process and the day-to-day reality of policy implementation across fragmented territories will emerge as a central theme in the comparative case studies that follow.

7.3 Medellin Metropolitan Area: The Aburra Valley Metro Area

7.3.1 Territorial Planning Policy at the Metro and Local Level

The Medellin metropolitan area better known as the Aburra Valley Metropolitan Area – AMVA (Spanish Acronym), is a pioneering institution in Colombia. It was officially established in 1980 through an ordinance by the Assembly of the Department of Antioquia. This metropolitan area was the first formally recognized supramunicipal institution, it was even established before the metropolitan areas law came into action, and as of today it is a national and regional benchmark for supramunicipal planning and governance. The AMVA is composed by ten municipalities: Medellín (the core city), Bello, Itagüí, Envigado, Sabaneta, La Estrella, Caldas, Copacabana, Girardota, and Barbosa. These municipalities share intertwined economic, environmental, territorial, and social dynamics and constitute one of the most densely populated and dynamic urban agglomerations in Colombia.

Figure 26. Aburra Valley Metropolitan Area



Source: Own work and (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 146)

As stated before, the metropolitan areas in Colombia have a potential set of competences. The AMVA holds competencies in territorial planning, environmental management sustainable mobility, and the coordination of metropolitan public policies. Its strategic action is guided by the Strategic Metropolitan Organizing Plan - PEMOT, which aligns municipal planning instruments within a long-term metropolitan vision focused on sustainable development, territorial equity, and climate resilience. This policy was adopted in 2019 by a metropolitan agreement (Área Metropolitana del Valle de Aburrá, 2019). It uses a structural territorial reading to acknowledge regional urban dynamics, tensions between physical growth and ecological carrying capacity, and proposes a polycentric model that links existing and emerging urban centers through a supramunicipal planning approach. Specifically, the PEMOT is structured around five major systems: (1) environment and risk management, (2) urban structure and land occupation, (3) mobility, (4) socioeconomic, and (5) metropolitan governance. Each system includes strategic objectives, analysis components, lines of action, and priority projects (Área Metropolitana del Valle de Aburrá, 2019).

A key innovation in the plan is the creation of Metropolitan Strategic Intervention Projects (PIEMs), which aim to operationalize PEMOT's goals through integrated territorial actions. These projects address critical issues such as informal expansion, access to housing, pressure on rural land, and lack of coordination between municipalities. The plan underscores the need to align local planning instruments, the POTs, with the PEMOT to ensure coherence and effectiveness. The following table presents 3 of the most critical PIEMS identified that aligns with the topic selection of the thesis and portraits how an institution created by municipalities makes an effort to catalyze coordination on critical matters.

Table 24. Metropolitan Strategic Projects

Project	Description
PIEM for Consolidation of the Urban-Rural Structure	This project seeks to control dispersed urban expansion and promote a compact, polycentric model. It focuses on containing growth toward rural land through supramunicipal planning instruments and strategies such as densification, recovery of urban centers, and planned occupation of land suitable for urbanization.
PIEM for Land Management for Social and Priority Housing	This project aims to identify, enable, and manage well-located land for social housing, in order to prevent low-income populations from settling in risk-prone or

Project	Description
	environmentally fragile areas. It also includes metropolitan mechanisms for land acquisition and management, as well as the development of land banks.
PIEM for Control and Management of Urban Expansions	The main objective of this project is to align municipal land-use plans (POTs) with the metropolitan model, promoting technical assessment of proposed expansions, the definition of growth thresholds, and the delineation of urban boundaries.

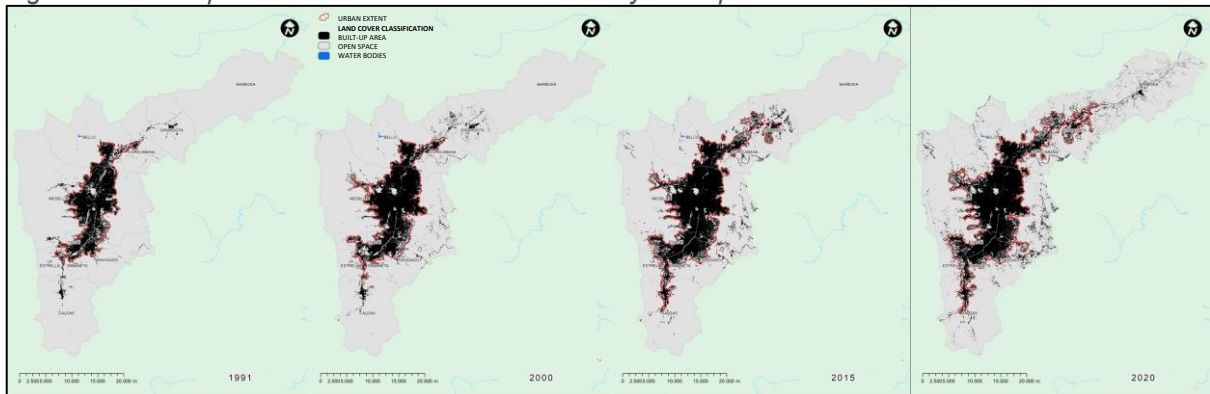
Source: (*Área Metropolitana del Valle de Aburrá, 2019*)

The first challenge that arises in terms of coordination is the coherence of the time frames. This to say that when the PEMOT was approved in 2019, 6 of the 10 individual municipal POT were being implemented. Only four were updated following the approval of the PEMOT: Girardota (2020), Itagüi (2023), La Estrella (2023) and Caldas (2025). In addition, the transparency and accountability of the implementation process of the PEMOT is not clear, in the 2021 AMVA Action Plan, there was a goal set to review all 17 strategic territorial projects related to the land-use model of the PEMOT. The performance report (2021-2023) indicates progressive completion: 64.95% progress in 2021, 90% in 2022, and 100% in 2023. However, there is no detail around what that revision entailed and more importantly the state of implementation of the actual project (*Área Metropolitana Del Valle de Aburra, n.d.*).

Moving to the effectiveness of local territorial planning policy—measured by the capacity to guide and manage urban growth—several empirical insights emerge from the Medellín Metropolitan Area. The satellite imagery available allows for a 30-year longitudinal observation (1991–2020) of urban transformation, offering a detailed view of how built-up areas have progressively taken shape across the ten municipalities that constitute the metropolitan area. As shown in the following figure, the expansion has been predominantly concentrated along the northeast and southern axes, indicating a corridor-based growth pattern that radiates outward from the urban core (Saavedra et al., 2022; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022). This evidence confirms that while initial densification was anchored in the central municipalities—particularly Medellín and Itagüi—the trajectory of development has increasingly involved peripheral jurisdictions. Over this three-decade period, approximately 13,000 hectares of new built-up pixels were added to the urban landscape, underscoring the magnitude of the transformation and the persistent pressure on metropolitan land resources. These spatial patterns reveal both the scale and direction of urban

expansion, setting the stage for a critical assessment of the coherence between observed growth dynamics and planned territorial development.

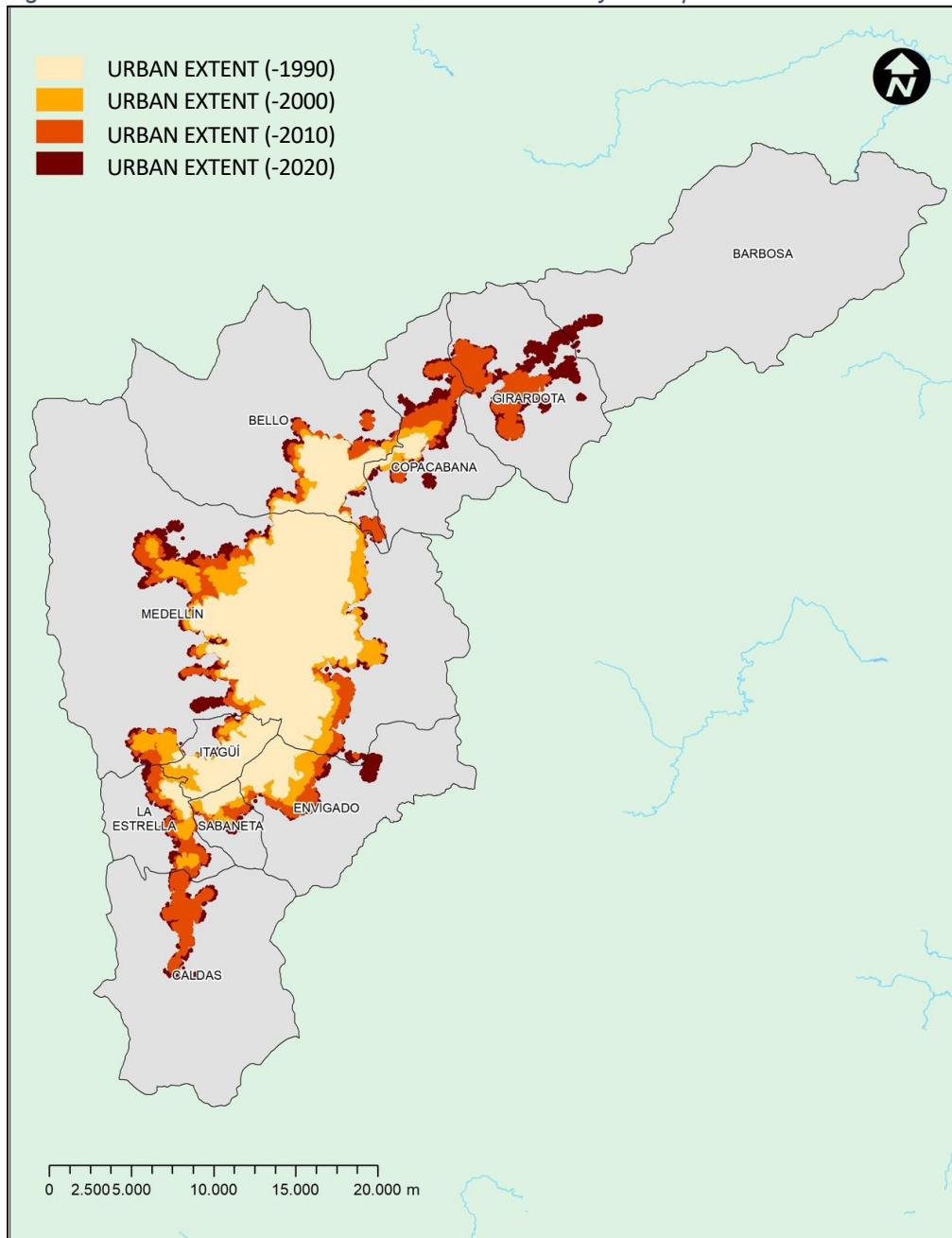
Figure 27. Built-up Area Evolution in the Aburra Valley Metropolitan Area



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 145)

The dynamics of built-up area expansion serve as a predecessor to understanding the evolution of the metropolitan urban extent. As detailed in Chapters 4 and 5, this type of analysis enables a spatially grounded assessment of continuous urbanization processes and their manifestation on the territory. While the expansion of built-up pixels reflects the physical transformation of land into a more intense use, the concept of urban extent—defined as the contiguous area of concentrated urban development—offers a more integrated view of functional urban growth. In the case of the Aburra Valley Metropolitan Area, the evolution of the urban extent generally mirrors the trajectory of built-up expansion. However, it tends to reach a slightly more limited spatial envelope. Notably, over the 30-year observation period, the urban extent of the metropolitan area doubled, increasing from 13,200 to 27,600 hectares. This represents an average annual growth rate of approximately 2.5%. The following figure illustrates the size and transformation of the urban extent at each analyzed time point. With this in mind, the pressing question reemerges: did this expansion occur in a sustainable and organized manner, as prescribed by the Territorial Organization Plans of each municipality?

Figure 28. Urban Extent Evolution of the Aburra Valley Metropolitan Area

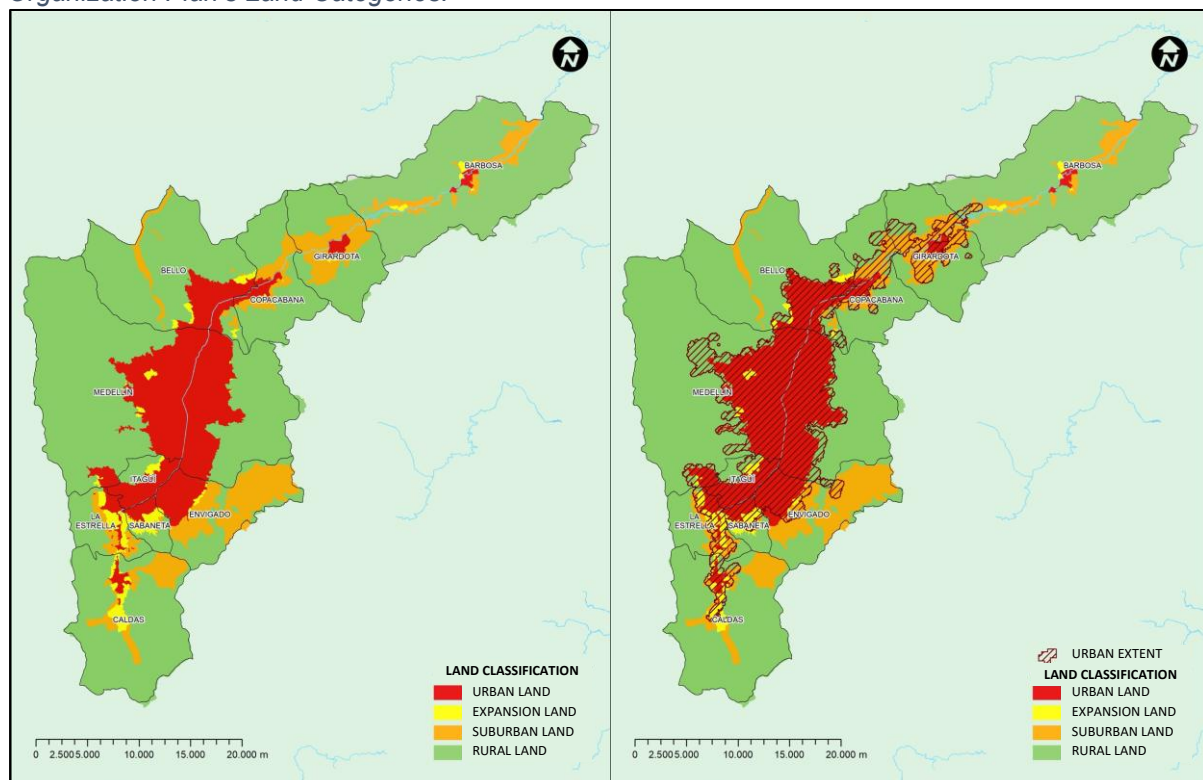


Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022)

To evaluate whether the growth observed between 1991 and 2020 unfolded by sustainable and organized planning, it is necessary to examine the guidance outlined in each municipality's Territorial Organization Plan (POT). These plans serve as the primary policy instruments for defining land use categories and identifying zones designated for future urban expansion. While the dates of adoption vary significantly, from early plans like Copacabana's in 2000 to more recent frameworks in Itagüí (2023), La Estrella (2023), and Caldas (2025), each POT outlines specific boundaries

for urban consolidation, urban expansion, and areas for mixed dynamic and rural activities. The figure below illustrates, on the left, the official land use categories established by each Participating Organization (POT). On the right, it overlays the most recent urban extent to assess spatial congruence. This visual comparison enables the determination of whether urban growth occurred within the zones legally designated for that purpose or whether it exceeded the boundaries of planned development. Such an assessment provides critical insights into the alignment—or lack thereof—between policy intentions and real territorial dynamics, which is central to evaluating planning effectiveness at the local scale.

Figure 29. Aburra Valley Metropolitan Area Urban Extent and its Interaction with the Territorial Organization Plan's Land Categories.



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022)

The analysis of land-use allocations across the ten municipalities of the Medellín Metropolitan Area reveals deep inconsistencies between the normative frameworks established in the Territorial Organization Plans (POTs) and the spatial reality of urban growth observed over the last three decades. This indicates that each local policy of territorial planning wasn't effective enough in managing urban growth. When aggregating data from the metropolitan level, only 37% of the total land area is

designated for urban use, with an additional 3% reserved for urban expansion. The remaining 60% is categorized as rural, a designation that includes both suburban transitional zones (10%) and land explicitly dedicated to conservation, agriculture, or forestry (50%). These percentages reflect a normative model of spatial development that aims to concentrate urban growth within delimited areas while safeguarding peripheral and ecologically sensitive zones. However, this distribution does not appear to reflect actual patterns of development. Notably, only two municipalities—La Estrella and Sabaneta—have designated more than 10% of their land for future expansion (19% and 34%, respectively). The remaining eight municipalities allocate between 1% and 8% for this purpose, suggesting either a limited foresight into long-term demographic and spatial trends or a deliberate policy orientation toward containment that is increasingly difficult to enforce.

Table 25. Percentage of Land Allocated to Land Type

Name	Type of Land			Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Rural	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Medellín	57,0%	0,6%	42,4%	57,0%	0,6%	3,1%	39,3%
Barbosa	1,1%	1,0%	97,9%	1,1%	1,0%	9,2%	88,6%
Bello	36,6%	2,1%	61,3%	36,6%	2,1%	4,4%	56,9%
Caldas	3,8%	6,1%	90,1%	3,8%	6,1%	13,2%	76,9%
Copacabana	17,9%	0,2%	81,8%	17,9%	0,2%	22,4%	59,4%
Envigado	42,4%	1,7%	55,9%	42,4%	1,7%	37,8%	18,2%
Girardota	5,6%	0,9%	93,6%	5,6%	0,9%	33,1%	60,5%
Itagui	74,4%	7,6%	18,0%	74,4%	7,6%	0,0%	18,0%
La Estrella	27,9%	19,0%	53,1%	27,9%	19,0%	19,2%	33,9%
Sabaneta	44,3%	33,7%	21,9%	44,3%	33,7%	2,4%	19,5%
Metropolitan Area	37,2%	2,8%	60,0%	37,2%	2,8%	10,2%	49,8%

Source: Own work based on each municipality POT

The mismatch becomes more pronounced when juxtaposing this normative framework with the actual spatial distribution of urban growth between 1991 and 2020. Across the entire metropolitan region, only 31% of the observed urban growth occurred within urban-designated land, while a modest 10% took place in zones designated for expansion. Alarming, the majority—59% of all new urban growth—occurred in areas designated as rural. This implies that more than half of the urban transformation over the past 30 years unfolded in areas not planned or equipped to accommodate urban functions. Disaggregating this 59% figure reveals further

analytical angles: 28 percentage points correspond to suburban zones, while the remaining 31% occurred in strictly rural areas. In practical terms, this means that nearly one out of every three hectares added to the urban extent was developed in zones explicitly meant to remain non-urban. Such expansion not only undermines the integrity of spatial planning instruments but also generates a cascade of negative externalities, including infrastructure inefficiencies, regulatory breaches, environmental degradation, and escalating governance costs for local administrations.

Table 26. Percentage of Growth in Each Land Type

Name	Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Medellín	40,2%	2,6%	11,1%	46,1%
Barbosa	0,0%	0,0%	45,2%	54,8%
Bello	47,2%	8,8%	2,2%	41,8%
Caldas	27,8%	36,6%	16,4%	19,2%
Copacabana	11,2%	0,4%	56,3%	32,0%
Envigado	48,5%	8,2%	43,3%	0,1%
Girardota	11,0%	2,2%	68,4%	18,4%
Itagui	41,6%	8,0%	0,0%	50,4%
La Estrella	23,8%	38,7%	37,0%	0,5%
Sabaneta	20,2%	73,8%	3,9%	2,1%
Metropolitan Area	30,9%	10,5%	27,7%	30,9%

Source: Own work

Municipal-level analysis highlights important patterns and outliers. Peripheral municipalities, such as Caldas, Envigado, Girardota, La Estrella, and Sabaneta, experienced growth in rural areas (where each was restricted) but remained below the metropolitan average of 31%. These jurisdictions—located in the metro periphery—appear to have absorbed growth pressures more gradually or perhaps benefited from more enforceable spatial zoning. Barbosa, however, presents a unique case. Its observed growth, concentrated along the northeast axis, reflects spillover from Copacabana and other municipalities further south. This growth occurred on land without a proper designation for urbanization, illustrating how regional dynamics can override local planning controls. Yet, it is also true that Barbosa hosts its main urban nucleus further northeast, where growth appears to be occurring more in line with designated land uses. In this sense, Barbosa’s planning failure is less about internal mismanagement and more about being structurally vulnerable to external pressures

from the broader metropolitan system. By contrast, Medellín, Bello, Copacabana, and Itagüí stand out as the most critical cases under both analytical lenses. When the rural land type is disaggregated to isolate suburban category, these municipalities still show high proportions of growth occurring in areas not designated for urban development. And if suburban and rural zones are considered as one broader non-urban category, all ten municipalities—without exception—register significant levels of prohibited growth. This evidence reinforces the broader argument that institutional design and planning enforcement have not kept pace with the pressures and complexities of metropolitan growth, raising fundamental concerns about the efficacy and credibility of territorial planning as a tool for sustainable urban governance.

7.3.2 Institutional Drivers of Implementation Gaps in Aburra Valley Metro Area: The limits of coordination under dual agency

The case the Área Metropolitana del Valle de Aburrá (AMVA) presents a compelling paradox. On the surface, it shows a highly coordinated metropolitan structure with a supramunicipal authority capable of executing long-term urban and environmental projects. That is even a regional reference for other metropolitan areas that are at earlier stages. However, despite this institutional strength, substantial mismatches persist between the objectives outlined in formal territorial planning instruments, such as the PEMOT and POTs, and the actual patterns of urban expansion, particularly in relation to social housing provision.

According to Savedra et al., the AMVA exhibits a high degree of institutional articulation, which has enabled the materialization of emblematic projects like integrated mobility systems and ecological corridors. Yet, the implementation of land-use policy has failed to adequately address the chronic shortage of well-located affordable housing. While the PEMOT includes a PIEM for land management for social housing, the plan's operationalization remains weak, in part due to the absence of up-to-date municipal POTs and asymmetric commitment from municipalities (Saavedra et al., 2022, p.262).

These findings when analysed through the dual agency lens makes evident that the AMVA Authority is both a policy agent of national urban and housing objectives

(responding to mandates from MinVivienda and DNP) and a coordinator of local interests. It must navigate competing expectations and strategic visioning from above and political feasibility from below, often without binding authority to enforce alignment. Mainly because each municipality retains autonomy over land-use decisions and competences for housing and urban development. In parallel, these municipalities must simultaneously respond to local electoral mandates, pursue their own urban agendas, and comply with supramunicipal goals. While considering fiscal and technical restrictions.

These overlapping and sometimes contradictory mandates illustrate the dual agency dilemma: both the AMVA and its member municipalities operate as agents to multiple principals with misaligned goals and timelines. For instance, while the national government may prioritize mass production of affordable housing²³, local governments may resist densification in high-opportunity areas due to political opposition or financial constraints. Moreover, coordination instruments like the PIEM (in the PEMOT) require implementation through the POTs, but divergent update cycles and autonomy in land classification weaken policy coherence.

Thus, the mismatch between planned and observed growth in AMVA is not merely a technical failure but reflects structural governance tensions embedded in Colombia's decentralized framework. These tensions are manifested in uncoordinated planning cycles between national, supramunicipal, and local instruments. Also, with legal autonomy without binding coordination and a clear political misalignment between strategic goals and local electoral incentives.

7.4 Barranquilla Metropolitan Area

7.4.1 Territorial Planning Policy at the Metro and Local Level

The Barranquilla Metropolitan Area (AMBq) was established in December 1981 through Departmental Ordinance No. 028, in compliance with the national legal framework for metropolitan regions (Área Metropolitana de Barranquilla, n.d.). As a formal administrative entity under Law 1625 of 2013, the AMBq holds legal personality,

²³ In Colombia this type of housing is known as Vivienda de Interés Social (VIS) and Vivienda de Interés Prioritario (VIP).

financial autonomy, and a governance structure led by a Metropolitan Board headed by the Mayor of Barranquilla. It comprises five municipalities, Barranquilla, Soledad, Malambo, Galapa, and Puerto Colombia and it is the third-largest formal metropolitan area in Colombia, with more than 2 million inhabitants. The AMBq's principal functions include planning and coordinating balanced territorial development, rationalizing public service delivery across municipalities, and executing metropolitan-scale infrastructure projects ranging from regional public transport systems, such as Transmetro, to sanitation and road networks (Área Metropolitana de Barranquilla, n.d.).

Figure 30. Barranquilla Metropolitan Area



Source: Own work and (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 150)

Although the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area (AMBq) does not yet have a formally adopted *Plan Estratégico Metropolitano de Ordenamiento Territorial* (PEMOT), the region has laid important normative foundations for coordinated land management and regulated urban expansion through instruments such as *Acuerdo*

Metropolitano 002 de 2013 and *Resolución 007 de 2021*. The Metropolitan Agreement promotes the principle of territorial integration and co-responsibility, recognizing that land-use decisions, especially those involving expansion areas, housing, and environmental systems, must be addressed collectively by the five member municipalities. It identifies urban expansion and infrastructure systems, as phenomena that transcend municipal boundaries and require harmonized planning responses. It also calls for the alignment of local POTs with the departmental *Plan de Ordenamiento Departamental* (POD) and with the strategic guidelines of the PEMOT once adopted. However, the absence of a fully formalized and adopted PEMOT has significant implications, particularly considering that all five municipalities currently operate under POTs that are relatively outdated. Barranquilla's plan dates back to 2014, Soledad's to 2002, Malambo's to 2011, Puerto Colombia's to 2008, and only Galapa has a relatively recent plan from 2016.

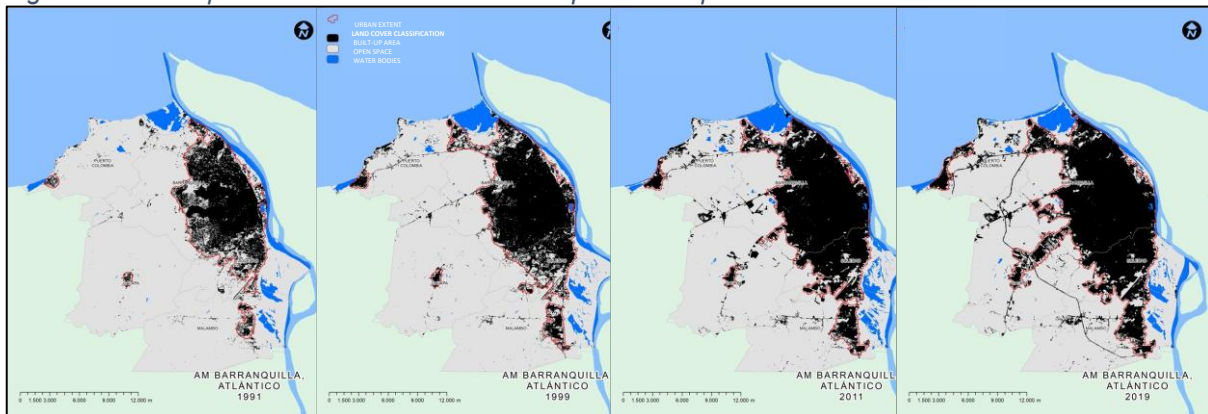
This lag in policy renewal undermines the potential for integrated spatial governance and leaves the metropolitan region with a fragmented and temporally inconsistent planning architecture. The situation is especially problematic given the rapid growth and suburbanization pressures faced by the AMBq, as decisions about where and how to expand urban land are being made within the constraints of aging and potentially obsolete planning frameworks. The *Resolución 007 de 2021* attempts to address some of these gaps by defining metropolitan priorities and sustainability criteria for urban expansion—such as infrastructure readiness, environmental sensitivity, and accessibility—but these remain limited in scope without full integration into updated local and metropolitan land-use instruments. As such, the AMBq presents a clear case in which the absence of an updated and binding metropolitan planning instrument, combined with the inertia of outdated POTs, creates both governance challenges and spatial vulnerabilities.

The spatial patterns of built-up area expansion in the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area between 1991 and 2020 reveal a clear process of impermeabilization and densification centered on the core municipalities of Barranquilla, Soledad, and Malambo. As illustrated in the figure below, these three municipalities form the primary urban nucleus of the metropolitan region, where most of the construction activity and population concentration has occurred. Additionally, the built-up area expands in a

consolidated manner along key road corridors, particularly toward Galapa in the west and Puerto Colombia in the north, reflecting growth facilitated by infrastructure connectivity. The predominant direction of expansion over the three decades has been toward the south and southwest, yet the northwest quadrant, especially in the corridor between Barranquilla and Puerto Colombia, has also emerged as a significant pole of urban development.

These expansion dynamics suggest the formation of two distinct urban cores: the traditional central cluster composed of Barranquilla–Soledad–Malambo, and a secondary corridor-based nucleus toward Puerto Colombia. This dual-core structure will become more evident when analyzing the evolution of the urban extent, which provides a clearer picture of functional urban continuity across municipal boundaries.

Figure 31. Built-up Area Evolution in the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area



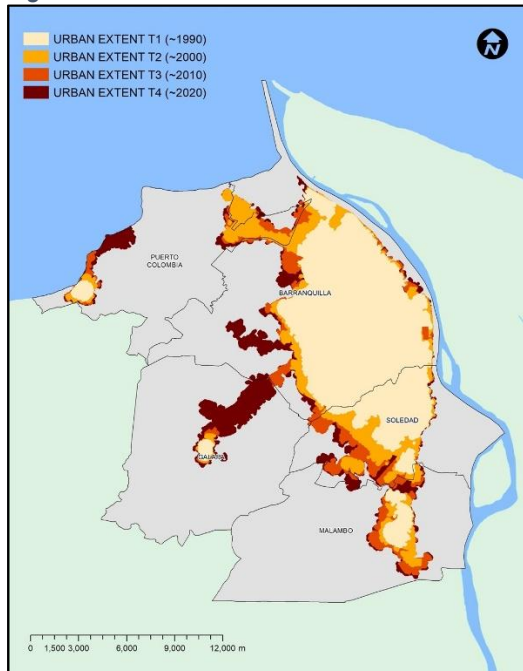
Source: Own work and (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 150)

The analysis of urban extent in the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area confirms what was evident in the built-up dynamic analysis: there is a dual structure in terms of urban continuity. On the one hand, there is a dominant urban footprint that encompasses Barranquilla and extends into parts of Galapa, Soledad, Malambo, and the rural area of Puerto Colombia. This constitutes the main metropolitan conurbation. On the other hand, a second, smaller, and more isolated urban footprint is identifiable around the historic center of Puerto Colombia. Although this secondary nucleus falls within the metropolitan boundary, its distance and lack of direct spatial continuity with the main conurbation justify its classification as a separate urban extent. Over the past three decades, the primary urban extent has grown from approximately 9,200 hectares in 1990 to around 16,400 hectares by 2020, reflecting an average annual growth rate

of 2.06%. This steady expansion reinforces the previously observed pattern of spatial consolidation around the Barranquilla–Soledad–Malambo corridor.

In contrast, the urban extent of Puerto Colombia has grown more rapidly but remains functionally and spatially disconnected from the core agglomeration. Its urban area expanded from 135 to 575 hectares over the same period, marking a higher annual growth rate of 5.2%. The difference in growth intensity and spatial configuration highlights the emerging complexity of urban dynamics within the metropolitan area, where integrated planning becomes increasingly necessary to manage distinct and evolving urban footprints.

Figure 32. Urban Extent Evolution of the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area

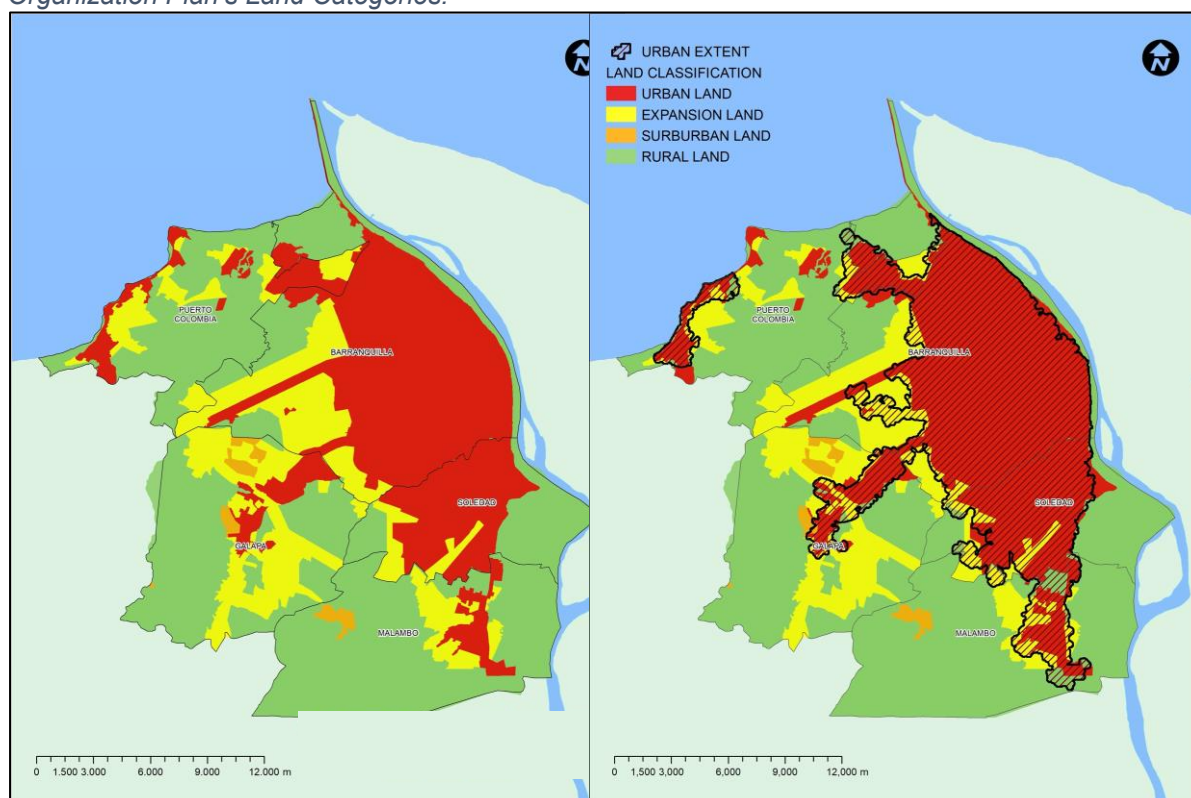


Source: Own work and (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 151)

The comparison between observed urban growth and land-use designations across the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area provides an encouraging example of relatively effective growth management. As illustrated in the following figure, the left panel shows the land classification across the five municipalities based on their existing *Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial* (POTs), distinguishing urban land, expansion areas, suburban land, and rural areas. The right panel overlays the most recent urban extent on top of these classifications, allowing for spatial assessment of where urban growth has occurred and whether it aligns with the designated categories. This visual representation reveals a high proportion of land formally assigned to urban

functions: approximately 60% of the metropolitan territory was designated for urban use, with an additional 12% reserved for future expansion. Only 28% remain classified as rural or suburban, a relatively low share compared to other Colombian metropolitan regions, such as the Valle de Aburrá

Figure 33. Barranquilla Metropolitan Area Urban Extent and its Interaction with the Territorial Organization Plan's Land Categories.



Source: Own work and (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 153)

This spatial distribution reflects a differentiated approach between core and peripheral municipalities. As seen in the following table, Barranquilla and Soledad, the historical and demographic cores of the conurbation, have allocated 84% and 76% of their total land, respectively, to urban uses, clearly acknowledging their urban character and metropolitan centrality. In contrast, Galapa, Malambo, and Puerto Colombia—despite being integral to the metropolitan dynamic—allocate less than 30% of their land to urban use. However, these municipalities balance this by assigning **significantly higher proportions to expansion areas**, often over three times more than Barranquilla and Soledad, which each designate less than 8% of their territory for such future growth.

Table 27. Percentage of Land Allocated To Land Type

Name	Type of Land			Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Rural	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Barranquilla	84,0%	7,9%	8,1%	84,0%	7,9%	0,0%	8,1%
Galapa	12,7%	30,8%	56,6%	12,7%	30,8%	3,5%	53,1%
Malambo	18,8%	12,1%	69,1%	18,8%	12,1%	1,4%	67,7%
Puerto Colombia	28,9%	18,3%	52,8%	28,9%	18,3%	0,0%	52,8%
Soledad	76,5%	7,4%	16,1%	76,5%	7,4%	0,0%	16,1%

Metropolitan Area	59,5%	12,1%	28,4%	59,5%	12,1%	0,6%	27,8%
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Source: Own work based on each municipality POT

Turning to growth outcomes, table presents a breakdown of how the observed urban growth between 1990 and 2020 has interacted with these land classifications. Overall, almost 90% of new urban development took place in areas that were designated for urbanization: 63% occurred on land classified as urban and 27% in expansion zones. Only 10% of growth extended into rural or suburban land, suggesting a relatively contained and policy-aligned pattern of urban expansion. Among the municipalities, Barranquilla emerges as the most effective case, with 96% of its urban growth occurring in designated zones. Puerto Colombia and Galapa also display high levels of alignment, with over 90% of growth following the planned land-use structure.

Table 28. Percentage of Growth in Each Land Type

Name	Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Barranquilla	68,3%	28,1%	0,0%	3,6%
Galapa	65,2%	25,1%	1,0%	8,7%
Malambo	32,6%	35,7%	0,0%	31,7%
Puerto Colombia	60,8%	25,5%	0,0%	13,7%
Soledad	72,5%	22,1%	0,0%	5,4%

Metropolitan Area	62,5%	27,0%	0,1%	10,3%
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Source: Own work

Nevertheless, some municipalities illustrate the challenges of spatial governance. Soledad, while maintaining a strong concentration of growth in expansion zones (26%), also shows a 14% encroachment into rural or suburban land, highlighting potential pressure points in enforcement or infrastructure readiness. Malambo, meanwhile, reflects the most fragmented pattern, with its growth evenly distributed

across urban (33%), expansion (33%), and rural (34%) areas. This highly dispersed outcome raises concerns about institutional capacity and the temporal obsolescence of its POT (last updated in 2011), which may no longer reflect the realities of territorial demand. Despite these exceptions, the overall performance of the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area in managing urban expansion stands out compare to the other case studies. The high proportion of growth within permitted land categories suggests that coordinated frameworks and clear land allocation rules can still enable effective growth governance under conditions of institutional asymmetry.

7.4.2 Territorial Planning effectiveness in the lens of dual agency

The Área Metropolitana de Barranquilla (AMBq) is often seen as a relatively successful case of compact urban growth. As already mention, nearly 90% of the urban expansion from 2000 to 2020 occurred in areas designated as urban or for expansion, a performance significantly higher than in other metropolitan regions of Colombia (Saavedra et al., 2022; Salazar Tamayo & Julio Estrada, 2022). This trend has been especially strong in the Barranquilla–Soledad–Malambo corridor, where spatial contiguity and urban density have advanced in line with planning aspirations. Yet, despite this alignment in outcomes, the area lacks a fully formalized PEMOT, and municipal POTs remain outdated and uncoordinated. For instance, Soledad still operates under a POT from 2002, Malambo from 2011, and Puerto Colombia from 2008. Only Galapa updated its POT in 2021. This disjuncture reveals a central paradox: planned growth appears successful in aggregate, but not because of strong institutional coherence—rather, growth has occurred amid normative lag, weak inter-jurisdictional coordination, and a reliance on informal alignments rather than binding instruments.

The AMBq as an entity has played a role in promoting regional integration through strategic documents like the *Acuerdo Metropolitano 002 de 2013* and the *Resolución 007 de 2021*, yet these instruments do not carry legal weight equivalent to a PEMOT, nor are they strictly enforceable across all municipalities. As a result, the articulation between metropolitan goals and municipal decision-making remains contingent on political will, administrative capacity, and electoral incentives. The dual agency dilemma is clearly at play here, though in a distinct modality. Unlike

Bucaramanga or Pereira, Barranquilla's dual agency tension is not expressed through institutional voids, but through the absence of binding authority. Each municipality retains full autonomy over land-use decisions, while the AMBq must navigate a contradictory mandate: it is expected to coordinate territorial development without having the power to enforce alignment across local governments, nor a document that actually provides the guidelines.

This is evident in cases like Malambo and Puerto Colombia, where significant urban growth occurred in rural areas—31.7% and 13.7%, respectively—despite the general trend toward compact growth (Saavedra et al., 2022). These deviations signal the limits of coordination by consensus: while the core municipalities may align *de facto*, peripheral jurisdictions often prioritize land development or housing production over sustainability or coherence, especially in the absence of enforceable regional policy.

The dual agency lens helps to reveal that even under conditions of apparent coherence, the underlying institutional architecture may remain fragmented, non-binding, and ultimately inconsistent with the scale and logic of metropolitan development.

7.5 Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area

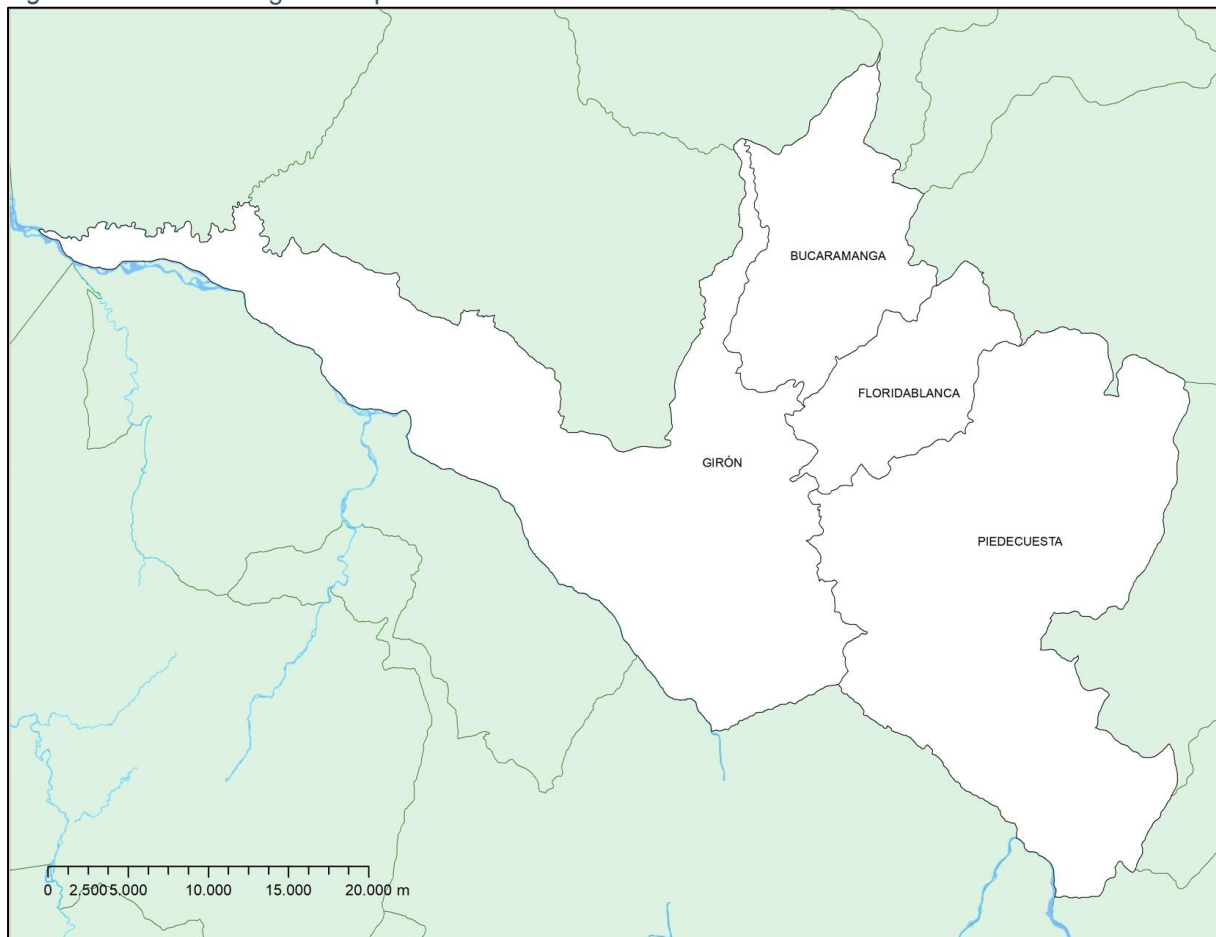
7.5.1 Territorial Planning Policy at the Metro and Local Level

The Bucaramanga Metropolitan area was formally established on December 15, 1981, through Departmental Ordinance No. 20, under the legal framework of Decree-Law 3104 of 1979 (Precedent the 1625 law). Located in the department of Santander in northeastern Colombia, the AMB comprises four municipalities: Bucaramanga, Floridablanca, Girón, and Piedecuesta. Bucaramanga functions as the core municipality, both demographically and administratively. The ordinance that created the AMB responded to the increasing spatial, social, and economic interdependence among these municipalities, driven by rapid and uncoordinated urban expansion from Bucaramanga into the surrounding area, particularly Floridablanca and Girón. At the time, this growth was chaotic, residentially concentrated, and poorly equipped in terms of public service delivery. The AMB was

created to manage this conurbation in an integrated manner, ensuring the rational use of natural, economic, and administrative resources and improving service provision across the territory.

The metropolitan authority replaced the earlier Association of Municipalities of the Bucaramanga Area (AMAB) and assumed planning and coordination responsibilities through a Metropolitan Board led by the mayor of Bucaramanga and representatives from the other member municipalities. Today, the AMB continues to serve as a key institutional mechanism for territorial coordination, environmental management, and infrastructure planning in the region.

Figure 34. Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 171)

The Strategic Metropolitan Organization Plan (PEMOT) of the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area was officially adopted through Metropolitan Agreement No. 011 on December 27, 2019. This administrative act, approved by the Metropolitan Board, formalized the PEMOT as the guiding instrument for territorial planning and

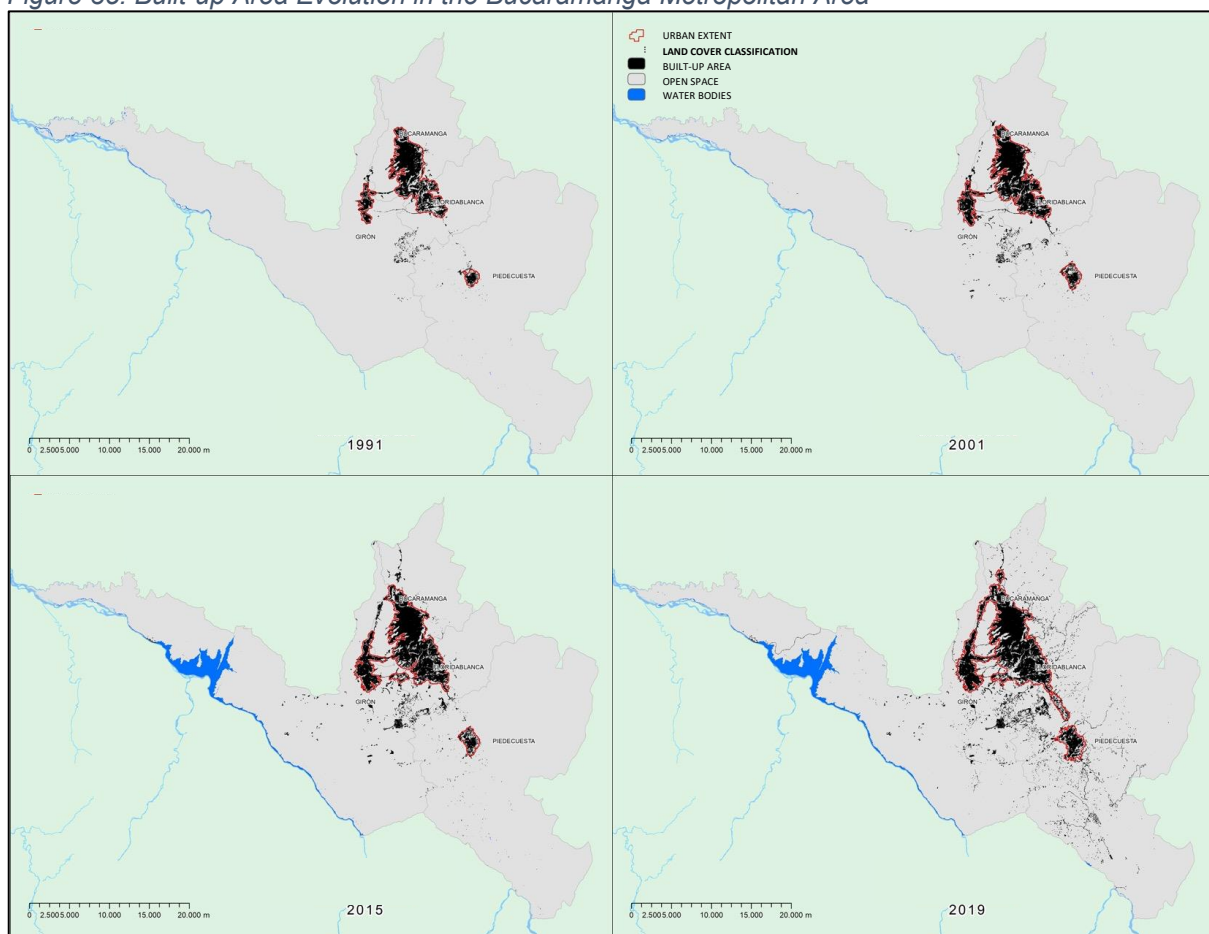
coordination across the four member municipalities of the metropolitan region. Rooted in the principles of spatial integration, territorial equity, and environmental sustainability, the PEMOT aims to harmonize the local planning instruments (POTs) of each municipality and ensure coherent metropolitan-scale land management. Among its key objectives are the promotion of polycentric urban development, the containment of disorderly expansion, and the optimization of existing infrastructure and service networks. The plan is structured around six thematic lines of action: (1) control and guidance of metropolitan growth; (2) environmental sustainability and risk management; (3) integrated mobility and accessibility; (4) economic competitiveness and land use efficiency; (5) governance and institutional coordination; and (6) strengthening of urban-rural linkages.

While the adoption of the PEMOT in December 2019 represented a major step forward in establishing a unified planning vision for the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area, its effective implementation has faced institutional and temporal challenges. One of the main obstacles lies in the lack of alignment between the PEMOT and all the individual POT, which were formulated at different times and under varying policy frameworks. As of today, Bucaramanga operates under a POT from 2014, while Floridablanca operates under a newly adopted 2023 plan. Girón and Piedecuesta, in contrast, rely on significantly outdated instruments—dating back to 2010 and 2003, respectively. This temporal misalignment complicates the harmonization process, as the PEMOT's strategic guidelines should be integrated into local plans that lack the flexibility to respond to metropolitan priorities. The coordination challenge is particularly acute in areas such as urban expansion, environmental protection, and infrastructure planning, where supramunicipal coherence is essential. Although the PEMOT proposes a compact and efficient occupation model and defines strategic territorial actions, its effectiveness depends mainly on the capacity and willingness of municipal governments to revise, update, and align their POTs accordingly.

The spatial evolution of built-up areas in the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area over the past three decades is shown in the sequence of images below. From these, it is accurate to state that building and land transformation have expanded significantly across all four municipalities: Bucaramanga, Floridablanca, Girón, and Piedecuesta. The dominant growth axis has extended in a southeast and southwest direction,

radiating outward from Bucaramanga toward its neighboring municipalities. This indicates a strong centrifugal pattern of urban expansion, reflecting the structural interdependence between the core city and its periphery. Over the observation period, approximately **5,200 new built-up pixels** were added to the landscape, demonstrating a growing pressure on the territory. The intensity and direction of this growth confirm the presence of a polycentric and supramunicipal urban system, where development dynamics are no longer contained within administrative boundaries. In this context, achieving sustainable development requires more than individual municipal efforts—it demands a coherent, metropolitan-scale response.

Figure 35. Built-up Area Evolution in the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area

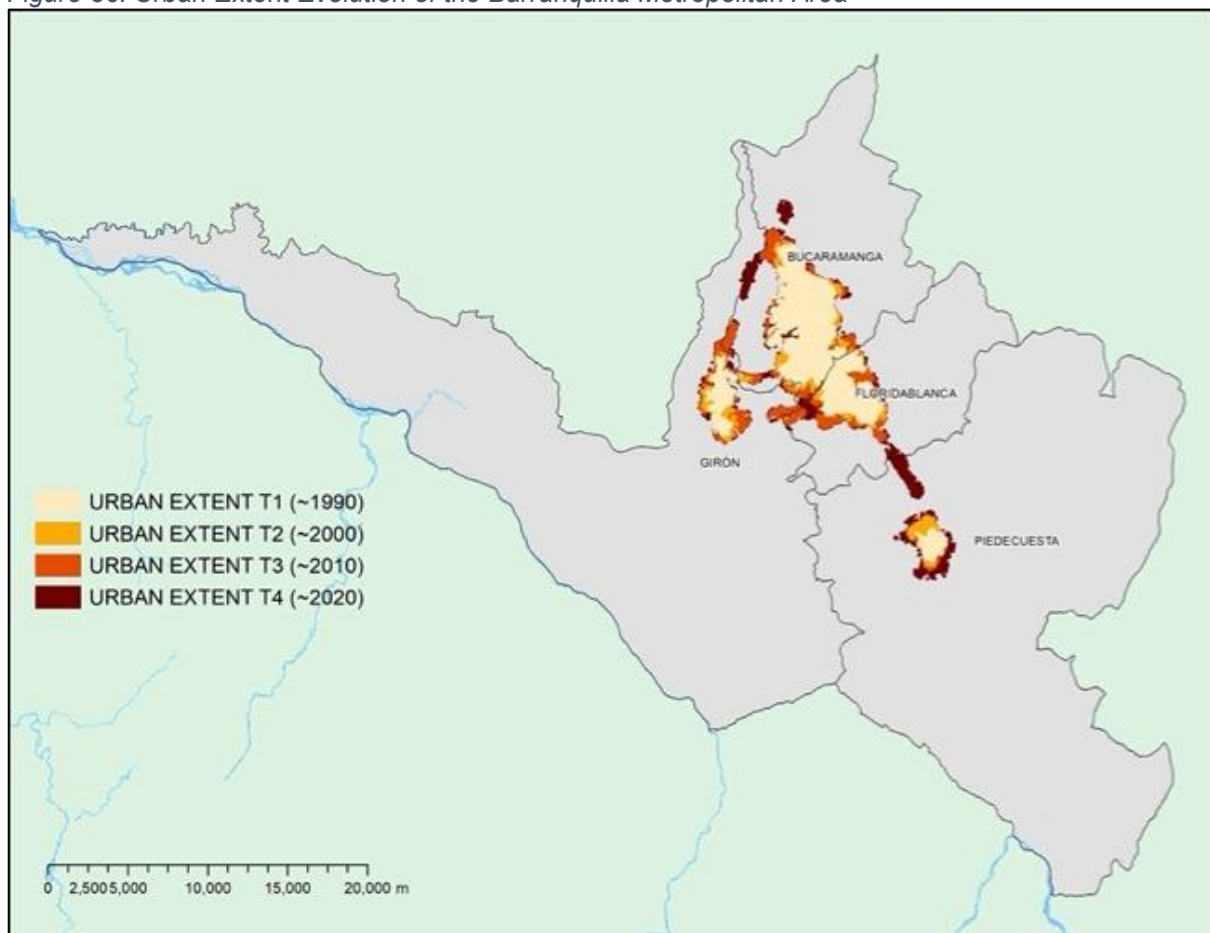


Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 171)

The urban extent dynamics of the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area exhibit a clear spatial structure, composed of two distinct yet increasingly connected footprints. The first encompasses Bucaramanga, Floridablanca, and Girón, forming a continuous and consolidated urban corridor. The second, centered in Piedecuesta, remains spatially detached but shows a pattern of outward expansion along the corridor that

links it to the rest of the metropolitan system. As shown in the figure, the progression of urban extent over time highlights a clear trajectory toward physical integration between these two zones. The main urban footprint—Bucaramanga–Floridablanca–Girón—expanded from approximately 2,400 hectares in 1990 to 5,300 hectares in 2020, representing an average annual growth of 2.77%. Piedecuesta’s urban extent, although smaller in absolute terms, more than tripled during the same period, growing from 150 to 560 hectares at a rate of 4.45% per year. This uneven but complementary expansion reinforces the emergence of a polycentric configuration, where formerly peripheral municipalities are assuming a more central role in the metropolitan structure.

Figure 36. Urban Extent Evolution of the Barranquilla Metropolitan Area

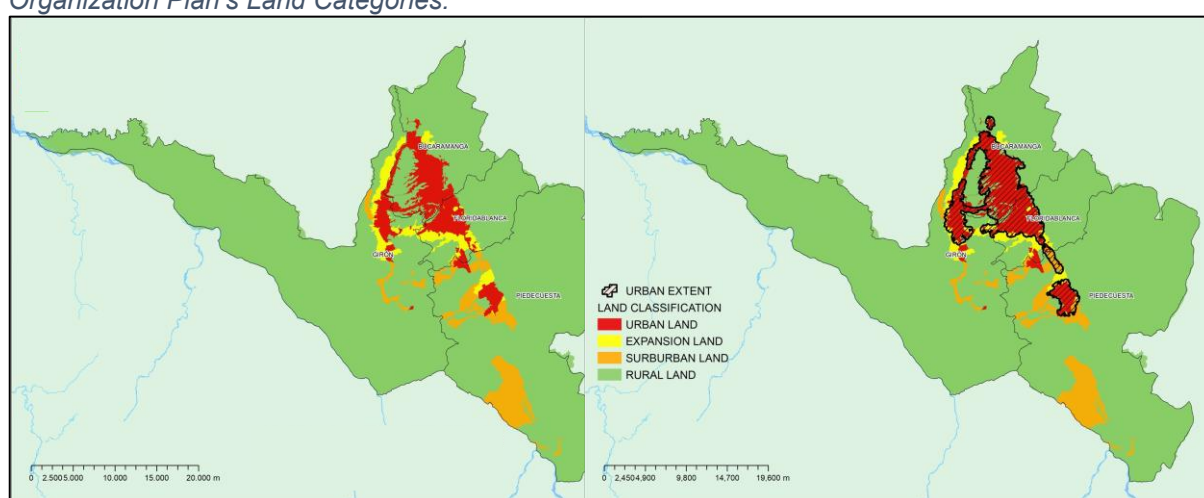


Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 172)

The spatial comparison between the most recent urban extent and the land-use classifications defined in the municipal POTs reveals substantial mismatches in the Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area. As shown in the figure below (left: land classification; right: overlay with urban extent), a significant portion of new urban development has

occurred in areas that were not designated for urban or expansion uses. According to the tabulated results, only 47% of the observed urban growth took place in land officially classified as urban, and 21% occurred within designated expansion areas. The remaining 32% of growth was registered in suburban and rural zones, which—under existing policy frameworks—should have remained unbuilt or reserved for non-urban activities. These patterns demonstrate a clear breakdown in the ability of local land-use plans to guide and contain urban development, raising concerns about the functionality and enforcement of municipal planning instruments.

Figure 37. Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area Urban Extent and its Interaction with the Territorial Organization Plan's Land Categories.



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 173)

At the municipal level, the data further illustrate uneven performances in growth management. Bucaramanga, despite being the core municipality and operating under its POT (2014), still registers growth outside designated zones. Floridablanca, shows improved spatial alignment, but Girón and Piedecuesta—whose plans date back to 2010 and 2003, respectively—show higher levels of expansion into prohibited areas. The inability of local governments to accommodate current growth pressures, either due to outdated land classification or weak regulatory capacity, directly impacts their territorial planning effectiveness. Each hectare of urbanization that occurs in rural or suburban land represents a deviation from the planned model and contributes to the degradation of institutional credibility. These findings, detailed in the tables below, point to a persistent gap between formal planning policies and real-world development pressures, and confirm that without alignment and enforcement, the policy capacity to steer sustainable urban growth remains severely limited.

Table 29. Percentage of Land Allocated to Land Type

Name	Type of Land			Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Rural	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Bucaramanga	45,1%	0,8%	54,1%	45%	1%	0%	54%
Floridablanca	38,0%	9,0%	53,0%	38%	9%	0%	53%
Giron	6,1%	3,8%	90,2%	6%	4%	1%	89%
Piedecuesta	4,0%	0,7%	95,3%	4%	1%	10%	86%
Area Metropolitana	15,1%	2,7%	82,2%	15%	3%	4%	78%

Source: Own work based on each municipality POT

Table 30. Percentage of Growth in Each Land Type

Name	Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Bucaramanga	62,6%	0,4%	0,0%	37,0%
Floridablanca	57,3%	29,0%	0,0%	13,7%
Giron	39,9%	39,7%	0,8%	19,5%
Piedecuesta	38,9%	12,8%	33,7%	14,6%
Area Metropolitana	51,4%	18,0%	7,3%	23,3%

Source: Own work

7.5.2 Planning vs Reality Through the Dual Agency Lenses

The Área Metropolitana de Bucaramanga (AMB) presents a case where formal coordination frameworks exist, but the observed urban expansion significantly diverges from the goals and instruments of territorial planning. Despite having an adopted PEMOT (Acuerdo Metropolitano 011 de 2019), and formal recognition as a metropolitan area, the urban growth dynamics across the four municipalities (Bucaramanga, Floridablanca, Girón, and Piedecuesta) reveal limited alignment with planning objectives. Between 2000 and 2020, only 47% of expansion occurred in designated urban areas, while 32% took place in rural or non-planned zones, especially in Girón (40.6%) and Piedecuesta (22.6%). This pattern diverges from the region's planning goals of compact and controlled development

The primary institutional explanation for this mismatch lies in the lack of harmonization between the PEMOT and the municipal POTs. Each municipality operates under a different planning timeline. While Floridablanca updated its POT in 2023, Girón (2010) and Piedecuesta (2003) continue to use outdated plans. Bucaramanga is less outdated compare to the latest two, it was approved in 2014. The

result is a temporal and normative disarticulation, where the PEMOT's guidelines cannot be fully operationalized due to incompatible or obsolete municipal instruments.

Here, the dual agency problem is structural: municipalities are both members of a metropolitan coordination framework and autonomous actors accountable to local interests. The AMB lacks binding authority to enforce its metropolitan vision, and municipalities face conflicting mandates. They have to balance local growth agendas with broader territorial sustainability goals. This generates horizontal tensions (between municipalities) and vertical ones (between local, regional, and national planning layers).

The role of housing development further exacerbates these dynamics. As detailed in the latter subsection (7.5.1), the expansion of the urban extent in Bucaramanga has been largely driven by residential development projects, many of which happened in unprepared areas. This growth has been driven by pressure to meet housing demand and incentivized by private interests. In this context, municipalities act as agents to multiple principals—the national government, the metropolitan entity, and local constituencies—without a clear hierarchy of mandates. The result is a fragmented urban expansion that reveals the institutional limits of Colombia's decentralized but weakly integrated planning model.

7.6 Cucuta Metropolitan Area

7.6.1 Territorial Planning Policy at the Metro and Local Level

The Cúcuta Metropolitan Area (Área Metropolitana de Cúcuta, AMC) was officially established in 1981 and is composed of six municipalities: Cúcuta, Los Patios, Villa del Rosario, El Zulia, San Cayetano, and Puerto Santander. Located in the department of Norte de Santander, this metropolitan region is governed under the legal framework provided by Colombian national legislation for metropolitan governance and territorial coordination. According to the AMC's official planning documents, its primary objectives include organizing urban growth, improving service delivery, and fostering economic integration among its member municipalities. As with other Colombian metro areas, the AMC is led by a Metropolitan Board chaired by the mayor of Cúcuta and supported by the mayors of the other five municipalities.

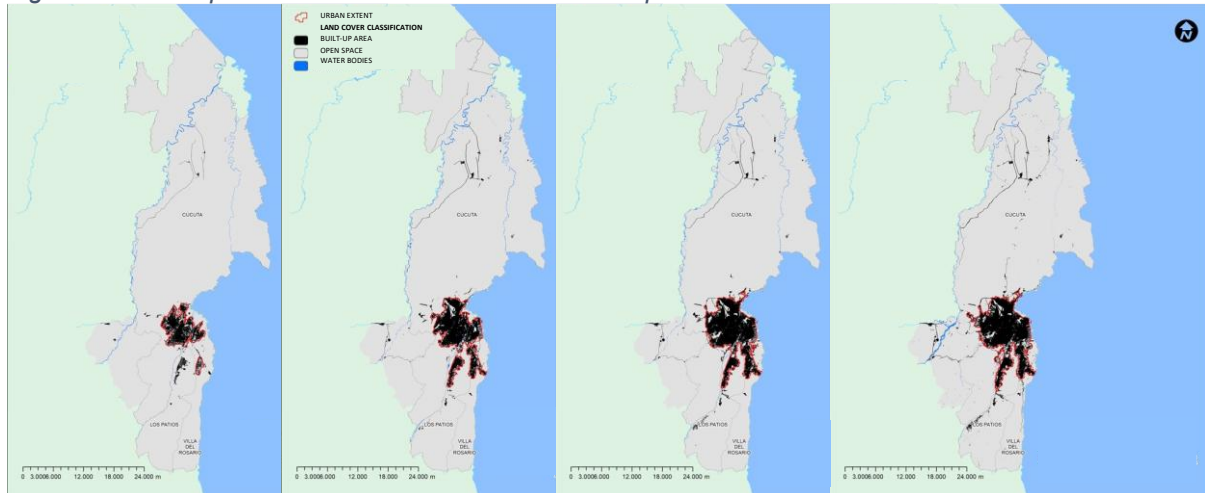
Figure 38. Cúcuta Metropolitan Area



Source: Own work

The spatial evolution of built-up land in the Cúcuta Metropolitan Area reveals a pattern of rapid and centralized expansion, mainly concentrated in the southern and southeastern sectors of the region. As illustrated in the figure showing the satellite-derived growth patterns, the expansion has primarily emerged from the city of Cúcuta and extended into the neighboring municipalities of Los Patios and Villa del Rosario. These three municipalities form the only continuous built-up footprint in the metropolitan area, while the other three—El Zulia, San Cayetano, and Puerto Santander—remain spatially disconnected in terms of urban extent. This configuration differs from other cases such as Barranquilla or Bucaramanga, where two urban extents interact and evolve toward consolidation. In the case of Cúcuta, the urban growth is clearly monocentric and radiates from a single consolidated node.

Figure 39. Built-up Area Evolution in the Cucuta Metropolitan Area

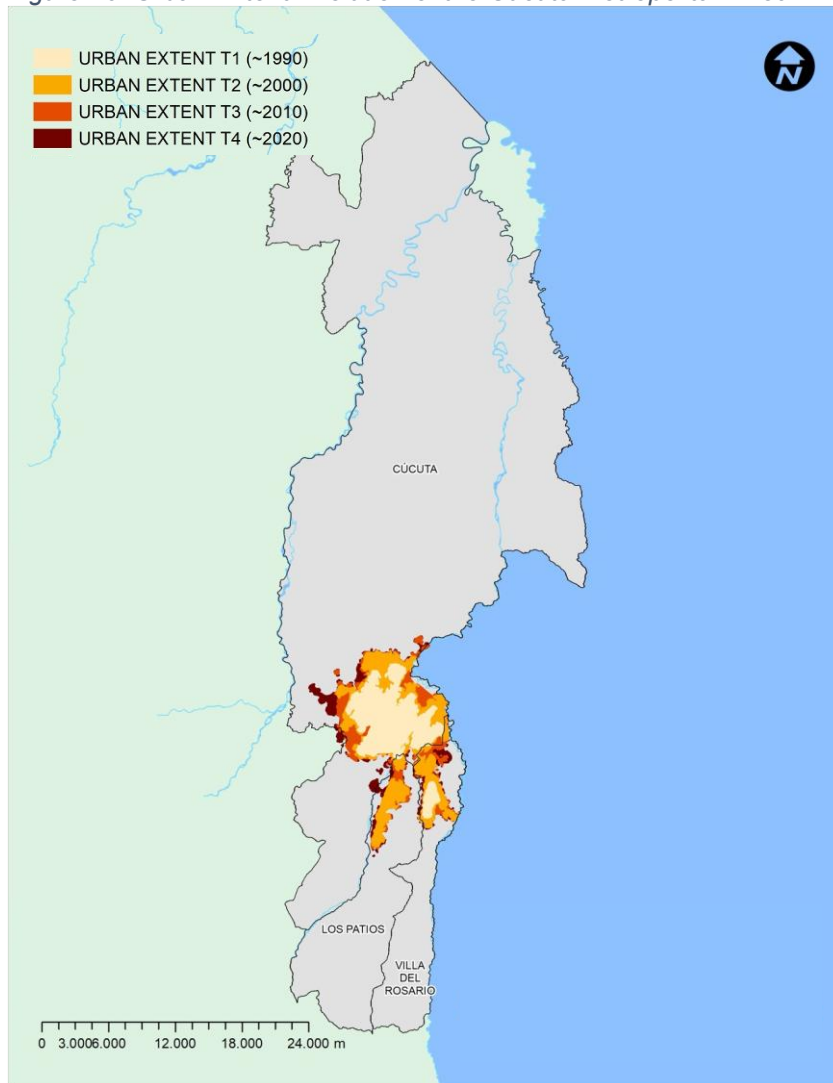


Source: Own work

Over the last 30 years, the urban extent shared by Cúcuta, Los Patios, and Villa del Rosario has expanded significantly. It went from approximately **2,800 hectares in 1990 to over 8,600 hectares by 2020**, nearly tripling in size at an average annual growth rate of **4%**. This intense and directional growth emphasizes the need for coordinated planning policies, as the expansion has occurred within a region that is socially and economically integrated but administratively fragmented.

As shown in the sequence of urban extent maps, the expansion of the metropolitan core has remained mostly concentrated within the triad of Cúcuta, Los Patios, and Villa del Rosario. The rapid rate of expansion is pushing development toward environmentally sensitive and infrastructure-poor zones at the periphery. The current trajectory of growth reinforces the urgency of integrating municipal plans and aligning them with a shared vision of spatial organization and sustainable land management. In particular, the continued disconnection of the other three municipalities from the main urban extent raises questions about their integration in the long-term metropolitan strategy.

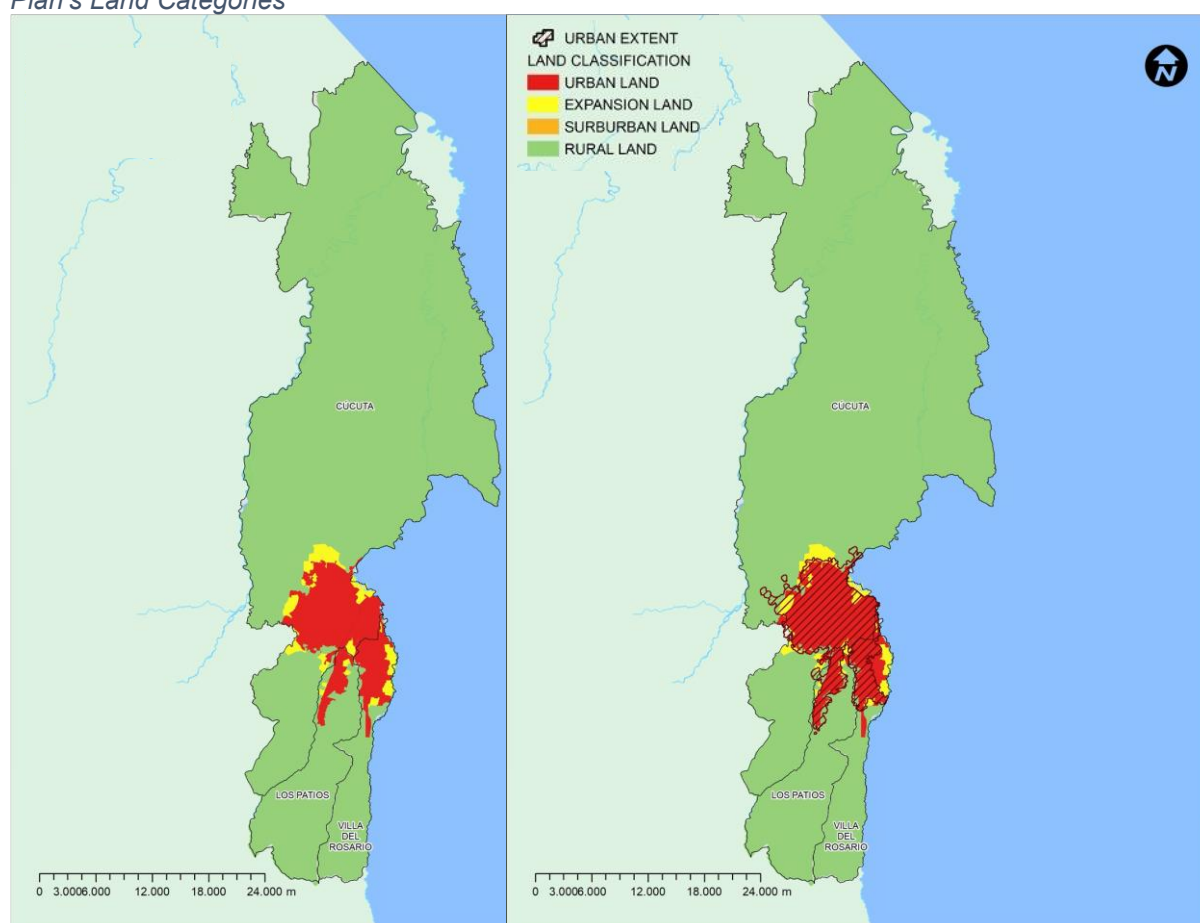
Figure 40. Urban Extent Evolution of the Cucuta Metropolitan Area



Source: Own work

A critical component of this analysis lies in evaluating whether urban growth has occurred in areas legally designated for such use. The land classification maps and associated tables show that among the municipalities sharing the main urban extent (Cúcuta, Los Patios, and Villa del Rosario), only 19% of land is officially classified as urban, while a mere 2% is designated for expansion. The remaining 79% is marked as rural land, including areas meant for environmental conservation, agricultural activity, and low-density uses. Despite these classifications, the actual growth patterns reveal a notable mismatch between planned land uses and territorial transformation.

Figure 41. Cucuta Metropolitan Area Urban Extent and its Interaction with the Territorial Organization Plan's Land Categories



Source: Own work

The comparative analysis between urban extent and land classification shows that a considerable portion of the new built-up area falls outside of designated urban or expansion zones. This signals a persistent weakness in the effectiveness of local territorial planning policies. Municipalities have failed to anticipate and structure growth according to legally defined land uses, which undermines the enforceability of their POTs (Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial). When urban growth consistently spills into rural or suburban areas, it not only compromises environmental buffers and service provision standards but also reflects a diminishing capacity of local governments to steer development according to strategic objectives. As in other metropolitan cases, this erosion of policy effectiveness is not merely technical but deeply institutional, revealing a need for strengthened coordination mechanisms, updated planning instruments, and regional-scale enforcement frameworks.

Table 31. Percentage of Land Allocated To Land Type

Name	Type of Land			Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Rural	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Cucuta	17%	2%	81%	17%	2%	0%	81%
Los Patios	19%	1%	80%	19%	1%	0%	80%
Villa del Rosario	43%	5%	53%	43%	5%	0%	53%

Area Metropolitana	19%	2%	79%	19%	2%	0%	79%
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Source: Own work based on each municipality POT

A closer look at the spatial performance of the three municipalities that share the continuous urban extent—Cúcuta, Los Patios, and Villa del Rosario—confirms the presence of strong territorial interdependence, but also highlights uneven planning outcomes. Of the approximately 6,400 hectares added to the urban footprint over the past three decades, 81% occurred in land designated for urban growth (either urban or expansion zones), suggesting a relatively high level of alignment in principle. However, the remaining 19% of growth took place in land not prepared for development, indicating that nearly one in every five hectares of new construction defied planning regulations. When disaggregated by municipality, Cúcuta and Los Patios emerge as the jurisdictions with the highest rates of planning ineffectiveness, as significant portions of their urban expansion encroached into rural or unclassified areas.

Table 32. Percentage of Growth in Each Land Type

Name	Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Cucuta	60,9%	18,9%	0,0%	20,2%
Los Patios	71,3%	2,6%	0,0%	26,1%
Villa del Rosario	86,7%	4,4%	0,0%	8,9%

Area Metropolitana	68,8%	12,3%	0,0%	18,9%
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Source: Own work

7.6.2 Dual Agency Challenges in Cucuta Metro Area

The case of the Área Metropolitana de Cúcuta (AMC) illustrates the institutional fragility of territorial planning in functionally integrated, yet administratively fragmented urban regions. Although the AMC has existed formally since 1981, it still lacks a PEMOT. This absence weakens its capacity to coordinate growth among its six

member municipalities, despite clear evidence of spatial and functional interdependence. Cúcuta, Los Patios, and Villa del Rosario share a continuous urban footprint that nearly tripled between 1990 and 2020—from 2,800 to over 8,600 hectares—yet land-use regulation has not kept pace with this growth.

As shown in land classification data, only 19% of the AMC territory is formally designated as urban and 2% as expansion area, yet 81% of the new built-up area falls within these categories—suggesting relative formal compliance. Still, almost one in every five hectares of urban growth occurred in land designated as rural or environmentally protected, particularly in Cúcuta and Los Patios. These deviations are not mere anomalies but symptoms of a deeper issue: the inability of local governments to anticipate and control growth within their jurisdiction, due in part to outdated POTs, limited enforcement capacity, and insufficient coordination with neighboring municipalities.

The institutional causes of this mismatch lie in the lack of vertical and horizontal integration in planning. The AMC provides a legal framework for coordination but lacks updated, binding regional instruments and budgetary power to align planning decisions. The municipalities retain autonomy over land-use decisions, yet their actions produce spillover effects that impact the shared urban system. For example, Cúcuta's expansion pushes informal growth toward Los Patios, and Villa del Rosario is affected by peripheral land occupation without effective inter-jurisdictional mitigation strategies. The lack of coordinated mechanisms such as synchronized POT revisions, joint technical offices, or binding agreements leaves planning fragmented and reactive.

These dynamics exemplify the challenges of dual agency in metropolitan governance. Each municipality acts as an agent simultaneously accountable to its local electorate, to national planning norms, and—at least formally—to the metropolitan vision. However, there is no unified principal with enforceable authority across these scales. This creates overlapping, often conflicting mandates, where municipalities prioritize immediate local needs over long-term territorial coherence. The AMC, in turn, is mandated to coordinate, but lacks the instruments and legitimacy to compel compliance. Dual agency, in this sense, is not just a governance dilemma—it is the root of planning inefficacy.

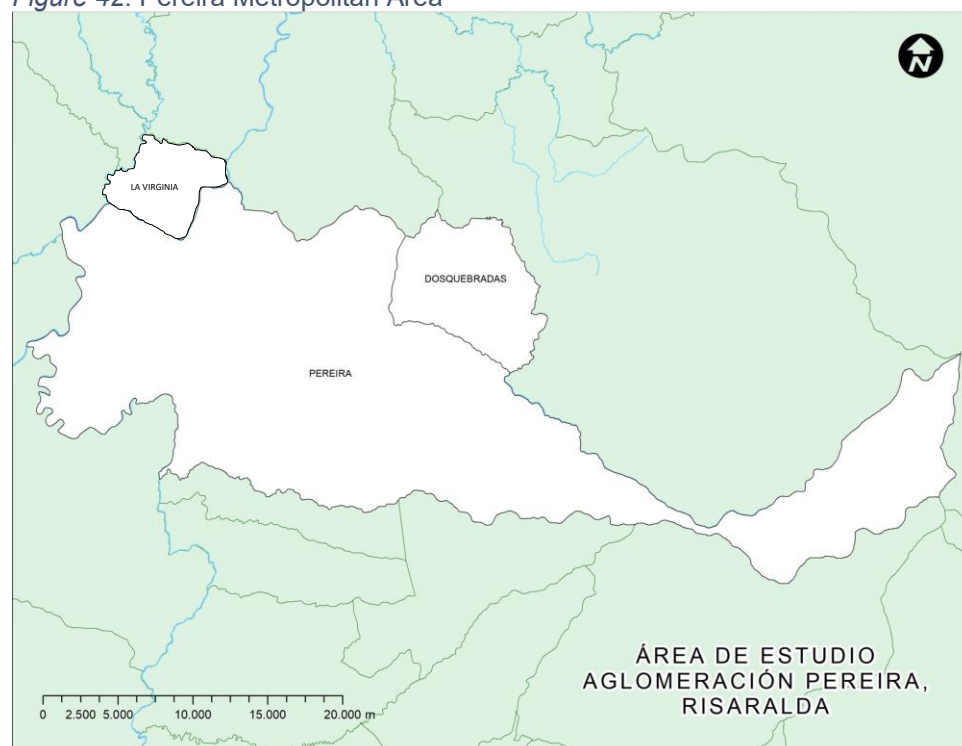
This case underscores the urgency of strengthening metropolitan governance instruments like the PEMOT, not only as planning documents but as binding tools of institutional alignment. Without clearly defined and enforceable roles, coordinated land management, and mechanisms for fiscal and legal compliance, urban regions like Cúcuta will continue to grow in contradiction with their own stated development objectives.

7.7 Pereira Metropolitan Area: Center-West Metropolitan Area

7.7.1 Territorial Planning Policy at the Metro and Local Level

The Área Metropolitana del Centro Occidente (AMCO), officially established in 1981, is composed of three municipalities: Pereira, Dosquebradas, and La Virginia. It is located in the department of Risaralda, and despite having a metropolitan development plan as a socio-economic guidance instrument, the AMCO does not currently have a *Plan Estratégico Metropolitano de Ordenamiento Territorial (PEMOT)*. As a result, the AMCO relies primarily on the individual *Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial (POTs)* of its member municipalities, despite the increasing evidence of territorial interdependence and overlapping urban dynamics.

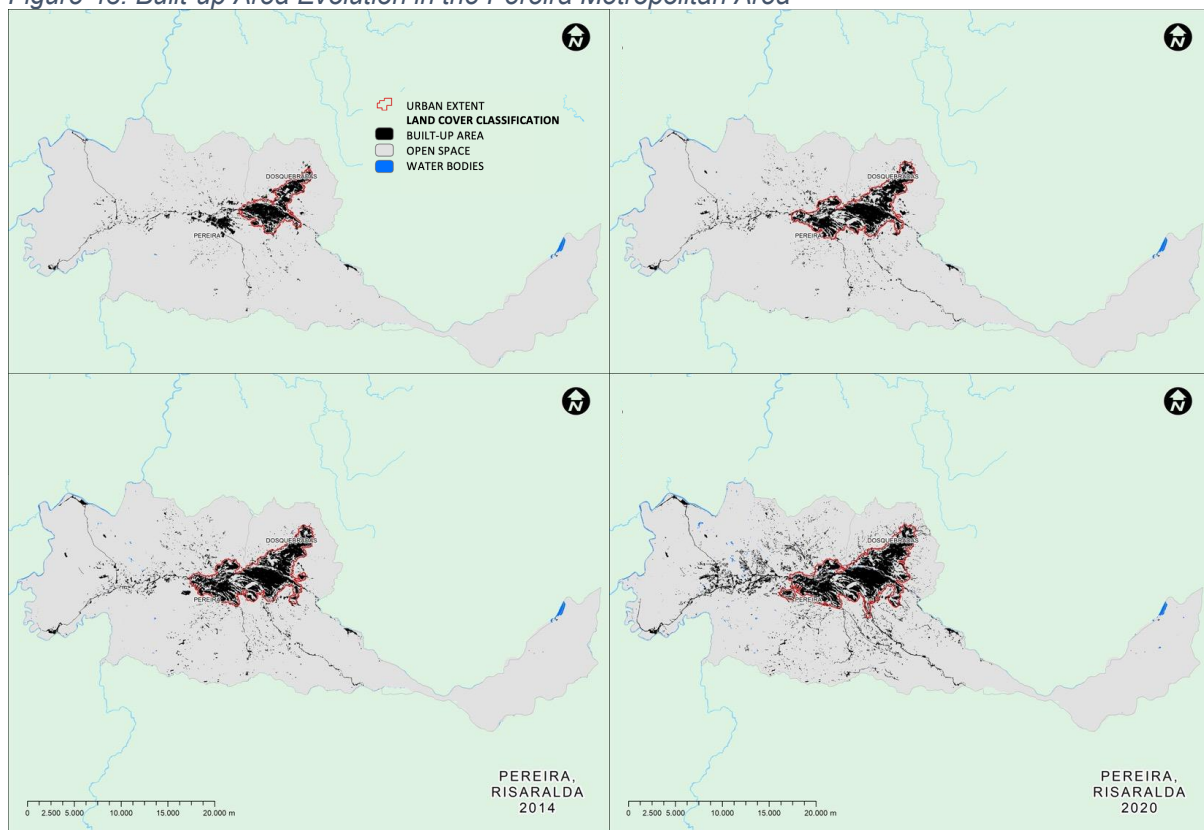
Figure 42. Pereira Metropolitan Area



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 175)

The analysis of land cover change over time reveals that urban growth in the Pereira metropolitan area has been intense and directional, primarily concentrated along a horizontal axis stretching from west to northeast. This pattern centers around Pereira and Dosquebradas, where impermeabilization has taken the form of a contiguous and consolidated built-up area. La Virginia, while formally part of the AMCO, remains largely disconnected from this dominant urban extent. Notably, recent growth trends show that other municipalities not included in the AMCO, particularly Cartago to the southwest and Santa Rosa de Cabal to the east, are becoming increasingly integrated into the functional urban system. Specifically, Cartago is already forming a physical continuity with Pereira.

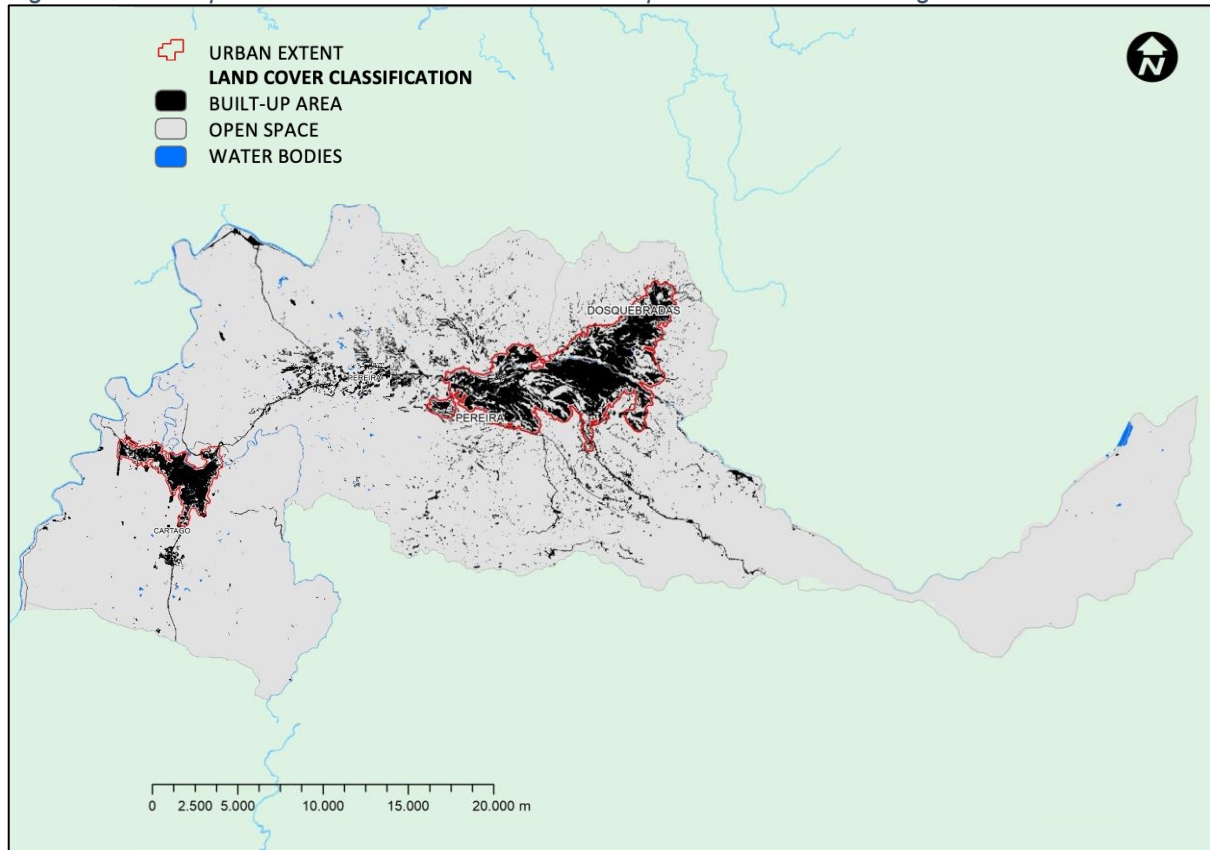
Figure 43. Built-up Area Evolution in the Pereira Metropolitan Area



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 175)

This development renders the Pereira metro area unique: while it is formally composed of three municipalities, only two (Pereira and Dosquebradas) share the main urban extent, and one of the most relevant emerging urban interactions is with a municipality outside the institutional framework. This raises critical questions regarding the spatial limits of metropolitan governance and the adequacy of current planning arrangements.

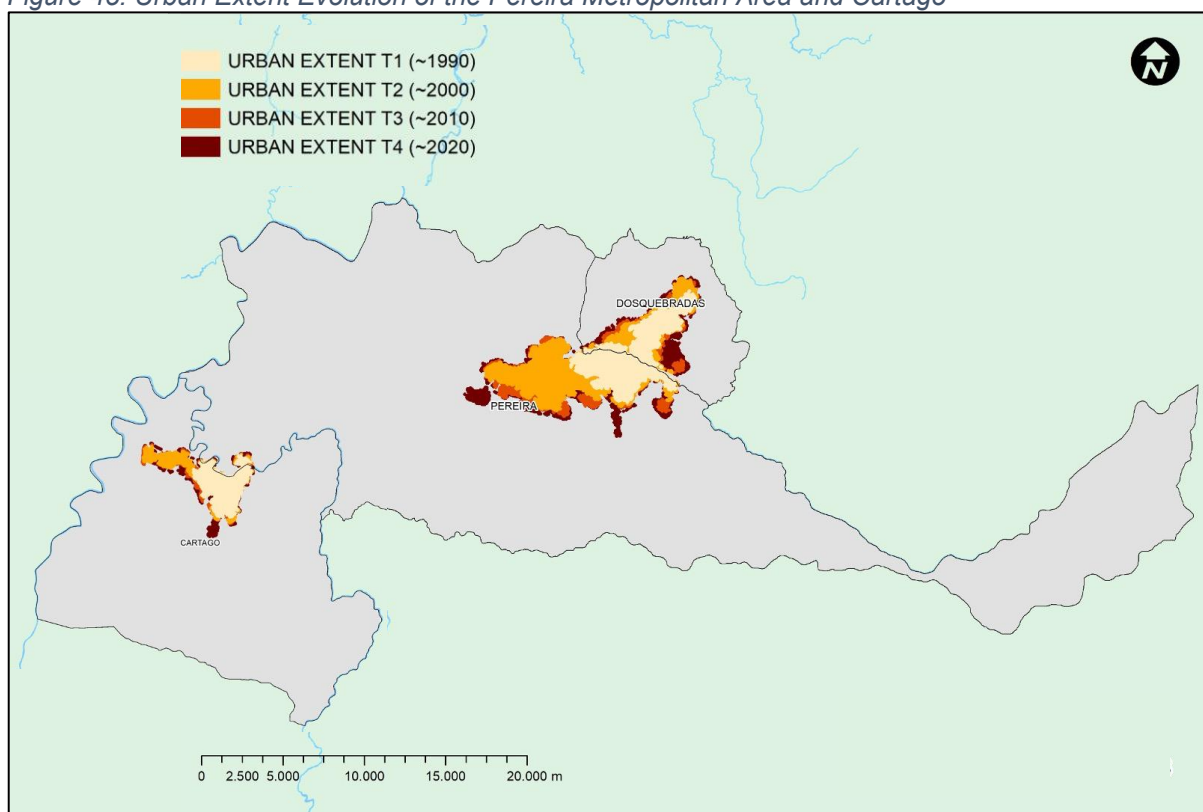
Figure 44. Built-up Area Evolution in the Pereira Metropolitan Area with Cartago 2020



Source: Own work

The maps showing the evolution of the urban extent confirm these findings. In the last 30 years, the contiguous Pereira–Dosquebradas urban footprint expanded from 2,000 hectares to approximately 5,700 hectares, representing a 2.85-fold increase and an average annual growth rate of 3.36%. At the same time, the urban extent of Cartago has also grown, doubling in size from 830 to 1,550 hectares, with an average annual growth of 2%. This dual dynamic suggests that Cartago is becoming an integral part of the urban system, even though it is not part of the metropolitan authority. As such, future metropolitan planning in the region will need to consider expanding its scope to include functionally integrated municipalities.

Figure 45. Urban Extent Evolution of the Pereira Metropolitan Area and Cartago



Source: (Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 176) and Own work

When it comes to managing this growth within the boundaries of planned land uses, the performance of the metropolitan area reveals clear weaknesses. In total, of the nearly 4,000 hectares added to the Pereira–Dosquebradas urban extent, 75% occurred in land officially designated for urban development or expansion, while the remaining 25% encroached into rural zones. This suggests that despite some degree of spatial planning alignment, a quarter of the observed growth defied local land use regulations.

The situation becomes different when analyzing municipal performance individually. In Pereira, 20% of the urban expansion occurred in rural land—already a red flag for policy misalignment. However, the case of Dosquebradas is more concerning: 40% of its urban growth took place in rural land, double the proportion observed in Pereira. This points to significant weaknesses in enforcement, planning foresight, or both, in a municipality that is spatially and economically tied to the core of the metropolitan region. These divergences also highlight the lack of a unified spatial vision for growth, exacerbated by the absence of a PEMOT.

Table 33. Percentage of Land Allocated to Land Type

Name	Type of Land			Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Rural	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Pereira	14,5%	3,2%	82,2%	14,5%	3,2%	5,0%	77,3%
Dos Quebradas	44,7%	2,5%	52,8%	44,7%	2,5%	0,0%	52,8%

Area Metropolitana	18,7%	3,1%	78,2%	18,7%	3,1%	4,3%	73,9%
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Source: Own work based on each municipality POT

Table 34. Percentage of Growth in Each Land Type

Name	Type of Land and Category			
	Urban	Expansion	Suburban	Rural
Pereira	66,1%	14,7%	5,6%	13,6%
Dos Quebradas	51,0%	9,4%	0,0%	39,6%

Area Metropolitana	61,8%	13,2%	4,0%	20,9%
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Source: Own work

Cartago, for its part, performs slightly better in this regard: 85% of its growth occurred in urban or expansion-designated land, while 15% still took place in rural areas. Although not legally part of the AMCO, Cartago's growing integration into Pereira's urban footprint makes this finding highly relevant. Its POT appears to manage growth more effectively than Dosquebradas', even without a metropolitan coordination institution.

The case of the Pereira metropolitan area underscores a paradox common to many Colombian metros: while institutional structures exist, they are not always equipped with the tools or mandates necessary to respond to contemporary patterns of urbanization. The absence of a PEMOT significantly diminish the coordination of land use across municipalities that are already physically and functionally interdependent. Moreover, the failure of local governments to channel urban growth within the parameters of their own POTs signals a broader problem of institutional capacity and enforcement. As Cartago becomes increasingly part of the functional urban system, the lack of institutional mechanisms to include it in a coordinated planning process may result in further fragmentation and inefficiency. In this light, Pereira's case illustrates both the necessity and the challenge of developing territorial instruments that are not only spatially integrative but also institutionally adaptive to fast-evolving metropolitan realities.

7.7.2 Governance Gaps in Pereira: Territorial Fragmentation, Institutional Gaps, and Asymmetry

The metropolitan area formed by Pereira, Dosquebradas, and La Virginia, formally known as Área Metropolitana del Centro Occidente (AMCO) illustrates how urban integration can advance physically while remaining institutionally fragmented. Although Pereira and Dosquebradas share economic, infrastructural, and demographic interdependence, and a legal metropolitan association exists, the region continues to experience urban expansion patterns that evade planning instruments and threaten environmental and social sustainability.

This mismatch is not simply a result of technical or financial limitations. Instead, it reflects a deeper institutional asymmetry and governance vacuum. Although the AMCO exists as a formal association, it lacks actual planning authority. There is no approved PEMOT, nor binding intermunicipal planning instruments that can regulate land use across the conurbation. Consequently, each municipality retains full sovereignty over land management, leading to uncoordinated urbanization that exploits regulatory loopholes and jurisdictional fragmentation.

Here, the dual agency dilemma becomes especially pronounced. Municipal governments like Dosquebradas are caught between responding to immediate local pressures, such as land availability, housing demand, and informal settlements while trying to conform to supramunicipal and national goals, including environmental protection and risk mitigation. Without a strong institutional framework to mediate these pressures, municipalities default to locally convenient but territorially inefficient decisions. In this metro area Pereira acts as the dominant node of the conurbation, concentrating institutional capacity, infrastructure, and formal planning tools. Dosquebradas, in contrast, faces structural disadvantages—less fiscal autonomy, lower administrative capacity, and fewer planning resources. This asymmetry turns Dosquebradas into a recipient of overflow urbanization, hosting low-income housing and informal settlements that the core city cannot or does not accommodate.

In addition, urbanization dynamic doesn't reach La Virgina, so it makes its engagement to the AMCO weak. While on the other hand Cartago's growth is taking place outside the AMCO's institutional framework but impacting the interdependent dynamic representing a form of "phantom agency", where actors without a formal planning role significantly influence territorial decisions without bearing the responsibilities of coordination. There is no doubt that in this metro area there is high level of asymmetry between the planning and enforcing capacities and in the role of who is experience the downturns of the unplanned growth.

7.8 Comparative Reflexions and Institutional Implications

The comparative analysis of five Colombian metropolitan areas—Medellín, Bucaramanga, Pereira, Barranquilla, and Cúcuta—reveals a persistent mismatch between planned urban development and observed growth dynamics. This discrepancy cannot be explained solely by outdated instruments or technical deficits. Rather, it emerges from deeper institutional misalignments rooted in Colombia's decentralized yet fragmented planning system.

In each case, the contradiction between the spatial logic proposed in planning policies-instruments (POTs and PEMOTs) and the reality of urban expansion reflects a structural governance problem. Local governments, while formally autonomous, are entangled in overlapping chains of accountability: to national agendas, to regional or metropolitan frameworks, and to local constituencies. These actors often operate with diverging timelines, priorities, and resource constraints, generating horizontal and vertical tensions that weaken the coherence and enforceability of planning policies.

This condition exemplifies what this thesis conceptualizes as **dual agency**: the scenario where local authorities act as agents to multiple principals with misaligned mandates and insufficient mechanisms of coordination. In metropolitan settings, this tension is exacerbated by the absence or weakness of supramunicipal institutions with binding authority, and by the political asymmetries among municipalities that share functional urban systems but not decision-making capacity. The result is policy fragmentation: expansion occurs in rural or unprepared land, sustainability goals are sidelined, and territorial governance remains reactive rather than strategic.

What emerges is a consistent misalignment between ends and means: metropolitan areas are expected to guide sustainable urbanization and implement the international agenda, but the tools, authority, and institutional arrangements they operate under are not equipped to deliver those results. Planning becomes aspirational, and implementation discretionary. In this light, the dual agency concept is not only descriptive, it is diagnostic. It helps reveal how the decentralization model in Colombia generates multiple chains of accountability without mechanisms for coherence. Addressing the gap between growth and planning requires not only technical improvements but also a redefinition of institutional roles, greater vertical integration, and binding metropolitan instruments with enforcement and resource allocation power.

A striking insight across cases is the role of housing development as a powerful explanatory factor behind these mismatches. Residential growth has become a key driver of land occupation, often pursued by local governments under pressure to meet demand, mobilize fiscal resources, or respond to private sector interests. However, this growth frequently occurs outside of planned areas and without adequate coordination, reinforcing territorial fragmentation and compromising long-term planning goals.

7.9 Final Remarks: Toward a Deeper Institutional Understanding

This chapter has offered a granular, comparative analysis of growth management across Colombia's five formal metropolitan areas, revealing a striking disconnect between the design of territorial planning policies-instruments and their implementation on the ground. It's been shown that the implementation of territorial planning in Colombia's metropolitan regions is not merely a technical or normative issue—it is an institutional one. The presence of sophisticated instruments like POTs and PEMOTs does not guarantee alignment with spatial realities unless accompanied by mechanisms that reconcile competing mandates across levels of government.

Although all case studies are formally governed by local Territorial Ordering Plans (POTs), and in some instances by Metropolitan Ordering Plans (PEMOTs), no single area achieved complete policy effectiveness in directing urban growth toward designated zones. On average, 30% of urban expansion in these metropolitan areas

took place in land not designated for development. This figure is particularly alarming when contrasted with the national average of 26% across the 43 major urban centers, as discussed in Chapter 5. The metropolitan scale, despite its institutional potential, has not guaranteed better territorial governance outcomes. More broadly, these empirical findings advance the operationalization of the dual agency concept introduced earlier in the thesis. The documented inconsistencies across municipalities—despite shared metropolitan institutions—highlight how overlapping mandates and unclear competence boundaries contribute to implementation gaps.

In sum, the chapter reveals that while Colombia has formalized metropolitan governance frameworks, their effectiveness remains constrained by institutional fragmentation, limited harmonization, and uneven local planning capacities. These findings set the stage for the next chapter, which will examine how these structural constraints are understood by key policy actors and more importantly the step-by-step applicability of the Dual Agency Model.

Also, these findings strengthen the rationale for the next section of the thesis, which explores in greater depth how dual agency operates within the housing sector. Given its centrality in shaping urban expansion patterns, housing provides a strategic lens through which to investigate how local governments navigate conflicting responsibilities and limited competences.

8. Challenge in Territorial Planning Policy in Colombia: Qualitative Evidence and the Dual Agency Model

8.1 Introduction

This chapter represents the final stage of Section II, which has progressively revealed the institutional tensions and coordination failures shaping urban growth management in Colombia's metropolitan areas and their correspondent cities. While Chapters 6 and 7 presented robust quantitative evidence, drawing on spatial data, policy evaluation, and comparative institutional analysis, this chapter (8) introduces the qualitative dimension of the research, offering a complementary perspective rooted in the lived experiences, perceptions, and strategic interpretations of key policy actors.

As established in the methodological design (Chapter 4), this thesis follows a sequential explanatory approach, wherein quantitative findings are subsequently enriched and interrogated through qualitative methods. This chapter presents the results of four focus groups and two in-depth interviews conducted with public officials, planners, and policy practitioners involved in territorial planning and urban management at both the local and supramunicipal levels. These qualitative exercises were designed not only to capture experiential insights on coordination and implementation, but also to provide deeper understanding of the dual agency that continuously manifests in the territorial planning effectiveness at the local level.

The inclusion of these voices responds to a central proposition of the research: that policy inefficiencies in metropolitan contexts cannot be fully explained by examining institutional design or policy outputs alone. Instead, they must also be understood through the strategic behaviors, role perceptions, and accountability dilemmas experienced by those tasked with implementing public policies on the ground. These actors operate at the intersection of multiple mandates—local political demands, national policy frameworks, regional coordination efforts, and often international project requirements—generating a layered and sometimes contradictory implementation environment.

The chapter is structured to serve two interconnected purposes:

- First, it presents the main takeaways from the qualitative data, highlighting recurrent patterns and tensions identified by practitioners in the field. Rather than restating technical or legal content from previous chapters, it focuses on how institutional ambiguity, coordination deficits, and political misalignment are experienced by those within the system. This section (8.2 and 8.3) provides thick description and interpretive depth to complement the statistical and comparative analyses presented earlier.
- Second, the chapter offers a grounded assessment of the Dual Agency analytical model proposed in Section I. Specifically, it asks whether the explanatory components of the model—such as multiple principals, blurred accountability, fragmented authority, and institutional inconsistency—resonate with the lived reality of policy implementation. In doing so, it evaluates the extent to which the model provides conceptual clarity and diagnostic power for understanding implementation gaps in multilevel urban governance.

In closing, the chapter synthesizes these findings to underline a critical observation that emerged consistently in the focus groups and interviews: housing policy appears as a key explanatory variable in the observed disconnect between territorial planning and actual patterns of urban expansion. As such, the chapter not only offers a reflection on the use of qualitative methods and theory-building, but also provides a bridge into Section III of the thesis, where housing will be analyzed for understanding the persistence of dual agency dynamics in public policy delivery.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that without attending to the micro-level logics of institutional actors and the subjective tensions they face in navigating multilevel mandates, we risk overlooking a vital dimension of why public policy fails to translate into coherent spatial and social outcomes—especially in complex metropolitan environments marked by decentralization and rapid urbanization.

8.2 Key Lessons from the Focus Groups: Patterns, Tensions, and Narratives

8.2.1 Focus Group Composition and Relevance

To complement the quantitative findings and assess the applicability of the Dual Agency analytical framework in real-world contexts, four focus groups were conducted between January and March 2022. These focus groups brought together a strategically selected group of experts, practitioners, and public officials whose professional trajectories and institutional roles are directly linked to the challenges of territorial planning, policy implementation, and metropolitan governance in Colombia.

Each focus group was designed to capture a distinct yet complementary perspective on the institutional and operational dynamics of public policy. Below is a summary of the composition and specific relevance of each group:

- **Focus Group 1: Foundational Experts in POT Design and Regulation.** This group included two of the country's most experienced professionals in the field of land-use planning: Ignacio Gallo and José Mario Mayorga. Both participants have directly shaped Colombia's planning policy frameworks over the past three decades—through legislative development, technical assistance methodologies, and local implementation strategies. Their insights were particularly valuable in providing a historical and regulatory perspective on how institutional fragmentation and dual mandates have evolved within the land-use planning system. Their longstanding involvement in the Modern POTs program also allowed for critical reflections on the performance and limitations of top-down planning efforts.
- **Focus Group 2: Academic and Regional Perspectives on Planning Governance.** Composed of six participants from academia, civil society, and think tanks, this group offered a cross-disciplinary perspective on how planning interacts with governance, sustainability, and regional coordination. Among them were José Salazar (National University of Colombia), a respected scholar and advisor on Bogotá's planning history, and Bibiana Rodríguez (ProBogotá Región), who offered a unique lens into how regional planning unfolds in the absence of formal metropolitan governance structures. The other members—

experts in law, architecture, and social-environmental research—contributed valuable reflections on how land-use planning is interpreted across academic disciplines and policy agendas. This group helped situate dual agency problems within broader intellectual debates and metropolitan coordination efforts.

- **Focus Group 3: Institutional Practitioners and Thematic Specialists.** This group integrated institutional officials from Bogotá’s local administration with academic researchers in law, geography, and public administration. Participants such as Antonio Avendaño (District Planning Secretariat) and Ana Milena Vallejo (IDPC) offered first-hand accounts of planning implementation challenges, coordination dynamics across jurisdictions, and the integration of cultural and environmental concerns. Others, like Pablo Sanabria (Universidad de los Andes), enriched the discussion with reflections on public sector behavior, transparency, and the political economy of local governance. This group was instrumental in connecting technical planning practices with broader issues of capacity, accountability, and inter-agency collaboration.
- **Focus Group 4: Consultants and Cross-Sectoral Practitioners.** This final group brought together professionals from consultancy and applied research backgrounds. Participants such as Juan Francisco Rodríguez (Geografía Urbana S.A.S.) and Diego Silva Ardila (Universidad del Rosario) combined practical implementation experience in diverse regions with strategic insights into the functioning of the Modern POTs program. Their dual exposure to national policy frameworks and on-the-ground project design enriched the discussion on how local and national actors interact under conditions of institutional ambiguity. Their perspectives helped validate the conceptual features of the Dual Agency model, especially regarding role ambiguity and accountability tensions in multi-scalar governance.

The following table present in detailed the relevance for the study that each participant represents. There is a detailed annex for each focus group that contains the summary of the discussion and the main takeaways. The table also relates the correspondent annex.

Table 35. Focus Group Composition

Group Number	Participants	Position ²⁴	Relevance for the Study	Annex
Focus Group 1	1. Ignacio Gallo	Managing Partner and Lead Consultant at Plan-IN Planeación Inteligente, supporting public entities in Colombia.	He is a professional with extensive experience in land-use planning, both through direct consultancy with local governments and advisory roles to the national government aimed at revitalizing these processes. He served as a consultant to the Ministry of Development during the formulation of Law 388 of 1997, the cornerstone legislation for land-use planning in Colombia. He was part of the pioneering team that developed the first regulatory frameworks on this subject. He also led the team that designed the initial methodology used to provide technical assistance to the national government and municipalities for the development of their land-use plans (POTs). In Bogotá, he played a leading role in the transformation of the city's land management system under the 2003 POT. Over the course of his career, he has contributed to the development of more than twelve land-use plans. His extensive experience offers a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities of land-use planning from a local government standpoint.	Annex 1
	2. José Mario Mayorga.	Consultant for the review of the Land Use Plan (POT) of Cartagena, Colombia, and university professor specializing in territorial planning.	A sociologist and Ph.D. in Geography, he has participated in the development of more than twenty Land-Use Plans (POTs), including the last three planning processes undertaken by the city of Bogotá, among others. He served as Director of the oversight component of the Modern Land-Use Plans Program. He is currently dedicated to academic work. In his role as Director of the oversight for the Modern Land-Use Plans Program, he provides first-hand insights based on his professional experience. This program, which will be analyzed in the thesis, represents a top-down approach to land-use planning aimed at supporting municipalities in achieving their local policy goals—an effort that, as will be demonstrated, faces several significant challenges.	
Focus Group 2	1. José Salazar	Professor at the National University of Colombia, focusing on urban planning and territorial development.	A renowned professor and scholar in the field of land-use planning and territorial organization in Colombia, he is the author of the book "The Planning of Bogotá: A Hybrid System of Progressive Development." Within the scope of his experience and relevance to this study, José Salazar contributed as a consultant to the Modern Land-Use Plans Program.	Annex 2.

²⁴ at the moment the focus group took place.

Group Number	Participants	Position ²⁴	Relevance for the Study	Annex
	2. Bibiana Rodriguez Campos	Director of Sustainable Urban Development at ProBogotá Región.	As Director of Sustainable Urban Development at ProBogotá Región, she leads a technical team engaged in long-term regional planning exercises grounded in co-creation and dialogue. Their work emphasizes urban, environmental, and technological dimensions of sustainable territorial development. Her participation is particularly relevant as it provides direct insight into the perspective of key actors such as ProBogotá regarding the significance and effectiveness of territorial planning policy. This is especially pertinent given that ProBogotá emerged in the absence of a formal metropolitan regional institution—which was only recently established—bringing together stakeholders from civil society and the private sector to envision the city from a supra-municipal perspective.	
	3. Erik Vergel	Assistant Professor in the Department of Architecture at Universidad de los Andes.	He has worked on land-use planning issues within the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Environment. Through her academic role and research on territorial planning from an architectural perspective, she contributes to the discussion on the importance and impact of public policy in this field.	
	4. Gloria Henao	Lawyer and Director of the Specialization and Master's Program in Urban Management Law at Universidad del Rosario.	Through her academic role and research on land-use planning from a legal perspective, she contributes to the discussion on the significance and impact of public policy in this field.	
	5. Dolly Cristina Palacio Tamayo	Research Professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Externado de Colombia, and member of the research group "Territories and Environment."	From her academic role and research on land-use planning from the perspective of social and environmental sciences, she contributes to the discussion on the relevance and impact of public policy in this domain.	
	6. Thierry Lulle	Research Professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Externado de Colombia, and Director of the research group "Territories and Environment."	From his academic role and research on land-use planning from the perspective of social and environmental sciences, she contributes to the discussion on the relevance and impact of public policy in this domain.	
Focus Group 3	1. Antonio Avendaño	Deputy Secretary for Information and Strategic Studies at the District Planning Secretariat of Bogotá.	A member of the Land-Use Plan (POT) team at the Bogotá Mayor's Office, he has been involved in the cartographic and monitoring processes that provide insights, based on his experience, into the application of these instruments for policy monitoring. His work also highlights the collaborative efforts and capacity-building exchanges with neighboring jurisdictions.	Annex 3.

Group Number	Participants	Position ²⁴	Relevance for the Study	Annex
	2. Ana Milena Vallejo	Technical Deputy Director of the Territorial Management Subdirectorates at the District Institute of Cultural Heritage (IDPC).	She has experience in the development of Departmental Land-Use Plans. From her role at the District Institute of Cultural Heritage, she contributes a perspective on the importance of heritage preservation within the framework of land-use planning.	
	3. Phillippe Chenut Correa	Research Professor at the Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidad Externado de Colombia, in the Geography Program – Research Area: Social Processes, Territories, and Environment.	From his academic role and research on territorial planning from a geographical perspective, they contribute to the discussion on the importance and impact of policy	
	4. Luis Felipe Guzmán	Research Professor at the Faculty of Law, Universidad Externado de Colombia, affiliated with the Environmental Law and Territorial Environmental Planning Program.	From his academic role and research on environmental land-use planning, approached from the field of environmental law, they contribute to the discussion on the importance and impact of policy	
	5. Pablo Sanabria Pulido	Research Professor at the School of Government, Universidad de los Andes.	He has extensive experience in public management, public employment, organizational behavior in the public sector, corruption and transparency, local governance and collaborative governance, public policy analysis and formulation, and the teaching of public affairs. His/Her contribution is particularly relevant to this study, as it addresses the field of public administration in Colombia and the management of competencies within the framework of territorial planning.	
Focus Group 4	1. Juan Francisco Rodríguez Vita	Founding Partner of Geografía Urbana S.A.S., where he has served as director in numerous consultancies related to urban and territorial planning and management in various countries, including the formulation of 13 land use plans under the “Modern POTs” program.	He has served as Director of Strategic Operations at the District Planning Secretariat of Bogotá and as Technical Director of Planning at the Urban Development Institute. Additionally, he has worked as a senior advisor to the management of entities such as Metrovivienda, the District Planning Secretariat of Bogotá, and the District Planning Secretariat of Santa Marta. Drawing on his background in architecture and his experience with Geografía Urbana S.A.S., he contributes to the discussion on territorial planning and the challenges it entails, adopting a role as a facilitator and catalyst between the national government and local governments.	Annex 4.

Group Number	Participants	Position ²⁴	Relevance for the Study	Annex
	2. Germán Camargo	Director of the Guayacanal Biological Station Foundation and of Guayacanal S.A.S., a consulting and research group focused on applied ecological research, ecosystem restoration, urban ecology, territorial planning, and the relationship between culture and the environment.	He has developed projects in the fields of territorial planning, urban management, and ecosystem restoration. Drawing on his background in biology and his experience with the Guayacanal Biological Station Foundation, he contributes to the discussion on territorial planning and the challenges it presents, assuming a role as a facilitator and catalyst between the national government and local governments.	
	3. Diego Silva Ardila	Professor in the Urban Management and Development Program at Universidad del Rosario.	Consultant in territorial planning issues. His professional experience includes serving as Deputy Director of the National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE), as a consultant for UN-Habitat, and as Chair of the Governing Board of the Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute (IGAC). He contributes to this study from both an institutional perspective within the national government and an academic perspective	

Source: Own Work

8.2.2 Questions and key takeaways

The aim was to gather a diverse and critical perspective on the effectiveness of Colombia's General Territorial Planning Policy, particularly regarding land use and territorial growth management. These sessions provided a forum to discuss structural limitations, practical experiences, and proposals for reform, enriching the explanatory dimension of this thesis.

Each focus group revolved around a series of guiding questions intended to stimulate reflective dialogue and comparative insights across institutional and disciplinary backgrounds:

1. What are the main problems of territorial planning in Colombia?
2. What role should territorial entities play in planning?
3. What are the institutional limitations to achieving effective territorial articulation?
4. How can multilevel governance be strengthened in the country?
5. Which sectors or actors should participate in planning processes?

6. How can the interests of different actors in the territory be harmonized?

These conversations enabled a critical and multidimensional analysis of the normative, institutional, and operational factors affecting territorial governance in Colombia. Participants reflected on the disconnection between planning frameworks and territorial realities, revealing persistent structural challenges such as an outdated legal framework, institutional fragmentation, weak local capacities, and the marginalization of local knowledge and actors.

The summary below captures the main findings from each focus group:

Table 36. Executive Summary Focus Groups

Focus Group	Summary
1	Experts described Colombia's territorial planning model as outdated and overly centralized, with poor coordination between government levels and limited municipal capacity. They emphasized the need for structural reforms that integrate sustainability, institutional strengthening, and intercultural approaches.
2	Discussions highlighted the urgent need to update legal and technical planning frameworks, which are seen as inadequate for addressing current territorial complexities. Tensions between economic growth, environmental protection, and territorial justice reflect a disconnect between national policy frameworks and local realities.
3	Participants stressed the obsolescence of the current legal framework and called for a differentiated approach that recognizes Colombia's regional and cultural diversity. Limited municipal technical and fiscal capacity, along with weak intersectoral coordination, were identified as key obstacles.
4	The group emphasized the need to understand territory not just as physical space, but as a product of historical, cultural, and political processes. Discussions centered on institutional fragmentation, lack of political will, and the invisibilization of local actors, pointing to the importance of integrating technical expertise with community-based knowledge.

Source: Own Work

While all four focus groups highlighted structural coordination failures and the need for institutional reform, each session brought forward distinct emphases and particularly illustrative contributions from participants. These perspectives help depend the understanding of dual agency and implementation gaps by drawing attention to concrete territorial experiences and policy dilemmas.

During the Focus Group 1 session, that can be title: Community Knowledge, Exclusion, and Institutional Blind Spots, participants argued that top-down models continue to marginalize local knowledges and non-normative forms of planning. One participant stressed: *"Planning cannot continue to ignore the knowledge produced in the territories. The problem is not just technical, it's epistemological."* (Annex 3). Academics critiqued the monocultural logic embedded in the POTs, warning that ignoring intercultural and differential approaches leads to social exclusion and

weakened legitimacy. The group called for a shift in the planning paradigm—from a regulatory-technical tool to a mechanism of territorial justice.

In the second Focus Group the discussion focused on governance gaps and the limits of territorial associativity. This session revealed a deep concern with the territorial associativity regime, widely regarded as ineffective. Participants emphasized that inter-municipal coordination lacks institutional clarity and political traction. One participant noted: *“We have legal figures for territorial association, but they are politically hollow and financially irrelevant”* (Annex 4). The discussion also underlined the imbalance of power between levels of government. Local officials reported a sense of procedural overload with minimal room for genuine agency (in the sense of having capacity to act). Across the board, participants demanded that future improvement to the institutional design should be grounded in spatial justice, co-creation, and institutional support mechanisms for the weakest territories.

The third Focus Group revolved around the tension between development models and territorial justice. Experts in this group problematized the disconnection between national economic development strategies and local planning goals. One participant stated: *“How can we talk about planning if we don’t talk about the development model that drives it?”* (Annex 5). This group emphasized the need for planning to engage directly with environmental sustainability, spatial equity, and economic logic. There was a strong call to avoid recentralization, highlighting the importance of decentralization despite the challenge it presents. The session introduced the idea of territorial pacts²⁵—multi-actor, co-governed planning frameworks that reflect shared commitments across levels and sectors.

The final focus group adopted a critical lens, pushing beyond normative frameworks to interrogate the politics of territorial planning. Participants questioned the instrumental view of land use and advocated for a deeper understanding of territory as shaped by history, conflict, and identity. A researcher noted: *“We’re not just*

²⁵ An idea originally developed in France. The Contrats de Plan État-Région (CPER) are joint programming and strategic planning instruments between the French central government and the regions. They were established in 1982 as part of France’s decentralization process. CPERs are considered one of the most sophisticated multi-level governance instruments in Europe and have been recognized by the OECD as a good practice. In Colombia, they were introduced through Law 1450 of 2011.

managing land. We're navigating power, memory, and belonging" (Annex 6). Following a comparative analysis of all sessions, ten key conclusions were derived. These findings explain why Colombia's five formal metropolitan areas face significant difficulties in implementing effective territorial planning and in harmonizing local actions with broader planning instruments like the POT and PEMOT.

Table 37 Focus Groups Key Conclusions

Issue	Summary
1. Structural Multilevel Disarticulation	A lack of coordination among national, regional, and local actors creates functional overlaps and gaps in competences, clearly reflecting the dual agency problem.
2. Sectoral Fragmentation	Sectors such as transport, housing, and environment operate independently, lacking an integrated vision of territory and leading to normative contradictions.
3. Weak Municipal Technical and Fiscal Capacity	Local governments often lack the technical tools and financial autonomy required for planning, resulting in dependency on the national level and misalignment between responsibility and capability.
4. Disconnection Between Legal Framework and Territorial Realities	A structural gap between legal mandates and on-the-ground realities hinders plan implementation and policy effectiveness.
5. Centralization vs. Territorial Autonomy	Centralized control limits the flexibility and relevance of planning instruments, creating tensions with the constitutional autonomy of local governments.
6. Overlapping Competencies Across Entities	The intersection of multiple mandates generates legal conflicts and undermines clarity of roles—another expression of institutional dual agency.
7. Uncoordinated Planning Instruments	Instruments like the POT and PEMOT often operate in isolation from one another, failing to reflect regional dynamics or guide integrated action.
8. Ineffective Territorial Associativity Regime	The existing framework for inter-municipal cooperation is perceived as weak and politically ineffective, requiring regulatory and operational reform.
9. Limited Citizen Participation Due to Institutional Frameworks	Participation is often symbolic and constrained by rigid institutional norms, excluding local knowledge from decision-making processes.
10. Lack of Effective Inter-Institutional Coordination	The absence of consistent coordination mechanisms results in duplicated efforts, unclear mandates, and fragmented policy action—directly linked to the core idea of dual agency.

Source: Own Work

Across all groups, there was strong consensus on the need to adopt a more complex and context-sensitive reading of territorial planning in Colombia. Participants agreed that planning effectiveness cannot be divorced from institutional design, and that institutional inconsistencies—particularly those associated with the dual agency phenomenon—must be placed at the center of diagnostic and reform efforts.

This collective perspective confirms that no single institutional model or sectoral solution can adequately address the layered challenges of urbanization, governance fragmentation, and policy implementation. Instead, any response must account for the interplay between competence distribution, governance architecture, and urban pressures, particularly in fast-growing and institutionally fragile metropolitan areas.

8.2.3 Concluding Reflection: Dual Agency and the Erosion of Local Policy Effectiveness

The qualitative evidence presented in this chapter confirms and sharpens a central hypothesis of this thesis: that the ineffectiveness of territorial planning policies in Colombia's metropolitan areas is not merely a result of technical or procedural flaws, but a consequence of deeper institutional contradictions, what this research conceptualizes as the problem of dual agency.

Across all focus groups, participants described a landscape marked by fragmented authority, overlapping mandates, and a persistent mismatch between responsibility and capacity. Local governments are simultaneously expected to lead planning processes and comply with national frameworks, while lacking the autonomy, resources, or institutional clarity to do so effectively. This double bind—being both agents of local political mandates and executors of national planning instruments—generates a diluted form of accountability and inhibits coherent, long-term public action at the local level.

Moreover, the discussions revealed how centralized, technocratic planning models continue to dominate, often at the expense of participatory, context-sensitive approaches. When local actors, knowledge, and territorial dynamics are excluded from decision-making, the legitimacy and effectiveness of planning instruments are undermined. In this way, the focus groups not only confirmed the structural symptoms of dual agency but also revealed its political and epistemic dimensions—how power, recognition, and institutional design interact to shape the implementation gap.

In this context, the erosion of local public policy effectiveness is not accidental. It is the outcome of a governance architecture that places local governments at the intersection of multiple and often incompatible mandates, without resolving the tensions between them. The empirical voices collected in this chapter illustrate the lived experience of these contradictions and reinforce the analytical relevance of the dual agency framework as a diagnostic and interpretive tool.

By situating these findings within the broader context of Section II, it becomes clear that territorial planning effectiveness cannot be restored through isolated reforms or legal adjustments alone. Instead, a more profound transformation is needed—one

that rethinks the distribution of competences, the design of coordination mechanisms, and the role of local governments as active subjects in the planning process. Only by addressing the structural roots of dual agency can policy implementation become not only more coherent, but also more democratic, participatory, and territorially just.

8.3 Insights from Key Informant Interviews: The Institutional Dimension of Dual Agency

8.3.1 Identification of key informant

To complement the focus group findings and further illuminate the structural challenges of Colombia's territorial planning system, two in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with high-level institutional actors directly involved in the formulation and implementation of decentralization and territorial governance policies: Julián Andrés Santiago Villarreal, former Deputy Director of Decentralization at the National Planning Department (DNP), and María Juliana Ruiz, Project Manager at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and coordinator of the Decentralization Mission.

These interviews offer a privileged institutional perspective on how dual agency dynamics manifest within the state apparatus—particularly in relation to the distribution of competences, intergovernmental coordination, and the operational capacity of subnational entities. Drawing from their leadership roles in the Decentralization Mission, both interviewees shed light on the contradictions between the legal responsibilities formally assigned to local governments and the actual means available to fulfill them. Their insights are particularly relevant for this study, as they reveal how institutional arrangements and political incentives affect the ability of local and metropolitan governments to implement territorial planning policies effectively.

By engaging with actors positioned at the interface between policy design and implementation, these interviews allow for a more grounded and systemic assessment of the limits of institutional consistency, while also offering critical reflections on the prospects for reform. The analysis of their contributions, presented in detail in Annexes 13 and 15, further supports the proposition that fragmented governance and overlapping mandates are not incidental features, but rather structural expressions of

a governance model that hinders coherent territorial management and fuels the implementation gap.

8.3.2 Interview takeaways

María Juliana Ruiz provided a systemic diagnosis based on more than three decades of accumulated evidence from the Decentralization Mission. She emphasized that regulatory proliferation without ex-post evaluation has led to overlapping competences in nearly 80% of government functions, severely affecting institutional clarity. According to Ruiz, this ambiguity creates fertile ground for what she terms “institutional ping-pong”, a scenario where different levels of government deflect responsibility, resulting in systemic inaction and implementation gaps. She explicitly connects these dynamics to the principal-agent problem, noting that the absence of effective monitoring and the weakness of Colombia’s party system prevent agenda alignment across levels of government and exacerbate institutional incoherence.

Ruiz identified two competing strategies to address this fragmentation. The minimalist approach proposes a return to constitutional principles and a reduction in regulatory complexity, whereas the maximalist approach—advocated by the Mission—calls for a sector-by-sector mapping of value chains to explicitly define responsibilities, allocate fiscal tools, and reduce discretionary spaces. Her critique also highlights the paradox of institutional innovation: while new figures such as metropolitan areas and administrative regions have been introduced to address coordination deficits, they lack funding and legal instruments to operate effectively—thus replicating and even amplifying the very dysfunctions they were created to solve (Annex 15).

Complementing this perspective, Julián Andrés Villarreal offered a more operational view of the performance asymmetries and structural inequalities that underpin the decentralization framework. From his role at DNP, Villarreal underscored how decentralization in Colombia remains formally advanced but functionally fragile. Most municipalities lack the technical, administrative, and fiscal capacities to effectively exercise their assigned responsibilities, resulting in chronic dependency on the central government. He pointed to a misalignment between delegated competences and actual support mechanisms, especially the absence of consistent

evaluation and feedback loops to monitor implementation. Without these tools, local actors remain under-resourced and under-scrutinized, which diminishes accountability and perpetuates (Annex 13).

To address this, Villarreal proposed a functional decentralization model that links delegated functions to incentives, results-based evaluation, and differentiated approaches tailored to territorial realities. His emphasis on performance-based governance, resource flexibility, and multilevel cooperation aligns closely with the analytical lens of dual agency, as it seeks to reduce the discretionary gaps in which institutional ambiguity and overlapping mandates thrive.

Taken together, both interviews converge on a central point: the current decentralization model generates fragmented authority without clear accountability, leaving municipalities caught between political mandates, financial dependency, and blurred institutional expectations. Ruiz critiques the normative and architectural design of the system, while Villarreal focuses on implementation capacity and policy tools. Both perspectives reinforce the argument that dual agency is not an anomaly, but a structural feature of Colombian territorial governance.

Their contributions validate the core findings of this thesis: that urban and territorial planning policies fail not only because of design flaws, but because of a governance architecture that assigns responsibility without providing the means or the clarity to fulfill it. Although the lack of resources and clarity in governance does not constitute double agency in itself, it fosters the conditions under which dual agency arises. Throughout this thesis, these governance gaps exacerbate the tensions between responding to national mandates and local interests, effectively enabling the very dual agency dynamics analyzed in this work. Addressing this condition requires more than technical reform. It demands a coherent political, fiscal, and institutional reconfiguration that links competencies to capacities, and mandates to monitoring systems—ensuring that the implementation of planning policy is not undermined by the very institutions tasked with carrying it out.

8.4 Dual Agency and Institutional Inconsistency in Territorial Planning Policy: Analytical Reflections

The territorial planning domain in Colombia starkly reveals the complexities and limitations of implementing coherent public policy in the face of institutional inconsistency and overlapping mandates. Through the analytical lens of the dual agency model applied in this section it was easy to see how Colombian municipalities or local governments—the primary agents in charge of land management—operate under conflicting expectations from multiple principals, each asserting different (and often contradictory) priorities and regulatory tools.

The application of the Dual Agency Model reveals several facts. Firstly, regarding the core dynamic of what the model seeks to assess, it can be stated that the territorial planning system places municipalities at the heart of policy implementation through the formulation and execution of Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT). However, their role as agents is deeply constrained by a fragmented normative framework that has evolved in a reactive and piecemeal fashion. The analysis shows how laws were enacted without ensuring their continuity or coordination with previous instruments and often left vague distinctions between "competences" and "functions." This results in mandates that are ambiguous in content and misaligned in timing.

In addition, local governments must respond to at least four district types of principals that are in different hierarchical levels. Namely:

- National government. It imposes technical standards, allocates funding for transfer system, and defines land use policy guidelines.
- Environmental authorities (CARs). These entities hold veto power over land use decisions on environmental grounds—often in tension with development objectives.
- Metropolitan or associative entities. They usually promote coordination but lack effective authority.
- Local residents and planning councils. They introduce local demands and democratic legitimacy but add another layer of expectations.

This variety of principal generates asymmetric pressures in the agent (Local government) and contribute to exacerbate a latent dilemma, while municipalities hold formal responsibility, they often lack the capacity, autonomy, or institutional support to reconcile these competing demands.

The dual agency model proves analytically powerful in making visible the invisible frictions of territorial governance. The application of the model in this policy realm allowed the research to trace how normative ambiguity and fragmented coordination structures affect a municipality's ability to implement land use decisions. It also revealed that institutional inconsistency is not just a technical problem but a structural feature of the Colombian planning system. Furthermore, it showed how coexisting but misaligned mandates undermine the coherence and power of local policies, in this case of POTs. Making it obvious why municipalities often default to inertia or symbolic compliance.

However, despite its strengths, some limits emerge when applying the framework to territorial planning. For example, in terms of temporal dimension the model does not yet fully account for how policy timing mismatches—i.e., delayed enactment or inconsistent policy cycles across actors—further distort implementation. The framework also fell short in assess municipal heterogeneity as it tends to treat municipalities as unitary agents, when in fact internal divisions (between planning offices, mayors, technical staff) may also generate fragmentation. In the same line the analysis notes limited municipal capacities, but these are not yet differentiated in a based on a differentiation of types of local governments (i.e., capital or peripheral municipalities).

8.5 Closing Remarks

In conclusion, the analysis reveals a persistent ineffectiveness in Colombia's territorial planning public policy, primarily due to a fragmented institutional design, misaligned competencies, and limited coordination across levels of government. Despite normative frameworks aimed at organizing and guiding land use and urban development, the reality is that local politics often become the de facto governing force in territorial planning. However, this local leadership is not necessarily aligned with the complex dynamics of territorial growth, resulting in reactive rather than strategic

planning. In this context, local governments frequently find themselves simultaneously positioned as both agents and principals, tasked with implementing national mandates while also pursuing their own political agendas—ultimately exemplifying the phenomenon of dual agency.

Bringing the concept of dual agency into this discussion allows for a more integrated understanding of the structural dysfunctions within territorial governance. Rather than treating institutional fragmentation, capacity gaps, and coordination failures as isolated problems, dual agency provides a comprehensive analytical lens that connects them as parts of a broader systemic issue. Recognizing this interconnectedness is essential not only for Colombia but also for other countries in the Global South facing similar decentralization challenges. By acknowledging dual agency as a composite phenomenon influenced by legal, political, fiscal, and administrative dimensions, policymakers and scholars can better design targeted, multi-level solutions that enhance coherence, accountability, and effectiveness in territorial governance. If addressed seriously, this framework could serve as a guiding reference for more adaptive and context-sensitive planning systems across the region.

Section III. Housing Policy: Dual Agency and Fragmented Implementation in a Key Development Sector

Section III continues the empirical exploration by applying the analytical framework developed in Section I to the housing sector, a domain that is central to achieving sustainable urban development yet particularly vulnerable to institutional fragmentation. Building on the evidence and patterns identified in territorial planning, this section examines how housing policy reflects and exacerbates the challenges posed by dual agency and inconsistent governance arrangements in metropolitan areas.

Through a sequential structure, the section first maps the institutional and normative evolution of Colombia's housing policy, tracing the distribution of competences across government levels and the design of housing-related instruments. It then investigates how this framework plays out in practice, analyzing policy appropriation by local governments, the role of associative schemes, and the variation in municipal responses to national housing directives. Drawing from both policy documents and actor narratives, the section captures the institutional tensions and operational frictions that arise when local authorities must simultaneously respond to national goals and local housing needs.

The final chapter in this section focuses on the structural challenges that undermine housing policy effectiveness, such as ambiguous mandates, overlapping roles, and resource constraints. It also highlights how these challenges are perceived by key informants and experienced by implementing institutions. By doing so, Section III provides a detailed account of how the housing sector operates as a site where dual agency problems materialize in concrete policy failures, setting the stage for the integrated analysis and theoretical reflection developed in Section IV.

9. Housing Policies and Competence Distribution

9.1 Introduction

Housing policy is a central pillar in the construction of inclusive, sustainable, and equitable urban development. In contexts such as Colombia's, where urban growth has outpaced institutional adaptation, housing emerges not only as a sectoral policy but as a key arena for intergovernmental coordination, territorial planning, and social equity. Despite its constitutional recognition as a fundamental right, the guarantee of access to adequate housing remains uneven and fragmented, particularly in metropolitan areas where administrative borders do not align with the spatial dynamics of urbanization.

This chapter examines the institutional and normative architecture that underpins the housing sector in Colombia, with particular emphasis on the distribution of competences across levels of government and the coordination challenges that arise from it. Building on the analytical framework developed in earlier chapters, this analysis draws attention to the phenomenon of dual agency—the coexistence of multiple principals with overlapping or contradictory mandates delegating responsibilities to the same implementing agents. As will be shown, this institutional configuration not only creates tensions in policy design and implementation but also undermines the state's capacity to meet the housing needs of vulnerable populations.

In line with the territorial planning analysis developed in Chapter 6, this chapter argues that the institutional design of the housing sector suffers from similar problems of fragmentation, lack of clarity in the assignment of roles, and limited consistency between planning, financing, and execution functions. These structural inconsistencies are exacerbated in metropolitan contexts, where housing policy must navigate complex governance arrangements, multiple stakeholders, and overlapping jurisdictions.

The chapter proceeds in six parts. Section 9.1 reviews the evolution of Colombia's legal and policy framework on housing, tracing the key milestones and principles that have shaped the sector. Section 9.2 outlines the institutional design of the housing system, identifying the main actors, their roles, and modes of interaction.

Section 9.3 examines the distribution of competences across levels of government and discusses the challenges this poses for governance and coordination. Section 9.4 analyzes the instruments and mechanisms used to implement housing policy, focusing on their effectiveness and alignment with planning tools. Section 9.5 explores the issue of institutional consistency, identifying sources of fragmentation and their effects on housing delivery. Finally, Section 9.6 applies the concept of dual agency to the housing domain, illustrating how it manifests and what implications it has for the effectiveness of housing policies in Colombia.

Ultimately, this chapter seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how institutional arrangements shape housing outcomes, and to identify opportunities for improving governance structures to ensure the realization of the right to housing in a context of increasing urban and territorial complexity.

9.2 Evolution of Normative Foundations for Housing Policy in Colombia

The evolution of housing policy in Colombia reflects the gradual consolidation of a legal and institutional framework that seeks to guarantee the right to housing and promote sustainable urban development. This framework has developed through constitutional mandates, legislative milestones, and the creation of sectoral institutions, culminating in a complex governance architecture with overlapping responsibilities and evolving priorities.

The 1991 Political Constitution of Colombia explicitly recognizes housing as a fundamental right. Article 51 states that "All Colombian citizens are entitled to live in dignity. The State shall promote policies for the provision of adequate housing." Additionally, Article 365 establishes the State's responsibility to ensure the provision of public services, including those related to water and sanitation, which are integral to dignified housing conditions. Furthermore, Article 334 grants the State a planning role in directing the economy and ensuring the equitable distribution of public resources, which includes housing programs for vulnerable populations (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991).

A pivotal moment in the institutionalization of housing policy came with the enactment of Law 3 of 1991, which established the legal basis for national housing programs and the provision of subsidies for low-income families. It introduced mechanisms for the allocation of demand-side subsidies, laying the groundwork for Colombia's approach to housing finance (Law 3 of 1991, Colombia).

Subsequently, the Law 1537 of 2012 further defined the guiding principles of housing policy in the country. It emphasized the importance of housing as a means of social inclusion and recognized the need for integrated urban development. This law also advanced the framework for urban renovation, neighborhood improvement, and promotion of sustainable housing practices (Law 1537 of 2012, Colombia).

More recently, Law 2079 of 2021 consolidated and updated the legal framework for housing and territorial development. It reaffirmed the State's obligation to ensure access to housing and incorporated provisions for improving institutional coordination, reinforcing the role of local governments in policy implementation, and promoting the planning-production nexus in housing supply (Law 2079 of 2021, Colombia).

An institutional milestone occurred with the creation of the Ministry of Housing, City, and Territory through Article 14 of Law 1444 of 2011, which separated housing and urban development functions from the former Ministry of Environment, Housing, and Territorial Development. This restructuring was formalized by Decree 3571 of 2011, which defined the Ministry's core mission: to formulate, direct, coordinate, and implement national policies, plans, and projects related to planned urban and territorial development, housing access and finance, and the provision of water and sanitation services (Decree 3571 of 2011, Colombia).

A significant regulatory development in the sector was the adoption of Decree 1077 of 2015, which issued the Unified Regulatory Decree for the Housing, City, and Territory Sector. This decree compiled, updated, and standardized the existing regulatory provisions applicable to the sector, providing a comprehensive legal tool that facilitates the implementation of housing policies and coordination between various actors. It includes regulations on housing subsidies, urban planning, land use, potable water and basic sanitation, and the institutional functions of different public entities at national and subnational levels.

Among its primary functions, the Ministry is responsible for (Decree 1077 of 2015, Colombia):

- Designing and coordinating policies on housing, housing finance, urban development, and land use regulation.
- Promoting urban renewal and neighborhood upgrading programs.
- Monitoring public and private entities involved in housing production.
- Defining instruments to guide urban development at national, regional, and local levels.
- Coordinating with other entities to establish technical parameters for urban growth and risk management.
- Ensuring integration of housing, water, sanitation, environment, infrastructure, and mobility policies.
- Supporting local authorities and fostering intergovernmental cooperation.

This institutional and legal evolution has enabled the State to consolidate a strategic vision for housing policy. However, as subsequent sections will show, challenges persist in the alignment of legal instruments, the distribution of competences, and the coordination between national mandates and local implementation capacities.

9.3 Institutional Design and the Housing System

The institutional design of Colombia's housing sector reflects a complex and multilayered governance architecture, built upon the constitutional principles of decentralization, coordination, and subsidiarity. Article 287 of the 1991 Political Constitution grants administrative autonomy to territorial entities, while Article 311 assigns municipalities the responsibility for promoting local development and ensuring the provision of public services. These constitutional principles are operationalized through a series of laws, most notably Law 388 of 1997 on territorial planning, Law 489 of 1998 on public administration, and Law 1444 of 2011, which created the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT).

Table 38 Institutional Roles and Responsibilities in the Colombian Housing Policy Ecosystem

Actor	Level of Government	Main Function	Key Instruments / Mechanisms	Legal Basis
Ministry of Housing (MVCT)	National	Direction of the housing system; policy design; resource allocation	National Housing Policy; housing subsidies; intersectoral coordination	Law 489 of 1998; Decree 3571 of 2011; Decree 1077 of 2015
FONVIVIENDA	National	Administration of subsidies and financial resources	<i>Mi Casa Ya</i> operation; subsidy allocation mechanisms	Law 3 of 1991; Decree 1077 of 2015
Departments	Regional (subnational)	Technical support; regional coordination; municipal assistance	Departmental agreements; coordination of supramunicipal housing strategies	Law 715 of 2001; Law 1454 of 2011
Municipalities	Local	Needs assessment; project formulation and execution; local subsidies	Municipal housing plans; legalization and upgrading programs; local subsidy schemes	Constitution (Art. 311); Law 388 of 1997; Law 3 of 1991
Family Compensation Funds (Cajas de Compensación)	Private with public role	Management of family housing subsidies; co-financing with public programs	Subsidy administration; complementary financing	Law 49 of 1990; Law 789 of 2002
Urban Developers / Operators	Mixed (delegated or private)	Project implementation; technical and legal land management	VIS/VIP housing promotion; public-private partnerships; participation in national programs	Law 388 of 1997; Law 2079 of 2021
Associative Territorial Schemes (EATs)	Supramunicipal	Coordinated land and housing project management among municipalities	Legal delegation via Law 1454; contracts plan; supramunicipal initiatives	Law 1454 of 2011; Law 489 of 1998; Law 1955 of 2019

Source own work based on current legal framework

At the national level, the MVCT is the lead entity of the housing sector. As established in Article 14 of Law 1444 of 2011 and further developed by Decree 3571 of 2011, the Ministry is tasked with formulating, directing, and coordinating policies for housing, urban development, and basic public services, including water and sanitation. The Ministry is also responsible for defining eligibility criteria for subsidies, regulating housing finance mechanisms, and promoting urban renovation and neighborhood upgrading programs. These responsibilities are consolidated and standardized in the Unified Regulatory Decree 1077 of 2015, which serves as the principal operational framework for the sector.

The MVCT works in coordination with the National Planning Department (DNP), which incorporates housing goals into national development plans and prepares policy

proposals for the National Council for Economic and Social Policy (CONPES). The Ministry of Finance oversees budget allocation and funding instruments for housing programs, while the Superintendence of Public Services ensures regulatory compliance in service delivery linked to urban development and housing quality (Law 489 of 1998; Decree 3571 of 2011; Law 152 of 1994; Law 142 of 1994).

As Carlos Felipe Reyes, former official of the Ministry of Housing, pointed out, “compensation funds account for nearly 80% of the resources the national government allocates to housing subsidies.” This financial weight grants them substantial influence over the housing system, despite being non-governmental actors, and further complicates the configuration of accountability in the sector (Annex 8).

At the subnational level, institutional design assigns key roles to departments and municipalities. While departments do not have a constitutional mandate for direct housing delivery, Law 1454 of 2011 and Law 2199 of 2022 emphasize their role in promoting regional coordination and supporting municipal capacities through technical assistance and co-financing. In particular, departments may participate in the formulation of regional housing strategies and the articulation of projects that involve multiple jurisdictions.

Municipalities, in accordance with Article 311 of the Constitution and Law 388 of 1997, are responsible for territorial planning and urban land management. They must integrate housing policy into their Land Use Plans (Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial, POT), identify land suitable for social housing (VIS/VIP), administer local subsidies, and manage housing development in coordination with public and private actors. Law 2079 of 2021 reiterates the responsibility of municipalities in aligning housing policy with territorial planning instruments and social inclusion goals (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991, art. 311; Law 388 of 1997; Law 2079 of 2021).

In practice, the level of implementation capacity varies widely. Larger municipalities —especially category special and category 1 cities—tend to have established housing offices, technical teams, and interagency coordination mechanisms. In contrast, intermediate and small municipalities often face human resource shortages, institutional fragmentation, and difficulties accessing co-financing

mechanisms or structuring viable housing projects (Law 136 of 1994; Law 617 of 2000; Law 388 of 1997).

Other institutional actors play complementary yet critical roles:

- Cajas de Compensación Familiar, regulated by Law 49 of 1990, manage and allocate family housing subsidies for formal sector workers. They are essential intermediaries for social housing delivery in urban areas.
- The Fondo Nacional del Ahorro (FNA) and commercial financial institutions, under Law 546 of 1999, provide savings and mortgage credit instruments for low- and middle-income households, supporting demand-side financing.
- Urban development companies (e.g., ERUs, municipal housing institutes) serve as project managers and land developers, particularly in urban renewal and resettlement programs (Law 388 of 1997).
- Private developers and construction firms supply most formal housing, guided by national regulations and municipal land-use policies (Law 388 of 1997; Law 2079 of 2021).
- The Superintendence of Notaries and Registry (SNR) and the Instituto Geográfico Agustín Codazzi (IGAC) provide critical support for land titling, cadastral information, and spatial planning (Law 1579 of 2012; Law 2237 of 2022; Law 1955 of 2019).
- Metropolitan areas and other associative schemes, such as the Región Metropolitana Bogotá-Cundinamarca or departmental councils, may coordinate regional housing actions, although they require legal delegation of functions to play an implementing role (Law 1454 of 2011; Law 2199 of 2022; Law 1625 of 2013).

Despite this relatively well-structured architecture, persistent tensions undermine effective coordination and delivery. Among them:

- Functional overlaps and legal ambiguities: Multiple institutions share overlapping mandates, particularly in program design, subsidy management, and urban interventions (Law 489 of 1998; Law 388 of 1997; Law 2079 of 2021).

- Vertical fragmentation: National policies and guidelines are not always aligned with local planning instruments or implementation realities, generating inconsistencies between strategic objectives and operative capacities (Law 388 of 1997; Law 1537 of 2012).
- Territorial asymmetries: Disparities in institutional capacity between municipalities —especially between large cities and small or rural ones—create uneven conditions for fulfilling housing-related functions (Law 715 of 2001; Law 1454 of 2011).
- Sectoral disconnection: Although housing policy intersects with sectors such as water and sanitation, environment, transport, and risk management, intersectoral coordination remains weak, both normatively and operationally (Law 142 of 1994; Law 1523 of 2012).

In metropolitan regions, these tensions are magnified due to the functional integration of territories and the absence of binding governance frameworks that align housing policy across jurisdictions. The inability to scale housing interventions beyond municipal borders limits the potential for coordinated solutions to regional housing deficits.

This fragmented institutional landscape underscores the importance of clarifying roles, improving intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, and investing in local capacity-building. These elements are essential to ensure that housing policy not only complies with legal mandates but also responds to the complex spatial and social dynamics of Colombian cities. The next section explores how competences are distributed across levels of government and the specific governance challenges this entails.

9.4 Distribution of Competences and Governance Challenges

The distribution of competences in Colombia's housing sector is structured upon the decentralized framework established by the 1991 Political Constitution, which guarantees the autonomy of territorial entities while establishing coordination, subsidiarity, and concurrence as guiding principles of public administration (Article 288). In this context, the housing sector is governed by a multi-level system in which

national, departmental, and municipal governments share responsibilities defined by both constitutional provisions and a series of sectoral laws and decrees (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991).

At the constitutional level, Article 51 affirms the right to dignified housing, assigning the State the obligation to promote public policies to secure it. Article 365 reinforces the duty of the State to guarantee the quality and continuity of public services, which are essential components of housing provision. Moreover, Article 311 designates municipalities as responsible for the management of local development and the provision of services that directly impact housing production and access (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991).

This framework is operationalized through a set of legal instruments:

- Law 388 of 1997 regulates land use and urban planning and mandates municipalities to integrate housing policy into their Land Use Plans (Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial, POT).
- Law 715 of 2001 and Law 1176 of 2007 assign responsibilities in the delivery of basic services and define criteria for fiscal transfers from the General System of Participations (SGP).
- Law 1454 of 2011 outlines the general framework for territorial organization and coordination among levels of government.
- Law 2199 of 2022 promotes regional planning and strengthens associative mechanisms as instruments for coordinating development at the supra-municipal scale.
- Decree 1077 of 2015 provides regulatory detail on housing functions, implementation instruments, and coordination mechanisms.

Under this architecture, the national government, through the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT), exercises policy leadership. It defines national housing goals, regulatory frameworks, eligibility criteria for programs and subsidies, and manages public investment for housing through co-financing schemes, the General System of Royalties, and national funds. The MVCT also articulates with the National Planning Department (DNP), the Ministry of Finance, and other sectoral entities to promote cross-cutting alignment between housing, water and sanitation, urban

development, and risk management policies (Law 489 of 1998; Law 3 of 1991; Law 1537 of 2012; Decree 1077 of 2015).

Departments, though not constitutionally mandated to provide housing, act as intermediaries and promoters of regional coordination. Law 1454 of 2011 and Law 2199 of 2022 empower them to support municipalities through technical assistance, promote associative governance, and articulate regional housing strategies. However, their influence remains contingent on political will, institutional capacity, and their ability to structure viable co-financing mechanisms (Law 1454 of 2011; Law 2199 of 2022).

Municipalities are the primary actors in the execution of housing policy. According to Article 311 of the Constitution and Article 91 of Law 136 of 1994, they are responsible for urban development, provision of services, and land-use planning. Law 388 of 1997 further assigns them the obligation to identify developable land for social housing (VIS/VIP), regulate urban expansion, manage public-private partnerships for housing production, and structure subsidy programs adapted to local realities. Decree 1077 of 2015 consolidates these attributions and mandates municipalities to articulate their housing policies with POTs and local investment frameworks. However, many municipalities—especially those in categories 5 and 6—lack the technical and financial capacity to fulfill these responsibilities effectively (Political Constitution of Colombia, 1991, art. 311; Law 136 of 1994, art. 91; Law 388 of 1997; Decree 1077 of 2015).

Associative schemes, such as metropolitan areas (regulated by Law 1625 of 2013), administrative and planning regions (RAP), and the Región Metropolitana Bogotá–Cundinamarca (established under Law 2199 of 2022), have gained increasing importance in coordinating housing actions across municipalities. While their formal recognition represents a step forward in addressing urban-regional housing dynamics, these schemes often face legal limitations for receiving delegated functions or managing sectoral budgets unless specific agreements or regulations are issued. Their operational capacity and mandate clarity remain under construction (Law 1625 of 2013; Law 1454 of 2011; Law 2199 of 2022).

Table 39 Distribution of Housing Sector Competences by Level of Government in Colombia.

Level of Government	Main Competences	Associated Instruments	Remarks
National Government	Set housing policy guidelines and targets Establish legal and technical frameworks Allocate and coordinate financial resources Grant national subsidies Coordinate with related sectors (land use, water, public services)	Law 3/1991, Law 1537/2012, Law 2079/2021 Decree 1077/2015 National Housing Policy (PNV) National subsidy programs (e.g., <i>Mi Casa Ya</i>) FONVIVIENDA	Leads the system. Designs national guidelines, co-finances housing initiatives, and provides technical standards. Delegates implementation to subnational levels but retains oversight and standard-setting roles.
Departmental Governments	Provide technical assistance to municipalities Co-finance housing programs Coordinate intermunicipal strategies Promote associative schemes (e.g., EATs)	Departmental Development Plans Inter-administrative agreements MVCT–department co-financed programs	Play a coordinating and supporting role. Limited direct operational capacity, but essential to articulate small municipalities and support rural housing initiatives.
Municipal Governments	Identify housing demand Manage land for VIS/VIP Formulate and implement housing projects Provide local subsidies Execute upgrading and legalization programs	Municipal POTs Municipal Housing Plans Local subsidy programs (rental, improvement) Social housing projects Land banks	Main implementing actors. Crucial for local diagnostics, project execution, and land use. Their capacity often depends on technical expertise and local fiscal space.
Associative Territorial Schemes (EATs)	Coordinate supramunicipal housing projects Implement delegated functions Jointly manage land and public services	Contracts Plan Formal delegation (Law 1454/2011) Intermunicipal agreements Entities such as AMB, Metropolitan Area of Valle de Aburrá or Bogotá, Cundinamarca Metropolitan Region	Their role depends on legal configuration and delegation mechanisms. Have strong potential to address housing and land challenges at metropolitan scale but require technical and legal capacity.

Source own work based on current legal framework

Despite the formal structure, several governance challenges persist:

- **Normative fragmentation and ambiguity:** Multiple legal instruments regulate the sector without clear articulation among them, creating uncertainties in role assignment and responsibilities.
- **Functional overlaps and duplication:** National, departmental, and municipal actors frequently operate in the same territories with similar mandates (e.g., subsidy allocation, project formulation) without effective coordination mechanisms.
- **Territorial asymmetries:** The distribution of institutional capacity and financial resources is highly uneven. While large cities can structure complex housing

projects and absorb national funds, small and intermediate municipalities struggle to meet even minimum technical and planning requirements.

- **Weak vertical and horizontal articulation:** National housing policies often fail to integrate with local planning instruments or to reflect real land availability and socio-spatial conditions. Similarly, coordination between neighboring municipalities remains limited, despite legal recognition of inter-municipal cooperation.
- **Limited use of delegation mechanisms:** Although delegation of functions is permitted under Law 489 of 1998 and further discussed in Law 2199 of 2022, its operationalization in the housing sector remains incipient, partly due to legal uncertainty, lack of clear protocols, and mistrust between levels of government.

This complex distribution of roles leads to practical ambiguities in implementation. As Fabio Sánchez observed, “municipalities provide land, the national government grants subsidies, and compensation funds intervene in demand,” resulting in “a complex system with diluted responsibilities” that weakens overall policy coherence (Annex 11).

These challenges result in a fragmented governance landscape in which competences do not always translate into clear, effective, or coordinated action. Institutional architecture tends to reproduce overlaps and implementation gaps rather than clarify and streamline housing delivery responsibilities. These dynamics are especially problematic in metropolitan contexts, where the functional integration of territories demands more robust, flexible, and consistent governance frameworks.

The following section will examine how these institutional issues manifest in the design and use of policy instruments, and how they affect the implementation of housing strategies at different territorial levels.

9.5 Instruments and Policy Implementation

Colombia’s housing policy operates through a diverse set of instruments aimed at facilitating access to adequate housing, reducing the quantitative and qualitative housing deficit, and promoting urban development aligned with territorial planning. These instruments—developed progressively since the 1990s—combine financial

subsidies, regulatory mechanisms, planning tools, and project-based interventions, all of which are framed by a normative structure that includes the 1991 Constitution, various sectoral laws, and Decree 1077 of 2015.

9.5.1 Subsidies and Housing Programs

The most prominent policy instrument is the demand-side housing subsidy, introduced by Law 3 of 1991, which enables low-income households to access new or used housing, build on owned land, or improve existing dwellings. These subsidies—administered by the Ministry of Housing, the Cajas de Compensación Familiar, and local governments—prioritize households classified under SISBÉN criteria and are co-financed by national and local sources (Law 3 of 1991; Decree 1077 of 2015).

Decree 1077 of 2015 consolidates the procedures for allocating these subsidies, defining eligibility conditions, income thresholds, and institutional responsibilities. The framework distinguishes between Vivienda de Interés Social (VIS) and Vivienda de Interés Prioritario (VIP), establishing price caps and technical standards for units eligible for public assistance (Decree 1077 of 2015).

Law 1537 of 2012 expanded the scope of subsidies by allowing more flexible use for incremental improvements, legal titling, and informal settlement upgrading. These adaptations were further reinforced by Law 2079 of 2021, which recognized housing not only as an asset but as a social right that must be guaranteed through integrated policy instruments and urban planning alignment (Law 1537 of 2012; Law 2079 of 2021).

Despite their centrality, housing subsidies face persistent challenges. The allocation system depends on household demand and the availability of suitable housing supply, which often excludes vulnerable groups in informal or rural contexts. Moreover, the geographic concentration of housing projects in peripheral or poorly serviced areas can reinforce socio-spatial segregation and urban fragmentation.

9.5.2 Territorial Planning Instruments and Land Policy

Territorial planning instruments such as the Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial (POT), Planes Básicos de Ordenamiento Territorial (PBOT), and Esquemas de

Ordenamiento Territorial (EOT) play a critical role in enabling or constraining housing implementation. According to Law 388 of 1997, municipalities are required to designate land for VIS/VIP development, define urban expansion areas, and implement land-use policies that facilitate adequate and equitable access to land (Law 388 of 1997).

However, the coordination between national housing policy and local planning instruments remains weak. In practice, the availability of land suitable for VIS is often limited due to speculative dynamics, high urbanization costs, environmental restrictions, or lack of infrastructure. Many municipalities fail to update their POTs or to enforce zoning regulations, limiting the effectiveness of land management tools.

From a local implementation perspective, Johan Julio from the Bogotá Housing Secretariat emphasized that “territorial planning must respond to local realities,” warning that national programs often operate with limited sensitivity to neighborhood conditions and real land dynamics (Annex 11).

9.5.3 Project-Based Instruments

In response to land scarcity and the complexity of urban housing delivery, the national government has promoted macroprojects of national interest (Macroproyectos de Interés Social Nacional, MISN)—regulated by Decree 4260 of 2007, now partially compiled in Decree 1077 of 2015—as large-scale interventions aimed at integrating housing, services, and urban infrastructure. These projects require coordination between multiple actors and levels of government, and often involve land readjustment, urban renewal, or resettlement processes (Decree 4260 of 2007; Decree 1077 of 2015).

While MISNs hold potential for comprehensive urban transformation, their implementation has been uneven. Some cases, like Ciudad Verde in Soacha, have achieved significant housing delivery but with critiques regarding location, lack of services, and weak integration into the surrounding urban fabric. Other initiatives have stalled due to conflicts over land tenure, financing constraints, or lack of political support.

More recently, municipalities and metropolitan areas have explored urban operations (*operaciones urbanas integrales*) and public-private partnerships as mechanisms to leverage land value capture, promote mixed-income development, and reduce the financial burden of urbanization. However, these tools require strong institutional capacity and legal certainty, which are not always present at the local level (Law 388 of 1997; Law 2079 of 2021).

9.5.4 Implementation Challenges

Despite the normative consolidation and variety of instruments, several implementation bottlenecks persist:

- **Mismatch between subsidy policy and land availability:** Subsidies are often granted in areas where no serviced land exists, delaying construction and affecting program credibility.
- **Disarticulation between planning and financing:** National housing programs are not always aligned with the investment priorities of municipal development plans or POTs.
- **Weak monitoring and evaluation systems:** As recognized in Law 2079 of 2021, there is limited capacity to monitor housing outcomes beyond quantitative delivery, particularly in terms of location, habitability, and social integration (Law 2079 of 2021).
- **Institutional fragmentation:** The implementation of housing instruments involves multiple actors—MVCT, municipalities, developers, Cajas, etc.—with weak coordination and unclear leadership.
- **Social resistance and lack of participation:** Urban interventions often lack meaningful community engagement, leading to conflicts, relocation challenges, or unsustainable outcomes.

These challenges underscore the importance of reinforcing institutional capacity, improving coordination mechanisms, and adopting an integrated approach that links housing instruments with broader territorial and social policies. The next section will explore how fragmentation and inconsistency in the institutional architecture exacerbate these implementation issues and constrain housing outcomes.

9.6. Institutional Consistency and Fragmentation

The effectiveness of housing policy in Colombia is significantly influenced by the degree of institutional consistency—that is, the extent to which legal frameworks, organizational mandates, and operational capacities are coherently aligned across levels of government and within the same level. In contexts of weak consistency, housing interventions often face overlapping responsibilities, contradictory procedures, and uncoordinated implementation, which undermine policy performance and territorial equity.

At the constitutional level, Article 209 of the 1991 Political Constitution establishes that public administration must be governed by the principles of coordination, efficiency, and responsibility. However, the sectoral implementation of these principles remains uneven. The architecture of housing governance, while normatively defined in several instruments (Law 3 of 1991, Law 388 of 1997, Law 1537 of 2012, Law 2079 of 2021, and Decree 1077 of 2015), lacks a unified operational framework that ensures institutional coherence across the housing system.

One of the main sources of inconsistency lies in the superposition of mandates. The Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT) shares functions with other national entities, such as the National Planning Department (DNP), Ministry of Finance, and the Superintendence of Public Services, without always having clearly delineated leadership or coordination roles. For example, while the MVCT defines housing policy and subsidies, the DNP designs policy guidelines and public investment frameworks, and the Cajas de Compensación administer resources under different regulatory conditions. This dispersion can lead to duplication of efforts and misaligned incentives (Law 489 of 1998; Law 3 of 1991; Decree 1077 of 2015).

At the subnational level, municipalities are legally responsible for housing implementation under Law 388 of 1997, but face frequent capacity gaps, particularly in land management, project structuring, and community engagement. Departments, while not formally assigned housing delivery responsibilities, often intervene through

ad hoc coordination or co-financing, leading to grey areas in accountability (Law 388 of 1997; Law 1454 of 2011).

Moreover, the coexistence of multiple instruments—POTs, sectoral plans, subsidy programs, land banking mechanisms, urban operations—without integrated platforms or protocols further contributes to fragmentation. While Decree 1077 of 2015 attempts to compile housing and urban development norms, it does not resolve the institutional tensions between central design and local execution (Decree 1077 of 2015; Law 388 of 1997).

In addition, inconsistencies arise between planning instruments and financing flows. Municipalities often formulate POTs with limited alignment to national investment criteria, and national programs are implemented without prior coordination with local land-use plans. This disconnection weakens the feasibility and sustainability of housing projects, particularly for social housing, which requires integrated urban services and connectivity (Law 388 of 1997; Law 1537 of 2012).

Legal gaps and normative contradictions also persist. For example:

- Law 2079 of 2021 encourages integrated housing interventions and monitoring systems, but these are not fully developed in Decree 1077 or linked to planning regulations.
- The delegation of housing functions to associative schemes (e.g., metropolitan areas) is allowed by Law 489 of 1998 and reinforced in Law 2199 of 2022, but there is no specific regulation that establishes procedures, financing conditions, or accountability frameworks for such delegation in the housing sector.
- Institutional arrangements for urban renewal and informal settlement upgrading overlap with instruments from risk management, environment, and mobility, often without integrated guidelines.

Another layer of fragmentation is territorial and procedural. Each actor (national, departmental, municipal, or private) often follows its own operational logic, project cycle, and monitoring criteria. This results in delayed project approvals, inefficient resource use, and difficulties in scaling effective practices.

In metropolitan regions, the lack of binding coordination mechanisms exacerbates these issues. While functional urban regions require integrated responses, particularly for land, mobility, and housing, the institutional design does not enable joint planning or execution beyond voluntary cooperation. Even when associative schemes exist, they lack financial autonomy or delegated authority to act on housing matters (Law 1454 of 2011; Law 1625 of 2013; Law 2199 of 2022).

These coordination gaps are not only technical but also institutional. As Johan Julio explains, “interinstitutional coordination is indispensable. Habitat problems require coordinated responses among entities,” yet current governance structures remain fragmented (Interview with Johan Julio, 2023, Annex 11).

In sum, the Colombian housing system operates under a formally decentralized model, but with insufficient institutional consistency. The fragmentation of roles, instruments, and procedures hinders strategic coordination, reduces policy effectiveness, and contributes to persistent housing deficits, particularly for the most vulnerable populations and in fast-growing urban areas.

The next section applies the dual agency framework to unpack how this fragmentation interacts with competing mandates and affects the effectiveness of local housing policy implementation.

9.7. Dual Agency in Housing Policy

The housing sector in Colombia offers a paradigmatic example of dual agency, a concept developed in this thesis to explain how the coexistence of multiple principals—often with divergent interests and mandates—delegating responsibilities to the same implementing agent can undermine policy coherence and effectiveness. In the case of housing, dual agency is particularly salient at the municipal level, where local governments are tasked with delivering housing solutions while navigating contradictory incentives, fragmented guidance, and limited autonomy.

Municipalities, under Article 311 of the Constitution and the framework established by Law 388 of 1997, are the principal agents responsible for implementing housing policy within their jurisdictions. However, their actions are simultaneously shaped and constrained by a diverse set of mandating actors, including:

- The Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT), which defines policy objectives, regulates access to subsidies, and sets technical standards (Decree 1077 of 2015).
- The National Planning Department (DNP) and Ministry of Finance, which influence investment priorities and budgetary allocations through planning instruments and fiscal rules (Law 152 of 1994).
- Cajas de Compensación Familiar, which administer family subsidies independently from municipal priorities (Law 49 of 1990).
- National oversight and control bodies, such as the Superintendence of Public Services, Comptroller General, and Attorney General's Office, which impose accountability requirements and audit practices (Law 489 of 1998).
- Private developers and financial institutions, which operate under market logics and pursue profitability, often at odds with equity-oriented municipal objectives.
- Associative schemes or regional entities, which may engage in territorial coordination but lack hierarchical authority over municipalities (Law 1454 of 2011; Law 2199 of 2022).
- International donors or multilateral institutions, whose funding and technical assistance programs may introduce additional layers of conditionality and performance indicators.

This constellation of principals, each with partial authority and specific goals, generates a fragmented landscape of expectations. Municipalities find themselves pulled in multiple directions: required to adhere to national technical standards, accountable to financial audit bodies, pressured by private market timelines, and responsible for responding to immediate local housing needs.

In practice, this multiplicity of mandates leads to four main tensions:

1. Strategic misalignment: Municipal housing plans and land use regulations may not coincide with the priorities defined by national programs, or the eligibility rules set by co-financing schemes. For instance, national subsidies may be available only for housing types or locations that are not aligned with local POTs or community priorities.

2. Operational overload and risk aversion: Local governments bear the burden of coordination, documentation, and project structuring without necessarily having the institutional capacity or legal certainty to resolve conflicts between principals. This often results in under-execution, delays, or institutional paralysis due to fear of sanction.
3. Blurry accountability lines: When multiple actors shape the design and implementation of a housing program, it becomes difficult to determine who is accountable for its success or failure. This weakens transparency, erodes public trust, and complicates evaluation.
4. Reduced policy autonomy: Municipalities have limited room to innovate or adapt housing policy to local contexts because they are constrained by centrally defined financing mechanisms, technical requirements, or political dependencies.

These tensions are particularly acute in metropolitan areas, where intermunicipal coordination is essential to address housing demand and manage land availability. Yet, the institutional framework rarely grants metropolitan agencies formal authority or resources to lead housing interventions. In the absence of delegated competencies or pooled governance mechanisms, municipalities must negotiate housing delivery in isolation, despite the regional scale of the challenges they face.

As Fabio Sánchez noted, “there is an efficiency problem when voters elect a mayor to improve services, but the actual decisions are made elsewhere,” highlighting a core dilemma of dual agency in decentralized systems (Interview with Fabio Sánchez, see Annex 11).

Furthermore, dual agency interacts with institutional fragmentation, as discussed in the previous section, to compound governance problems. The simultaneous delegation of implementation to municipalities by multiple, uncoordinated principals reduces consistency, generates overlapping reporting obligations, and drains administrative capacity.

Recognizing and addressing dual agency is essential to improving housing outcomes. This implies not only clarifying mandates and strengthening coordination mechanisms but also granting municipalities greater autonomy to integrate housing

with other urban policies, including mobility, risk management, and environmental sustainability. It also calls for redefining intergovernmental relations based on trust, subsidiarity, and the development of shared agendas across levels of government and sectors.

9.8 Conclusions

This chapter has explored the institutional and normative foundations of housing policy in Colombia, highlighting how the fragmentation of competences, the misalignment between planning and implementation tools, and the prevalence of dual agency undermine the capacity of the State to guarantee the right to adequate housing. Although Colombia has developed a robust legal framework and a wide range of policy instruments, ranging from housing subsidies to urban macroprojects, their effectiveness remains constrained by structural inconsistencies across levels of government and weak coordination among key actors.

The analysis shows that the housing sector replicates many of the challenges previously identified in territorial planning: lack of clarity in the distribution of roles, insufficient vertical and horizontal articulation, and asymmetric institutional capacities. These challenges are especially acute in metropolitan contexts, where housing needs transcend administrative boundaries, but governance structures remain fragmented and legally weak.

The application of the dual agency framework further illustrates how municipalities are simultaneously accountable to multiple principals, each imposing different incentives, controls, and expectations. This not only creates tension in the execution of housing policy but also limits the autonomy and responsiveness of local governments—particularly when resources are conditioned by national guidelines that do not reflect territorial realities.

Improving the effectiveness of housing policy requires a rethinking of intergovernmental relations in the sector. This includes strengthening the technical and financial capacities of municipalities, clarifying the roles of departments and associative schemes, and designing more flexible coordination mechanisms that promote coherence and shared accountability. It also demands a stronger alignment

between housing policy and other public interventions—such as land-use planning, mobility, risk management, and public services—so that housing becomes an integrated pillar of sustainable and inclusive urban development.

As the Colombian State continues to pursue the constitutional mandate of ensuring dignified housing for all, especially in the face of urban growth and socio-spatial inequality, reforming the institutional architecture and addressing dual agency tensions emerge as critical conditions for success.

10. Coordination and implementation in housing policy: How actors interact in reality

10.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the dynamics of vertical coordination in the implementation of housing policy, focusing on how national goals, instruments, and guidelines are interpreted and operationalized by local and metropolitan governments. The analysis draws on a comparative review of municipalities across five metropolitan areas -Valle de Aburrá, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla, Centro Occidente, and Cúcuta- which represent diverse levels of institutional capacity, planning sophistication, and engagement with national housing instruments. Municipalities such as Medellín, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Cúcuta, Copacabana, and Sabaneta illustrate the variation in how local governments interact with national housing frameworks.

The empirical analysis focuses specifically on how local governments respond to the quantitative housing deficit²⁶, a core dimension of national housing priorities and a measurable expression of implementation progress.

Rather than assuming a uniform implementation pattern, this chapter is guided by a comparative question: why do some municipalities achieve greater alignment and coordination with national housing policy, while others fall short despite formal commitments? Addressing this question helps unpack the institutional, political, and territorial variables that explain divergent outcomes in housing policy implementation.

Through a comparative analysis of planning documents and implementation records, the chapter identifies recurring coordination challenges and governance gaps. In doing so, it also assesses how capacity asymmetries, institutional fragmentation, and dual agency dynamics shape the ability of local governments to act as effective implementers of housing policy.

²⁶ According to DANE (2020), the housing deficit is composed of two dimensions: (i) the *qualitative deficit*, which includes households in dwellings that require improvements to meet minimum habitability conditions, and (ii) the *quantitative deficit*, which refers to households living in dwellings with structural or space deficiencies that cannot be corrected and therefore require the construction of new housing units. These definitions are based on the *National Quality of Life Survey* and consider contextual variables such as geographic location and access to services.

10.2 National Housing Policy

According to the National Planning Department, the National Housing Policy is primarily oriented toward closing gaps in access to homeownership for the population, mitigating problems associated with housing quality, and improving access to public utilities.

With the creation of the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT) in 2011, Colombia developed a specialized and technocratic approach to housing issues, separating it from environmental and territorial matters, recognizing housing as a multidimensional policy that transversally addresses poverty, stimulates the economy, and promotes urban equity. (Ministry of Housing, City and Territory & United Nations Development Program. (2021). Ministry of Housing, City and Territory: a decade building the country. Bogotá: MVCT & UNDP. ISBN: 978-958-57464-5-9)

The housing policy implemented since the creation of the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory through 2021 succeeded in reducing the urban quantitative housing deficit from 9.0% to 4.2%, and the qualitative deficit from 12.8% to 8.8%, as a consequence of implementing high-impact programs, among which the following stand out for their scope and continuity:

- **Mi Casa Ya:** Demand-side subsidy for low- and middle-income families.
- **Vivienda Gratuita (PVG):** 100% subsidized housing for vulnerable populations.
- **VIPA (for savers):** Housing with co-financing through the ABC model (Ahorro-Bono-Crédito).
- **Casa Digna, Vida Digna:** Program focusing on improvement of existing housing and titling in poor urban neighborhoods.
- **Promoción de Oferta y Demanda (POD)** and various targeted subsidy "bolsas" for displaced persons, victims, and other groups (Ministry of Housing, City and Territory & United Nations Development Program. (2021). Ministry of Housing, City and Territory: a decade building the country. Bogotá: MVCT & UNDP. ISBN: 978-958-57464-5-9)

For the present analysis exercise on the appropriation, harmonization, synergy, and coordination of policy at the national, metropolitan, and local levels, we will focus

on the quantitative housing deficit as an indicator directly related to urban growth presented in Chapter 7.

In the government period from 2014 to 2018, the National Housing Policy set a goal of reducing the housing deficit by 21.1% (20% qualitative deficit and 1.1% quantitative deficit).

Table 40. 2014-2018 National Development Plans Housing Goals

INTERMEDIATE GOAL	BASELINE (2014)	TARGET BY 2018
People in a situation of quantitative housing deficit according to the MPI	707,107	565,685
PRODUCT	BASELINE (2014)	TARGET BY 2018
Urban public and private housing units started	858,958	800,000
Priority and social interest housing units started with support from Fonvivienda	241,886	300,000
Social interest family housing subsidies allocated with support from Family Compensation Funds (CCF)	122,987	100,000
Households benefiting from family housing subsidies in-kind with family and community support	22,804	100,000
Housing solutions delivered by the Adaptation Fund (urban)	2,932	24,253

Source: Own elaboration base on National Development Plan 2014-2018

During this period, public housing policy was primarily oriented toward providing new urban housing for acquisition, seeking to reduce the housing deficit. In fulfilling this policy, regarding quantitative deficit reduction, programs such as Vivienda Gratis, Casa Ahorro - Vivienda de Interés Prioritario para Ahorradores (VIPA), Mi Casa Ya, and Interest Rate Coverage were implemented.

Accordingly, the National Housing Policy for 2014-2018 showed important advances in new housing provision, although without conclusive data on the actual reduction of the quantitative housing deficit. The implemented programs delivered approximately 898,000 housing solutions, exceeding the goal of 800,000 initiated units, demonstrating a strong effort to facilitate access to homeownership.

For the 2018-2022 period, the national government continued several housing policy programs; however, housing was considered more comprehensively,

contemplating additional factors (at least in the national planning document) such as rural areas, precarious settlements, tenure types, among others. The government, complementing established programs, implemented a new program: Semillero de Propietarios, focused on granting subsidies for renting VIP and VIS housing for 24 months.

Unlike the previous period's National Development Plan, the 2018-2022 NDP developed the housing theme in greater detail, to the point that needs previously unaccounted for were identified, and goals with baseline zero were established for the four-year period. The established goals were as follows:

Table 41. 2018-2022 National Development Plans Housing Goals

GENERAL GOALS OF HOUSING POLICY		
INDICATOR	BASELINE	FOUR-YEAR TARGET
Qualitative and quantitative rural housing deficit	51.6%	48.2%
Percentage of urban households with qualitative housing deficit	9.75%	8.50%
Percentage of urban households with quantitative housing deficit	5.22%	4.00%
Qualitative and quantitative rural housing deficit in PDET municipalities	63.0%	48.2%

Source: Own elaboration base on National Development Plan 2018-2022

During the 2018-2022 period, housing policy in Colombia shifted toward a more comprehensive vision that not only focused on new housing construction but also included rural issues, land titling, improvement of precarious settlements, and strengthening of secure tenure. This change allowed for designing specific goals with zero baselines, especially for programs such as comprehensive neighborhood improvement and urban and rural titling, recognizing historically invisible needs. During this period, the urban quantitative deficit was reduced below the proposed target (reaching 3.69% versus an objective of 3.84%).

Despite the achievements of the national government in housing matters, there is no precise geographical delimitation that allows identification of which territories actually benefited from the policy. Nor is there evidence that its implementation was guided by territorial characterizations that prioritized areas with the greatest deficits. This reflects that, although the policy met its general goals, its broad and poorly focused design could be favoring dual agency dynamics in territorial management, where decisions about land use for housing are made without effective articulation with the specific realities and needs of each territory.

10.3 Policy Appropriation by Local Governments and Associative Schemes

The MVCT recognizes municipalities and departments as key actors for developing infrastructure projects, territorial planning, and water and sanitation services. Understanding this and the cascading application of this policy, it is relevant to understand how metropolitan areas act within this framework and how they conceive housing policy from their role as associative actors responsible for coordination and synergy among their municipalities. The following table comparatively presents the Comprehensive Metropolitan Development Plans and what each metropolitan area establishes regarding housing and housing deficit:

Table 42. Housing comparative - Metropolitan Integral Development Plans

METROPOLITAN AREA	HOUSING DEFICIT (GENERAL)	QUALITATIVE HOUSING DEFICIT	QUANTITATIVE HOUSING DEFICIT	SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE IT	COMPETENCE / IMPLEMENTATION
VALLE DE ABURRÁ (PIDM 2021-2032)	The plan aims to reduce the housing deficit as one of its objectives. A specific number or quantitative target is not specified.	It addresses improvement through the promotion of housing improvement programs in existing neighborhoods and the legalization of informal settlements.	It addresses the need for new housing by promoting and constructing social interest (VIS) and priority (VIP) projects to increase the supply.	- Formulation of a "Metropolitan Habitat and Housing Master Plan". - Articulation of VIS/VIP construction projects with infrastructure and services. - Provision of technical and legal support for the formalization of settlements.	The Metropolitan Area has the planning competence at a regional scale. Implementation is carried out through coordination with the municipalities, which are responsible for local execution and land management.
BUCARAMANGA (PIDM 2016-2026)	The document's goal is the reduction of the housing deficit, understood as the gap between supply and demand.	It proposes neighborhood improvement and the development of rehabilitation and legalization programs for informal settlements.	It seeks to promote the construction of new housing and facilitate access to dignified housing, without a numerical target.	- Design and implementation of improvement and legalization programs. - Fostering alliances with the private sector and national government for housing projects. - Integration of habitat policies with environmental and risk management.	The PIDM establishes the vision and programs at the metropolitan level, which must be agreed upon with the municipalities for their implementation. Direct execution depends on coordinated action between the metropolitan entity and local administrations.
BARRANQUILLA (PIDM 2020-2032)	The plan focuses on habitat and housing management to address the	It is addressed through comprehensive neighborhood improvement programs to	It focuses on the promotion of social interest housing projects to increase the	- Creation of land management instruments to enable land for housing	The Metropolitan Area adopts the plan through a "Metropolitan Agreement," giving it a binding and

METROPOLITAN AREA	HOUSING DEFICIT (GENERAL)	QUALITATIVE HOUSING DEFICIT	QUANTITATIVE HOUSING DEFICIT	SPECIFIC STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE IT	COMPETENCE / IMPLEMENTATION
	deficit, recognizing it as a key challenge in territorial planning.	enhance the conditions of existing homes and their environment.	supply and meet demand.	projects. - Investment in infrastructure and public services in areas with a qualitative deficit. - Coordination with financing entities for VIS/VIP projects.	planning nature. Implementation requires collaboration and execution by the municipalities and other public and private entities.
CENTRO OCCIDENTE (AMCO) (PIDM 2021-2032)	It raises the need to facilitate access to housing for the population, thereby mitigating the deficit.	It focuses on promoting the quality of the urban habitat and the integration of housing with services and public spaces, without specific improvement programs.	It proposes actions for land management and facilitating the construction of housing to meet the demand.	- Development of land management instruments to urbanize properties. - Integration of habitat planning with disaster risk management. - Promotion of housing projects that integrate with mobility corridors.	The AMCO has the competence to plan and coordinate the regional vision. The execution of specific projects and land management in each area are the responsibility of the municipalities of Pereira, Dosquebradas, and La Virginia, following the PIDM guidelines.
CÚCUTA (PIDM 2017-2028)	The document does not explicitly mention the term "housing deficit" or its components. It addresses housing more generally.	The focus is on the provision of metropolitan infrastructure and public services for settlements, which indirectly improves quality of life, but it does not detail specific housing improvement programs.	A specific focus on the construction of new housing is not detailed. The plan is more centered on territorial planning and infrastructure for urban development.	- Implementation of a metropolitan territorial planning system to organize growth. - Development of metropolitan infrastructure for sustainable development (roads, terminals, etc.). - Metropolitan social projection that seeks to include the population in development.	The Metropolitan Area is responsible for strategic planning and regional-scale infrastructure, while the municipalities are in charge of local land management and project execution, in coordination with the metropolitan entity.

Source: Own elaboration based on the Metropolitan Integral Development Plan from Valle de Aburrá Metropolitan Area, Barranquilla Metropolitan Area, Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area, Cúcuta Metropolitan Area and Center-West Metropolitan Area.

At the local level, territorial planning policies and housing policy are deeply correlated, to the point that all comprehensive metropolitan development plans recognize housing as a fundamental issue requiring coordination, given that it is one of the explanatory variables of urban growth. However, these plans tend to be declarative: they speak of housing's importance and the need for coordination but do

not specify instruments, tools, concrete projects, or financing sources for implementation.

Although plans such as those of Valle de Aburrá, Bucaramanga, and Barranquilla formulate strategies to address qualitative and quantitative deficits—such as neighborhood improvement, settlement legalization, and promotion of VIS/VIP projects—none establishes quantifiable goals or specific monitoring mechanisms. Thus, while all metropolitan areas recognize housing as a priority issue within their jurisdiction, they approach it from a moderate position because they do not necessarily have direct competencies in this matter and fulfill, rather, a coordination function among local actors.

On the other hand, some plans such as those of Cúcuta and Barranquilla propose creating metropolitan housing observatories and information systems for monitoring indicators related to deficit, supply, and location of housing projects. This proposal represents an important advance in governance and housing policy monitoring, as it would allow generating inputs for decision-making and intervention prioritization. However, the development of these systems is still in initial phases or their full implementation is not evident, which limits their real contribution to reducing housing gaps and formulating evidence-based policies.

To deepen the analysis of housing policy and its articulation with local development, the development plans of each city within the metropolitan areas are reviewed below, with the purpose of identifying how they have perceived and addressed housing issues during the last two government periods, specifically in those cities that participate in the urban footprint. This analysis will reveal to what extent local governments have incorporated housing as a strategic axis of their development, what their main commitments have been, and whether they have managed to establish clear and measurable goals²⁷.

²⁷ For the analysis conducted in Section III, the municipalities of Barbosa (Valle de Aburrá Metropolitan Area) and Puerto Colombia (Barranquilla Metropolitan Area) were excluded. As established in the previous section, the urban expansion of the settlements located in these municipalities is oriented toward their historical centres, but they remain physically and functionally distant from them. Given that housing policy interventions primarily focus on consolidated urban areas, these municipalities were removed from the sample to ensure consistency in the spatial scope of the study.

Table 43. Valle de Aburrá Metropolitan Area - Development Plan Analysis

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
MEDELLÍN	2020-2023 (Medellín Futuro)	The plan addresses housing from the "Ecocity" pillar and the "Habitat for Life" component, with a focus on sustainability and quality of life. It recognizes the need to build new homes and improve existing housing conditions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Reduce housing deficit. Goal: Deliver 8,000 housing solutions (construction, improvement, legalization). Goal: Carry out 1,800 housing improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Habitat for Life: seeks to generate housing access opportunities. Strategies: Management of VIS and VIP construction projects. Implementation of housing improvement programs. Public-private partnerships for new projects.
	2016-2019 (Medellín cuenta con vos)	The plan focuses on social inclusion and equity. It diagnoses housing problems through indicators such as property ownership, public services, and satisfaction with public space.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Formalize or legalize 24 neighborhoods. Goal: Carry out 2,700 housing improvements. Goal: Deliver 2,500 new homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Comprehensive Neighborhood Improvement. Program: Medellín Life Citadel. Strategies: Subsidies for purchase and improvement. Land management for VIS/VIP projects. Strengthening risk management.
BELLO	2020-2023 (Por el Bello que queremos)	The plan integrates housing as a transversal axis in its territorial planning and social development strategy, seeking to improve citizens' quality of life and habitat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Carry out 3,200 housing improvements. Goal: Deliver 1,800 new homes. Goal: Formalize ownership of 500 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Bello, city of opportunities, with projects such as: Land management and promotion of VIS and VIP projects. Subsidies for housing acquisition and improvement. Comprehensive neighborhood improvement programs.
	2016-2019 (Bello, Ciudad de Progreso)	The plan considers housing as a fundamental part of Comprehensive Rural Development and Territorial Planning, focusing on the inclusion of informal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Manage the construction of 600 VIS/VIP homes. Goal: Carry out 300 housing improvements. Goal: Title 600 social interest properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Dignified housing and territorial planning: Management for obtaining housing subsidies. Rural and urban housing improvement projects.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
		settlements and housing quality.		Support for neighborhood legalization and property titling processes.
CALDAS	2020-2023 (Caldas territorio transformador)	The plan seeks the social, economic, and environmental transformation of the municipality. Housing is a key component for territorial development and population dignification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Deliver 1,200 housing solutions (including improvements, construction, and titling). Goal: Carry out 500 urban and rural housing improvements. Goal: Deliver 100 new VIS homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Caldas Habitat and Territory, which includes projects for: Promotion of new VIS and VIP housing projects. Housing improvement programs. Legalization and property titling.
	2016-2019 (Caldas Progresia)	The plan focuses on unity, culture, and progress. Housing is seen as a right and a pillar for social welfare, with emphasis on supporting low-income families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Manage 1,500 housing subsidies from departmental and national governments. Goal: Carry out 400 rural and urban housing improvements. Goal: Manage the construction of 120 new homes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Housing and Dignified Habitat, with projects for: Support in subsidy management. Execution of housing improvements. Promotion of self-construction projects.
COPACABANA	2020-2023 (Copacabana con Seguridad)	The plan addresses housing as a component to strengthen the social component and dignify living conditions, within the framework of the "Our People" strategic line.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Deliver 560 housing solutions (construction, improvement, legalization). Goal: Carry out 380 housing improvements. Goal: Manage the construction of 180 new homes. Goal: Formalize 150 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Dignified and Organized Habitat, with projects such as: Management of subsidies and resources for new housing. Rural and urban housing improvement programs. Neighborhood legalization and property titling.
	2016-2019 (Copacabana Somos Todos)	The plan considers housing as a pillar for inclusion and social development. It focuses on reducing qualitative and quantitative deficits and improving neighborhood facilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Carry out 400 housing improvements. Goal: Manage 200 subsidies for new housing. Goal: Title 100 social interest properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Dignified housing for all, with projects for: Housing locative improvements. Resource management for VIS and VIP construction. Urban legalization of settlements and property titling.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
ENVIGADO	2020-2023 (Juntos Sumamos por Envigado)	The plan focuses on humanism and transparency. Housing is integrated into the objective of improving quality of life and urban environment, seeking equity in access to dignified housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Carry out 500 housing improvements. Goal: Deliver 200 new housing solutions (VIS/VIP) managed. Goal: Formalize ownership of 150 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Habitat and Dignified Housing, which includes: Management of national and departmental housing subsidies. Locative improvement programs for rural and urban housing. Promotion of VIS/VIP construction projects with partners.
	2016-2019 (Vivir Mejor)	The plan has "Living Better" as its superior purpose, placing human beings and families at the center. Housing is a fundamental right to guarantee quality of life and coexistence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Manage 600 housing solutions (including improvements and subsidies). Goal: Carry out 100 housing improvements. Goal: Formalize ownership of 120 social interest properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Habitat for Life, with projects for: Support in housing subsidy management. Execution of housing improvement programs. Property titling processes for vulnerable families.
GIRARDOTA	2020-2023 (¡Ahora SÍ! Girardota para todos)	The plan focuses on a sustainable and organized territory, where dignified housing is a key factor for social development and equity. It addresses the problem of qualitative housing deficit and the need for new housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Deliver 500 housing solutions (including housing improvements and VIS). - Goal: Carry out 350 urban and rural housing improvements. Goal: Deliver 150 new VIS homes. - Goal: Formalize 100 property titles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Girardota with Dignified Housing, with projects for: Management of new social interest housing subsidies. Implementation of locative improvement programs. Coordination with entities for property titling.
	2016-2019 (Girardota, un territorio de oportunidades para la gente)	The plan seeks to strengthen social welfare and territorial development. It recognizes the need to improve housing and habitat conditions and manage projects to reduce the housing deficit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Carry out 300 housing improvements. Goal: Manage the construction of 150 new VIS/VIP homes. Goal: Formalize 80 social interest properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Habitat and Social Housing, with projects for: Resource management for construction and subsidies. Urban and rural housing improvement programs. Settlement legalization and property titling processes.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
ITAGÜÍ	2020-2023 (Itagüí, Ciudad de Oportunidades)	The plan focuses on building "Cities of Opportunities" through territorial planning and quality of life improvement. Housing is a fundamental pillar to dignify the population and consolidate integral habitat.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Deliver 1,500 housing solutions (improvements and VIS). Goal: Carry out 1,200 urban and rural housing improvements. Goal: Manage the construction of 300 new VIS homes. Goal: Formalize 200 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Habitat and Housing for All, which includes: Subsidies for housing improvements and construction of new units. Promotion of VIS/VIP construction projects. Support in legalization and property titling processes.
	2016-2019 (Itagüí avanza con equidad para todos)	The plan is based on the principle of social equity. The diagnosis identifies the need to reduce the qualitative housing deficit and strengthen the management of social interest projects for the vulnerable population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Carry out 1,000 housing improvements. Goal: Manage 500 new housing solutions. Goal: Support the titling of 250 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Housing with Equity: Subsidies and credits for housing improvement. Partnerships with the private sector and government for VIS construction. Property formalization processes.
LA ESTRELLA	2020-2023 (Siempre con la Gente)	The plan seeks to guarantee dignified and safe habitat, focusing on reducing qualitative and quantitative housing deficit. It proposes to improve living conditions for the most vulnerable population.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Deliver 650 housing solutions (including improvements and VIS). Goal: Carry out 500 urban and rural housing improvements. Goal: Manage the construction of 150 VIS homes. Goal: Formalize ownership of 100 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Habitat and Dignified Housing, which includes: Management of subsidies and resources for housing. Execution of housing improvement programs. Promotion and management of VIS/VIP construction projects.
	2016-2019 (La Estrella, Seguimos Avanzando)	The plan focuses on territorial development and social security, recognizing the housing deficit and the need to intervene in neighborhoods to improve inhabitants' quality of life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Carry out 300 housing improvements. Goal: Manage 150 new VIS homes. Goal: Formalize 80 social interest properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program: Quality Housing, which includes projects for: Subsidies for housing improvement. Management of new housing projects with national entities. Titling and settlement legalization processes.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
SABANETA	2020-2023 (Sabaneta, Ciudad Consciente)	The plan addresses housing as a pillar for territorial planning and social welfare. It seeks to reduce qualitative housing deficit, improve habitability conditions, and formalize property in informal settlements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal: Carry out 400 housing improvements. • Goal: Manage the construction of 200 new VIS/VIP homes. • Goal: Formalize ownership of 100 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program: Dignified Habitat for all, with projects for: Subsidies for housing improvement. Resource management for new housing construction. Titling and settlement legalization processes.
	2016-2019 (Sabaneta de todos)	The plan focuses on social development and quality of life, recognizing the need to provide dignified and safe housing solutions to the most vulnerable population and those at risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goal: Carry out 250 housing improvements. • Goal: Manage the construction of 100 VIS homes. • Goal: Formalize 50 properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program: Social Housing and Habitat, with projects for: Technical and legal support for improvements. Management of housing subsidies with national entities. Property titling and legalization projects.

Source: Own work based on each Local Development Plan

Table 44. Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area - Development Plan Analysis

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
BUCARAMANGA	2016-2019	The plan does not explicitly use the term "housing deficit" but focuses on access to housing and formalizing settlements. The vision aims to strengthen access to decent housing and formalize human settlements in incomplete development areas.	Not specified. No clear numerical targets are listed for housing units or improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formulate and adopt a public policy for social and priority interest housing. Formulate a master plan for housing and habitat. Provide integral housing improvements in incomplete human settlements.
	2020-2023	The plan frames housing as a fundamental "right to the city" and a dignified habitat. It recognizes the need to improve the quality of life for families and reduce the housing deficit, though a specific deficit figure is not provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal: Support 1,000 families in purchasing social interest (VIS) and priority interest (VIP) housing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Program "Tu Techo": Provide accompaniment and subsidies for low-income families. Program: Housing Improvement. Improve living conditions. - Rental Subsidy Program: Support vulnerable families with rental payments.
FLORIDABLANCA	2016-2019	Document not found	Document not found	Document not found
	2020-2023	The plan addresses housing within the "Development with equity for the people" dimension. The vision is to improve the population's quality of life by promoting access to dignified housing, enhancing urban and rural environments, and strengthening land tenure security. A specific housing deficit figure is not mentioned.	Goal: No specific numerical targets for new housing or improvements are specified in the document.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strengthen the dignified habitat and housing policy. - Provide new housing for low-income and vulnerable families. - Improve living conditions for vulnerable families. - Guarantee the legal security of property.
GIRÓN	2016-2019	The plan focuses on "Habitat and environmental sustainability," acknowledging housing's role in social development. It addresses the need for new housing projects, improvements, and land legalization. The document does not specify a housing deficit figure.	Goals: - Manage resources for the construction of 2,000 VIS and VIP units. - Legalize 20 informal neighborhoods. - Implement 3,000 housing improvements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote VIS and VIP projects. - Manage subsidies. - Build infrastructure in subnormal settlements.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
	2020-2023	The plan's "INCLUSIVE GIRÓN" section addresses dignified habitat. It recognizes the need for housing solutions and improvements for vulnerable populations, including conflict victims and households with a high housing deficit. A specific deficit figure is not provided.	Goals: - Initiate 2,000 housing improvement subsidies. - Manage the legalization of 3 informal neighborhoods. - Initiate projects for the construction of 1,000 new homes.	- Provide support to vulnerable populations to access housing projects and subsidies. - Coordinate with public and private entities. - Identify populations with qualitative and quantitative deficits.
PIEDRECUESTA	2016-2019	The plan includes a "Housing and Habitat" program aimed at managing and developing social and priority interest housing. It acknowledges the existence of a qualitative and quantitative deficit and aims to reduce it, but does not provide a specific deficit number.	Goal: Manage housing projects for the construction of 2,000 new housing units.	- Manage housing subsidies. - Promote public-private partnerships. - Legalize and improve informal settlements. - Build housing for vulnerable and rural populations.
	2020-2023	The plan's "Dignified and Sustainable Habitat" chapter recognizes the need to "close the gap of the quantitative and qualitative housing deficit". A specific figure for the deficit in the municipality is not provided.	Goal: Develop 800 dignified housing solutions (combining improvements and new housing). Goal: Formalize land tenure for 200 families from informal neighborhoods.	- Construct social and priority interest housing. - Implement housing improvement programs. - Legalize land tenure. - Manage subsidies and financing.

Source: Own work based on each Local Development Plan

Table 45. Barranquilla Metropolitan Area - Development Plan Analysis

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
BARRANQUILLA	2020-2023 "Soy Barranquilla"	The plan recognizes both qualitative and quantitative housing deficits. The qualitative deficit relates to the lack of dignified conditions, such as access to public services and construction quality. The plan seeks to build an equitable city with opportunities, where access to dignified housing and quality habitat is a fundamental pillar.	- Goal: The information provided in the document does not contain specific numerical targets for housing construction, but rather focuses on improvement and titling strategies. However, the goal is to achieve substantial intervention in the qualitative housing deficit.	- Housing improvement program: Intervene in housing to improve habitability conditions. - Property titling program: Formalize land ownership to provide legal security to families. - Urban development projects: Focus on improving public spaces and neighborhood infrastructure.
	2016-2019 "Barranquilla, Capital de Vida"	The plan recognizes the importance of housing for improving inhabitants' quality of life and the need for a territorial approach. It focuses on fighting poverty and closing social gaps. The accountability report demonstrates a focus on improvement, titling, and housing relocation.	- Results Achieved: - 1,000 housing improvements completed, exceeding the target of 623. - 5,861 property titles granted, exceeding the target of 3,000. - 1,132 families relocated from high-risk areas, exceeding the target of 900.	- Housing improvement program: Through the Infrastructure Secretariat, housing improvements were executed to dignify habitability conditions. - Property titling: A titling program was carried out to provide legal security to families. - Family relocation in risk areas: Relocation projects were implemented for families living in non-mitigable high-risk areas.
SOLEDAD	2020-2023 "Gran Pacto Social por Soledad"	The plan recognizes housing and dignified, inclusive environments as fundamental elements for urban planning and quality of life for Soledad residents. The plan seeks to transform household habitability conditions, prioritizing investment in housing within the "Social Pact for Equity, Social Inclusion and Welfare Policies." No housing deficit figures are specified in the document.	- General goal: Provide Soledad residents with quality urban design and transform household habitability conditions. - Explicit goal: The document does not present a specific numerical target for the number of homes to be built or improved. The goal is described as managing for Soledad residents to have "equity in access to new housing programs from the national government."	- Promote property legalization and titling programs. - Manage the transformation of Soledad households' habitability conditions through physical housing improvements. - Promote the comprehensive neighborhood improvement program. - Manage access to new housing programs from the national government. - Investment in culture, sports, recreation, and housing programs to achieve equity and social welfare.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
	2016-2019 "Soledad Confiable"	This plan refers to the need for inhabitants to access dignified housing, efficient public services, and safe mobility. It focuses on improving sanitary conditions and urban quality of residential areas, including deteriorated ones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General goal: Allow inhabitants to access dignified housing and efficient services. - Improvement goal: Rehabilitate or adapt deteriorated residential areas to increase their urban quality. - Results: No specific results of numerical targets were found in the document fragment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of urban voids for residential uses. - Comprehensive improvement of residential areas. - Relocation of residential areas with non-mitigable high risk. - Development of residential areas in urban expansion zones. - Use of legal instruments for normalization of deteriorated sectors.
MALAMBO	2020-2023 "Malambo, Ciudad Entre Todos"	The document establishes that the municipality faces both qualitative and quantitative housing deficits, resulting from population increase, migration, and informal settlements. The vision seeks to guarantee the right to dignified housing and quality public services. No detailed diagnosis with housing deficit figures was found in the provided fragment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Product goals: - Build 100 social interest housing (VIS) or priority interest housing (VIP) units. - Carry out housing improvements for 100 households. - Title 500 properties in informal settlements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction and provision of Social Interest Housing (VIS) and Priority Interest Housing (VIP). - Housing improvement and sanitation. - Property titling. - Relocation projects for housing located in non-mitigable high-risk areas. - Urban development and neighborhood legalization projects.
	2016-2019 "Para Seguir Avanzando"	The plan recognizes that the housing sector is fundamental for the population's quality of life. It seeks to improve habitability conditions, especially in neighborhoods that have emerged informally and without planning. The importance of managing new housing projects and improving existing housing is mentioned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Goals: No specific numerical goals were found in the document fragment. However, the plan focuses on managing projects and programs for housing improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Management of social interest housing (VIS) projects with support from government institutions and the private sector. - Promotion of housing improvement programs. - Property titling. - Family relocation programs in risk areas.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
GALAPA	2020-2023 "Galapa, Progreso Para Todos"	The development plan recognizes the importance of guaranteeing the availability of adequate and safe housing, and aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It seeks to reduce the housing deficit and improve inhabitants' quality of life. The document does not provide a diagnosis with specific housing deficit figures.	- Goal: The document does not present specific numerical targets for housing construction or improvement in the provided fragment. The main focus centers on strategies for territorial planning and urban control.	- Management for the construction of social interest housing (VIS) and priority interest housing (VIP). - Titling of social interest properties. - Implementation of housing improvement programs. - Conduct awareness campaigns about the mandatory nature of construction licenses. - Urban control and urban licensing.
	2016-2019 "Galapa, La Puerta del Caribe"	The plan recognizes the need to improve urban control and licensing for better territorial planning. The vision focuses on planned urban development and managing housing projects for the population.	- Product goals: - Conduct 4 annual awareness campaigns about construction licenses. - Conduct 1 training for new Community Action Boards (JAC) on urban control. - Contract an urban control advisor for the 4 years of the plan. - Maintain 5 people contracted annually for the urban control surveillance program.	- Promotion of obtaining construction licenses. - Training for Community Action Boards (JAC) on urban control topics. - Contracting legal advisory for urban control processes. - Urban control surveillance program. - Review and update the municipality's planning model.

Source: Own work based on each Local Development Plan

Table 46. Center-West Metropolitan Area - Development Plan Analysis

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND DIAGNOSIS	HOUSING GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
PEREIRA	2016-2019	No specific diagnosis regarding housing deficit is detailed in the document. However, it focuses on strengthening the social sector and infrastructure to improve residents' quality of life. The vision can be inferred as improving habitability conditions and housing standards in the city through social and infrastructure programs.	The 2016-2019 development plan does not contain explicit numerical targets for housing construction or housing deficit reduction. Its objectives center on managing and executing infrastructure and social housing projects, such as social interest housing (VIS) and priority interest housing (VIP) management, land titling procedures, and housing improvement.	Key programs and projects: - "Dignified Housing for All" Program: Includes projects for land titling, housing improvement, and social housing project management. - Infrastructure and Habitat: Focuses on environmental enhancement and public service provision. - Quality of Life Improvement: Through social program and community development offerings.
	2020-2023	The document emphasizes the importance of guaranteeing dignified habitat conditions for the population, articulating the Development Plan with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). It seeks to increase access to dignified housing, public spaces, and amenities for vulnerable populations.	The objective is to enhance access to dignified housing, public spaces, and facilities for vulnerable populations in urban and rural areas. Specifically, it proposes: - Establishing and adjusting 250 urban case files for legalization and regularization of informal settlements. - Creating the District Materials Bank for "Plan Terrazas" construction. - Establishing public social curatorship.	Key program and projects: - "Housing and Dignified Environments in Urban and Rural Territory" Program: Focuses on legalization and regularization of informal settlements, housing improvement through strategies like "Plan Terrazas," and creating public social curatorship. - Designing and implementing financial alternatives and schemes for access to dignified housing and habitat management. - Formulating and implementing a pilot project that develops a "Plan Terrazas" housing solution scheme.
DOSQUEBRADAS	2016-2019	The plan does not provide a specific housing deficit diagnosis with detailed figures. It focuses on improving the population's quality of life, strengthening	The plan does not establish concrete numerical targets for new housing construction. The objectives are oriented towards managing and developing projects for legalization, titling, and	Key programs and projects: - "Dignified Housing" Program: Focuses on developing social housing projects, legalization and titling of

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND DIAGNOSIS	HOUSING GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
		infrastructure, and territorial planning. The vision is to guarantee adequate habitat through legalization, titling, and housing improvement.	housing improvement. The approach is more qualitative, centered on social and legal management.	properties, and housing improvement. - Territorial Planning: Seeks to optimize land use and urban development to generate adequate habitat. - Infrastructure Project Management: Support for projects that improve housing environments.
	2020-2023	The plan recognizes the importance of guaranteeing dignified and sustainable habitat. It aligns with the national housing policy objective of reducing the housing deficit. Challenges identified include the need to legalize settlements, improve housing quality, and increase housing access for the most vulnerable population.	The plan establishes specific targets for housing improvement and land titling. It proposes: - Conducting improvement of 600 housing units through improvement projects. - Granting 1,000 property titles for land legalization. - Allocating 1,500 social interest housing (VIS) subsidies.	Key programs and projects: - "Social Territory" Strategic Axis: Focuses on social development and quality of life improvement. - "Dignified Housing" Strategic Line: Includes projects for land titling, housing improvement in vulnerable areas, and subsidy management. - "Materials Bank": Created to support housing improvement projects. - Articulation with national programs: Seeks cooperation with the National Government for housing project financing.

Source: Own work based on each Local Development Plan

Table 47. Cúcuta Metropolitan Area - Development Plan Analysis

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
SAN JOSÉ DE CÚCUTA	2020-2023	The document "Municipal Development Plan Cúcuta 2050, Everyone's Strategy" addresses housing within Strategic Line 5: Sustainable Territory and Healthy Habitat for All. It mentions the need to ensure access to adequate housing and basic services, with the objective of reducing the quantitative housing deficit. Reference is also made to infrastructure development for social welfare as part of the "opportunities" pillar and the competitiveness component for economic development.	The municipal development plan establishes a budget target of 7.55 billion pesos for the four-year period in the "SISBEN and Quality Public Officials with Meritocracy" action line. Additionally, strategic projects with specific amounts are mentioned, though not all are directly related to housing.	Within the framework of the 2020-2023 Development Plan, the Habitat Secretariat was responsible for advancing 11 targets in the strategic line "More opportunities for decent housing." At the strategic project level, initiatives mentioned include: - Metropolitan Aqueduct: 1.5 billion pesos - Storm drainage master plan: 100 million pesos
	2016-2019	The "Municipal Development Plan 2016-2019: Yes, We Can Progress" was structured around four dimensions: Social, Economic, Institutional, and Environmental. The document notes that the qualitative housing deficit in Norte de Santander is 19.2%. Within the social dimension, they focus on providing greater opportunities for the population, especially for groups at high social vulnerability.	At the departmental level, the target was set to reduce the difference between the lowest and highest qualitative housing deficit from 73.3% to 44.2%. In financial terms, the budget allocated to the "Housing" sector within the social dimension was 2,096,840,000 pesos for the four-year period.	Among the administration's actions and achievements, the creation of the municipal Housing Secretariat and the titling of 1,194 fiscal properties are mentioned, in addition to the habitability verification process in free housing projects. The general strategy focuses on job generation and sustainable social development.
LOS PATIOS	2020-2023	The Municipal Development Plan "Los Patios, Heart of All" focuses on social development and equity, with an emphasis on improving the quality of life of inhabitants. The document diagnoses the existence of a housing deficit in the municipality, highlighting the need to promote access to decent and safe housing. Reference is made to property titling and settlement legalization as key strategies.	The document mentions the need to intervene in reducing the housing deficit. However, in the accessible sections, no specific quantitative figures or targets are found regarding the number of houses to be built or the percentage of deficit reduction. The targets focus more on land tenure formalization.	- Land tenure regularization: The plan proposes the legalization and titling of properties as a strategy to formalize settlements and provide legal security to families. - Social infrastructure and public services: It focuses on improving the coverage of essential services such as aqueduct, sewerage, and electricity, which contributes to housing quality. - Social interest housing: Mention is made of promoting social interest housing projects, although specific programs or amounts are not detailed.

CITY	PLAN PERIOD	VISION AND HOUSING DIAGNOSIS	GOALS AND TARGETS	KEY STRATEGIES AND PROGRAMS
	2016-2019	The "Municipal Development Plan 2016-2019: Los Patios is Changing" does not present a detailed diagnosis of the housing deficit. The vision centers on progress and transformation of the municipality, with a focus on social inclusion and infrastructure improvement. Housing is framed within the social dimension but is not dedicated a specific chapter.	Like the following plan, in the available sections of the document, no numerical targets or measurable results for housing deficit reduction are specified. The targets center on social program management and basic infrastructure improvement.	- Property legalization: The plan contemplates neighborhood legalization and fiscal property titling. - Housing improvement programs: Support for housing improvement projects for low-income families is mentioned. - Basic infrastructure: Emphasis is placed on investment in aqueduct, sewerage, and access roads, which are fundamental for habitability.
VILLA DEL ROSARIO	2020-2023	The Municipal Development Plan "It's Time to Grow Leaving a Mark" recognizes the problem of decent housing as a crucial factor for social development. The need to address both quantitative and qualitative deficits is identified, especially in informal settlements and marginalized neighborhoods. The plan also highlights the importance of property legalization and titling to improve inhabitants' quality of life.	The document establishes targets such as neighborhood legalization and property titling, although it does not specify a concrete number of houses to be built or rehabilitated. The target is to improve the habitability conditions of the vulnerable population. The plan seeks rural and urban housing improvement.	- Property legalization and titling: The plan prioritizes neighborhood legalization and property titling as a strategy to guarantee legal security of land tenure. - Housing improvement: The development of housing improvement programs in rural and urban areas is proposed. - Housing project management: Management of social interest and priority housing projects with national government support is mentioned.
	2016-2019	The Development Plan "United for Villa del Rosario" does not offer a specific and detailed diagnosis of the housing deficit. Instead, it focuses on infrastructure development and public services, which indirectly contribute to habitability. Housing is not addressed as a central theme but as part of a broader approach to quality of life improvement.	No specific targets or figures were found regarding new housing construction or housing deficit reduction. The targets center on investment in basic infrastructure such as sewerage system and aqueduct.	- Basic infrastructure: The development plan concentrates on improving public service infrastructure, such as aqueduct, sewerage, and roads. - Social interest housing: Interest in managing social interest housing projects is mentioned, but specific programs or targets are not detailed. - Neighborhood improvement: Comprehensive neighborhood improvement is proposed, which includes access to services and public space adequacy.

Source: Own work based on each Local Development Plan

The ability of municipalities to align with the national housing policy is a matter of coordination, institutional capacity, and goal alignment. In most cases, local governments seek to follow national guidelines to gain access to resources; however, their success depends on their capacity to make land available, which is one of their key housing-related responsibilities. Ultimately, this pursuit of resources often proves ineffective, as national programs require high levels of technical and managerial capacity that many municipalities, particularly those in metropolitan areas facing greater restrictions, do not possess.

In general, it is evident that most analyzed municipalities recognize housing as an important component for territorial development and improving citizens' quality of life. In the cases of Medellín, Itagüí, and Bello, these cities present housing strategically in their plans, with quantifiable goals both in construction of new VIS/VIP units and in improvements and property legalization. Programs such as "Hábitat para la Vida" in Medellín or "Habitat y Vivienda para Todos" in Itagüí articulate construction, improvement, and titling actions, reflecting alignment with national policy, especially in its orientation toward overcoming the quantitative deficit through increasing housing and formalizing tenure.

On the other hand, it is evident that municipalities such as Copacabana, Girardota, and Sabaneta, while including goals and projects related to housing, present a more operational approach, limiting their management to subsidy delivery, locative improvements, and titling processes, without clear articulation with national programs such as Mi Casa Ya, Semillero de Propietarios, or Casa Digna Vida Digna. This shows how there is a lack of vertical harmonization between national and local levels, which could limit their inhabitants' effective access to subsidies and benefits outlined in national public policy.

In the case of municipalities in the Bucaramanga and Cúcuta metropolitan areas, the reviewed plans recognize the need to reduce the housing deficit and improve living conditions, but the lack of concrete numerical goals persists in several of them, such as Floridablanca or Los Patios, where analysis shows general diagnoses and legalization or improvement proposals, without defining measurable objectives for new unit construction or compliance mechanisms. This reflects a

declarative treatment of housing policy and shows that, while there is a discursive understanding of its importance, it does not translate into strong programmatic commitments that guarantee effective execution or full alignment with national policy oriented toward quantitative deficit reduction.

Finally, the absence of updated diagnoses about housing deficit in most municipal plans stands out as a relevant finding. Although some mention the existence of qualitative and quantitative deficits, precise figures or local estimates are not presented, contrasting with the national policy approach, which defines its programs based on periodic measurement of housing deficit through censuses. This lack of information, as well as the lack of geographical delimitation and determination of action mechanisms, affects and limits territorial development planning and the effectiveness of actions implemented in compliance with public housing policy, reflecting the persistence of dual agency in territorial management: municipalities use planning instruments but fail to achieve articulation with national action lines or precise territorial diagnoses.

To more clearly and comparably demonstrate the evolution of the quantitative housing deficit, the following presents available information at the national level from the 2005 and 2018 censuses, as well as in each metropolitan area and their constituent cities. This analysis will identify patterns, gaps, and territorial trends that are fundamental for evaluating housing policy effectiveness in the country.

Table 48. National Quantitative Deficit 2005-2018

NATIONAL QUANTITATIVE DEFICIT ACCORDING TO CENSUSES	
2005	2018
12.37%	9.8%

Source: Own elaboration with information from DANE, 2005 and 2018.

Table 49. The Aburrá Valley Metro Area Quantitative Deficit 2005-2018

Quantitative deficit - The Aburrá Valley Metro Area		
City	2005 (%)	2018 (%)
Medellín	6.73	2.02
Bello	5.39	4.17
Caldas	2.97	1.69
Copacabana	2.92	1.48
Envigado	4.53	0.69
Girardota	5.94	1.28

Quantitative deficit - The Aburrá Valley Metro Area		
City	2005 (%)	2018 (%)
Itagüí	2.27	1.83
La Estrella	2.83	1.30
Sabaneta	3.47	0.46

Source: Own elaboration with information from DANE, 2005 and 2018.

Table 50. Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area Quantitative Deficit 2005-2018

Quantitative deficit - Bucaramanga Metropolitan Area		
City	2005 (%)	2018 (%)
Bucaramanga	17.77	5.59
Floridablanca	13.01	3.45
Girón	15.76	4.76
Piedecuesta	14.52	4.75

Source: Own elaboration with information from DANE, 2005 and 2018.

Table 51. Barranquilla Metropolitan Area Quantitative Deficit 2005-2018

Quantitative deficit - Barranquilla Metropolitan Area		
City	2005 (%)	2018 (%)
Barranquilla	15.16	5.13
Galapa	11.08	9.72
Malambo	15.43	6.83
Soledad	14.52	5.01

Source: Own elaboration with information from DANE, 2005 and 2018.

Table 52. Cúcuta Metropolitan Area Quantitative Deficit 2005-2018

Quantitative deficit - Cúcuta Metropolitan Area		
City	2005 (%)	2018 (%)
Cúcuta	12.80	9.53
Los Patios	13.48	6.01
Villa del Rosario	7.43	11.11

Source: Own elaboration with information from DANE, 2005 and 2018.

Table 53. Center-West Metropolitan Area Quantitative Deficit 2005-2018

City	2005 (%)	2018 (%)
Pereira	7.64	4.03
Dosquebradas	7.04	1.99

Source: Own elaboration with information from DANE, 2005 and 2018.

Given the lack of precision in the analyzed development plans and notable disarticulation in local government planning instruments with public housing policy approaches, the need to observe the historical and recent behavior of the quantitative housing deficit becomes evident, to have indicators that can present with greater precision the variation of the quantitative housing deficit and identify whether national housing policy, through its various programs, has achieved its objective of effectively reducing the housing deficit or whether, conversely, the figures indicate additional factors influencing the achievement of this objective.

While national policy shows a general reduction in urban quantitative deficit from 9% to 4.2% between 2011 and 2021, city-level data show different behaviors: while Medellín, Bucaramanga, and Barranquilla show significant reductions, cities like Villa del Rosario show an increase.

In the specific case of Villa del Rosario, an increase in housing deficit was evident by 2018, which circumstantially can be attributed, among many factors, to its geographical location on the border between Colombia and Venezuela and the massive migration that has occurred since 2014. However, for the government established in the 2018-2020 period, this municipality was prioritized to benefit from various policies, data that surely must have decreased and will be reflected in future statistics.

It is important that public policy has clear geographical delimitation to prioritize territories with the greatest deficits, as not considering this geographical delimitation could be reproducing spatial inequalities and favoring dual agency dynamics in land and housing management.

10.4 Typology of Municipal Responses to Housing Policy

To better understanding of the variation in housing policy implementation across metropolitan areas, this section proposes a typology of municipalities based on two key dimensions: the degree of alignment with national housing policy and the operational capacity to deliver on housing goals.

This comparative framework allows for a more analytical reading of the empirical findings, moving beyond descriptive accounts to explain why certain municipalities are more effective in articulating local strategies with national instruments. The typology distinguishes three ideal types of municipalities: those with high alignment and operational capacity; those with programmatic intent but limited execution; and those with weak or fragmented planning practices.

This classification highlights how differences in institutional capacity, access to technical resources, and the ability to coordinate vertically shape the implementation of housing policy across diverse local contexts.

Table 54. Typology of Municipalities According to Housing Policy Implementation Capacity and Alignment with National Instruments

Type	Description	Included Municipalities	Key Characteristics
1. High alignment and operational capacity	Municipalities with clear diagnoses, quantified goals, alignment with national instruments, and evidence of coordinated implementation.	Medellín, Barranquilla, Bucaramanga, Pereira	Strong institutional capacity, updated land-use plans (POT), use of recent data, integration with subsidy schemes, and available serviced land.
2. Programmatic intent without full operational articulation	Municipalities with declared goals and planning efforts, but facing challenges in execution, land management, or effective coordination with national policy.	Envigado, Itagüí, Floridablanca, Dosquebradas, Soledad, San José de Cúcuta	Intermediate planning capacity, partial alignment with national instruments, limitations in land habilitation or financing mechanisms.
3. Weak or fragmented planning	Municipalities lacking concrete strategies for social housing, with limited diagnostic information, vague goals, or minimal engagement with national policy frameworks.	Sabaneta, Copacabana, La Estrella, Bello, Caldas, Girardota, Galapa, Malambo, Girón, Piedecuesta, Los Patios, Villa del Rosario	Low technical capacity, general planning documents with little operational detail, weak or absent linkage to national programs, and poor metropolitan coordination.

Source: own work

This typology underscores that implementation gaps in housing policy are not random or circumstantial but patterned along institutional and territorial lines. The varying degrees of alignment and operational capacity observed across municipalities reflect deeper asymmetries in state-building, resource distribution, and administrative coordination. Rather than a uniform decentralization model, what emerges is a fragmented landscape where the right to adequate housing is unevenly realized.

This finding reinforces one of the central arguments of the thesis: that the effectiveness of public policy in metropolitan contexts depends not only on formal mandates or policy design, but on the actual capacity of local governments to navigate multi-level governance dynamics. The next chapter reflects on the broader theoretical and policy implications of these findings, and revisits the role of dual agency in explaining persistent implementation challenges.

These typologies not only clarify the heterogeneity of municipal responses but also reinforce the need to move beyond uniform policy prescriptions. As the next chapter will argue, effective implementation requires differentiated governance strategies that acknowledge institutional diversity and confront the tensions produced by dual agency dynamics.

10.5 Closing Remarks

The analysis presented in this chapter highlights how vertical coordination in housing policy remains limited by structural mismatches between responsibilities, capacities, and incentives. Despite the fact that all five metropolitan areas recognize the housing deficit and include related objectives in their development plans, implementation continues to be shaped less by updated diagnoses or local strategic planning than by the logic of accessing national funding. This results in fragmented interventions and the persistence of quantitative housing deficits across most municipalities.

One of the main constraints is land development, which -although a core municipal responsibility-is constrained by overlapping political, legal, technical, and market limitations. These challenges, detailed throughout the chapter, are not merely operational obstacles but symptoms of deeper institutional inconsistencies that hinder the local realization of housing policy objectives.

The typology proposed in this chapter illustrates that not all municipalities face these constraints in the same way. Some, like Medellín or Barranquilla, have managed to align their strategies and mobilize technical capacity, while others present more declarative commitments without concrete execution pathways. These differences reflect a broader pattern of institutional asymmetry across urban territories.

Ultimately, the persistence of coordination failures, even in contexts where planning instruments formally align, reveals the limits of a policy model that delegates housing implementation to local governments without ensuring the necessary enabling conditions. Strengthening institutional consistency in the housing sector requires more than updated laws or new programs, it demands reforms that promote shared accountability, empower metropolitan coordination mechanisms, and equip local governments with the technical and political tools to manage land and housing delivery effectively.

This chapter has shown that institutional inconsistencies and asymmetrical capacities are not merely technical obstacles but core structural barriers to realizing housing policy objectives in Colombia's metropolitan areas. The persistence of these gaps underscores the importance of rethinking policy design through the lens of dual agency, a concept that will be further developed in the final chapter to understand the systemic limitations of current governance arrangements.

11. Challenges in Housing Policy

11.1 Introduction

Building on the implementation findings discussed in Chapter 10, this chapter shifts the focus toward a structural and analytical reflection. It aims to synthesize the recurring governance barriers to effective housing policy in Colombia—particularly in metropolitan contexts—and to evaluate how the dual agency framework contributes to explaining the persistence of coordination and implementation gaps

The chapter draws from interviews, documentary analysis, and application of the dual agency framework to unpack how institutional fragmentation and overlapping mandates affect the effective delivery of housing policy. It mirrors the structure of Chapter 8 on territorial planning challenges, enabling comparative insights into the systemic issues of multilevel governance.

This chapter aims not only to deepen the institutional analysis of the housing sector but also to enable a systematic comparison with territorial planning challenges previously identified.

11.2 Competence Distribution and Institutional Roles

According to Chapter 9, "Despite its constitutional recognition as a fundamental right, guaranteeing access to adequate housing remains unequal and fragmented, especially in metropolitan areas where administrative boundaries do not align with the spatial dynamics of urbanization." However, this section appears to perfectly describe what occurs with the assignment and execution of competencies in territorial planning and housing matters across different levels of government.

In housing policy implementation, the following competencies are assigned:

Table 55. Competencies In Housing Policy Implementation

COMPETENCIES IN HOUSING POLICY IMPLEMENTATION	
MINISTRY OF HOUSING, CITY AND TERRITORY	Represents the national government exercising political leadership. Defines national housing goals, regulatory frameworks, eligibility criteria for programs and subsidies, and manages public investment through co-financing schemes, the General Royalties System, and national funds
METROPOLITAN AREAS	The law grants them the competency to coordinate intermunicipal housing actions
DEPARTMENTS	Exercise intermediation and promote regional coordination. They have the competency to provide technical support to municipalities, promote associative governance, and articulate regional housing strategies
MUNICIPALITIES	Are responsible for local development management and service provision that directly impacts housing production and access. They have responsibility for urban development, service provision, and land planning

Source: Own elaboration based on Law 1454 of 2011, Law 2199 of 2022, Article 311 of the Constitution and Article 91 of Law 136 of 1994

As evident, the relationship between territorial planning and housing policy is direct and proportional, since efficient implementation of housing policy requires equally efficient territorial planning and, according to the analysis in Chapter 7, achieving organized territorial planning oriented toward fulfilling planning objectives requires consideration of housing policy. This synergy and operational dependence is summarized in land use as an integrating factor of both policies.

Thus, it can be demonstrated that the competencies assigned in housing policy matters, for some actors, are the same as those assigned in territorial planning matters, corroborating the dual agency in which different actors engage when fulfilling these competencies.

The competencies, besides not being clearly defined, delimited, and standardized in territorial or housing regulations, present specific challenges that also permeate the pertinent formulation and application of planning instruments. The identified challenges are as follows:

- Fragmentation and regulatory ambiguity, without legally defined articulation mechanisms.

- Overlapping functions and duplication of tasks, where national, departmental, and municipal actors attend to similar and contradictory competencies without a defined hierarchy.
- Weak vertical and horizontal articulation between national policies disconnected from development plans, territorial planning schemes, and scarce coordination among actors.
- Limited use of delegation mechanisms, normatively permitted but poorly operationalized due to legal uncertainty and lack of trust between government levels.
- Territorial ignorance and information asymmetry that generates inequality in institutional and financial capacity.

11.3. Implementation Effectiveness: Misalignments, Bottlenecks, and Coordination Failures

Regarding policy effectiveness, while it is evident that since the creation of the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory the quantitative deficit has decreased considerably, the causal relationship with this policy's territorial implementation is unclear. This is because the goals established by the national government, despite being considered by local governments within their development plans, do not adjust to territorial reality or the real capabilities of these actors.

This analysis calls into question the policy's effectiveness and efficacy regardless of the result which, while continuing to be generated by different circumstances, occurs in a disarticulated manner and outside what should normatively be carried out under the principles of coordination, concurrence, and subsidiarity.

Now, in fulfilling the autonomy principle, planning and organization of land use by municipalities will always be a determining and subjective factor for evaluating whether national housing policy is effective or not. In reality, "effectiveness" materializes in the appropriation of national resources by local governments to address housing supply needs, but in land generation this is not done according to municipalities' technical capacities.

These structural challenges were not only documented in official policy and planning documents but also confirmed and nuanced through qualitative interviews with key actors in the housing sector. The following table synthesizes the key structural challenges identified throughout this section, integrating both documentary and interview-based insights:

Table 56. Structural Challenges to Effective Housing Policy Implementation in Colombia

Structural Challenge	Description	Interview Insight (paraphrased)	Source Used in the Thesis
Institutional fragmentation	Housing and land policies are managed by multiple institutions with overlapping mandates and weak coordination mechanisms.	Carlos Felipe Reyes highlights that no institution articulates land and housing, resulting in fragmented execution.	<i>Chapter 4; Chapter 10</i>
Instrumental disarticulation	Policy tools such as subsidies, land instruments, and planning frameworks are poorly integrated across levels of government.	Interviewees noted that planning instruments and budgets often do not align, creating implementation delays.	<i>Chapter 10; Dual Agency Framework</i>
Weak technical and administrative capacity	Many local governments lack skilled staff and resources to prepare projects or update planning instruments like POTs.	Fabio Sánchez explains that municipalities lack in-house technical teams and must hire costly consultants.	<i>Chapter 4; Chapter 9</i>
Territorial asymmetries	Smaller municipalities and some metropolitan areas face structural disadvantages in accessing housing funds or enabling land.	Johan Julio reflects on how some municipalities have land but no resources to make it viable for projects.	<i>Chapter 4; Chapter 10</i>
Regulatory and political disincentives	Legal requirements and political costs deter mayors from engaging in essential but complex reforms such as POT updates.	Fabio Sánchez describes POT adjustments as politically risky and costly, often avoided by local leaders.	<i>Chapter 6; Chapter 10</i>
Market distortions	Developers often operate based on profitability rather than planning, reinforcing peripheral urbanization and spatial inequality.	Interview analysis indicates that developers favor cheaper peri-urban land regardless of municipal plans.	<i>Chapter 6; Urban Expansion Chapter 5</i>
Design-implementation gap	Subsidy schemes are top-down and do not consider territorial needs, leading to poorly adapted and underused instruments.	Carlos Felipe Reyes suggests that subsidies often target projects that are not locally feasible or strategic.	<i>Chapter 10; Dual Agency Framework</i>
Agency overload and limited autonomy	Municipalities must comply with various demands from national and private actors, often without clear authority or support.	Johan Julio expresses frustration that municipalities are responsible for delivery but lack real tools or decision-making power.	<i>Chapter 3; Chapter 9; Dual Agency Concept</i>

Source: Own elaboration

These observations highlight the persistent misalignment between policy objectives and implementation capabilities. To clarify the institutional bottlenecks that undermine policy effectiveness on the ground, the following table synthesizes eight structural challenges identified throughout this chapter. Each one is illustrated with insights drawn from interviews with key housing stakeholders, offering a more grounded understanding of how institutional fragmentation, limited capacities, and conflicting incentives interact to obstruct coordinated housing delivery.

11.4. Key Informant Perceptions: Institutional Constraints and Local Realities

Faced with a scenario of institutional tensions, absence of effective organizational mechanisms, lack of coordination and political will for good territorial organization, housing policy experts were consulted to learn more deeply about the reasons for this disarticulation and possible solutions that would facilitate effective implementation of national policy. The consulted experts were selected after identifying key roles within sectors participating in housing policy implementation in Colombia.

Below are the consulted experts according to each sector and their respective analysis within the study under development.

Table 57. Key Experts by Sector

KEY EXPERTS BY SECTOR					
Name	Institution	Current or Former Position	Represented Sector	Relevance for the Study	Interview Content Analysis
Johan Dilak Julio Estrada	Mayor's Office of Bogotá. District Secretariat of Habitat	Undersecretary of Habitat Financing	Local Government	His contribution is especially relevant to the study, as he offers the perspective of local government, specifically that of a central actor such as Bogotá. As the local government with the greatest power, revenue, and population in the country, his experience reveals that even in contexts with greater institutional capacity, asymmetries and challenges persist in terms of inter-institutional coordination and dual agency scenarios. This perspective also highlights the even greater difficulties faced by smaller local governments with less political and administrative influence.	Annex 9. Analysis
Antonio Avendaño	Mayor's Office of Bogotá. District Secretariat of Planning	Undersecretary of Information and Strategic Studies	Local Government	From his role, he contributes an interesting perspective to the study by offering not only a local government viewpoint but also insights into the development of territorial planning within local governance.	Annex 5. Analysis

KEY EXPERTS BY SECTOR					
Name	Institution	Current or Former Position	Represented Sector	Relevance for the Study	Interview Content Analysis
Carlos Felipe Reyes	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	Director of the Housing System, Ministry of Housing	National Government	His contribution is fundamental given his position and the institution he represents. The department he leads within the Ministry of Housing is responsible for formulating and adjusting the National Housing Policy.	Annex 6. Analysis
Juan David Ching	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	Legal Advisor Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	National Government	From his role and experience, he sheds light on the legal challenges involved in the design and implementation of housing policy from a national perspective.	Annex 10. Analysis
Javier Antonio Villareal	Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. Housing System Directorate	Deputy Director of Promotion and Technical Support for Social Interest Housing Investments	National Government	In his role, he was responsible for devising solutions when conflicts arose between the National Government and local governments, particularly in relation to one of the main social housing policy programs: "Mi Casa Ya."	Annex 8. Analysis
Karen Ortega Burgos	Colombian Chamber of Construction (CAMACOL)	Head of Strategic Information and Regional Studies	Private Sector Construction Guild	Her perspective as a representative of the construction guild is significant for this research, as it enriches the discussion from the standpoint of a key stakeholder in the provision of housing.	Annex 12. Analysis

Source: Own elaboration

Johan Julio presents, from a local housing management perspective, an analysis of housing policy under a comprehensive understanding of habitat. His contribution adds to the discussion because it articulates both the practical challenges of policy implementation, and a programmatic vision of what housing policy should be.

Julio recognizes inter-institutional coordination problems while maintaining a propositional perspective on the need to evolve toward a comprehensive housing policy that goes beyond considering housing as a mere material product. From his perspective, he suggests that policy efficacy problems are not resolved only with better coordination, but with a conceptual change in the policy approach.

His recognition of "regulatory rigidity and lack of flexibility to implement differentiated solutions at the local level, especially for vulnerable groups" identifies a problem of policy adaptability to diverse local contexts and needs, arguing that efficacy is also affected by proposing general and standardized solutions for all territories without distinguishing their particularities and own characteristics.

Regarding competencies, Julio does not propose a redistribution of them, but rather greater flexibility in their implementation. He argues that the problem is not so much who does what, but how it is done. Regarding dual agency, his experience from Bogotá shows how even cities with greater capacities face coordination challenges, suggesting structural problems in institutional design as a model rather than specific deficits in local capacity.

For his part, Antonio Avendaño from local territorial planning provides a critical vision, focusing on the disarticulation between territorial planning and housing regulatory frameworks, and the capacities of each local government. His position shows that the institutional and regulatory complexity of the Territorial Planning Scheme (POT) constitutes a fundamental obstacle to housing policy efficacy, particularly in municipalities with limited technical and administrative capacities.

From his perspective, policy efficacy is compromised by the effective and adequate operability of regulatory instruments that, although technically sound, prove inapplicable in local contexts with limited resources. Avendaño identifies that the gap between regulations and municipal reality generates a breach that affects effective housing policy implementation. His emphasis on the need for "sustained political will and institutionalized monitoring systems" suggests that problems go beyond institutional design, entering dimensions of governance and institutional continuity.

In terms of competency assignment, Avendaño does not directly question the formal distribution of responsibilities, but points to the need for more robust coordination mechanisms. His analysis implies that the problem does not reside so much in who has what competence, but in how these competencies are articulated in practice. This suggests the presence of coordination gaps that could configure the dual agency phenomenon, where multiple actors have overlapping responsibilities, but no one fully assumes responsibility when rendering accounts for results.

Carlos Felipe Reyes offers a perspective from the central level, as a housing policy maker in the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory. He explicitly recognizes the disconnections between national design and local realities. His analysis is particularly revealing because it admits, from the national government position, the structural limitations of the current housing policy model.

Reyes' perspective demonstrates a deep understanding of the fragmentation problem: while the national government is responsible for granting demand subsidies, the responsibility for managing land falls on municipalities. This division of competencies generates significant disarticulation, especially when local planning instruments are outdated or not adequately implemented. His observation is crucial in evidencing a structural mismatch in the institutional architecture of housing policy.

His criticism of metropolitan areas proves revealing for the study, as he points out that these instances, theoretically designed to improve supramunicipal coordination, concentrate their efforts on mobility and public services, leaving housing coordination "weak and fragmented." This observation suggests that even institutional mechanisms specifically created to resolve territorial coordination problems fail in the housing sector.

Regarding housing policy efficacy, Reyes recognizes shortcomings in the regulatory institutional design. In terms of competencies, his analysis indicates that, although formal distribution may be conceptually adequate, articulation mechanisms prove insufficient. The dual agency problem is reflected in his description of shared responsibilities without clear coordination mechanisms, a situation in which national and local levels perform critical and complementary roles that, in practice, fail to articulate effectively.

Juan David Ching as Legal Advisor to the Ministry of Housing provides a critical vision from regulatory design, recognizing the limitations of legal frameworks to resolve coordination failures. His perspective is particularly valuable because it comes from the institution responsible for regulatory design and, nevertheless, recognizes the structural limitations of institutional design and its regulatory framework.

Ching identifies that: "policy is designed at the national level under the assumption that local governments will execute, but in reality, coordination is weak and municipalities often lack tools to fulfill their role." This observation is fundamental because it points out that the problem is not technical but one of articulation between different actors and levels of government.

His identification of a territorial bias in implementation, where programs like "Mi Casa Ya" concentrate in municipalities with greater capacities, leaving behind those who need them most, reveals a systemic problem of territorial equity. This suggests that policy efficacy is not only limited, but may be counterproductive in terms of territorial equity.

From the competencies perspective, Ching does not question the logic of distribution but the absence of effective tools for municipalities to fulfill their roles. Regarding dual agency, his analysis suggests that legal frameworks alone are insufficient to resolve coordination problems when institutional capacities are asymmetric.

Javier Villarreal, from his experience in the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory provides a critical perspective based on direct experience in national public management. His analysis focuses on the disarticulation between government levels and the reactive nature of Colombian housing policy.

Villarreal identifies an important asymmetry: while the national government promotes supply and demand, local governments bear the responsibility of generating land for housing with little support. This reveals not only an inadequate distribution of responsibilities, but also an imbalance in institutional and financial support to fulfill these responsibilities.

Consequently, Villarreal characterizes housing policy as a reactive policy and considers that the policy presents profound efficacy problems: he indicates that instead of prospectively planning urban growth in coordination with local actors, the policy is limited to "fixing problems that are already critical." This characterization implies that housing policy lacks a strategic territorial vision for the long term.

From the competencies perspective, Villarreal does not question the logic of decentralization, but the way it is implemented. His analysis suggests that the problem lies in the lack of effective coordination and support instruments between levels. In terms of dual agency, he explains that when mandate fragmentation occurs, policy implementation may not happen because each level has responsibilities, but none has complete capacity to generate results.

To complement this exercise, Karen Ortega from the private construction sector vision provides a perspective on the impacts of institutional fragmentation on housing market operation. Her contribution allows identification of how institutional coordination problems affect private sector efficiency and, likewise, housing supply.

Ortega identifies that "housing policies are often designed centrally and adapt poorly to local conditions, especially in small municipalities with limited technical staff." This contribution is important for the present analysis because it suggests that coordination problems not only affect public sector efficacy, but generate negative externalities on private sector operation.

Additionally, she warns about the consequences of poor coordination in territorial planning, where "building social housing on the periphery reflects a lack of comprehensive coordination between urban planning, housing, and service provision," identifying a multidimensional urban quality problem that transcends the simple action of providing housing units.

From the efficacy perspective, Ortega suggests that institutional fragmentation generates inefficiencies not only in housing public policy, but also in the market, affecting the quality of housing products. In terms of competencies, Ortega does not propose specific changes but suggests better articulation between levels. Her perspective on dual agency comes from the private sector she represents, indicating that when multiple public actors have overlapping responsibilities without effective coordination, the private sector faces regulatory and operational uncertainty that affects investment and product quality.

The articulation between regulatory analysis, competency distribution, and the perspectives of consulted experts evidences a fragmented institutional system that challenges the accelerated territorial growth and housing demand in the country.

11.5. Dual Agency and Institutional Inconsistency in Housing Policy: Analytical Reflections

Housing policy in Colombia exemplifies how institutional inconsistency and fragmented governance can generate persistent implementation gaps—particularly in metropolitan contexts. By applying the dual agency framework, this section aims to unpack how conflicting mandates, overlapping responsibilities, and asymmetrical capacities hinder the effective delivery of housing solutions at the local level, despite the existence of formal legal and programmatic alignment.

11.5.1 Policy Design versus Implementation Reality

At the national level, the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT) exercises strategic leadership in housing policy by defining the regulatory framework, setting programmatic objectives, and allocating financial resources through instruments such as Mi Casa Ya and other subsidy programs. However, the execution of these policies falls under the responsibility of local governments and, to a lesser extent, departments and associative schemes. This multilevel implementation structure operates within a fragmented institutional ecosystem characterized by significant capacity asymmetries and poorly coordinated planning and financing tools.

While municipalities are legally mandated to operationalize housing policies in accordance with territorial planning instruments (e.g., POTs), they must also navigate conditions imposed by national housing programs, meet technical and financial requirements from agencies such as FONVIVIENDA, and respond to the demands of their constituencies. These parallel mandates generate frequent tensions between the formal design of policy and its on-the-ground implementation.

11.5.2 Multiple and Conflicting Principals in the Housing System

Local governments operate as agents accountable to several principals, each with distinct and sometimes contradictory expectations:

- The national government, through the MVCT and DNP, defines housing priorities, programmatic frameworks, and investment criteria, often without adapting them to local conditions.
- Housing finance institutions such as FONVIVIENDA, which set rigid requirements and timelines that local governments struggle to meet.
- Territorial planning and environmental authorities, which impose additional constraints and require alignment with land-use policies.
- Citizens and local communities, who expect not only access to housing but also adequate location, infrastructure, and services.

These overlapping demands frequently create an implementation environment marked by confusion, delays, and inefficiency. Municipalities are thus placed in a dual agency position: they must respond simultaneously to national rules, technical controls, and local social expectations, often with limited discretion and institutional capacity.

11.5.3 Strengths and Limits of the Dual Agency Model for Housing Policy

The application of the dual agency framework to the housing sector provides several analytical benefits:

- It explains why housing programs may produce fragmented, uncoordinated, or inequitable outcomes, despite the existence of significant funding.
- It highlights that coordination failures are not merely managerial but are structurally embedded in the institutional design of the policy domain.
- It reveals the tension between normative leadership at the central level and constrained agency at the local level, where most housing functions are executed.
- It allows for a better understanding of why municipalities tend to underperform, not due to unwillingness but because of conflicting incentives and responsibilities.

Nonetheless, the framework also presents limitations when applied to the housing sector, specifically:

- It tends to underrepresent the role of non-state actors, such as developers, banks, and private operators, who influence implementation conditions and market dynamics.
- It does not fully capture how fiscal asymmetries—particularly co-financing requirements—undermine local autonomy and exacerbate territorial inequalities.
- It requires further refinement to address territorial differentiation, since the dynamics of housing implementation vary substantially across cities of different sizes, capacities, and land-market structures.

Despite these limits, the dual agency framework remains a powerful analytical tool for diagnosing structural barriers in Colombia’s housing governance. It emphasizes the need to move beyond simplistic notions of decentralization and instead engage with the complex reality of competing mandates, institutional fragmentation, and uneven power across levels of government.

11.6 Closing Remarks

This chapter confirms the persistence of a misalignment between policy design and implementation in Colombia’s housing sector. Despite the existence of a robust normative framework, policy instruments, and declared commitments at both national and local levels, coordination failures, institutional fragmentation, and fiscal constraints continue to undermine effective delivery.

The application of the dual agency framework has revealed how municipalities, acting as implementing agents, are caught between multiple principals—national ministries, fiscal institutions, oversight agencies, and their own constituencies—each with different mandates and expectations. This multiplicity of authorities generates tensions that weaken policy coherence, dilute accountability, and limit the autonomy of local governments to adapt housing interventions to territorial realities.

Crucially, the analysis shows that these challenges are not mere execution problems but stem from deeper institutional inconsistencies embedded in the governance design of housing policy. These include overlapping roles, fragmented instruments, and the absence of effective platforms for vertical and horizontal

coordination. Furthermore, technical capacity gaps and limited access to co-financing mechanisms exacerbate the structural vulnerability of municipalities, especially in metropolitan contexts.

To move forward, three institutional reforms should be considered:

1. **Clarification of mandates and coordination protocols:** Clear, enforceable coordination mechanisms between national and local entities must be institutionalized, reducing ambiguity and overlap.
2. **Strengthening local autonomy and technical capacity:** Municipalities must be granted greater discretion and resources to adapt housing policy to local needs. This includes sustained technical assistance and dedicated funding channels.
3. **Integration of housing with territorial planning and social infrastructure:** Housing programs must be aligned with land-use planning, public services, and mobility policies to promote inclusive and sustainable urban development.

As shown in earlier chapters, similar challenges affect the territorial planning sector (see Chapter 8). This reinforces the conclusion that enhancing policy effectiveness requires not only better tools but also a rethinking of Colombia's multilevel governance architecture. Thus, reforming Colombia's housing governance is not only a matter of efficiency, but of equity, sustainability, and the right to the city.

Section IV. Discussion, Results, and Conclusion: Rethinking Institutional Design in Urban Governance

Section IV brings together the empirical and theoretical strands of the thesis to evaluate the explanatory capacity and operational utility of the dual agency framework. It synthesizes findings from the analysis of territorial planning and housing policy to assess how institutional inconsistencies, competence overlaps, and coordination failures affect the effectiveness of local public policies in metropolitan contexts.

The first part of this section reflects on the strengths and limitations of the proposed analytical framework, drawing lessons from its application across two critical policy domains. It revisits key concepts—such as institutional consistency, implementation gaps, and policy coordination—through the lens of empirical evidence, highlighting the mechanisms through which dual agency conditions constrain or distort local policy outcomes. The discussion also points to areas where the model could be refined or expanded, including a greater focus on informal governance arrangements, fiscal dynamics, and political incentives.

The conclusion consolidates the thesis' main contributions to theory, policy, and methodology. It articulates the broader implications of the research for governance reform in rapidly urbanizing regions in changing decentralized systems. Finally, the section identifies avenues for future research, suggesting how the dual agency concept could be further tested or adapted in other contexts and sectors. In doing so, Section IV not only closes the empirical investigation but also reaffirms the normative and analytical value of rethinking institutional design for effective and equitable urban

12. Discussion on Proposed Analytical Framework

12.1 Framing the Analytical Model: Introducing Dual Agency as a Diagnostic Tool

This chapter builds on the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 3 by revisiting the **Dual Agency Model**—a diagnostic tool designed to analyze policy implementation in multilevel governance contexts marked by institutional fragmentation and overlapping authority. The model conceptualizes *dual agency* as a governance condition in which local or intermediate governments become agents to multiple principals —national ministries, metropolitan bodies, international organizations, and local constituents—each imposing mandate that may align, conflict, or duplicate each other.

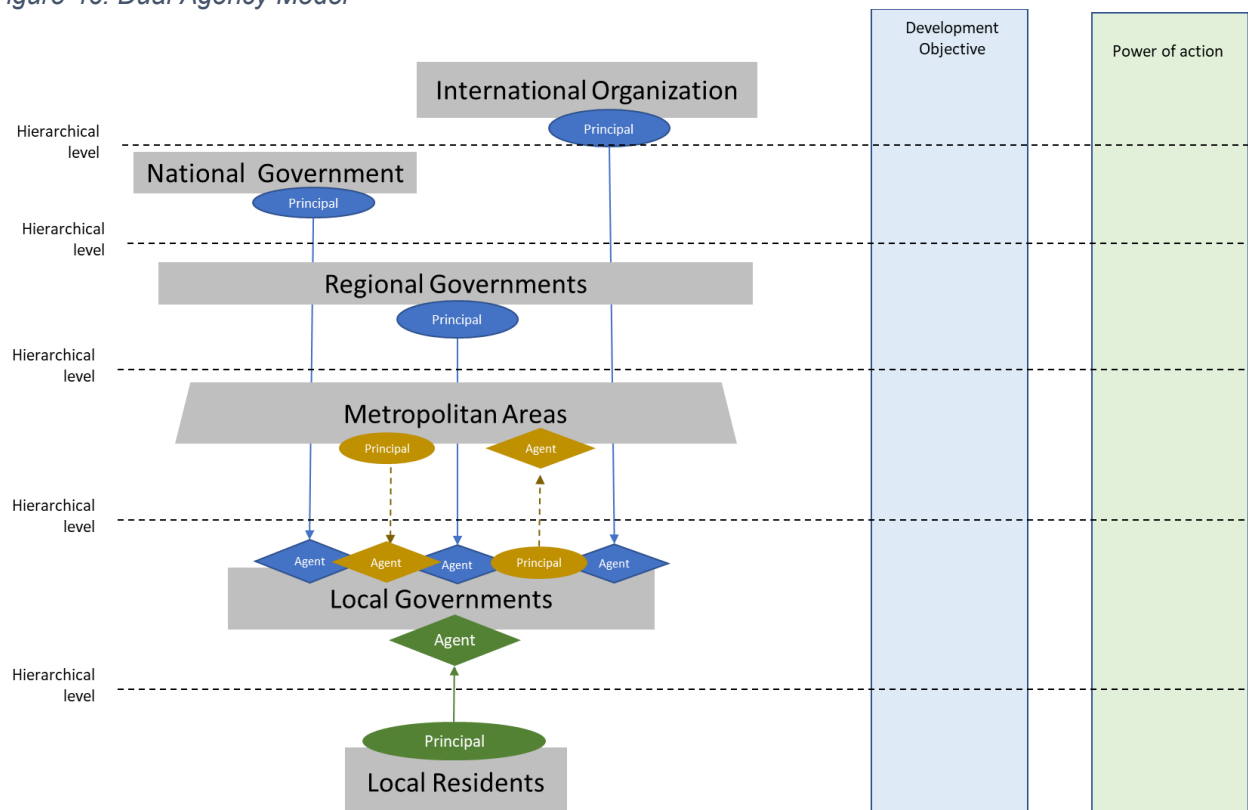
Originally operationalized in Section 3.4, the model is structured around four analytical steps that aim to uncover how and where institutional inconsistencies emerge, how competences are distributed, and how misaligned policy objectives can generate implementation frictions. These steps include:

1. Mapping the **multiplicity of principals** and directions of delegation.
2. Identifying the **hierarchical levels** and lines of accountability.
3. Analyzing the **objectives** pursued by different actors.
4. Evaluating the **competence distribution** and actual power of action.

Together, these dimensions allow for a structured diagnosis of dual agency in action. They help detect contradictory mandates, disjointed planning instruments, and fragmented evaluation criteria, all of which can undermine policy coherence and effectiveness. The framework was applied in this thesis to two policy domains—territorial planning and housing policy—to assess its usefulness in capturing the structural challenges faced by local governments in Colombia.

The figure below, previously introduced in Chapter 3, will be reused here to support the discussion on how the model functioned as an analytical lens throughout the thesis.

Figure 46. Dual Agency Model



Source: Own Work

In what follows, this chapter critically evaluates the model's contribution to understanding implementation challenges in both policy areas. It assesses its explanatory capacity, limitations, and possible improvements, while also reflecting on its relevance for policy analysis beyond the Colombian context.

12.2 Institutional Inconsistency and Dual Agency in Territorial Planning and Housing Policy

Drawing upon the analytical exercise of the preceding chapters and adopting a comprehensive perspective on territorial planning and its relationship with housing policy implementation in Colombia, it is possible to identify the phenomenon of dual agency across different moments and aspects.

The starting point of this phenomenon reveals a significant institutional inconsistency within the Colombian institutional design, which for future analyses

appears to be general across all political, social, and administrative aspects, but which in this study is evidenced in territorial planning and housing policy.

The Colombian institutional design has developed in an isolated, uncoordinated, and inconsistent manner, with an attempt to establish long-term guidelines that, in practice, end up being merely reactive and ineffective mechanisms in the face of the rapid pace of actual territorial planning dynamics and urban expansion driven by housing provision needs. In this exercise of attempting to create long-term normative projections, the promulgation of regulations that provide continuity to what was initially proposed is left to the discretion and authority of future governments. This temporal gap significantly affects the efficacy and exercise of territorial planning, which in turn impacts housing policy, as realities constantly change and what was proposed in initial regulations ultimately fails to adjust to the dynamics that need to be regulated at the given moment.

In this promulgation of isolated regulations, a first factor is introduced to the dual agency phenomenon. Given the generalized reactive nature of the normative framework, each law that was promulgated considered different actors that it deemed important according to the dynamics evidenced in territorial planning. However, despite showing an attempt at institutional organization and articulation through the identification and creation of these actors, the delayed execution of what was established in each regulation meant that, at the time of implementation, the realities of that moment were once again neglected, and the competencies that had been granted to said actors proved insufficient.

As a consequence of what has been presented thus far, the assignment of competencies to each actor was perceived through different regulations and under particular concepts, where the difference between the concepts of competencies and functions was not even specified, and likewise, in some cases, both were assigned to them. In the specific case of housing policy, several factors determined its ineffectiveness due to the dual agency phenomenon.

In a causal chain, dual agency manifests in territorial planning and housing policy according to the following dynamics:

12.2.1 Agent: Municipalities (Local Governments)

Municipalities are primarily responsible for land management and territorial planning, upon which the effective implementation of housing policy depends. Chapter 10 emphasizes that municipalities are the only entities with "effective competence in land management." However, this competence is not accompanied by the necessary technical, financial, and political capacity.

As the principal agent responsible for land management, municipalities are tasked with formulating, presenting, implementing, and reviewing Territorial Planning Schemes (POT) as the fundamental instrument for territorial planning and housing policy implementation.

As the agent responsible for this exercise, municipalities must respond to different "principals" with mandates regarding housing policy:

12.2.2 Multiple Principals

Considering the universe of actors established by the normative framework of territorial planning and housing policy, having multiple principals makes the dual agency phenomenon more complex. The following presents the multiple principals that interact in housing policy:

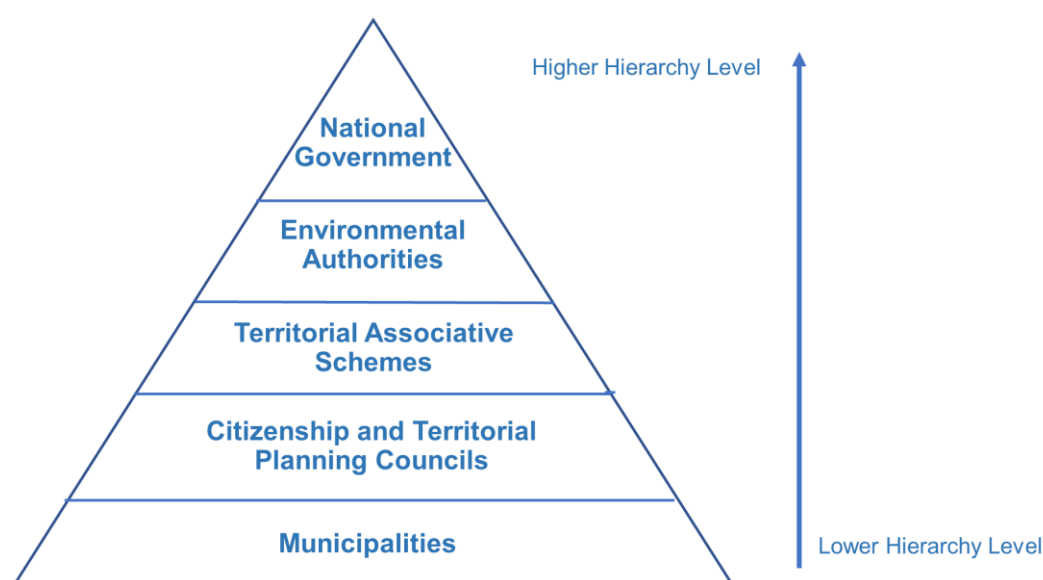
1. **National Government (Ministry of Housing, City and Territory, DNP):** Establishes housing policy, programs, goals, and criteria for subsidy allocation at the national level. Resource allocation and project eligibility are conditioned by national guidelines. Municipalities must comply with these guidelines to access financing, although their mandates often fail to consider local realities.
2. **Environmental Authorities (Regional Autonomous Corporations - CAR):** Play a fundamental role as they participate in the review and approval of POTs, establishing restrictions and requirements that may conflict with urban expansion objectives and housing provision defined by the national government and the municipality.
3. **Territorial Associative Schemes (Metropolitan Areas):** Within their competencies, they must guarantee intermunicipal coordination and growth

management at the metropolitan scale. However, as demonstrated, their capacity to harmonize policies is limited.

4. **Citizens and Territorial Planning Councils:** This principal also participates in POT formulation and review processes, presenting local demands and needs that may not align with national plans or market needs.

To understand the dynamics of multiple principals and the agent, the following presents a diagram showing the hierarchy that governs these relationships within housing policy.

Figure 47. Hierarchical Structure in Housing Policy.



Source: Own elaboration.

The following table presents the complex scheme of relationships and influences that defines the dual agency phenomenon in housing policy and territorial planning in Colombia. Through a logical hierarchy, the multiple "principals" that exert influence over the key "agent," the municipality, are identified, and it details how each uses specific planning instruments to impose their mandates. This analysis not only reveals the distribution of competencies but also the mechanisms through which institutional inconsistencies and normative conflicts manifest in practice, hindering the effective implementation of the Territorial Planning Scheme (POT) and, consequently, housing policy.

Table 58. Classification of roles and level of influence by hierarchical level

HIERARCHICAL LEVEL	PRINCIPAL	TYPE OF INFLUENCE ON THE AGENT (MUNICIPALITY)	ROLE IN THE AGENCY CONFLICT
1.	National Government (Ministry of Housing, DNP)	Direct. Exercises control through law, policy directives, and the allocation of budgetary resources.	Its mandates are the most powerful and often unavoidable for the municipality, as they control funding and the legal framework. Tension arises when these mandates do not adapt to local realities.
2.	Environmental Authorities (CAR)	Direct. Have the power to approve or deny the inclusion of land in POTs for urban development, based on environmental criteria.	Its mandate creates a direct regulatory clash. Its veto power can paralyze the implementation of housing policy by limiting the availability of suitable land for urbanization.
3.	Territorial Associative Schemes (Metropolitan Areas)	Indirect. Their influence is exercised through regional-scale planning, seeking harmonization, although their coercive capacity is weak.	Although its instrument (the PEMOT) has an important role in theory, in practice, its capacity to harmonize policies is limited. The agent can disregard its directives if local interests and pressures from other principals are stronger, exacerbating fragmentation.
4.	Citizenship and Territorial Planning Councils	Indirect. They influence through mandatory participation in the POT formulation process and social pressure.	It does not delegate a mandate in a formal sense, but rather exerts political and social pressure. Its influence can lengthen and complicate the approval of the POT, adding a layer of complexity for the agent.
Agent	Municipalities (Local Governments)	At the Center of Multiple Mandates. They must implement housing policy through the POT but lack the technical and financial capacity to satisfy the demands of all principals.	Its primary instrument (the POT) is the meeting point for all mandates and pressures. The inconsistency among principals is directly reflected in the ineffectiveness of this instrument, creating conflicts in implementation.

Source: Own elaboration

In conclusion, the phenomenon of dual agency in territorial planning and housing policy in Colombia reveals a deep institutional inconsistency, with disjointed and fragmented regulatory frameworks. The simultaneous involvement of multiple principals with specific and often divergent objectives affects the effectiveness of housing policy implementation, further compounded by the fact that municipalities have limited or nonexistent technical and financial capacity.

12.3 Evaluating the Analytical Framework in Territorial Planning Policy

The empirical application of the Dual Agency framework in Section II provided a robust and layered understanding of Colombia's territorial planning challenges. Through a sequential explanatory design, the thesis integrated spatial and institutional

data (Chapters 6 and 7) with qualitative insights from policy actors (Chapter 8), allowing the model to demonstrate both explanatory depth and diagnostic versatility.

A key strength of the framework was its capacity to identify and visualize the multiplicity of principals involved in territorial planning. National entities (such as the MVCT, DNP, and Congress) and supramunicipal coordination schemes (Metropolitan Areas) all delegate competing mandates to territorial entities. Chapter 6 confirmed this through legal and policy review, while Chapter 7 used institutional mapping to reveal overlaps in the assignment of competences. Applying Step 1 and 2 of the Dual Agency model enabled a clear illustration of how vertical delegation and fragmented mandates coexist within the Colombian multilevel governance system.

Moreover, by examining the instruments and development objectives (Steps 3 and 4), the framework helped to surface mismatches between policy goals across levels. For instance, while national plans emphasize compact cities and environmental sustainability, local plans often reflect short-term political interests or are out of sync with municipal realities. The comparative analysis across Colombia's five metropolitan areas showed that even where similar instruments exist (POTs, PEMOTs), the implementation logics diverge, producing contradictions in land use decisions and growth management strategies.

Chapter 8 enriched this analysis by mobilizing the Dual Agency model in focus groups and elite interviews. Here, the model proved valuable not only analytically but heuristically: it resonated with practitioners' lived experiences. Participants consistently described a landscape of institutional ambiguity, accountability dilution, and coordination fatigue. Concepts such as "institutional ping-pong" and "overlapping competences" were invoked organically, validating the model's capacity to diagnose institutional disarticulation. The empirical results in Table 37 (Focus Groups Key Conclusions) of Chapter 8 align precisely with the model's assumptions—particularly on structural multilevel disarticulation, overlapping mandates, and uncoordinated instruments.

Nonetheless, the application of the model also revealed some limitations. First, while the framework excels in identifying institutional complexity, it is less equipped to capture the political drivers behind fragmentation. For instance, the influence of party

politics, electoral incentives, or informal networks is acknowledged in qualitative data but remains outside the analytical scope of the model. This suggests the need for integrating complementary tools from political economy or public administration to enrich future applications.

Second, while the model rightly centers on legal-institutional dimensions, it struggles to fully account for non-institutional logics, such as territorial identities, historical conflicts, or epistemic contestation over what constitutes legitimate planning. Several focus group participants stressed that planning is not only a technical process but a political and cultural one. The model could be strengthened by incorporating these epistemic and symbolic dimensions as part of a broader understanding of multilevel governance.

Third, the stepwise structure of the model may over-simplify iterative feedback loops between principals and agents. In practice, delegation is not static, and mandates evolve in response to performance, lobbying, or institutional reform. Future refinements of the model could integrate temporal dynamics or adaptive cycles to reflect this reality.

Despite these limitations, the framework proved effective in fulfilling its intended purpose: to operationalize and evaluate the impact of dual agency on policy implementation. Its application helped to identify not only where governance breakdowns occur, but also why they persist, especially in contexts marked by rapid urbanization and contested competence distribution. It also provided a conceptual bridge between legal-institutional mapping (Chapters 6–7) and lived experience analysis (Chapter 8), reinforcing the interdisciplinary value of the approach.

12.4 Evaluating the Analytical Framework in Housing Policy

The application of the Dual Agency model to Colombia's housing policy, as developed in Section III, further affirmed the analytical utility of the framework while also exposing new limitations. Housing policy—unlike territorial planning—revealed an even more intricate web of delegation and institutional fragmentation, particularly due to its intersection with market dynamics, subsidy allocation, and land use regulation.

In this context, the model proved useful for identifying critical governance tensions but also highlighted areas that require methodological refinement.

The first two steps of the framework—mapping multiple principals and identifying their hierarchical position—were particularly effective in this domain. The analysis showed that the Ministry of Housing, City and Territory (MVCT), the National Planning Department (DNP), departmental governments, and supramunicipal bodies (such as metropolitan areas) all exert mandates over local governments. These mandates are complemented by the operational influence of Cajas de Compensación²⁸, private developers, and occasionally international donors. This multiplicity of actors was consistently cited in interviews and expert testimonies as a source of confusion, duplication, and contradictory pressures.

However, unlike territorial planning, housing policy adds a market-driven layer. The presence of private actors with public mandates (e.g., construction companies operating under subsidized housing programs) introduces informal delegation mechanisms not originally considered in the model. This suggests that the framework, while suitable for identifying formal institutional arrangements, may need refinement to account for hybrid public-private agency relationships.

In terms of goal alignment (Step 3), the model uncovered significant divergences. National programs, such as *Mi Casa Ya*, emphasize quantitative targets (number of units built or subsidies delivered), whereas local governments must reconcile these targets with land availability, service infrastructure, and territorial equity considerations. The framework's diagnostic lens enabled this misalignment to be clearly articulated. Local actors repeatedly noted that central goals are often detached from municipal realities, reinforcing the perception of top-down policy imposition without sufficient adaptation to territorial needs. The model thus succeeded in illuminating the vertical disconnect between policy goals and implementation environments.

The analysis of competence delegation (Step 4) revealed a more complex scenario than initially anticipated. Legal norms (e.g., Law 1454 of 2011, Law 2199 of

²⁸ A common translation is Family Compensation Fund.

2022) formally assign housing functions across different levels of government, but practical delegation remains weak and fragmented. Interviewees—especially from local and national governments—emphasized that while decentralization exists on paper, coordination mechanisms and operational support are either underdeveloped or non-existent. In this regard, the Dual Agency model proved helpful in revealing not only the overlaps in competences, but also the institutional voids where no actor assumes full responsibility.

The framework also shed light on issues of accountability and governance coherence. Several informants from both national and local levels identified situations in which local governments were held accountable for housing outcomes without having the necessary instruments or resources to act. This creates a perverse dynamic: municipalities are legally responsible for land management—crucial for housing supply—but lack fiscal and technical capacities to align with national programs. The model was particularly powerful in exposing these asymmetric mandates, where the delegation of responsibility is not accompanied by the delegation of power or support.

Nonetheless, certain analytical gaps emerged in its application. First, the model does not explicitly account for informal or political dynamics, such as electoral incentives, partisan alignments, or bureaucratic turf wars. Several testimonies hinted at these factors, especially in discussions about the selective application of housing programs or the discretionary allocation of national resources. Future iterations of the framework could integrate a political economy dimension to capture these dynamics more systematically.

Second, while the model maps delegation directions and actor positions well, it is less equipped to evaluate temporal feedback loops—that is, how policy instruments and delegation schemes evolve based on past failures, negotiation outcomes, or shifts in political coalitions. A more dynamic or longitudinal perspective may enhance the explanatory depth of the model in contexts where reform processes are ongoing.

Finally, the interviews also revealed the limited inclusion of citizen participation and community voices in the housing governance chain—a dimension not directly addressed by the current model. While this may fall outside the scope of principal-

agent relations in a strict sense, integrating social accountability mechanisms or participatory diagnostics may strengthen the model's application in inclusive policy contexts.

Despite these limitations, the Dual Agency framework performed strongly in diagnosing how institutional inconsistencies, fragmented competences, and coordination failures affect housing policy outcomes. It succeeded in capturing how disconnected mandates translate into operational frictions and ultimately shape the perceived and actual effectiveness of housing interventions. Moreover, it demonstrated that even in cities with greater institutional capacity structural dual agency persists, reinforcing the conclusion that the problem lies less in technical ability and more in institutional design and coordination architecture.

In sum, Section III confirmed that the model offers not only a powerful lens for dissecting complex governance structures but also a scalable and transferable tool that could be adapted to other sectors facing multilevel implementation challenges. The next section of this chapter will address how these insights can guide methodological refinements to the model and inform its potential application in broader comparative research.

12.5 Methodological Refinements to the Dual Agency Model

The application of the Dual Agency framework across the domains of territorial planning and housing policy revealed both its explanatory strengths and its current limitations. To enhance its analytical precision and applicability in complex, multilevel governance environments, specially in the Global South, it is necessary to implement some improvements.

The suggested improvement can be classified in three dimensions: contextual, steps and logic. Contextual are those improvements related with information and action to carry before the actual implementation of the Dual Agency Model, but that need to be stated clearly. The dimension referring to steps, is about new action within the process that will contribute to a greater understanding of the dual agency and its impact. Finally, improvements related to logic is about changes to the overall dynamic

of the model. The following table present what improvements are suggested in each of these dimensions.

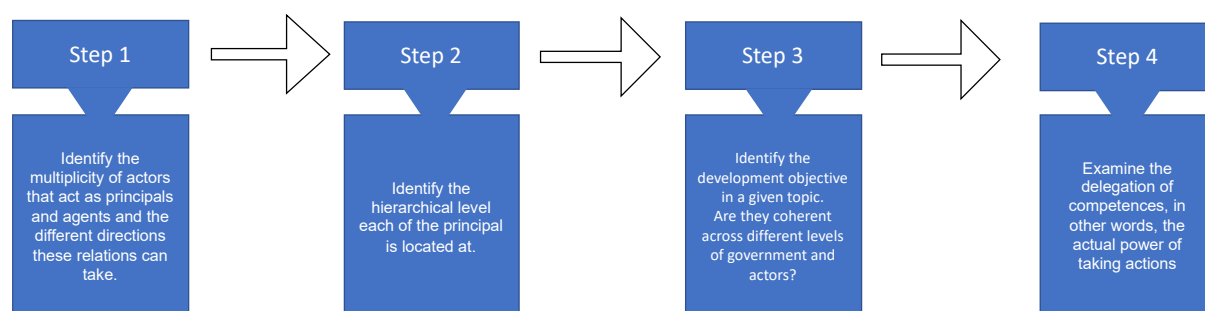
Table 59. Improvements to Dual Agency Model by Dimension

Dimension	Action	Operationalization
Context	Differentiate municipal types	Gather information to classify municipalities based on fiscal autonomy, technical capacity, economic development, or urban typology.
Step	Integrate Policy Instrument Coherence	Expand step 3 not only to asses coherence between general development objectives but also to asses coherence in instruments.
	Accounting for Informal Delegation Mechanisms	Distinguish formal vs. informal delegation and identifies public-private hybrid actors.
	Integrating Political Dimensions	Map political parties and election timelines in each government level to assess alignment or conflict.
	Formalize and Strengthen the Output-Outcome Linkage	Collect information in the actual outputs and outcomes of policies.
Logic	Include the notion of time	Include the logic of cycle or period to the implementation of the model.

Source: Own work

In order to understand, where these improvements will be introduced it is important to recall the sequential logic of the original version:

Figure 48. Dual Agency Model in Sequential View



Source: Own Work

Now, each of the suggested improvements that could help overcome the main shortcomings of the model will be detailed:

- Differentiate Municipal Types.** It is essential to gather contextual information that allows for a deeper understanding of the capacities and conditions of each local government. This information can be used to classify municipalities based on criteria such as fiscal autonomy, technical capacity, level of economic development, or urban typology. Developing such typologies offers valuable insights into why the dual agency phenomenon overwhelms certain municipalities while others manage it more effectively. By identifying structural asymmetries, this classification can inform more targeted policy design, institutional support strategies, and differentiated implementation pathways.
- Integrating Political Dimensions.** While the framework effectively identifies formal delegation relationships, it overlooks political dynamics such as electoral cycles and intergovernmental conflicts. These forces often explain why specific mandates are enforced or ignored. The model should incorporate political alignment mapping across government levels. For this, two variables should be identified: the year of election and the winning political party in the executive branch (i.e., the President, Governors, and Mayors).
 Create a typology of alignment scenarios (e.g., alignment, conflict, neutrality) and cross-reference with implementation outcomes. It will contribute to understanding how power dynamics influence the occurrence of dual agency.
- Integrate Policy Instrument Coherence.** It is important to further expand step three by moving beyond merely identifying the development objectives of each principal and agent. The focus should also be on assessing whether these objectives are coherent across different levels of government and involved actors. More critically, the analysis should delve into the specific policy instruments employed—examining their characteristics, operational procedures, and implementation timelines. This level of detail is essential for understanding how aligned—or misaligned—the instruments are in practice, and how such (in)coherence shapes policy outcomes.
- Formalize and Strengthen the Output-Outcome Linkage.** In the empirical application of the model to the Colombian case, in order to make the case of loss of policy effectiveness, there was a comparison in both policies between the intended results and the real outcome achieved. However, this practice wasn't clearly stated in the model. Inserting this dimension of analysis will not

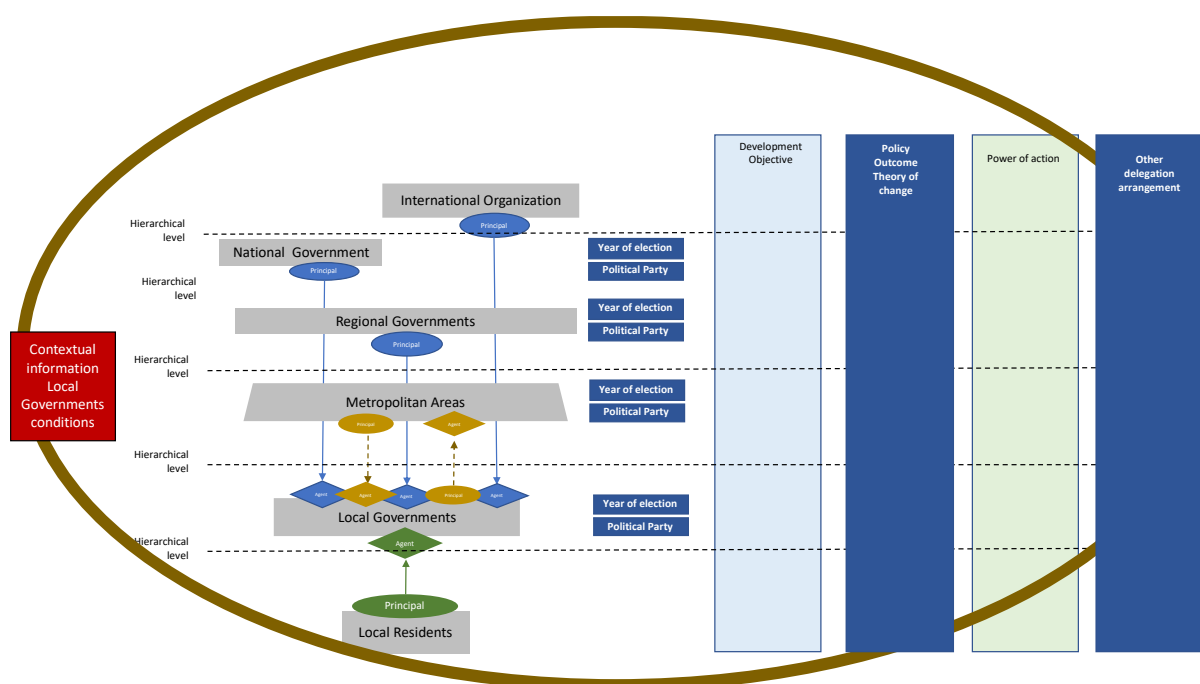
only explain governance complexity but also collect information that helps understand how these complexities translate into concrete effects on outputs or outcomes.

The guiding question for this step is what policy outcome is expected and what are the data on outputs and outcomes achieved. Incorporating a result chain or theory of change component would allow researchers to link dual agency configurations with implementation effectiveness—both in quantitative and qualitative terms

- **Accounting for Informal Delegation Mechanisms.** The current model assumes formal delegation via law or decree. However, as shown in the housing policy case, many critical roles are performed by hybrid public-private actors (e.g., developers, *cajas de compensación*). Future applications should distinguish between formal and informal delegation and map operational partnerships, especially in market-driven sectors.
- **Include the notion of time.** Delegation relationships are not static. Mandates evolve in response to institutional learning, crises, or administrative reforms. A temporal layer capturing feedback loops and sequencing of implementation phases would enable longitudinal analysis and improve the model's responsiveness to dynamic governance environments.

These refinements enhance the diagnostic, explanatory, and even prescriptive power of the model. They allow it to engage with more complex, real-world dynamics and move beyond static institutional mapping toward a fuller understanding of the mechanisms behind public policy (in)effectiveness in multilevel system. The following figure shows the updated model dynamic.

Figure 49. Updated Dual Agency Model



Source . Own work

12.6 Potential application in broader comparative research.

As cities across the Global South face the dual pressures of accelerated urbanization and mounting policy responsibilities, the need for robust analytical tools that can unpack the complexity of policy implementation becomes increasingly urgent. The analytical framework proposed in this thesis—grounded in the intersection of metropolization, institutional design, and public policy implementation—has proven particularly useful in identifying a key but underexplored phenomenon: the problem of dual agency. This is especially relevant given that cities in Latin America, Africa, and parts of Asia are simultaneously dealing with rapid urban expansion and evolving decentralization frameworks (UN-Habitat, 2022; Blanco et al., 2014; Subirats, 2017).

Rooted in the principal-agent tradition, the concept of dual agency builds on classical models of delegation (Bendor, Glazer, & Hammond, 2001), but adapts them to account for fragmented authority and multilevel governance contexts (Peters & Pierre, 2001; Bertelli, 2006). Whereas traditional principal-agent theory focuses on the binary relationship between a principal and a single agent, dual agency theorizes what happens when a local or intermediate government—such as a supramunicipal

authority—becomes simultaneously accountable to multiple principals situated at different hierarchical levels. In doing so, it captures the tensions that arise when overlapping and sometimes contradictory mandates intersect in the same implementation arena.

Previous theoretical developments, including multiple-principal models, have acknowledged that agents may be accountable to more than one authority (Gailmard, 2009; Moe, 1984). However, these approaches often fall short of capturing the scalar and institutional intricacies of public action in decentralized systems. They tend to reduce the problem to incentive alignment or preference aggregation. By contrast, the dual agency framework developed here situates the issue within a broader institutional landscape, where legal ambiguity, overlapping competences, and conflicting planning instruments create a governance tangle that undermines coherent action (Saetren, 2005; Hill & Hupe, 2009).

This conceptual shift is particularly important in Global South contexts, where decentralization reforms, democratization efforts, and the influence of international development agendas have restructured governance frameworks in uneven and often contradictory ways (Grindle, 2004; Andrews, Pritchett, & Woolcock, 2017). In such contexts, local governments are expected to deliver ambitious policy agendas—including housing, infrastructure, and climate adaptation—while navigating complex and often ambiguous delegation systems. These are characterized by fragmented legal frameworks, contested indicators of success, and planning instruments that are only partially coordinated across sectors and levels (Andersson, 2017).

These conditions generate an environment in which compliance with one directive may result in a breach of another, and where resources are allocated through fragmented and frequently politicized channels. As Peters and Zittoun (2016) and Capano and Howlett (2019) have argued, institutional inconsistency—defined by overlapping mandates, vague accountability structures, and asynchronous planning cycles—is a key factor explaining policy implementation failures, particularly in multilevel governance systems.

The analytical model developed in this thesis provides a structured lens to identify and interpret such contradictions. It not only traces where dual agency problems emerge but also unpacks how they affect policy effectiveness. In particular, it highlights how institutional inconsistency—in legal frameworks, competence allocation, and planning instruments—functions both as a cause and a consequence of dual agency. This contributes to a vicious cycle of fragmented accountability, reduced coordination, and diminished implementation capacity (Fontaine et al., 2023).

Ultimately, the dual agency framework offers critical value for countries where the scale and speed of urban transformation outpaces institutional adaptation. By illuminating the invisible frictions of multilevel governance, it serves as a diagnostic and conceptual tool for policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working to strengthen institutional coherence and improve policy outcomes in rapidly urbanizing territories.

13. Conclusion

13.1 General Reflexion

From a conceptual standpoint, the thesis advances the literature on urban governance by integrating insights from three academic traditions that have often operated in silos: (1) the political economy of urbanization and metropolitan expansion, (2) institutionalist theories of governance, and (3) the policy design and implementation literature. In doing so, it introduced a framework capable of explaining why public policy failure in metropolitan areas is not solely a function of weak capacity or poor planning, but often a structural outcome of institutional misalignment. By explicitly connecting the notion of institutional inconsistency with the dual agency condition, the framework enables a more precise diagnosis of implementation gaps, particularly in critical policy areas like territorial planning and housing.

Empirically, the thesis produced a rich and multi-layered analysis through a mixed-methods research design that combined spatial data, policy performance indicators, and qualitative evidence from interviews and focus groups. The findings revealed that Colombia's metropolitan areas face systemic challenges in aligning public policy instruments with actual patterns of urban growth, and that local governments are often trapped between national mandates, international agendas, and locally rooted constraints, leading to conflicting incentives and implementation paralysis. This is particularly evident in the territorial planning policy, where land management tools are formally decentralized but operationally constrained by legal fragmentation and weak metropolitan coordination. Likewise, in the housing sector, the coexistence of multiple financing and regulatory regimes exacerbates the misalignment between urban development goals and institutional execution.

The Colombian case proves especially valuable for examining these tensions, given its status as a unitary yet decentralized state with an advanced legal framework for planning and housing policy, but persistent gaps in intergovernmental coordination. Colombia's urban landscape, shaped by fast-paced metropolitanization and an uneven decentralization process, offers a representative setting to observe how urban form and institutional form collide. The coexistence of strong formal instruments and weak practical coherence exemplifies the structural limits to local policy effectiveness

when institutional consistency is not guaranteed. As such, Colombia becomes not only an emblematic case but also a critical mirror for other Global South countries undergoing similar urban transitions under multi-level governance regimes.

Beyond the specificities of the Colombian case, the thesis provides broader analytical insights relevant for understanding the limits of policy effectiveness in metropolitan contexts worldwide. The findings support the proposition that institutional arrangements must evolve in tandem with urban dynamics and that governance frameworks must explicitly address the scalar, legal, and political complexity of modern cities. Simply decentralizing responsibilities is insufficient if authority, capacity, and coordination mechanisms are not equally strengthened.

The dual agency framework thus emerges as a useful analytical tool to assess and eventually address these governance bottlenecks. It reveals how local governments operate within nested systems of delegation, often with limited clarity over who is responsible for what, under what rules, and with what resources. Recognizing this condition is the first step in designing more coherent metropolitan institutions, aligning development agendas with actual implementation capacity, and ultimately closing the persistent gap between formal decentralization and functional governance.

In sum, the thesis contributes both a conceptual advancement and an empirical mapping of a key governance dilemma: how to make public policies effective in an era where urban growth transcends administrative boundaries, but governance structures often do not. The dual agency model offers a way forward—both as a framework for analysis and as a heuristic for institutional reform—particularly in regions like Latin America where governance and urbanization continue to evolve in tension.

13.2 Answering the research questions

To close this thesis, it is essential to return to the core research questions that guided the analytical and empirical journey. These questions were designed not only to interrogate how institutional and spatial dynamics intersect in metropolitan governance but also to assess the real implications of these interactions for policy implementation and local development. This final section brings together the main

findings by restating each research question and summarizing the corresponding answer in a concise and integrative manner.

By revisiting the research questions through the lens of the empirical evidence and analytical framework developed throughout the thesis, this synthesis aims to underscore the explanatory power of the “dual agency” concept. It also reflects on how institutional design, decentralization, and urbanization processes jointly shape the effectiveness of local public action. These reflections offer a clear and accessible summary of the contributions of the research, while reinforcing its relevance for both scholarly debate and policy practice.

1. What dual agency problems do local governments face amid urbanization, and how do these challenges affect the efficiency of local public policy implementation?

The concept of dual agency, as outlined in the thesis, refers to the condition in which local governments are simultaneously accountable to multiple, often conflicting principals—typically national authorities, supramunicipal bodies, and local constituents. Amid rapid urbanization and metropolization, this overlapping of mandates becomes especially problematic. Urban growth increasingly exceeds municipal boundaries, creating metropolitan regions where planning, infrastructure, and service delivery require coordination across jurisdictions. However, institutional frameworks often fail to evolve accordingly, leaving local governments with responsibilities that surpass their legal authority, technical capacity, or fiscal autonomy. The result is a structural tension where local governments must navigate conflicting demands, unclear hierarchies, and competing incentives—all of which typify the dual agency problem.

These governance tensions critically undermine the efficiency of local public policy implementation. In practice, dual agency leads to fragmented planning processes, duplicated or contradictory interventions, and delays in policy execution. For example, while national policies might push for housing development aligned with international agendas (like the SDGs), local governments often lack the land management authority or financial tools needed to implement them effectively. Moreover, urban expansion—frequently occurring

outside formal planning boundaries—exposes the institutional gaps in coordinating territorial policies. This disjunction between responsibilities and capacities not only erodes the coherence of public policy but also reduces accountability and weakens the ability of governments to deliver sustainable urban development outcomes.

2. From a perspective of analytical framing is relevant to ask how can institutional design challenges be analyzed through the lens of principal-agent theory? And how does the interaction between institutional (in)consistency, decentralization design, and policy implementation contribute to or mitigate dual agency problems?.

From an analytical framing perspective, institutional design challenges can be effectively analyzed through the lens of principal-agent theory by focusing on the delegation relationships between levels of government. In this model, the central government (principal) delegates authority to local governments (agents) to implement public policies. However, in decentralized and metropolitan contexts, multiple principals often coexist—national ministries, regional agencies, and even international donors—each imposing expectations and accountability structures on local governments. This leads to conflicting mandates, fragmented oversight, and incoherent incentive structures. The traditional principal-agent model, which assumes unidirectional control and a single principal, fails to capture these complexities. By extending the model to incorporate multi-principal dynamics and institutional fluidity, researchers can better identify how ambiguities in roles, overlaps in responsibilities, and asymmetries in capacity lead to agency drift, non-compliance, or implementation paralysis.

The interaction between institutional (in)consistency, decentralization design, and policy implementation is crucial in either exacerbating or mitigating dual agency problems. Institutional inconsistency—manifested in overlapping mandates, vague norms, and mismatched responsibilities—amplifies the challenges of coordination and accountability across actors. When decentralization processes do not adequately define the roles, resources, and coordination mechanisms for each level of government, local agents face contradictory obligations that hinder coherent action. Conversely, institutional consistency—characterized by clearly defined competences, aligned instruments, and

coordinated oversight—can reduce dual agency tensions and enhance policy implementation. The effectiveness of decentralized governance thus depends not only on devolving authority but also on designing institutions that harmonize goals, instruments, and accountability structures across the multilevel governance system.

3. How are dual agency problems manifested in decentralized countries like Colombia? how adequately do current decentralization and territorial governance schemes reflect the realities of urbanization and agglomeration? And what specific roles do jurisdictions, legal boundaries, and governance frameworks such as metropolitan areas play in enabling or hindering policy coordination?

In decentralized countries like Colombia, dual agency problems are empirically manifested through the persistent mismatch between the institutional architecture of governance and the spatial dynamics of urbanization. As metropolitan regions expand beyond the administrative boundaries of core municipalities, local governments are expected to coordinate planning, housing, and service delivery across fragmented jurisdictions—often without adequate legal authority or fiscal tools. For example, territorial planning is formally decentralized through instruments like the POTs (Planes de Ordenamiento Territorial), but their implementation is constrained by overlapping mandates from national and supramunicipal actors, limited enforcement mechanisms, and the absence of metropolitan-scale institutions with binding authority. This creates a scenario where local governments are accountable to multiple principals while lacking the institutional capacity to mediate or harmonize those expectations—thus making coordination both necessary and institutionally elusive.

These governance challenges highlight deeper issues within the current decentralization and territorial governance schemes, which often fail to reflect the realities of urban agglomeration. Jurisdictional boundaries remain administrative rather than functional, impeding inter-municipal coordination and the articulation of unified development strategies. Legal frameworks, such as Colombia's Law 1625 on metropolitan areas, offer tools for integration, but in practice their adoption is limited and their operational capacity uneven. Without robust metropolitan

governance frameworks or incentive mechanisms for coordination, policy actions tend to be siloed, redundant, or even contradictory across municipalities. As a result, governance at the scale of urban reality—where daily flows of people, goods, and services occur—is structurally disconnected from the institutions meant to govern it. This gap not only undermines policy coherence but also exacerbates inequalities in infrastructure provision, access to housing, and territorial development outcomes.

4. How decisive are dual agency challenges in shaping the capacity of local governments to meet development goals, particularly those aligned with international agendas like the SDGs?

Dual agency challenges are highly decisive in shaping the capacity of local governments to meet development goals, particularly those aligned with international agendas like the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These challenges manifest as institutional contradictions and competing demands across governance levels, which directly impact local governments' ability to act effectively. In the case of Colombia, local authorities are expected to deliver on ambitious SDG targets such as sustainable urbanization (Goal 11) or access to adequate housing (Goal 11.4), yet they operate within a framework of fragmented competences, overlapping mandates, and insufficient resources. This results in significant implementation gaps, where plans and programs aligned with the SDGs are adopted formally but fall short in execution due to coordination failures and unclear accountability chains.

The research clearly demonstrates that unless these structural issues are addressed, SDG localization efforts risk becoming aspirational rather than transformative. The lack of alignment between policy instruments, institutional authority, and the spatial realities of urban growth means that policies may be well-designed but remain ineffective in practice. Moreover, the dual accountability to both local constituencies and higher-level principals dilutes policy coherence and creates incentives for short-term, fragmented actions. Ultimately, dual agency does not just delay implementation—it structurally impairs the ability of local governments to prioritize, plan, and deliver sustainable development outcomes in

an integrated way, thus undermining both national and international commitments to equitable and sustainable urban development.

This analysis comprehensively unpacks the challenges that arise from the distribution of competences across different levels of government. By focusing on the case of Colombia, it clearly demonstrates how metropolization, institutional inconsistency, and fragmented governance structures hinder the ability of local governments to act effectively. The empirical evidence—drawn from spatial analysis, policy performance indicators, and qualitative interviews and focus groups—illustrates not only the existence of dual agency dynamics but also their concrete effects on public policy implementation in both territorial planning and housing.

Moreover, the thesis fulfills its ultimate purpose by constructing and applying an original analytical framework that links metropolization, institutional design, and public policy implementation. The integration of the *dual agency* concept with that of *institutional consistency* offers a novel and operationalizable lens for analyzing multilevel governance challenges. This framework proves analytically sound, empirically grounded, and normatively relevant. It not only advances theoretical debates on decentralization and urban governance but also provides practical insights for improving policy coherence in complex territorial systems—especially relevant for cities in the Global South facing similar institutional and spatial dynamics.

13.3 Future Research Paths

While this thesis has contributed to a deeper understanding of how institutional design, urbanization, and policy implementation intersect—particularly through the lens of dual agency—its findings also open important avenues for future research. These opportunities fall into three broad categories: theoretical refinement, empirical expansion, and methodological innovation.

13.3.1 Theoretical Refinement of the Dual Agency Framework

The concept of dual agency has proved valuable in unpacking the contradictions faced by local governments caught between multiple and often conflicting mandates. However, further theoretical work is needed to deepen the understanding of how this

condition varies across different governance regimes and policy sectors. Future studies could explore:

1. How dual agency manifests differently in federal versus unitary states.
2. Whether some policy domains (e.g., health, education, climate) are more resilient to dual agency challenges than others.
3. The role of political parties, electoral incentives, and civil society in mitigating or exacerbating dual accountability tensions.

Such inquiries would allow the concept to evolve from a diagnostic tool into a predictive and prescriptive framework for analyzing public sector governance in complex territorial systems.

13.3.2 Comparative and Cross-Country Empirical Research

While the Colombian case provides a rich empirical basis for examining the interplay between institutional inconsistency and urban governance, further comparative research could assess the generalizability of these findings. Potential directions include:

1. Comparative studies across Latin American countries experiencing similar decentralization-urbanization tensions (e.g., Mexico, Peru, Brazil).
2. Analyses of metropolitan governance in secondary cities or rapidly urbanizing regions in Sub-Saharan Africa or South Asia.
3. Case studies of cities that have succeeded in overcoming dual agency problems—highlighting institutional innovations, policy alignments, or political leadership strategies.

Such research could help identify enabling conditions for more effective metropolitan governance, particularly under decentralization frameworks.

13.3.3 Methodological Advancements and Data Integration

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining spatial analysis, policy indicators, and qualitative data. Future research could build on this by:

1. Integrating network analysis to map relationships between institutional actors and understand power asymmetries.
2. Expanding the use of longitudinal data to trace institutional reforms and their effects on policy coherence over time.
3. Applying participatory research methods to include citizen perspectives, thereby assessing how dual agency problems affect not just state actors but also public service users and urban communities.

Moreover, further development of spatial methodologies—particularly in linking urban extent data with land-use planning instruments and housing policy outcomes—could enhance the precision and explanatory power of governance analysis in metropolitan areas.

13.3.4 Policy Implementation under Multiscalar Pressures

Finally, a promising avenue for research lies in investigating how international agendas—such as the SDGs, the New Urban Agenda, or climate agreements—influence local policy implementation under conditions of dual agency. Questions worth exploring include:

1. How do global development frameworks alter the hierarchy or coordination of mandates across levels of government?
2. To what extent do international financing mechanisms create new principals in local governance, further complicating accountability chains?
3. How are transnational networks of cities (e.g., C40, ICLEI, UCLG) shaping local capacity to navigate these tensions?

Understanding the multiscalar nature of public policy implementation will be critical as cities are increasingly placed at the forefront of tackling global challenges with limited institutional tools.

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15. Annexes

Annex 1. List of Municipalities Included in the Urban Trends Analysis

List of Municipalities with More than 100.000 dwellers according to National Census 2018.

Departamento	Municipio	Población Total 2018
Bogotá, D.C.	Bogotá, D.C.	7,412,566
Antioquia	Medellín	2,427,129
Valle del Cauca	Cali	2,227,642
Atlántico	Barranquilla	1,206,319
Bolívar	Cartagena de Indias	973,045
Norte de Santander	San José de Cúcuta	711,715
Cundinamarca	Soacha	660,179
Atlántico	Soledad	603,999
Santander	Bucaramanga	581,130
Meta	Villavicencio	531,275
Tolima	Ibagué	529,635
Antioquia	Bello	522,264
Magdalena	Santa Marta	499,192
Córdoba	Montería	490,935
Cesar	Valledupar	490,075
Risaralda	Pereira	467,269
Caldas	Manizales	434,403
Nariño	Pasto	392,930
Huila	Neiva	357,392
Valle del Cauca	Palmira	349,294
Cauca	Popayán	318,059
Valle del Cauca	Buenaventura	308,188
Quindío	Armenia	295,208
Santander	Floridablanca	291,935
Sucre	Sincelejo	277,773
Antioquia	Itagüí	276,744
Nariño	San Andrés de Tumaco	253,637
Antioquia	Envigado	228,848
Risaralda	Dosquebradas	217,178
Valle del Cauca	Tuluá	212,685
Santander	Barrancabermeja	203,537
La Guajira	Riohacha	188,014
Boyacá	Tunja	172,548
Santander	Piedecuesta	170,625
La Guajira	Maicao	170,582
Casanare	Yopal	168,433
Caquetá	Florencia	168,346
La Guajira	Uribí	163,462

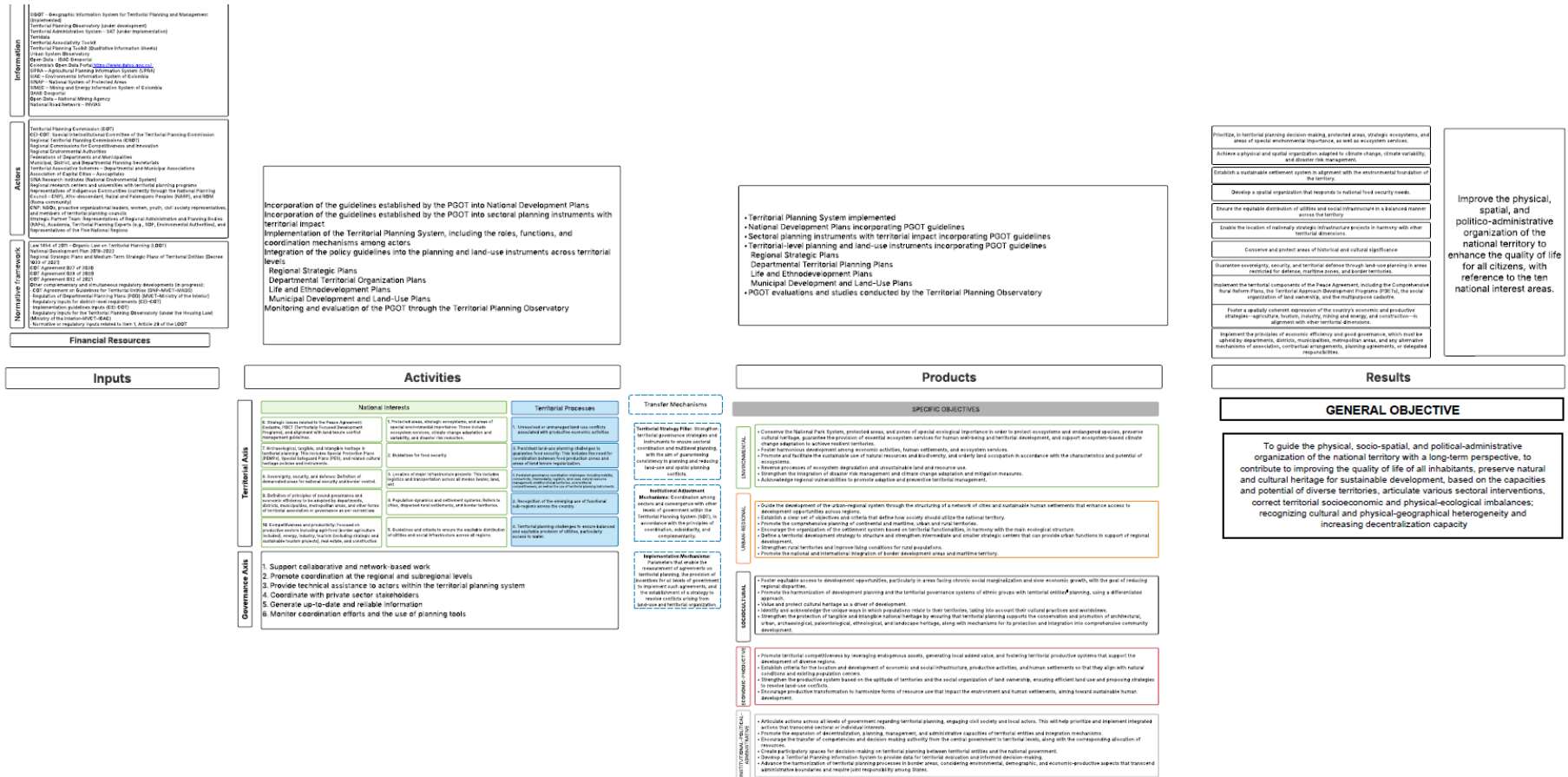
Departamento	Municipio	Población Total 2018
Santander	Girón	160,403
Valle del Cauca	Jamundí	159,877
Cundinamarca	Facatativá	139,441
Cundinamarca	Fusagasugá	138,498
Valle del Cauca	Cartago	135,729
Antioquia	Rionegro	135,465
Bolívar	Magangué	133,270
Cundinamarca	Chía	132,181
Cundinamarca	Zipaquirá	130,537
Cundinamarca	Mosquera	130,221
Chocó	Quibdó	129,237
Atlántico	Malambo	128,203
Valle del Cauca	Guadalajara de Buga	127,545
Boyacá	Sogamoso	127,235
Antioquia	Turbo	124,552
Huila	Pitalito	124,359
Boyacá	Duitama	122,436
Antioquia	Apartadó	121,003
Magdalena	Ciénaga	120,071
Norte de Santander	Ocaña	118,273
Nariño	Ipiales	116,136
Córdoba	Lorica	113,909
Cundinamarca	Madrid	112,254
Cauca	Santander de Quilichao	110,445
Cesar	Aguachica	109,621
Córdoba	Sahagún	107,636
Valle del Cauca	Yumbo	107,334
Córdoba	Cereté	105,815
Bolívar	Turbaco	105,166
Norte de Santander	Villa del Rosario	101,952
Cundinamarca	Girardot	101,018

List of Municipalities added Metropolitan dynamics

Departamento	Municipio	Población Total 2018
Cundinamarca	Funza	93,154
Valle del Cauca	Candelaria	91,825
Norte de Santander	Los Patios	89,091
Antioquia	Sabaneta	82,375
Cundinamarca	Cajicá	82,244
Antioquia	Caldas	79,638
Antioquia	Copacabana	77,884

Quindío	Calarcá	72,783
Antioquia	La Estrella	71,545
Caldas	Villamaría	64,652
Atlántico	Galapa	60,708
Antioquia	Barbosa	51,969
Antioquia	Girardota	51,662
Atlántico	Puerto Colombia	49,264
Cundinamarca	Tocancipá	39,996
Cundinamarca	Sibaté	33,491
Cundinamarca	Cota	32,691
Cundinamarca	La Calera	29,868
Tolima	Flandes	28,389
Cundinamarca	Sopó	25,782
Cundinamarca	Tenjo	21,935
Cundinamarca	Tabio	21,665
Boyacá	Cómbita	12,970
Cundinamarca	Ricaurte	12,881
Boyacá	Motavita	5,569

Annex 2. Value Chain



Annex 3. Focus Group Analysis - February 16: Workshop on Territorial Planning Reform in Colombia

Focus Group Introduction

The focus group was conducted on February 16, 2022, with the participation of 12 experts from various sectors, including representatives from public entities, academia, social organizations, and stakeholders involved in territorial planning. The purpose of the meeting was to generate collective reflection on the current challenges of territorial planning in Colombia and to explore proposals for a potential regulatory and institutional reform in this area.

Questions Posed During the Focus Group

1. What current challenges does Colombia face regarding territorial planning?
2. How is the relationship between the economic development model and territorial planning perceived?
3. What role should territorial entities play in territorial planning?
4. What should be the scope of a territorial planning reform?
5. Which sectors or actors should be prioritized in the construction of this reform?
6. What institutional limitations exist to achieve genuine territorial articulation?
7. How could multilevel governance be strengthened in the country?
8. What risks should be avoided in a new planning model?
9. What lessons can be derived from previous territorial planning experiences?
10. Which citizen participation mechanisms would be most effective?

General Summary of the Focus Group

During the exercise, participants emphasized the urgency of updating the legal and technical framework of territorial planning, which is considered outdated in relation to current territorial complexity. Tensions were identified between economic growth, environmental sustainability, and territorial justice, reflecting a disconnection between national policies and local dynamics.

A recurrent point was the limited technical and fiscal capacity of municipalities, which impedes effective planning and generates high dependence on the central level. Additionally, a lack of intersectoral articulation was evident: sectors such as transportation, environment, and housing act in a fragmented manner, affecting coherence in land use and territorial interventions.

There was consensus that any reform must consider a differential approach that recognizes the regional, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the country. In this sense, emphasis was placed on the construction of territorial pacts that actively involve communities, social sectors, and economic actors. The reform should not be limited to reorganizing competencies but must include effective mechanisms for citizen participation, the integration of environmental criteria, and the consolidation of functional multilevel governance.

Risks that could arise in the reform process were also discussed, such as a recentralization of power or the disregard of previous learning. The need to provide territorial entities with real capacities to lead their planning processes was emphasized.

The group concluded with a reflection on the importance of a participatory roadmap that articulates technical and community knowledge, allowing progress toward a more just, coherent, and sustainable territorial planning model.

Main Ideas and Key Points from the Focus Group

- 1.** The current territorial planning model is outdated and does not respond to the contemporary territorial realities of the country.
- 2.** There is a disconnection between economic development promoted from the central level and local dynamics.
- 3.** Territorial entities require greater autonomy and technical and fiscal strengthening to lead planning processes.
- 4.** A differential approach that recognizes Colombia's regional, ethnic, and environmental diversity is essential.
- 5.** The construction of territorial pacts must include broad participation from social, public, and private actors.

6. Current multilevel governance is weak and needs effective mechanisms for articulation between levels of government.
7. Sectoral planning is fragmented and lacks a common vision of the territory.
8. It is necessary to avoid a recentralization of power in the reform of territorial planning.
9. Lessons from previous processes must be systematized and applied to avoid repeating past mistakes.
10. Citizen participation should be permanent, impactful, and not merely consultative.

Annex 4. Focus Group Analysis - February 17: Workshop on Territorial Planning Reform in Colombia

Focus Group Introduction

The focus group was conducted on February 17, 2022, with the participation of 9 expert individuals from various sectors, including representatives from public institutions, environmental organizations, academics, social actors, and consultants specializing in territorial issues. The activity was convened for the purpose of collectively reflecting on the challenges, tensions, and opportunities of Territorial Planning (TP) in Colombia, from a critical, interdisciplinary perspective situated within the territories.

Questions Posed During the Focus Group

1. What do you understand by territorial planning?
2. What do you believe are the main problems related to territorial planning in your contexts?
3. Which sectors are most involved or should be involved in these processes?
4. What are the challenges of territorial planning in diverse contexts?
5. How can the interests of different actors in the territory be harmonized?
6. What tools do you consider effective for planning territory?
7. How can citizen participation in these processes be strengthened?
8. What positive or negative experiences are you familiar with regarding planning processes?
9. What elements do you consider key for good territorial governance?
10. How can technical knowledge be integrated with local knowledge?

General Summary of the Focus Group

The focus group was conducted with the participation of nine experts representing various sectors related to territorial planning and management, including academic, institutional, environmental, and social areas. The session began with a conceptual exploration of "territorial planning," where participants emphasized the need to

understand territory not only as a physical space but as a place traversed by power relations, culture, history, and economic dynamics.

Subsequently, the main challenges faced by territorial planning processes were addressed, such as institutional disarticulation, lack of political will, invisibility of local actors, and conflict between economic and environmental interests. One of the most discussed points was the importance of articulating technical knowledge with the empirical knowledge of communities, highlighting that without this integration, plans tend to fail or are not appropriately adopted by the population.

There was reflection on the need to improve citizen participation from early stages and continuously, not just in validation spaces. Likewise, previous territorial experiences were shared that demonstrated both the risks of imposing vertical plans and the benefits of inclusive and concerted processes.

Finally, there was agreement that territorial planning should be viewed as a political tool that enables spatial and social justice, and not merely as a technical-normative instrument.

Main Ideas and Key Points from the Focus Group

1. Territorial planning must be understood as a political process with social, economic, and cultural implications.
2. Centralized technical planning tends to disregard the complexity and diversity of local territories.
3. There is a marked disconnection between technical-institutional knowledge and community knowledge.
4. Land use conflicts reflect power disputes and structural interests among economic, environmental, and social sectors.
5. Citizen participation should be binding, active, and sustained throughout the entire planning process.
6. Articulation between levels of government (national, regional, local) remains one of the greatest challenges of territorial planning.
7. Community experiences in planning demonstrate organizational capacities and alternative approaches that should be formally recognized.

8. Planning should be a tool for inclusion and spatial justice, guaranteeing the right to inhabit and make decisions about the territory.
9. Territorial governance should integrate multiple actors with legitimate and effective concertation mechanisms.
10. It is essential to strengthen local capacities through training, technical assistance, and financial resources so that communities can lead planning processes.

Annex 5. Focus Group Analysis - January 13: Workshop on Territorial Planning Reform in Colombia

Focus Group Introduction

The focus group was conducted on January 13, 2022, with the participation of 11 expert individuals from various sectors, including representatives from the national government, local authorities, civil society organizations, academia, and international cooperation agencies. The convening aimed to collectively analyze the challenges, needs, and reform proposals for Colombia's territorial planning system, based on territorial and sectoral experiences. The session enabled the identification of critical issues and improvement strategies through a diverse and constructive dialogue.

Questions Posed During the Focus Group

1. What has been your experience with the current territorial planning system?
2. Which aspects do you consider function effectively in the current system?
3. What weaknesses or challenges have you identified in Colombian territorial planning?
4. What types of reforms do you consider necessary?
5. What role should municipalities and regions play in a potential reform?
6. How could better coordination between government levels be guaranteed?
7. What is your opinion on the current territorial associativity regime?
8. What mechanisms do you consider necessary to strengthen territorial planning and management?
9. How can regional particularities be incorporated into a reform?
10. What should be the role of the State in supporting territories?

General Summary of the Focus Group

During the focus group, participants identified profound deficiencies in the current territorial planning model in Colombia, characterized by centralized decision-making, lack of articulation between levels of government, and limited capacity of municipalities to lead effective planning processes. Regulatory gaps, disconnection between instruments such as the Territorial Planning Plans (POT) and regional realities, as well as the need to reconsider the territorial associativity regime, deemed ineffective, were

extensively discussed. From a regional perspective, an approach more adapted to local particularities was proposed, with greater autonomy and responsibility for territorial entities.

Participants emphasized the urgency of reforms that include components of sustainability, active community participation, and institutional strengthening. It was suggested that the State should fulfill a more active role in providing technical and political support to territories, especially those with fewer capacities, and that it is imperative for reforms to be constructed with an intercultural vision, integrating social and environmental dimensions, and territorial justice.

The group agreed that reforms must transcend a merely technical-normative approach to become a democratic transformation initiative for the territory.

Main Ideas and Key Points from the Focus Group

1. The current territorial planning model presents serious problems of articulation between national, regional, and local levels.
2. There exists a structural weakness in the technical, administrative, and financial capacities of municipalities to exercise an active role in territorial planning.
3. The centralist approach limits the adaptability of planning instruments to local and regional realities.
4. It is necessary to reformulate the territorial associativity regime to ensure its practical viability and political relevance.
5. Reforms must contemplate differential approaches, recognizing the cultural, ethnic, and environmental diversity of territories.
6. Greater participation of communities in planning processes is required, not only as consulted subjects but as co-creating actors.
7. The State must assume an active role in providing technical, financial, and institutional support to territories with fewer capacities.
8. Territorial planning must be linked to strategies of sustainable development, spatial justice, and territorial equity.
9. Inter-institutional coordination is fundamental to avoid duplications and ensure coherence between sectoral public policies.

10. Strengthening local capacities is indispensable to guarantee the effective and sustainable implementation of planning plans.

Annex 6. Focus Group Analysis – January 12th: Workshop on Territorial Planning Reform in Colombia

Focus Group Introduction

The focus group was held on January 12, 2022, with the participation of 13 expert individuals from diverse sectors, including representatives from national and local government institutions, social organizations, academia, and international cooperation agencies. The session was convened with the aim of collectively analyzing the progress, challenges, and opportunities of Territorial Planning (TP) in Colombia, based on the sectoral and territorial experiences of the participants.

Questions Posed During the Focus Group

1. How is Territorial Planning currently understood in Colombia from your sectoral experience?
2. What role should social and community actors play in planning processes?
3. What are the main challenges for effective implementation of territorial planning in the country?
4. What positive experiences or lessons learned do you consider valuable in the field of planning?
5. What recommendations would you offer to strengthen the capacities of the State and communities in this area?

General Summary of the Focus Group

The focus group held on January 12, 2024, gathered thirteen experts from various sectors, including national and local entities, academia, social organizations, and international cooperation agencies. The objective was to identify advances, challenges, and proposals surrounding Territorial Planning (TP) in Colombia through a pluralistic and critical dialogue.

The workshop generated an in-depth dialogue on Territorial Planning in Colombia. While institutional representatives highlighted progress in normative frameworks and tools such as Territorial Planning Plans (POT) and Development Programs with a Territorial Approach (PDET), other sectors pointed out that these instruments fail to

reflect the diversity of territorial realities. Social and ethnic organizations shared experiences of self-led planning that have not been recognized by the State, sparking a debate on legality versus legitimacy.

One of the most relevant moments of the discussion emerged around the role of communities. Several participants agreed that communities should no longer be seen as passive subjects of consultation but rather as active agents with real influence in planning processes. This was emphasized by those who argued that top-down planning tends to reproduce exclusionary patterns, whereas proposals built from the local level promote sustainability, rootedness, and territorial peace.

The group also discussed the need to revise the monocultural approach of the POTs, which tend to homogenize ways of inhabiting the territory and insufficiently incorporate the particularities of Indigenous peoples, Afro-descendant communities, and peasants. Academic experts contributed theoretical insights on multiple territorialities and emphasized the urgency of including differential, gender, and intercultural approaches in planning.

The session concluded with a round of recommendations, highlighting the importance of strengthening technical and political capacities in the territories, ensuring inter-institutional coordination, and, above all, recognizing the value of community territorial knowledge as the foundation for any legitimate planning model. There was consensus that territorial planning should be a tool to build spatial justice, reduce inequalities, and guarantee the right to dignified inhabitation of the territories.

Main Ideas and Key Points from the Focus Group

- 1.** Territorial planning must transcend its normative-technical focus to become a tool for territorial justice that addresses the social, cultural, and environmental dynamics of each region.
- 2.** There is a structural disconnect between legislation and territorial realities, which hinders the implementation of plans and limits the effectiveness of local public policies.
- 3.** Communities must be protagonists in planning processes, actively participating based on their knowledge, experiences, and ways of inhabiting their territory.

4. The current centralized model prevents municipalities, especially smaller ones, from having the technical and financial capacity to carry out effective planning processes.
5. The lack of inclusion of differential and intercultural approaches restricts the participation of ethnic groups, peasant communities, and vulnerable populations in planning processes.
6. Community-led planning experiences demonstrate comprehensive approaches that could enrich public policy if they were formally recognized and integrated.
7. Planning must contribute to reparation and reconciliation in conflict-affected contexts, prioritizing the right to territory and ensuring non-repetition.
8. Institutional transformation is required to ensure coordination across levels of government and avoid gaps or duplications in territorial plan implementation.
9. Environmental management and climate change must be incorporated as foundational pillars of planning, especially considering the growing vulnerability of ecosystems.
10. Strengthening local capacities, supported by training and technical assistance, is essential to guarantee meaningful participation and sustainable territorial planning.

Annex 7. Interview Summary: Antonio Avendaño - District Planning – Bogotá

Introduction of the Interviewee

Antonio Avendaño is a public official with extensive experience in territorial planning issues in Bogotá, having worked across three district administrations. He currently serves at the Secretariat of Planning of Bogotá, where he has participated in the formulation, revision, and socialization process of the Territorial Planning Scheme (POT) approved by Mayor Claudia López's administration in late 2022. Avendaño is recognized for his technical and operational expertise regarding Bogotá's POT, and has led institutional coordination processes and the production of official cartographic information. He has been directly involved in implementing governance strategies, monitoring, and evaluation of the POT, and has promoted associative models with municipalities in the Sabana region to strengthen the technical capacity of the Bogotá-Cundinamarca region.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. How do you perceive the territorial planning reform proposals presented in the base document?
2. What is your opinion regarding the simplification of territorial planning instruments?
3. What challenges exist in relation to the maturation of investment projects derived from the POT?
4. What is your experience with suburban land management and its implications in the Bogotá Sabana?
5. What strategies has Bogotá implemented to improve the quality of cadastral and cartographic information?
6. How can the sustainability of intermunicipal associations for data production be ensured?
7. What is your vision regarding territorial governance and POT monitoring?
8. What lessons does the Bogotá case offer for other municipalities in the country?

Interview Summary

Antonio Avendaño's intervention centers on a critical and constructive analysis of territorial planning challenges in Colombia, drawing from his practical experience in Bogotá. Avendaño validates the relevance of the proposed reforms, particularly those aimed at strengthening institutional coordination, project maturation, and technical information quality.

From his perspective, one of the greatest obstacles to territorial planning in Colombia is the lack of regulatory clarity and the dispersion of instruments, which hinders execution and citizen comprehension. He notes that technical rigidity often exceeds municipal capacity and that excessive regulatory complexity distances the POT from citizens.

He emphasizes the importance of clearly identifying in development plans which POT projects will be executed during each administration. He highlights that Bogotá achieved this alignment for the first time in its latest development plan, which he considers a fundamental milestone.

He also underscores the need to more clearly define suburban land, which has generated regulatory gaps and urban planning complications, particularly in municipalities adjacent to Bogotá. Similarly, he argues for strengthening intermunicipal associative models to acquire quality information and reduce technical inequality between territories.

Finally, he proposes that governance should be supported by annual monitoring and evaluation systems that institutionalize the POT and overcome political volatility. He asserts that without political will and institutional continuity, no regulatory reform will be sufficient.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Need to align POT with development plans:** Each administration must clearly define which POT projects it will execute during its four-year term.
2. **Urgent regulatory simplification:** The quantity of instruments and technical complexity render the POT inoperative for many municipalities and citizens.

3. **Clear definition of suburban land:** This represents a regulatory gap that has facilitated uncontrolled urbanization and has denied rurality in many municipalities.
4. **Bogotá as a technical reference:** Its financial capacity has enabled the development of quality information, useful both for itself and for neighboring municipalities.
5. **Associative models as a solution:** Proposes the need to collectively acquire cartographic data among municipalities by watershed or region.
6. **Political will is key:** Beyond regulations, political will is needed to sustain projects that transcend political cycles.
7. **Governance based on annual monitoring and evaluation:** Proposes that the POT be measured annually through clear progress indicators.
8. **The failure of capital gains tax and alternatives:** The instrument's complexity has made its implementation unfeasible; proposes localized urban charges as a better option.
9. **Valuable experience to avoid errors:** Highlights that Bogotá's POT revision took eight years and paralyzed many decisions; urges avoiding repetition of this process.
10. **Preservation of local knowledge:** Warns about the danger of imposing technical models without considering each territory's reality and ancestral knowledge.

Annex 8. Interview Summary: Carlos Felipe Reyes - Ministry of Housing

Introduction of the Interviewee

Carlos Felipe Reyes is an expert in housing policy who has worked at the Colombian Ministry of Housing. During the interview, he shares his knowledge and experience regarding Colombian housing policy, its implementation, and the roles fulfilled by different levels of government within this policy framework. His participation in the ministry has allowed him to gain firsthand knowledge of housing subsidy programs, land management, and the dynamics between the national government and territorial entities, providing him with a valuable perspective on the distribution of competencies in housing matters.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. What is the current housing policy in Colombia?
2. How are the roles and responsibilities within housing policy distributed among the different levels of government?
3. What role do governorates play in the housing policy process?
4. What role do formal metropolitan areas (Valle de Aburrá, Bucaramanga, Barranquilla) play within this housing policy?
5. How is responsibility divided within housing policy? Do you believe it functions effectively? Has implementation been successful?
6. How was the relationship between the National Government and municipalities? Was the development of municipal competencies fluid? Did municipalities adequately enable land for development?

Interview Summary

The interview with Carlos Felipe Reyes comprehensively addresses Colombian housing policy, focusing on the distribution of competencies among different levels of government and their effectiveness in practice. Reyes explains that national policy is primarily based on mortgage credit subsidies through the "Mi Casa Ya" program, which offers support for down payments and interest rates. He also mentions smaller initiatives such as housing improvement and social rental programs.

Regarding the distribution of competencies, Reyes indicates that the national government focuses on demand subsidies, while municipalities bear responsibility for land management through Territorial Planning Schemes (POT) and other planning instruments. Governorates play a very limited role, essentially centered on complementing subsidies when resources are available. He identifies family compensation funds as important actors, contributing approximately 80% of what the national government allocates to subsidies.

Reyes describes metropolitan areas as associative schemes more focused on mobility and public services than on housing, although he recognizes the pressure on peripheral municipalities to generate new housing when capital cities exhaust their available land.

Regarding the effectiveness of this distribution of responsibilities, Reyes points out that subsidy policy is closely tied to macroeconomic and reactivation cycles, generating distortions and instability in the construction sector. He also mentions as a deficiency that mortgage credit subsidies rarely reach the poorest 20-25% of the population, primarily benefiting vulnerable or middle-class segments.

Finally, he explains that the national government's role in land management is limited, mainly providing agency and accompaniment, while updating Territorial Planning Schemes faces significant political economy and resource challenges, especially in smaller municipalities.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Focus on subsidies:** Colombian housing policy is centered on mortgage credit subsidies through the "Mi Casa Ya" program, which includes support for down payments and interest rates.
2. **Distribution of competencies:** The national government is primarily responsible for demand subsidies, while municipalities are responsible for land management and territorial planning.
3. **Limited role of governorates:** Departments have a residual role in housing policy, essentially limited to complementing subsidies when they have resources available.

4. **Importance of family compensation funds:** These entities contribute approximately 80% of what the national government allocates to subsidies and are relevant actors that also implement housing projects.
5. **Metropolitan areas:** These associative schemes have focused primarily on mobility and public services, with the housing component lagging despite pressures for urban expansion.
6. **Instability due to economic cycles:** Subsidy policy is linked to economic reactivation objectives, generating expansion and contraction cycles that affect the sustainability of the construction sector.
7. **Targeting limitations:** Programs based on mortgage credit rarely reach the poorest 20-25% of the population, primarily benefiting vulnerable or middle-class segments.
8. **Persistent deficit:** Despite efforts, Colombia maintains a high housing deficit, especially qualitative.
9. **Challenges in land management:** Updating Territorial Planning Schemes faces major obstacles due to cost, limited incentives, and political economy complexities.
10. **Complementarity of subsidies:** The ideal scheme would be the concurrence of subsidies from different sources (national, departmental, municipal, and family compensation funds) to reduce the financial burden of housing.

Annex 9. Interview Summary: Fabio Sánchez - University of Los Andes

Introduction of the Interviewee

Fabio Sánchez is a professor at the University of Los Andes in Colombia. He specializes in public policy, with particular emphasis on education, housing, and decentralization. He has conducted impact evaluations of various government programs such as "Mi Casa Ya" ("My House Now"), "Vivienda Gratuita" ("Free Housing"), and "Semillero de Propietarios" ("Nursery of Homeowners"). Additionally, he has published academic research on decentralization and efficiency in the provision of public services, including a study in the World Development journal on education and local capacities. He possesses extensive experience in analyzing principal-agent models within the context of Colombian public administration.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. How do you view the dual agency phenomenon in the context of the decentralization process in Colombia?
2. How do these dual agencies phenomena impact the effectiveness of public policies at the local level?
3. What is your perspective on the configuration of dual agency problems in sectors such as housing?
4. Do you consider that the creation of additional entities such as metropolitan areas adds complexity or enhances efficiency in the provision of public services?
5. How do you view the principal-agent interaction in complex sectors such as housing?
6. What is the problem that you identify with housing from a dual agency approach?
7. How is the capacity for action of local governments defined and measured?
8. Are there adequate indicators to measure local capacity beyond outcomes?
9. In which sectors, apart from education, would it be worthwhile to analyze the dual agency configuration?

10. Could you share your experience on how the dual agency configuration affects decentralization in Colombia?

Interview Summary

The interview with Fabio Sánchez explores the phenomenon of dual agency in the context of decentralization in Colombia, focusing on how the distribution of competencies across different levels of government affects the efficacy of public policies. The interviewee shares his research experience on the subject, particularly in the education sector, where he has documented efficiency problems when the entity responsible for providing a service is not the same one for which citizens vote.

Sánchez explains a study published in *World Development* on education in Colombia, where municipalities with educational autonomy were compared against those whose education was administered by departments (states), finding greater efficiency when municipal governments had direct control over resources. Regarding housing, he analyzes how competencies are distributed between the national government (demand subsidies) and local governments (land provision), identifying challenges in coordination and territorial distribution of programs such as "Mi Casa Ya."

The conversation also addresses the creation of supra-municipal entities such as metropolitan areas, recognizing their necessity for managing externalities in issues like transportation, while raising doubts about their effectiveness in other sectors. A central point of the discussion is the measurement of local capacity, where Sánchez points out the limitations of current indicators, which tend to measure outcomes but not the actual potential of local governments to deliver services.

Finally, he reflects on how political incentives can partially compensate for capacity limitations when elected officials must respond directly to their voters, suggesting that the structure of responsibilities can be as important as technical capacity in the effective provision of public services.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Dual agency problem in education:** There is a clear efficiency problem when voters elect a mayor to improve education, but the entity actually providing the

service is another entity (department or nation), generating difficulties in coordination and accountability.

2. **Empirical evidence of inefficiencies:** Research published in World Development demonstrates greater efficiency when municipalities have direct control over educational resources, compared to those where departments intervene.
3. **Metropolitan areas as partial solutions:** He recognizes the need for supra-municipal entities to manage externalities in sectors such as transportation, though not necessarily for all public services.
4. **Distribution of competencies in housing:** In housing, there exists a fragmentation where municipalities provide land, the national government grants subsidies, and compensation funds (cajas de compensación) intervene in demand, creating a complex system with diluted responsibilities.
5. **Problems of territorial distribution:** National housing programs such as "Mi Casa Ya" are not equally distributed throughout the territory, concentrating in certain municipalities while others with greater needs remain underserved.
6. **Limitations in measuring local capacity:** He criticizes that currently, capacity is measured by outcomes, not by the real potential of local governments to deliver services, suggesting the need to develop better indicators.
7. **The role of the market in housing:** He considers that market mechanisms can be effective in regulating aspects such as the location of subsidized housing, balancing factors such as size and proximity to economic centers.
8. **Importance of political incentives:** He notes that even municipalities with limited technical capacity can provide better services when officials have political incentives to respond to voters.
9. **Arbitrary cutoff point in public policy:** He highlights how seemingly arbitrary decisions, such as establishing educational autonomy for municipalities with more than 100,000 inhabitants, can create natural experiments that reveal differences in efficiency.
10. **Potential of new analytical tools:** He suggests that technologies such as machine learning could enable better analyses of local capacity through the processing of data such as public officials' résumés.

Annex 10. Interview Summary: Javier Villarreal - Ministry of Housing

Introduction of the Interviewee

Javier Villarreal is a former official at the Colombian Ministry of Housing with expertise in urban development and housing policy. During his tenure at the ministry, he worked in areas related to the implementation of social housing programs, land management, and coordination with local governments. He was recommended for this interview by Julián Andrés Santiago Villarreal, Deputy Director of Decentralization at the National Planning Department (DNP), for his knowledge regarding the distribution of competencies among different levels of government in housing and urban development matters.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. What was your specific role within the Ministry of Housing?
2. How do you view the current distribution of competencies between the national government and local governments regarding housing?
3. Do you consider the fragmentation of responsibilities among different levels of government problematic for the implementation of housing policies?
4. How does the relationship between the Ministry of Housing (which promotes supply and demand) and local governments (which must generate land) function in practice?
5. What is your opinion on accelerated urbanization processes in Colombia and how do they affect institutional design?
6. What is your perspective on the growth and densification of cities like Bogotá?
7. In your experience with the Free Housing Program (PVG), how was the participation of municipalities in land provision?
8. What alternatives do you see regarding the current challenges faced by major Colombian cities?

Interview Summary

The interview with Javier Villarreal primarily addressed urban development challenges in Colombia from an institutional and governance perspective. Villarreal criticized the

micro-analytical approach that predominates in Latin American public policies, rather than adopting a macro vision that considers territorial particularities. He pointed out that there exists a false conviction from the central government that territories are homogeneous, when in reality they present substantial differences in terms of resources, capacities, and geographical characteristics.

A central theme was the problematization of the continuous growth of large cities, particularly Bogotá, questioning whether it is sustainable to continue densifying these urban centers. Villarreal argued that current policies seem obsessed with acquiring land to build more housing within the same cities, without considering alternatives for decentralization or deconcentration of economic and political power centers.

He also discussed social housing programs such as the Free Housing Program (PVG), noting the limitations of municipalities in providing adequate land and financing challenges. He criticized both the traditional market approach (which does not reach the most vulnerable) and the statist approach (which overburdens the system without efficient results).

Villarreal proposed a more prospective vision of urban planning, similar to European models, where urban growth is planned in advance, considering future infrastructure needs. He suggested disruptive measures such as deconcentrating public institutions toward intermediate cities to reduce pressure on Bogotá and other major urban centers.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Erroneous Territorial Homogenization:** There is a centralist tendency to treat all territories as equal, ignoring fundamental differences between municipalities in terms of resources, capacities, and geographical contexts.
2. **Centralization of Power:** The concentration of governmental institutions, financial entities, and educational centers in Bogotá generates a cycle that attracts more population, increasing problems of densification and urban congestion.

3. **Questioning the Expansive Model:** Villarreal questions the logic of continuing to densify large cities and suggests that the real solution might be to deconcentrate population and functions toward intermediate cities.
4. **Reactive vs. Prospective Approach:** He criticizes that urban planning in Colombia is reactive, responding to already existing problems, in contrast with European models that plan in anticipation of future infrastructure needs.
5. **Disconnection Between Competencies:** He identifies a structural problem where the national government promotes housing demand through subsidies, but the responsibility of generating land falls on local governments that lack technical and financial capacities.
6. **Limitations of the PVG:** He notes that programs like the Free Housing Program (PVG) functioned on a small scale, but municipalities did not have more land available for larger projects, evidencing a structural problem of availability of developable land.
7. **Critique of Statism:** He questions the current government approach that assumes that injecting large volumes of public resources into the housing system is sufficient, without considering the complexities of the construction sector's production chain.
8. **Institutional Decentralization Proposal:** He suggests measures such as relocating ministries and public entities outside of Bogotá to stimulate the development of intermediate cities and reduce pressure on the capital.
9. **Political Polarization:** He mentions that the alternation between left-wing and right-wing governments complicates the implementation of coherent and long-term urban policies.
10. **Public/Market Duality:** He exposes the tension between social objectives (such as providing housing to the most vulnerable) and market logic (such as land appreciation and profitability), which complicates the implementation of social housing policies.

Annex 11. Interview Summary: Johan Julio - Bogotá Housing Secretariat

Introduction of the Interviewee

Johan Julio is an official at the Bogotá Housing Secretariat (Secretaría del Hábitat de Bogotá), an entity responsible for ensuring access to dignified habitat in the city through the design and implementation of public policies. From his role, Johan provides an institutional perspective centered on the construction of comprehensive care pathways and intersectoral coordination to address the living conditions of vulnerable populations. His work is framed within the defense of habitat as a fundamental right and the promotion of differentiated strategies that respond to diverse territorial and social realities.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. How does the Housing Secretariat approach the issue of access to dignified housing in Bogotá?
2. What specific programs or strategies exist to serve vulnerable populations such as waste pickers, informal vendors, or homeless individuals?
3. What barriers or difficulties do you identify from an institutional standpoint in providing effective solutions to these populations?
4. How do you coordinate with other District entities to offer comprehensive solutions?
5. What role does community participation play in the construction of habitat solutions?
6. How are differential approaches (gender, ethnicity, life cycle) integrated into housing policies?
7. How do you evaluate the impact of your programs on improving the living conditions of vulnerable populations?
8. What are the most urgent challenges that Bogotá faces in terms of habitat and housing?
9. What proposals do you consider priorities for improving access to dignified habitat in the short and medium term?

10. How is the sustainability and permanence of the housing solutions you provide guaranteed?

Interview Summary

The interview with Johan Julio provides insight into how the Bogotá Housing Secretariat has developed a public policy oriented toward recognizing habitat as a right and not simply as a market product. His narrative highlights the territorial and differential approach that guides institutional intervention, prioritizing populations such as waste pickers, informal vendors, and homeless individuals, whose realities have historically been neglected by conventional housing solutions.

Johan emphasizes the need for robust interinstitutional coordination that overcomes fragmentation between entities and allows for comprehensive care beyond physical access to housing. Community participation is also positioned as an essential axis for building solutions adapted to neighborhood and territorial dynamics.

Among the main challenges, he mentions the lack of regulatory flexibility, the difficulty of financing sustainable solutions, and the need to change the logic with which urban territory is managed. Finally, he presents proposals ranging from strengthening planning to the cultural transformation implied in understanding habitat as a collective construction rather than a simple housing unit.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Habitat as a fundamental human right:** Habitat must be understood as a fundamental human right, not as a commodity or product of the real estate market. This vision allows for the orientation of public policies centered on dignity rather than profitability.
2. **Differential approaches for equity:** The integration of differential approaches is key to achieving equity. The Secretariat incorporates dimensions of gender, life cycle, and ethnic belonging to ensure that solutions respond to the real needs of each population group.
3. **Essential interinstitutional coordination:** Interinstitutional coordination is indispensable. It is recognized that habitat problems require coordinated

responses among District entities to offer comprehensive solutions that include employment, health, education, and legal assistance.

4. **Community participation and legitimacy:** Community participation strengthens the legitimacy and relevance of interventions. The inclusion of citizens' voices is promoted, especially those who inhabit historically excluded territories.
5. **Persistent structural challenges:** Structural difficulties persist that hinder the implementation of solutions, such as informality in land tenure, legal barriers to legalization and titling, and budgetary limitations.
6. **Commitment to inclusion:** There is a determined commitment to the inclusion of excluded populations, such as waste pickers, homeless individuals, and informal vendors, through the creation of specific and differentiated care pathways.
7. **Responsive territorial planning:** Territorial planning must respond to local realities. The Secretariat works with a territorialization perspective that allows adapting its strategies to the conditions of each neighborhood or locality.
8. **Institutional cultural transformation:** Cultural transformation within the State is necessary. It is essential to change institutional paradigms that continue to understand housing policy as the delivery of material goods, and not as an integral social process.
9. **Policy evaluation for improvement:** Constant evaluation of the impacts of public policies allows for improving their effectiveness. The Secretariat seeks to monitor and adjust its programs based on measurable results and institutional learning.
10. **Priority proposals for action:** Priority proposals include strengthening urban planning, greater investment in basic infrastructure, and the simplification of procedures for accessing housing programs, always with a focus on social inclusion and environmental sustainability.

Annex 12. Interview Summary: Juan David Ching – Ministry of Housing

Introduction of the Interviewee

Juan David Ching serves as Legal Advisor to the Housing System Directorate at Colombia's Ministry of Housing. His role focuses on providing legal and structural foundations for the formulation of public housing policy at the national government level. His work operates within the Colombian legal framework, employing a technical and strategic approach that enables the ministry to articulate and substantiate social housing policies. His expertise centers on designing regulatory and financial instruments, with particular emphasis on programs such as "Mi Casa Ya" (My Home Now) and coordination with key stakeholders including family compensation funds and local governments under principles of autonomy and concurrence.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. How was housing policy approached from the national government level?
2. What role do local governments play in implementing national housing policy?
3. How was the relationship with local governments within the framework of the "Mi Casa Ya" program?
4. Why doesn't the national government subsidize housing supply?
5. What role do family compensation funds play within the housing system?
6. What distortions are generated within the "Mi Casa Ya" program?
7. What is the Ministry's role in relation to other housing system actors?
8. Which actors are key to closing gaps in access to decent housing?

Interview Summary

The interview with Juan David Ching provides clear insight into how Colombia's Ministry of Housing formulates national housing policy, primarily through the development of demand-side subsidies. Ching explains that policy is designed at the national level with the expectation that local governments and other actors assume their specific roles as established by law and the Constitution, under the principles of autonomy and concurrence.

One of the central themes addressed is the "Mi Casa Ya" program, which held significant relevance between 2015 and 2022. Ching emphasizes that the national government does not directly engage in land generation or licensing facilitation—competencies that fall to local governments. This has resulted in the program's success depending largely on the technical and financial capacities of territorial entities.

The crucial role played by family compensation funds is also discussed, as these entities act as allies of the national government in subsidy delivery, supporting household financial closure and complementing national efforts. However, distortions are identified, such as the concentration of benefits in municipalities with greater capacities and the exclusion of highly vulnerable populations due to formal financial requirements for accessing subsidies.

Finally, Ching argues that while there have been regulatory and technical advances, structural challenges persist in coordination between government levels and in targeting resources toward those most in need, given Colombia's high labor informality.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Centralized design, decentralized execution:** The national government formulates housing policy, but its implementation depends on the actions of other territorial actors under the principle of autonomy.
2. **Subsidizing demand, not supply:** The Ministry focuses on subsidizing purchasing households rather than directly intervening in housing production or land development.
3. **"Mi Casa Ya" program as cornerstone:** This program has been the primary housing policy instrument of the national government in recent years, but presents challenges in territorial implementation.
4. **Targeting limitations due to informality:** The requirement for formal income validation excludes a significant portion of the vulnerable population not linked to the financial system.

5. **Territorial distortions:** Municipalities with greater technical capacity concentrate social housing execution, leaving territories with weaker institutional capacity behind.
6. **Autonomy versus coordination:** The lack of effective coordination mechanisms between government levels generates competency conflicts and institutional "buck-passing."
7. **Family compensation funds as key actors:** These entities complement national policy by granting subsidies and generating alliances to facilitate housing access.
8. **Moral hazard in subsidy allocation:** The current system could perpetuate inequalities if targeting toward households with greatest needs and least formal access is not improved.
9. **Limited concurrence in practice:** Although the law permits joint action, cooperation between government levels and private actors remains incipient and uneven.
10. **Need to strengthen local capacities:** Without strengthening territorial entities, it will be difficult to advance toward a more inclusive and effective housing policy.

Annex 13. Interview Summary: Julián Andrés Villarreal - National Planning Department (DNP)

Introduction of the Interviewee

Julián Andrés Villarreal is a cadastral and geodetic engineer with a Master's degree in Government and Public Policy. He currently serves as Deputy Director of Decentralization at the National Planning Department (DNP), the governmental entity responsible for formulating and coordinating the country's development policies. His professional experience has focused on strengthening Colombia's decentralization system, designing policies to improve the allocation and exercise of territorial competencies, and generating guidelines that promote a more efficient and effective distribution of responsibilities between central and local governments. His perspective integrates institutional analysis, public management capacity, and the historical challenges Colombia faces regarding territorial autonomy.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. What is your general assessment of Colombia's decentralization system?
2. How have competencies been historically distributed among different levels of government?
3. What challenges do municipalities face in adequately exercising their assigned competencies?
4. What role does the DNP play in strengthening territorial capacities?
5. Are there formal mechanisms to evaluate whether territories are fulfilling their responsibilities?
6. How is national public policy articulated with local realities and needs?
7. What proposals does the DNP have to improve decentralization?
8. How effective has the delegation of competencies been in practice?
9. How should the country advance toward a more efficient and equitable decentralization model?
10. What types of incentives could be created for territorial entities to improve their performance?

Interview Summary

The interview with Julián Andrés Villarreal focused on analyzing Colombia's decentralization system, emphasizing competency delegation and the challenges territorial governments face in their adequate implementation. Villarreal highlighted that while decentralization has been a structural commitment since the 1991 Constitution, multiple barriers that limit its consolidation persist in practice. Among these, he mentioned the unequal institutional capacity of municipalities, poor intergovernmental coordination, and rigidity in the use of transferred resources.

The interviewee explained that many territorial entities lack adequate technical personnel and administrative systems to exercise their assigned competencies, generating continuous dependence on the central level. Furthermore, he emphasized that although responsibilities have been transferred, in many cases there has not been a proportional transfer of resources nor the establishment of effective evaluation mechanisms.

Villarreal highlighted the DNP's role in creating instruments to measure and strengthen territorial capacities, as well as in formulating guidelines for better competency distribution. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that progress toward functional decentralization, where government levels act in a complementary and effective manner, remains necessary.

Finally, he proposed a comprehensive approach that combines territorial performance evaluation, expenditure flexibility, and the implementation of results-based incentives. According to him, Colombia needs to evolve toward a decentralization model based on real capacities, fiscal responsibility, and multilevel coordination.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Incomplete decentralization:** Although many competencies have been formally transferred to local governments, decentralization in practice is limited by lack of resources and capacities.
2. **Territorial inequality:** High heterogeneity exists in municipalities' institutional performance, generating inequities in public service delivery.
3. **Limited capacity:** Many municipalities lack the necessary technical, human, and financial tools to adequately execute their functions.

4. **Deficient coordination:** Coordination among government levels (national, departmental, and municipal) is insufficient, limiting public policy effectiveness.
5. **Delegation without support:** Competency transfers are not always accompanied by proportional resource allocation or adequate technical assistance.
6. **Evaluation and monitoring:** Systematic mechanisms need to be established to measure local governments' compliance with their functions.
7. **Incentives for improved management:** Schemes should be created that reward good management and foster institutional strengthening in territories.
8. **Need for differential approach:** Decentralization policy must adapt to local realities, considering their socioeconomic conditions and administrative capacities.
9. **Active DNP role:** The National Planning Department seeks to lead structural reforms to rationalize competency distribution and strengthen territorial capacities.
10. **Toward functional decentralization:** The future of Colombia's decentralized model should focus on effectiveness in service delivery, fiscal responsibility, and cooperation among government levels.

Annex 14. Interview Summary: Karen Ortega Burgos (CAMACOL)

Introduction of the Interviewee

Karen Ortega Burgos is an economist who worked at CAMACOL (Colombian Chamber of Construction), the construction industry association in Colombia. During her tenure at CAMACOL, she was involved in monitoring housing policies, including the free housing program implemented by the government. Her expertise centers on economic and data analysis related to Colombia's construction and housing sector. She currently resides in Barcelona, Spain, where she has observed different approaches to housing policies and urban development. Her experience encompasses the period prior to Gustavo Petro's administration, enabling her to offer a perspective on the evolution of housing policies in Colombia until 2022.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. How would you characterize the relationship between the private sector, specifically the construction association, and local governments?
2. How does the private sector association or construction guild perceive housing policy? What are its primary concerns?
3. How do you understand housing policy? Do you view it as a policy directed at vulnerable populations while housing acquisition for those with greater financial capacity is left to market forces?
4. What relationship does CAMACOL maintain with family welfare funds (cajas de compensación)?
5. What would improve the effectiveness of housing policy considering the different levels of government that need coordination?
6. What competencies should local governments have within housing policy?
7. How did private sector actors understand metropolitan area dynamics (such as Bogotá, Faca, Mosquera, Chía)? Did they perceive good coordination or was it more of a "hunger games" scenario?
8. What reflections emerged in the private sector regarding the peripheral location of projects such as free housing units and their impact on the city?

Interview Summary

The interview with Karen Ortega Burgos addresses housing policy in Colombia from the private sector perspective, specifically from CAMACOL. The conversation covers the challenges of implementing national policies at the local level, the lack of technical capacities in small municipalities, coordination problems between different government levels, and the tension between the social objectives of housing policy and the commercial interests of the construction sector.

Karen emphasizes how nationally designed policies face difficulties in their territorial implementation due to limited local technical capacities and lengthy approval processes. She notes that housing programs have been more successful in large cities where demand is stronger but have faced limitations in reaching the base of the social pyramid, especially in small municipalities.

The interviewee also draws a comparison with the Spanish model, where local governments have greater autonomy to design housing programs adapted to their local needs, including the ability to purchase housing units and partner with the private sector through Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). She underscores the importance of a long-term housing policy not tied to political cycles and the need to decentralize more competencies toward local governments.

Regarding the peripheral location of social housing projects, Karen acknowledges the economic constraints that lead to construction in peripheral areas where land is cheaper, but also points out the lack of a comprehensive vision that considers infrastructure, access to services, and the socio-spatial segregation this generates.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Disconnection between national policy and local reality:** Although Colombia has advanced in the design of housing policies at the national level, there exists a significant disconnection with territorial implementation, which limits their effectiveness.
2. **Municipal technical weakness:** Small municipalities lack technical capacities to adequately identify and manage land, generating delays in license approvals and project implementation.

3. **Insufficient targeting:** Housing programs, with the exception of free housing units, have not effectively reached the base of the pyramid, primarily benefiting middle-income sectors.
4. **Cultural challenge:** Programs such as free housing faced problems because they did not consider local cultural dynamics and preferences (example: providing apartments to people accustomed to houses with space for animals).
5. **Need for long-term policy:** Housing policy in Colombia has been conjunctural, linked to political cycles, and lacks a stable long-term vision.
6. **Decentralization of competencies:** Local governments should have more autonomy to design housing programs adapted to the specific needs of their population and territory.
7. **Metropolitan coordination:** The private sector has supported the creation of metropolitan coordination mechanisms, especially regarding public services that affect project viability.
8. **Peripheral location and segregation:** The construction of social housing in peripheral areas, while responding to land market logic, generates problems of socio-spatial segregation and disconnection from employment centers and services.
9. **Potential of urban operators:** Urban development and renewal companies could play a more active role in land management but face limitations in resources and capacities.
10. **Spanish model as reference:** The Spanish housing management model, where local governments have greater autonomy and capacity to partner with private entities, could offer lessons for Colombia in terms of decentralization and adaptation to local realities.

Annex 15. Interview Summary: María Juliana Ruiz - UNDP

Introduction of the Interviewee

María Juliana Ruiz serves as a Project Manager at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and is the Director of the Decentralization Mission project. In this capacity, she leads initiatives focused on analyzing and improving Colombia's decentralization model, with particular emphasis on the distribution of competencies among different levels of government and its impact on the effective implementation of public policies.

Questions Asked During the Interview

1. Regarding the distribution of competencies from the mission's perspective: "How does the mission approach the issue of competency distribution? That is, how do you view the current situation and what would be the ideal approach if changes are being considered?"
2. Regarding new institutional frameworks and territorial realities: "To what extent do these competencies genuinely reflect processes such as urbanization and regionalization? Does this process of delegating competencies, or this institutional design, take into account these new territorial realities?"
3. Regarding the effectiveness of local public policies: "How do you perceive the relationship between the distribution of competencies and policy effectiveness at the local level? [...] What happens to problem-solving at the local level when this entire institutional framework is constructed around it?"
4. Regarding the implementation gap: "Concerning the final result of whether there is a gap in policy implementation, my question relates more to who notices it and who cares [...] Who is aware of this and is it truly having an impact?"
5. Regarding overlapping competencies and inaction: "In a scenario of overlapping competencies, which seems to generate justification for inaction, what could be done to address this?"
6. Regarding the principal-agent problem in delegation: "There appears to be a principal-agent problem to some extent, as each level of government has its own programmatic agenda and competencies, which it delegates or relies on lower levels to execute [...] What instruments might help us better understand

or perhaps prevent the formation of so many principal-agent elements in this management process?"

Interview Summary

The interview with María Juliana Ruiz addressed the complexities of Colombia's decentralization model, specifically the distribution of competencies among different levels of government and its impact on the effective implementation of public policies. Ruiz emphasized that after 33 years of implementation, the model presents significant problems due to the proliferation of regulations without proper impact analysis, generating overlaps in approximately 80% of competencies.

Ruiz explained that the Decentralization Mission has identified two approaches to addressing this issue: a minimalist approach that proposes returning to the general guidelines established in the Constitution, and a maximalist approach that suggests analyzing each sector through its value chain to define specific responsibilities. However, she noted significant resistance among different government levels to relinquishing competencies, as they perceive this as a loss of power.

Regarding new territorial realities (urbanization, regionalization), Ruiz indicated that while new government levels such as metropolitan areas and administrative regions have been created to respond to these dynamics, these entities lack "teeth" and robust financing models to effectively exercise their functions.

Concerning the effectiveness of local public policies, Ruiz pointed out an inversely proportional relationship between the quantity of competencies and implementation effectiveness, primarily because competencies are not always accompanied by adequate financial resources or fiscal frameworks. Additionally, she highlighted that the lack of clarity in competency distribution allows different government levels to "make excuses" to avoid assuming responsibilities.

Finally, Ruiz reflected on the principal-agent conflict in territorial management, noting that any attempt to align agendas between different government levels could compromise the territorial autonomy guaranteed by the Constitution. She concluded

that without a strong political party system capable of generating programmatic alignment, this conflict will persist in the Colombian decentralization model.

Key Insights and Main Ideas

1. **Diagnosis of the Current Model:** Colombia's decentralization model, implemented for 33 years, presents an overlap of competencies in 80% of cases among different government levels, generating significant inefficiencies.
2. **Resistance to Change:** There exists widespread resistance among different government levels (national, departmental, municipal) to relinquish competencies, perceiving it as a loss of power, even when they lack the resources to execute them adequately.
3. **Underfunding of Supramunicipal Entities:** Metropolitan areas, created to manage conurbation phenomena and regional issues, function as "clubs" where municipalities should contribute resources, but in practice many fail to do so, resulting in underfunding that prevents the effective exercise of their competencies.
4. **Inversely Proportional Relationship:** There exists an inversely proportional relationship between the number of assigned competencies and the effectiveness in public policy implementation, primarily because competencies are not accompanied by adequate fiscal or financial frameworks.
5. **Local Fiscal Inertia:** The expectation that every delegated competency should be accompanied by transfers from the central level has generated "fiscal laziness" in territorial entities, which collect minimal revenue due to outdated tax statutes and the political difficulty of updating them.
6. **Value Chain Approach:** Ruiz proposes a "maximalist" approach that analyzes each sector (education, health, housing, etc.) through its value chain, clearly defining which actor is responsible for each part of the process and what resources they have to accomplish it.
7. **Institutional "Ping-Pong" Problem:** The ambiguity in competencies allows different government levels to "ping-pong" responsibilities between them, directly affecting citizens who do not receive solutions to their problems.

8. **Absence of Monitoring:** There is no entity systematically monitoring compliance with competencies; problems only become visible when they "hurt" a citizen who is directly affected.
9. **Principal-Agent Conflict:** The principal-agent conflict is inherent to the Colombian decentralization model, as each elected level has its own programmatic agenda, and any attempt to align these agendas would risk territorial autonomy.
10. **Weakness of the Party System:** The weakness of Colombia's political party system prevents natural programmatic alignment between different government levels, exacerbating the principal-agent conflict in public policy implementation.