



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, Reshape:**  
The centrality of organized waste pickers in the  
articulation of new service modalities  
in Bogotá, Colombia

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**ISABELLE TURCOTTE**  
(Canada)

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Members of the examining committee:

Dr. Georgina Gomez  
Dr. Erhard Berner

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***Inquiries:***

Postal address:           Institute of Social Studies  
                                  P.O. Box 29776  
                                  2502 LT The Hague  
                                  The Netherlands

Location:                 Kortenaerkade 12  
                                  2518 AX The Hague  
                                  The Netherlands

Telephone:               +31 70 426 0460

Fax:                       +31 70 426 0799

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Y a todos los aleros que en camino me han dado alas

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## List of Acronyms

ARB

Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá  
Bogotá's Recycler's Association

BID

Banco Inter-Americano de Desarrollo  
Inter-American Development Bank

DANE

Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadísticas  
National Administrative Statistics Department

DANCOOP

Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Cooperativas  
National Administrative Cooperatives Department

ISWM

Integrated Solid Waste Management

MDGs

Millennium Development Goals

NPM

New Public Management

PMIRS

Plan Maestro de Manejo Integral de Residuos Sólidos  
Master Plan for the Integral Management of Residual Waste

SENA

Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje  
National Learning Service

UAESP

Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos  
Special Administrative Unit for Public Services

## **Abstract**

Waste picking has become a prominent activity in the urban landscape, bridging the gap between shortfalls in service delivery and personal income generation in virtually all cities of the developing world. Overcoming previous stigmatization and work fragmentation through organization and dialogue, waste pickers' work is increasingly perceived as a valuable contribution to urban waste management. Yet formal and informal linkages with solid waste management have hardly altered the situation of poverty and marginality limiting the opportunities and choices of waste pickers. At the onset of governance structures at the local level, various cities in Latin America including Bogotá are fomenting the inclusion of informal waste pickers into Integrated Solid Waste Management (ISWM) systems through the medium of social economy organizations who are constitutive and representative of the poor. What this paper specifically analyses is whether these organizations help form new mechanisms that help overcome the institutional nature of poverty.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Issues of poverty have stimulated both in discourse and practice a broad range of reflections regarding the deprivation and limitations experienced by the poor. From the MDGs to local initiatives such as the PMIRS, there is a mounting recognition of the potential contribution of the poor to social, political and economic spheres. This specific case study presents the mutual benefits which may be derived from strategically balancing the activities and needs of various social actors according to a governance framework, specifically engaging the organized poor in the outsourcing of municipal services.

## **Keywords**

Waste picking / Poverty / Social Economy / Governance / Bogotá (Colombia)

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

“They are the most paradoxical relationship between the environment and inequality: namely that affluence produces abundant waste, while poverty does not; that poverty encourages efficient reuse and recycling of materials, while affluence does not; and that urban livelihoods built on resource conservation and recycling, ironically and tragically, are predicted upon persistent inequalities in income and consumption” (Beall and Fox 2009)

### 1.1 Indication of Problem: Making Sense of Waste Picking

Waste picking is an occupation consisting of sorting waste to recover valuable materials for use or resale and which has witnessed over the last decades a rise in popularity. This has emerged as a function of historical socio-political and economic distribution particularly in Latin America, where the concentration of political and economic power since colonial times has been embedded in elite groups and reproduced through the concentration of capital and modes of production. Exclusion from access to the modes of production or the assets necessary to contribute to recognized spheres of the labour market has meant that many individuals operate at the margin in terms of employment, social and political participation. Specifically, the filtering of market orthodoxy into political and economic restructuring agendas in the developing world has effectively reorganized internal labour markets to suit cross-border marks of competitiveness. This has resulted in a significant cleavage between skilled and unskilled workers and has encouraged the spread of the informal economy as a principal vehicle of value creation particularly for the urban poor. As a result of these tendencies, waste picking has surfaced as a survival activity engaging thousands of individuals in urban centres throughout the world.

Despite falling below the responsibilities of local governments, waste management has been composed of ad-hoc systems of formal and informal operators functioning side by side. In light of leaner government budgets and cutbacks on public sector employment, municipal service delivery has been placed under significant stress forcing either a shift towards cost-recovery systems or a reduction of the geographical coverage or quality of services. Given that public perception of waste has moved away from merely one of public-health to include economic cost-benefit dimensions, government entities have had to rethink their position relative to service delivery.

Waste pickers are central actors in the management of waste flows; therefore they withhold significant potential in complementing service delivery for Integrated Solid Waste Management (ISWM). Despite bridging the gap between service delivery and personal income generation, the activities performed by waste pickers have generally not been recognized as positive contributions. Rather, waste pickers are associated to the materials which they



process and thus are regarded as trash by society. Informal waste picking remains a vulnerable way of securing basic assets and needs, exposing workers to health problems, rendering income flows variable, thus weakening the recycler's command over resources in face of increasing competition and fluctuating material prices. Atomized waste picking often entrenches individuals in a cycle of poverty by marginalizing their position both as social actors and workers. Therefore, a growing trend amongst waste pickers in Latin America has been their organization into groups forming part of the social economy. These groups reduce fragmentation by organizing activities and demands for their members, and serve as immediate platforms to communicate with external actors. While these bodies allow for a new modality of service delivery to emerge, accounting for the third sector of the economy, what remains dubious is the degree to which the involvement of these cooperatives realistically alters the structures of access relegating waste pickers to live and work at the margins of society.

Specifically in Colombia, the context for new service modalities was born out of new constitutional arrangements, decentralization and the strengthening of the social economy. As organizations of the social economy, cooperatives are said to restore social justice in production relations, and provide a platform to engage in public dialogue, which is why cooperativism has been promoted in Colombia since the 1930's as "a valid option to overcome economic inequality, the progressive deterioration of the quality of life of Colombians and the incorporation of vulnerable groups in the dynamics of economic, social, cultural and political progress" (Dane 2004: 7). This has allowed a shift in representation from atomized undertakings to certain associational arrangements that rearticulate the position and relationship of members with external stakeholder (ibid).

In Bogotá, this has concretely established new channels of affiliation between the state and these associations of *recicladores* as they are locally known. With the advent of the *Plan Maestro de Manejo Integral de Residuos Sólidos* (PMIRS) established through the active engagements of public sector entities and Bogotá's Waste Picker Association (ARB) in 2004, a new projection of solid waste management has been proposed to society with the specific focus of addressing functional fallacies, environmental degradation and exclusionary structures. As such, this plan has put forward a platform for dialogue between various actors to engage in a potentially mutually beneficial project.

## **1.2 Background and Relevance: Waste Pickers as Social Actors**

Waste picking is an income generating activity that knows no boundaries, actively engaging the poorest of the poor throughout the world to comb through streams of waste generated by society, disposed by industry, offices and households, and later separated for collection at source, on the streets, in transportation to disposal or at the final dumping sites. The size of this industry, much like other informal sector enterprises, is hard to quantify. Yet with rates of consumption escalating in metropolitan cities, more materials are placed in the waste stream on a daily basis, meaning that opportunities for income generation also expand. While this may mean more potential value for

the waste picker community as a whole, it also means that governments are facing compounded complexities in residual waste management given that the leadership of an integrated system relies on the initiative of local governments who may hardly overlook the fact that their obligations both in the past and in the present are being fulfilled by informal workers who have initiated processes of waste reduction through reuse and recycling.

In the city of Bogotá, the National Statistics Department (DANE) identifies 3,692 households and specifically 8,479 individuals actively partaking in waste picking activities. Disregarding this population segment in edifying new plans for the management of waste would not only place new structures at odd because of competition for the materials that sustain their lives, but would negate opportunities to the very individuals that currently form the backbone of the solid waste structure (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004: 55). In general “the state builds its behaviour on the social structure of society, reproducing within public services, for example, many of the inequalities of the private sector” where experiences with neo-liberal ‘new public management’ approaches usually give way to cost-recovery mechanisms that have been known to leave out, both on the sides of inputs and outputs, the most vulnerable populations (Mackintosh 1998: 77). This is precisely why the onset of governance structures have brought forward the notions of synergy and complementarities of different local actors included in the realm of service provision. Not only has the division of responsibilities and activities shifted, but the overall relationship between government, private and societal entities has broadened.

These social actors, their organizations and mutual relationship, the formation of new institutional mechanisms and their short term outcomes will be the central focus of this study within the specific area of solid waste management in the capital city of Bogotá, where the PMIRS represents a pilot study for the implementation of ISWM in other principle Colombian cities.

### **1.3 Research Objectives and Questions**

What this research aims to identify is the relevance of waste in modern social and economic development, distinguishing the principal actors involved in the dialogue and governance structure which has edified the new waste policies in Bogotá. Secondly, an analysis of the inclusionary mechanisms for waste pickers into the overall Master Plan will be analyzed critically so as to account for significant shifts in the overall linkages of poor informal workers with the formal system, taking into specific consideration the social economy as a principle medium. In this way, I question whether these organizations, who claim to restore social justice in production relations effectively engage with the new modalities of service delivery in a way that allow to overcome the structures that reproduce conditions of poverty and marginality.

This leads me to formulate the following main question and sub-questions:

To what extent has the involvement of cooperatives in Bogotá's new waste policy altered the situation of poverty of waste pickers?

- How have the distinct segments of the waste picking population respectively benefitted from this policy?
- In which ways has the approach to 'inclusion' gone beyond the dimensions of employment?

#### **1.4 Methodological Approach and Limitations of Research**

Two principal approaches have been used to build my research. Initially the theoretical discussion is based on a thorough review of literature issued by a range of academic journals and books to provide a comprehensive discussion of topics of conceptual importance. The second approach is empirical in nature and covers a plethora of sources including primary and secondary data. Specifically, I initially researched the specific laws and decrees at the base of the PMIRS and the studies performed by the DANE regarding the waste picking population of Bogotá to understand the backbone of the initiative and its target population. I later cross-referenced reports from the Municipality, the Controller's Office, local and national newspapers, documentaries and conference proceedings to obtain a wide range of quantitative and qualitative findings regarding the progressive successes and shortfalls of the plan. I contiguously performed interviews with Nohra Padilla, director for the ARB, Lina Arbelaez, a lawyer in Bogotá, and Lilianna Abarca a representative at WASTE (an organization) to further delve into their respective specialization which provided me the depth of detail required for a thorough analysis.

This research was carried outside of Colombia, implying a lack of micro-level data born out of immediate observations. I have tried to counterbalance this by focusing the core of my research on meso-level processes that are more easily complemented by interviews and cross-referenced secondary observations. This, however, did not allow me to overcome the difficult task of untangling the processes taking place in the national domain including the presence of extended years of conflict, its effect on the displacement of individuals and on the ongoing political and military tensions that may have an influence or causal relationship with the meso-processes observed. I have engaged in significant reading and personal discussions with Colombian friends to understand the bearing of such a historical process on the current political events unfolding in Colombia today.

## **1.5 Navigating Through this Research Paper**

The second chapter offers a theoretical discussion embracing the substantive issues at the root of waste picking both as an income generating activity for the poor and as a government priority in edifying new modalities in service delivery. The third chapter presents contextual information keeping in mind the specific case study of Bogotá, and is followed by the fourth chapter which overviews the PMIRS policy and its relevant dimensions in discussing the reorganization of the recycling chains, its effects on the diverse population segments and their organizational status. This bridges over to the fifth chapter which provides deeper analysis regarding the position of the social economy as a central medium for the organized poor to engage in the policy, and its subsequent effects at the level of reinstating social justice in production relations. Lastly I conclude by reviewing the main issues and tying in immediate observations regarding the relevance of this case study in the growing urgency of addressing waste management both on a local and global scale.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Reconfiguring the Access of the Poor: a Theoretical Discussion on the Relationship between Social Structures, Poverty and Organization**

#### **2.1 The Social Construct of Poverty**

Social inequality is as ancient as the civilizations that first strived to organize and separate productive and reproductive roles amongst the members of their clan or society. The ability to command resources has always been intimately linked to superior capabilities and functions within the organization of society, which in concrete terms translate into the development of power relations which distribute disproportionate advantages and disadvantages to its members. Yet throughout centuries, the growing size and complexity of societies have created more intricate mechanisms that divide populations into strata due to function, prestige, or right of birth to name a few. What is particularly striking in today's world is the large demarcation between the rich and the poor within a country, between regions of even within a particular city. As cleavages deepen, groups of individuals deprived of the opportunities to fulfil their aspirations and meet their needs place pressure on their localities, whether due to the sheer size of their population, to their organizational arrangements or to their immediate demands, so as to address the structural barriers to their disadvantage.

While disadvantage does not necessarily translate into poverty, it must be acknowledged that those who face a multitude of contiguous disadvantages are often deprived of the political, economic or social means to fulfil their needs or aspirations. Poverty in itself is a particularly difficult term to define as divergent perspectives attempt to represent its components, relational features and measurement tools. While certain theoretical discourses would reduce poverty to the economic inability to satisfy needs, and would boil down poverty to the characteristics of a person, I argue that poverty is rather related to an unfavourable social position which limits this person's access or ability to acquire his or her needs. In this way, the poor are not a "unitary community" of individuals and households merely facing consumption shortfalls; rather they form heterogeneous groups which are "the site of both solidarity and conflict, shifting alliances, power and social structures" (Clever 1999: 604). In these terms, poverty may be understood not a static state but rather a dynamic process which is intrinsically linked to deprivation and the limitation of a person's agency within the social structure, which renders the poor more vulnerable to fluctuations or unexpected events than other members of society (Sindzingre 2007, Cariola 2002, Baulch and Hoddinott 2000: 19). In this sense, poverty curtails the quality of life of individuals, and to some degree may force them to be excluded from the social, political or economic mechanisms that ensure a better standard of living to other members of society.

Exclusion is also a highly debated concept deeply rooted in the composition, structure and understanding of the social construct, and while

this paper will not focus on analyzing its features, it is important to underline that while they are analytically two different concepts, in certain cases poverty and exclusion are mutually reinforcing. This is to say that even though exclusion normally acts as a barrier delimitating participation, and therefore reducing the ability to effectively alter what excludes in the first place, poverty also tends to exacerbate marginalization, which may lead to “the fragmentation of social relations, breakdown of social cohesion and emergence of new social and economic division” (Mackintosh 1998: 76). In other words, poverty and exclusion are intrinsically linked to the construction and operational modes of society, which are largely defined by the institutions that organize and delimitate social reality.

## **2.2 The Role of Institutions in Structuring Society**

In a broad sense, institutions can be understood as “humanly devised constraints that structure human interaction” (North 1990 in: Shirley 2008: 18). More specifically, institutions are “systems of shared beliefs, internalized norms, rules and organizations that motivate, enable and guide individuals to follow one rule of behaviour thereby generating regularities of behaviour” either due to formal arrangements such as laws or decrees, or through informal norms and conventions that are implied or embedded in social identity and interaction (Greif 2006 in: Shirley 2008: 18).

It is important to underline that institutions are formed, perpetuated and continuously evolving out of the behaviour of social actors, who themselves are shaped by the institutional framework in which they live; it is a dual process and in this sense the organization and regroupment of individuals who articulate social demands form the basis for the static state or evolving nature of institutions at the local level. In this respect, it may be stated that institutions “define the strategic equilibrium between agents, that is to say the norms that are born out of the conflict between individual and collective actors with opposing or divergent interests.” Institutions do not necessarily form efficient responses to problems of coordination to which a society is faced but rather they are “the product of the equilibrium of forces that exist in the disparate motivations and interests that operate” in a given environment (Alonso and Garcimartin 2008: 65).

In the analysis of poverty, institutions therefore hold a very important position; the divergent interests present in ongoing social bargaining are highly politicized and engrained in division and reproduction of power relationships. Those with the ability to influence the formation of formal institutions, to command resources and define the mechanisms of distribution tend to be more influential than those who have limited ability to participate in public discourse. Argued through the perspective of strategic actors, communities that are subservient to strategic groups “lack the institutional power to legitimize a value system that is sharply at odds with the dominant value system,” which would suggest that the influence required to alter structures that delimitate access is virtually limited to these strategic groups (Berner 2001: 123). This is not to say that the formation or reformulation of institutions is only possible for those in power, but it reflects the existence of varying degrees

of influence in the social sphere which can obstruct certain marginal or subordinate groups through “institutional barriers that prevent the poor from accessing public goods, services and decision-making arenas” (Beall and Fox 2009: 109).

Despite the ability of institutions to change over time, it is important to state that the composition of the norms that construct institutions are path dependent, meaning that what is experienced today is largely dependent on the progressive construction of these norms overtime. In other words, the norms that dictate function, activity, access and social positioning can reinforce the large disparities in the articulation of interests. Once these mechanisms are reinforced to the point where they are institutionalized, there must be a conscious effort to alter the structures of access of the poor.

### **2.3 Defining Institutional Poverty**

As argued above, institutions are both formed by differential access and distribution, and are reproductive of these tendencies. As stated by Bastiaensen et al., “institutions thus bear a direct relationship to people’s capabilities as they determine both 1) the size of the cake and 2) how it is divided” (Bastiaensen et al. 2005: 980). Keeping in mind that poverty is profoundly linked to the construction and reproduction of power relations that delimit access to resources and opportunities, two very important points must be discussed.

In first instance, power relationships are established based on the valuation of a group of individual relative to a devaluation of other groups. Over time, these groups can be marginalized to a degree in which they lack recognition in the societal sphere, which is oftentimes compounded by an overall lack of ability to voice proposal and concerns, forming boundaries which Reiock and Carr claim to “determine who is included within a jurisdiction and define local arrangements of service provision and production, patterns of economic development, and the exercise of political power. Boundary decisions carry important distributional implications because they can determine whose preferences are decisive in public choice.” (Feiock and Carr 2001: 383) Oversight in the public sphere is partially resulting from a lack of linkage or strategic relationship with external actors whose degree of influence may mediate and reposition vulnerable groups amongst societal actors. The essence of progress relies on assisting vulnerable groups in the articulation of interests and concerns.

The ability to articulate interests however is not an independent variable as institutions by definition form mechanisms reproducing desired norms and restraining outlying behaviours. This implies that for structures to evolve, it is important to regroup and organize both the ideas and the people which stand behind them in a way that puts the dominant model at odds. To do so would imply that these individuals withhold the capabilities to alter their lives. The concept of capabilities is deeply rooted in Sen’s literature , which he identifies as “the ability of human beings to lead lives they have reason to value and to enhance the substantive choices they have” (Sen 1997). Vulnerability clearly limits the development of such choices, as it creates a degree of uncertainty which results from the inability of the poor to secure their needs

due to fluctuating revenues, unstable living and working conditions or poor health. Without investing in the development of individual skills, whether they be technical, analytical or organizational, then uncertainty is also reproductive of these tendencies. In other words, access to quality education, training, employment, assets and resources is central in altering the predispositions of the poor and their engagement with private and public actors in the construction of alternative models accounting for more plural interests (Sen 1997: 1, Beall and Fox 2009:75, Sindzingre 2007).

This paper argues that institutions strengthen the structural advantages and disadvantages embedded in social interactions, meaning that overcoming poverty relies upon the evolution of institutional norms through the process of ongoing social bargaining and negotiations between different actors.

## **2.4 Actors operating in the institutional landscape**

Analyzing poverty as an institutional process is particularly relevant given the panoply of interventions undertaken at the national, regional and local levels to counter rising trends of poverty and marginality. Antipoverty interventions necessarily need to address “the existing structures of power ... to improve opportunities for participation and voice and engaging the hitherto disadvantaged or disenfranchised...” in the public sphere (Bardhan 2002 in: Bastiaensen et al. 2005: 981). It is important to recognize that the public sphere is composed of a variety of social actors each with their particular interests, whose goals may be unique or shared between groups. The arena of ongoing bargaining between these actors is what Bastiaensen et al. call the “institutional landscape” (Bastiaensen et al. 2005: 981).

At the local level, actors can be broadly divided into three general groups which include the public sector, the private sector and civil society each with different positions, abilities and responsibilities with regards to each other and to a fourth category: society. The relationship and linkages that are established between these actors form market relationships which co-ordinate resources, production and consumption. Poverty is the result of multiple failures within the productive, allocative and distributive system.

The allocation of resource, as stated earlier, is largely defined by those in a position of power. Since the industrial revolution, leaders have modelled their political economy and ensuing markets by combining growth and redistributive mechanisms. In a post-Fordist context, the flexible specialization of production has incited cost-cutting and large scale reallocation of the labour force, motivating a decisive shift towards the creation of efficient productive systems which value growth over redistribution (Filion 1998: 1105). The outcome has largely been to polarize societies. In the labour market alone, discrepancy between formal and informal employment and enterprise revealed in the 80's a very visual disparity in the streets of metropolises between those who could or could not access registration, capital or training. During this decade, the neo-liberal model strengthened its position in many countries, encouraging through the Washington Consensus the adoption of pernicious structural adjustments which cutback public expenditure. Particularly focused on reducing investment in public education and health system, the majority of



the poor had to relinquish access to the development of intrinsic knowledge, skills or physical capacity to contribute to recognized spheres of work. Despite the rise of the Post-Washington Consensus, debates raged on regarding the very logic of capitalism as a vehicle for balanced growth.

Critics such as Razeto and Tiriba argue that workers gain utility from their labour beyond the monetary value they can obtain from wages and earnings. In fact, employment becomes a way for individuals to invest in the construction of their human needs and satisfaction, for the wellbeing not only of themselves but of their household, kin or community. In this sense Tiriba consider that market societies can strengthen oppression when they foment “the economic man, in detriment of the multidimensional man” (Tiriba 1998: 5). As a way of countering these effects, it has been stressed by proponents of the social economy that there is a need to bring social justice back into the realm of the economy, adding to growth an intrinsic redistributive feature, given that “the notion of poverty focuses primarily on distributional issues” (Gerometta et al. 2005: 2010). Filion argues that “if social justice and a more thorough form of democracy is not to be achieved through government reorganization, intervention, and redistribution, one alternative is to rely on self-sustaining economic activities that promote these same objectives” (Filion 1998: 1109). Given that the social economy is said to reintroduce the notion of social justice into productive and allocative systems, we now turn our attention to the relevance of the social economy in addressing institutional poverty.

## **2.5 Strategies through Organization: The Social Economy**

The social economy has been particularly salient in academic debate and in empirical form throughout a variety of Latin American countries where government and market failures have prompted the spread of organized groups formulating demands and new forms of production. In broad terms “a social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners.” (Hewitt 2002: 2). The social economy profoundly holds a distinct paradigm as it is driven by the formation of associative bonds. Hirst argues that as a social theory, Associativism postulates the defence of a market economy based in the non-capitalist principles of cooperation and mutuality (Hirst 1994 in: Rodriguez Garavito 2004: 7). Association is therefore a way of countering individualization which “fosters social fragmentation, emphasizes the fault lines between different social groups and thus limits possibilities for integration” (Gerometta et al. 2005: 2008).

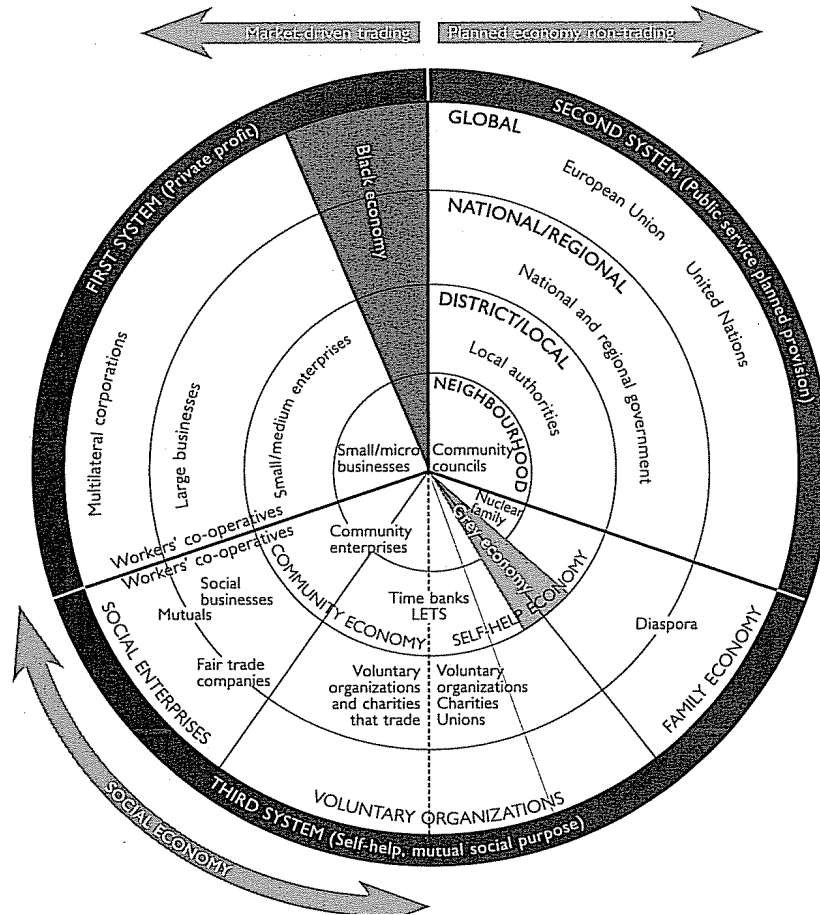
Focusing on association rather than individualization helps counter the posture of modern economics which make it “difficult to recognize how economic action is constrained and shaped by the structures of social relations in which all real economic actors are embedded” (Granovetter 1992: 4). In practical terms, the collective stance provided by the social economy helps previously fragmented workers represent themselves as an entity in negotiations and bargaining, whether this be in contract bidding, the subsequent terms of engagement or conditions and benefits of their work.

Further, it helps these entities represent themselves and liaise with external actors from universities and non-governmental organizations to obtain external information and knowledge, further aiding in the structuring of the organization, the training of its members to upgrade skills and processes further providing recognition from society at large.

Cooperatives are an interesting case study as they have often been claimed to straddle between the logics of private firms and civil organization groups, inherently creating value-added production, yet redistributing earnings between members of the enterprise or community (See Figure 2.5). Being one of the main actors of the social economy, it has given way to the organization and participation of the poor in numerous fields of activity from agriculture to waste picking. Yet as any organization of individuals, participation is selective. In the case of cooperatives, the egalitarian redistribution of earnings between members puts pressure on these members to reduce the inclusion and participation of undesirable or underperforming individuals in the group, meaning that while cooperatives commonly represent the poor, they represent a selected group within this heterogeneous population (Abarca 2009). Yet the reflection goes further to account that “contrary to the ubiquitous optimistic assertions about the benefits of public participation, there are numerous documented examples of situations where individuals find it easier, more beneficial, or habitually familiar not to participate” (Cleaver 1999: 607) Abarca further highlights in the context of waste picking that at times individual waste pickers prefer to operate on their own because this provides greater flexibility in terms of the quantity of hours worked, personal scheduling, pace of work or final resale point (Abarca 2009). In other words it is important to keep in mind that widespread representativeness is not a systematic outcome of social economy organizations.

As a market actor, cooperatives nonetheless propose to enhance participation within the economic structure yet they are only one actor amongst a multitude operating and competing within the market. Gomez and Helmsing remind us that “in order to foster economic and social innovation, there is a need for collaboration and complementation of roles among organizations of different types because there is more than one solution to implement economic policies to attain welfare objectives” (G. Gomez and Helmsing 2009: 9). This brings us to view the importance of analyzing the evolving configuration of the market, and the position and relations that local actors have with regards to each other.

Figure 2.5: The Three Systems of the Economy



(Amin 2009: 26)

## 2.6 The Evolving Paradigm of State Involvement

Within the framework of every country, the state holds both rights and obligations through a social contract, in the same way as individuals do towards the state and society at large. Below a historical perspective, part of the state's obligation has been to design, implement and regulate social and economic policies, with special obligations to organize public service provision. The ascendancy of the neo-liberal project has placed new priorities regarding the state's involvement in both social and economic affairs, diminishing its presence based on the perspective that 'too much state' created distortions and higher transactional costs in the economy. In the face of globalization, the "greater mobility of the factors of production," also revealed a weakened capacity of governments in affecting domestic policies (Paquet 2001: 183) .

As structural adjustment programs have demonstrated throughout developing countries, cutbacks on social investment create an entirely new set of challenges which have impacted countries in different ways, from the disintegration of educational programs, the inexistence of health services, the

cutbacks in service delivery and increased resource scarcity to name a few. Cutbacks of state action, however has been compounded by the rise of other actors who have taken up these responsibilities, and an overall reorganization of relationships between the public sector, private sector and civil society has ensued, giving rise to what is termed a 'governance' framework. Governance in a certain way has emerged out of the general recognition that the state still holds a primary position in both economic and social policy making, principally as an enabler which brings together formal and informal networks to reorient the configuration of the market. This moves actors away from traditional roles and responsibilities towards more complementary relationships.

## **2.7 Local Level Governance and Service Delivery**

In order to understand how governance has reshaped relationships not only at a macro-level but on a municipal scale, it is important first to underline two particular trends that have directly impacted the internal separation of responsibilities. Initially decentralization has relegated certain areas of policy making from central to local governments. The principal of subsidiarity states that "power should devolve on the lowest, most local level at which decisions can reasonably be made, with the functions of the larger unit being to support and assist the local body in carrying out its tasks" (Bellah et al. 1991 in: Paquet 2001: 195). Paquet further argues that "while subsidiarity reduces the vertical hierarchical power, it increases in a meaningful way the potential for participation" in other words "distributed governance does not simply mean a process of dispersion of power toward localized decision making within each sector: it entails a dispersion of power over a wide variety of actors and groups" (Nohria and Eccles 1992 in: Paquet 2001: 188).

Moving away from direct service provision, the role of government shifted towards the creation of an enabling environment where external actors contribute according to their skills and specialization. In other words, government is moving away from a bureaucratic structure that has the "concern to do" towards a leaner, efficient administrative body that has "the concern to get things done" (Batley and Larbi 2004: 15). Even where there is the need for intervention, "government does not necessarily have to assume the entire responsibility for the provision of a service. The case for governments assuming responsibility may be reduced by separating the elements of service provision" (Batley and Larbi 2004: 32).

By applying subsidiarity to service delivery, many local governments are decentralizing their management by creating autonomous agencies who serve as executive managers in service delivery, contracting out portions or the totality of the service to external actors (Batley and Larbi 2004: 45). This overall vision is deeply driven by New Public Management (NPM) whose practices are rooted in taking a management approach to public functions. Central to the NPM methods, the professionalization of public servants is meant to create leaner, efficient, competitive and technical management of services. In the case where in-house knowledge or service delivery comes short, the idea of outsourcing and privatizing elements of the service to

specialized third parties is a central way of cutting back on large bureaucracies. The experience with the privatization of public services such as water and education in developing countries has been highly contested. It is claimed that privatization often increases costs which reduces availability for the poorest of the poor, in such a way that it creates a segmented market rather than broadening access for universal coverage as appropriate when these services are considered a public good.

If public delivery creates burdened bureaucracies, and privatization segments the market creating exclusion, one wonders how other actors can contribute to service delivery. Intrinsically there is no reason for services to either be entirely publicly or privately delivered. As more plural systems allow for new groups to contribute to the delivery of these services, new considerations arise regarding not only *the way* in which services are divided and delivered, *but who* will be responsible to providing these services. Brandsen and Pestoff argue that the third sector is becoming a key player in the organization and delivery of public services. Specifically, “the relationship between the third sector and the production process is a dynamic one” when accounting for the plethora of citizen groups involved in the actual delivery of traditionally state led services. A growing focus on cooperation and emerging forms of public-community partnerships encourages new arrangements ranging from co-production, co-management and co-governance which accounts for the participation of the third sector in the planning and delivery of public services (Brandsen and Pestoff 2006: 496-497). To further confirm in an institutional sense the growing importance of service delivery partnerships, the UNDP has recently published a set of documents to offer suggestions and best practices on the issue of pro-poor municipal partnerships.

## **2.8 New Modalities of Service Delivery: the Appearance of the Third Sector**

This brings us back to view government functions through the eyes of redistributive governance which takes into consideration contributions or cooperation on behalf of private and civil society actors for enhanced quality and coverage of service delivery all the while improving the linkages that may reduce inequalities. While in theory partnerships may seem beneficial for all parties, in practice it is very hard to strike a balance between interests, efficiency, coverage and the inclusion of marginal workers and their organizations. Oftentimes, outsourcing contracts are granted to large private sector firms with the ability to invest in technology and capital intensive processes rather than groups of organized marginal workers. In other instances a mix of private and cooperative actors encourages a ‘fragmented coherence’ in the overall delivery of service. This is to say that “the state, private sector and communities may all share responsibility for provision, with each compensating for the delivery shortfalls of the other, but with no clear mechanisms of accountability or coordination structures in place” (Beall and Fox 2009: 155).

For local leaders, “the metropolitan challenge is one of establishing institutional structures and processes that effectively mediate diverse interests

to ensure comprehensive action at the metropolitan scale” (Beall and Fox 2009: 215). Integrated systems for service delivery would compel a new kind of approach which reduces redundancy, vertical and horizontal conflict between actors and provides opportunities to marginal groups. Let us remind ourselves that “poverty reduction has to do with changing the existing structures of power ... to improve opportunities for participation and voice and engaging the hitherto disadvantaged or disenfranchised in the political process” (Bardhan 2002 in: Bastiaensen et al. 2005: 981). This implies that the distributional benefits of including marginal groups in service delivery would allow municipalities to effectively reconsider the structures of access of the poor to services and income generation opportunities, and generate spillover effects out these new linkages. Naturally, there is a challenge for the poor to organize and operate in such a way as their activities are compatible with the new service delivery design and requirements.

Returning to the basis of the social economy, however, we may understand that its existence is meant to reduce fragmentation by moving from an individual to a collective stance thus strengthening associative bonds and representation. This in turn would allow for collaboration or partnerships between local governments and organizations of the social economy that are constitutive of the poor to surface as a potential solution to the management and delivery of services while offering new channels of economic and social participation for the poor. Participation alone, however, does not guarantee that benefits will be extensive enough to overturn the institutionalized structures of poverty. It is necessary to underline that participation must lead to alteration within the structures of access, which the social economy literature proposes as “reinstating social justice in production relations” (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005).

From an analytical standpoint, social justice has evolved to represent two principle claims; one of *recognition* and one of *redistribution* which form the analytical backbone of the ensuing analysis (Fraser 1999: 27). As argued by Fraser, recognition “targets injustices it understands as cultural which it presumes to be rooted in social patterns of representation...” (Fraser 1999: 27). She argues that at the root, non-recognition, disrespect and cultural domination devalue identities that make it particularly difficult to overcome dominant patterns and paradigms (ibid). In this way, *empowerment evolves as a vehicle* to reinstate voice and plead for recognition in the public sphere, tackling the overarching social structures that have led to non-recognition and marginality in the first place. Social justice also encompasses the need for redistribution which Fraser describes as focusing “on injustices it defines as socio-economic and presumes to be rooted in the political economy” (Fraser 1999: 27). Redistribution can mean an immediate repartition of goods, assets or income, but in broader terms refers to restructuring the economic access that creates deprivation in the first place (ibid). Providing access to these resources is key to advance the faculty of groups to cultivate their realm of influence and their ability to grow. In this way *accessing more resources reflect a change in socio-economic patterns*.

As a way of applying these notions, this paper seeks to analyze whether the nature of relationships embodied by the new modalities of service delivery

inclusive of the third sector effectively alter previously institutionalized mechanisms that reinforce social structures and the advantages and disadvantages built into social interaction. Key to this study is observing specifically whether organizations of the social economy truly act as a positive medium where social justice helps alter pre-existing barriers institutionalizing poverty. As argued by Gomez and Helmsing, institutional theory suggests that civil society organizations, in this case social economy organizations “become stable participants in the economy. Staff becomes more professional and acquires expertise in a variety of fields, often beyond the advocacy with the government, the representation of collective interests, and the service delivery to members. They also grow in number and legitimacy, multiplying the variety of collective interests they can represent” (G. Gomez and Helmsing 2009: 13-14). The question remains whether the representation of these collective interests will inevitably create social justice in production relations as a way of altering the conditions creating poverty. The case of Bogotá’s integrated solid waste management plan which proposes to promote the inclusion of waste picker cooperatives in service delivery will be critically analyzed for deeper insight into these theoretical dimensions.

## Chapter 3

### Contextual Underpinnings: Bogotá's Waste Landscape

“One man's trash is another man's treasure”

Popular saying

#### 3.1 A Brief Historical Perspective of Urban Poverty in Colombia

Before delving into specific local dimensions of waste and waste picking, it is important to underline some of the historical trends that have cultivated and segmented urban poverty in Colombia. Similar to many of its Latin American neighbours, the concentration of economic and political power inherited from colonial times by a small elite has meant that by 1945 “almost three fourths of the population were peasants living in relative poverty and three percent of the landowners monopolized half of the land” (Sanchez 1992 in: Tuft 1997: 40). With the mechanization of agriculture and large inequalities in land tenure, rural populations started giving up their land, putting in motion structural changes as a demographic shift towards urban areas meant that urbanization rates were topping “4 percent between 1950 and 1970, roughly twice as high as that of the more developed countries” (Portes and Schauffler 1993: 34). While it has often been stated that Latin American countries were already largely urbanized by the 90's, it is important to note that in the case of Colombia, continued factional fighting and the emergence of a clash between dissident armed groups and the military continues to displace individuals from their homes and regions even today, meaning that while migration has slowed, it has not altogether disappeared as waves of internally displaced migrants arrive to cities searching for peace and a means to earn a living.

In reality, the flow of migrants outstripped the quantity of jobs created by industrial growth, meaning that many individuals were relegated to informally produce goods and services to generate an income, segmenting the economically active population in a dual economy (De Oliveira and Roberts 1994: 53). As technological progress lessened the reliance on manual labour, and economic liberalization further segmented labour markets based on education and skills, the social stratification which already prominently divided upper and lower classes further entrenched delimitations between economic production, labour market integration and income (Ocampo 1994: 132). By the end of the 80's, OECD figures place the incidence of urban poverty at 55% (Bussolo and Lay 2003: 11). As stated by Rakowski, poverty is an attribute linked to the process of distribution, and in this case, distribution is a function the state's willingness to seek social balance rather than monopoly power, as well as a function of access to productive units that allows individuals to benefit from a steady source of revenue, and the social benefits that accrue to workers protected by the formal sphere of the economy. In other words, the concentration of urban poverty during the 80's in the Colombian context was largely structural, highly dependent on economic and political interests, and due to changes in modes of production which encouraged rural population to



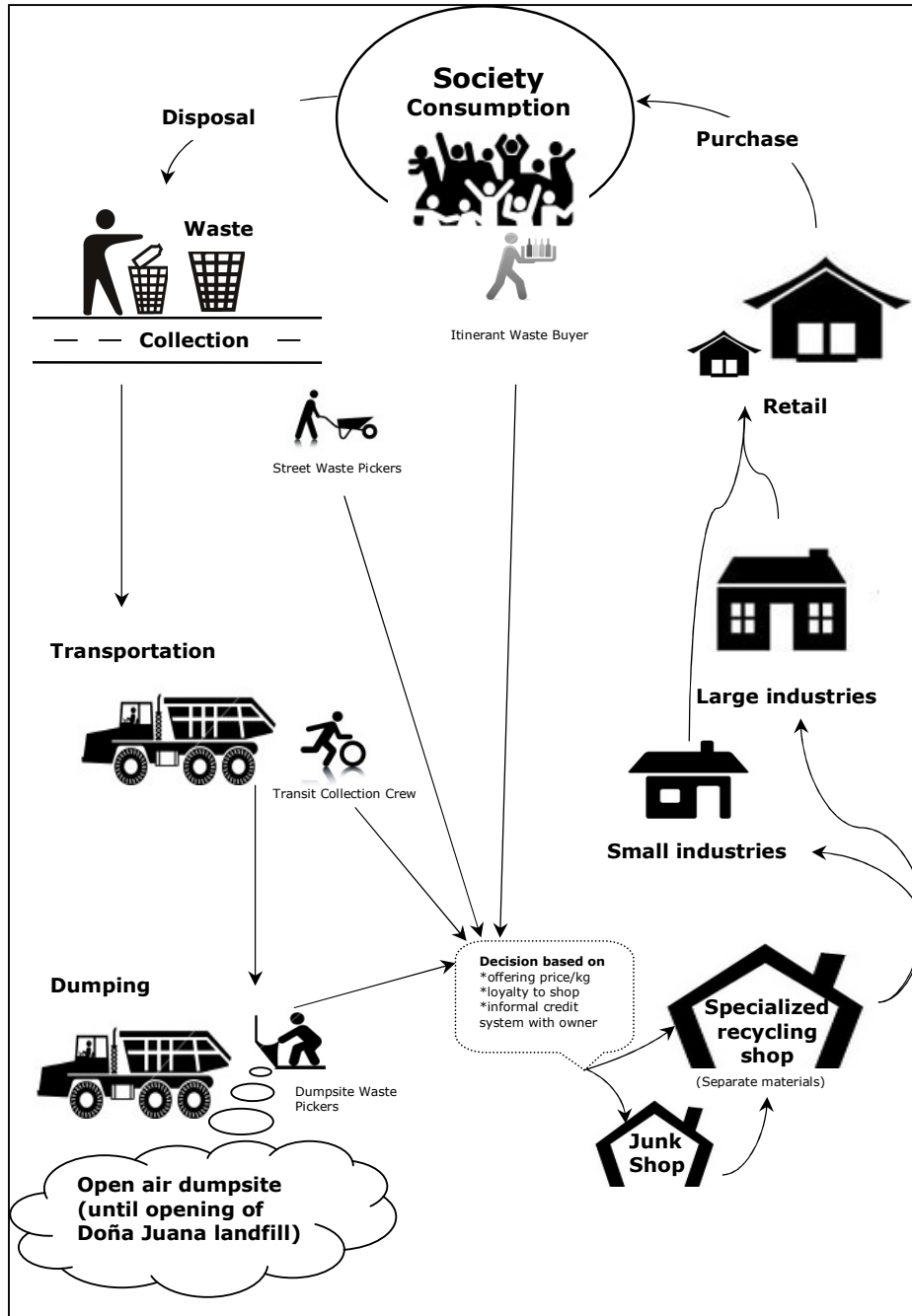
relinquish their land assets, which did not translate into labour market integration, further segmenting the population and disenfranchising the urban poor to a degradation of living standards.

Born out of these historical trends, and due to a lack of functional redistributive social policies until the edification of a new constitution in the early 90's, Colombian cities have fostered the propagation of waste picking as one of these precarious forms of informal employment. In Bogotá, “the money generated by the collection of activities that compose the recycling circuit (...) was 22 million dollars” in 1990 (Rodríguez Garavito 2004: 15). The significance and logic behind these numbers and the occupation of waste picking is that it is accessible to all individuals who have the physical capacities to filter through waste streams, separate goods and transport them to a resale point. In other terms, barriers to entry into waste picking are low, and based more on physical ability than education, skill or capital requirements. Waste picking is a labour intensive independent activity which can be taken up as a permanent or temporary income generator for virtually any migrant, unemployed or underemployed individual, which is why its popularity and presence in the urban landscape has survived the cyclical up and downturns of the larger economy.

### **3.2 Waste as a Resource**

Waste pickers' ability to earn a living is largely dependent on the generation and disposal of waste by society, and as such it is important to broadly define its categories, volume and movement. Indeed, waste management is a complex construction of the post-consumption flows instigated by households, commerce, organizations and industry and integrated into multi-scalar processes of recollection, separation, transportation, transformation and disposal (See Figure 3.2). Waste takes on many forms from organic to toxic, meaning that each category requires different methods of transformation and disposal to ensure limited environmental impact. Mainstream household and office waste, more specifically non-organic recyclable materials including paper, cardboard, plastics, glass and corrugated metals are central to this study, as these are the principal materials that waste pickers in Bogotá recuperate and transform for resale. These materials not only withhold the most concrete economic value for waste pickers, but constitute a significant bulk of the waste that local governments want to deduce from overall waste flows in order to extend the lives of sanitary landfills and dumps existing in the municipality.

Figure 3.2: Waste Value Chain (prior to PMIRS)



In 2008, approximately 25,079 tons of waste was generated daily throughout Colombia, averaging the disposal rate of .56kg/person/per day at the national level (Superintendencia De Servicios Publicos 2008). Specifically speaking, Bogotá alone produces 6,500 tons of waste daily, which is disposed at the Doña Juana sanitary landfill which not only serves the Bogotá

community, but further absorbs the residual waste of six neighbouring municipalities (Jaramillo Henao and Zapata Marquez 2008: 32). Given a significant rural-urban divide in waste management characterized by higher trends of consumption and disposal in urban areas, the volume, flows and organization of waste management systems differ. In fact “higher volumes of garbage are associated with rising levels of affluence, cheaper consumer products, built-in obsolescence, increased packaging and the demand for convenience products” (Beall and Fox 2009: 144). In terms of non-organic waste, Bogotá accounts for approximately a quarter of all waste produced in the country despite representing less than 18% of the overall population (Superintendencia De Servicios Publicos 2008: 46). This means that residents of Bogotá dispose on average more solid goods per capita, posing a stress on current systems of municipal management, which, according to a 2005 census formally covers only 7 out of 45 million Colombians (Publicos 2008: 21). The significant gap in coverage stimulates the spread and reliance on alternative systems, specifically fostering economic opportunities for different groupings of waste pickers including itinerant waste buyers, street waste pickers, transit collection crew and dumpsite waste pickers who operate at different transit points along the waste value chain illustrated in Figure 3.2. This goes to demonstrate the centrality not only of waste picker’s purpose and role in complementing or altogether fulfilling municipal waste services, but further confirms the need to revisit current systems for more integrative strategies.

### **3.3 The Profile of Waste Pickers in Bogotá**

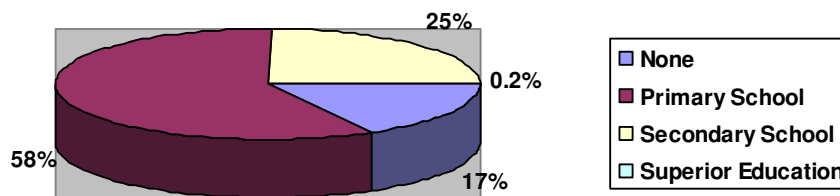
A study performed between 2002 and 2004 by the DANE sought to provide concrete data reflective of the size, attributes and organizational nature of the recycling circuit and its operators. Specifically, it segments waste pickers first by defining their principle activities and later dividing them into functional groupings. The waste picker, in Bogotá called *el reciclador*, is “a person who dedicates him/herself to retrieve and recuperate the residues of those materials that can submit themselves to a new process of reutilization, through its conversion in prime materials useful in the fabrication of new products” (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004: 53). In Bogotá, the study stipulates the presence of two overall groups, one that is dedicated to waste picking virtually on a full time basis, and another that is composed of individuals living on the street that occasionally pick waste amongst other activities including begging. The data reveals that the full time waste picking community is composed of 8,479 individuals, forming part of 3,692 households representing a total population of 18,506 individuals depending upon these activities for survival (ibid). In terms of the street population partially partaking in waste picking activities, a population of 5,276 is identified, reflecting that beyond the core of the study which focuses on waste picking as a full time income generation source, it must be accounted that over five thousand individuals partake on an ad-hoc basis to the functioning of the recycling chain.

Returning to our core population of full-time waste pickers, segmentation on the basis of sexes yields a rather balanced proportion of 45.5% women and 55.5% men. When divided into age groups, men are over represented between the ages of 0-17 years, while women are more present in

other cohorts, particularly between the ages of 18-40. Given the important dependent population that represents almost 10,000 individuals, a socio-demographic analysis of households is particularly important in understanding the wellbeing of its members. Out of the total households, approximately 28% are headed by males and 72% headed by females. Particularly, out of the total amount of households, 34.4% are headed by single parents. What is particularly striking, however, is to note that in the case of female single-headed households the average amount of dependents is 4.5 people, relative to male single-headed households that sustain 2.5 people on average, demonstrating that a greater stress is placed on most waste picking women to sustain their dependents (See Appendix I).

This partially explains why child labour in this domain is so prominent. It is estimated that out of the 8,479 overall full-time waste pickers, 2800 are children between the ages of 5 and 17 years, representing 33% of the overall workforce. These children are considered to work on a full time basis and therefore do not, for the large part, partake in the formal educational system. The value of incorporating children and youth in the schooling system is initially based on the ability to expand literacy, cognitive and analytical skills yet it also withholds intrinsic benefits such as integrating children into an environment that broadens opportunities to find alternative social networks and employment opportunities in the long term. As these children become adults, it is therefore unsurprising that illiteracy rates are seven percentage points higher than the national average. In Colombia 10% of the population is considered to be illiterate, and in the case of waste pickers in Bogotá, the level reaches 17.3%. On average more women than men are illiterate, representing 57% and 42% respectively. Observing the levels of education is also revealing of the low level of access and attendance in the formal educational system as only 25.2% have gone beyond primary school. A breakdown of educational achievement is illustrated in table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Population Breakdown by Educational Attainment



Given that the materials and working environment of waste pickers may cause serious health problems, access to health services is crucial to the ability to sustain activities over the long term. The study identifies that almost 65% have access to the health system, with respect to 35% who either do not,

or do not know of their status relative to health services. What is particularly important to note, however, is that while the claim to health services is sustained, it refers to emergency health services rather than integral health care linked to social security. Usually the organizational status of waste pickers, either forming part of cooperative groups or operating individually, largely defines the relationships of waste pickers with social security coverage. In fact, the organizational status of waste pickers directly affects their linkages, not only to social security, but to other actors in the waste value chain. Let us now further delve into the existing distinctions within the waste picking community.

### **3.4 Recognizing the Heterogeneity of Waste Pickers**

While regrouping waste pickers as a homogenous body would facilitate the analysis, this would be very unreflective of their respective relationship to the waste chain. As highlighted above, currently over 8,000 individuals actively pick through waste on a full time basis and over 5,000 do so part time. Within the full time waste picker community, a second subdivision is particularly relevant in analyzing linkages given that certain individuals operate on an individual basis, and others form part of organized groups.

The main logic behind organizing is to overcome the individualization of labour, which reinforces the fragmented nature of the labour market, and isolates individuals in their activities, limiting their capacity to process materials, and ultimately rendering them vulnerable to fluctuations and instability. Organizing individuals also means organizing their activities and their demands through negotiations, which help reduce overlapping activities, their transaction cost and potentially rebalance power structures. Estimates of organized waste pickers in Bogotá are quite unreliable. The National Statistics Department places organization at 11%, while the director of the Recycler's Association of Bogotá places figures closer to 30% (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004, Padilla Herrera 2009). It is important to note that the membership trend indicates that the immediate benefits of organizing are recognized by a portion of the population and rejected by another much along the lines presented in the theoretical chapter. Individuals may operate individually by obligation because of deficient skills and habits which include working slowly, being drug or alcohol dependent, or sustaining discordant behaviour (Abarca 2009). They may also operate individually by choice valuing the flexibility sustained by autonomous employment, including the most appropriate hours of work, pick up spots and resale point which immediately affects the income level of these waste pickers. Cooperatives are nonetheless undeniably central actors in altering both representation and demands at the local level, and I now turn to the Colombian context in which the rise of cooperatives may be situated.

### **3.5 The Rise of Cooperativism**

In Colombia, the organization of informal or unrecognized workers has been primarily through the mediums of the "social economy". The rise of associative movements in the Colombian context may be understood as a response to the shortfalls in the implementation of the centralized economic principals of the time, which saw in the 1930's the first waves of market

liberalization through foreign direct investment. The economic production and exchange models were of a fragmentary nature excluding groups with limited asset base from participating in the evolving economic model. Moulaert and Ailenei explain that “when the economic growth engine starts to stutter, formal distribution mechanisms begin to fail and new social forces develop and give rise to alternative institutions and mechanisms of solidarity and redistribution as a means of addressing the failures of the institutions of the socioeconomic movements to guarantee solidarity among economic agents” (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005: 2038). Between the 30’s and the 50’s, discussions in the public sphere iterated the importance of bridging and streamlining economic and social development at the national policy level so as to address substantial discrepancies between the rich and poor. In order to do so, Law 19 of 1958 was passed in order to edify the first National Plan for Economic and Social Development which served as a necessary platform for the progressive institutionalization of the social economy (Dane 2004: 7).

The “social economy” began to take form as the values and practices of cooperativism emerged as an alternative economic production base. In 1963 the first regulatory board known as the *Superintendencia de Cooperativas* took charge of the registration, evaluation, inspection and control of cooperatives, not only recognizing them as legal entities, but further promoting them as a vehicle for production and distribution of essential goods and services (ibid). The early 80’s saw the conversion of this entity into the National Department of Cooperatives (DANCOOP) whose principal objectives were to “direct and execute the cooperative policies of the State” while “serving the popular interests and reaching higher levels of development” with a special focus on reducing the unsatisfied basic needs of the population (Dane 2004: 7). From there on, the cooperative model was adopted by alternative groups as a way to organize and be recognized as legal entities with rights and obligations relative to the State.

Cooperatives have indeed been a decisive outcome of the development of associative bonds amongst waste pickers in Colombia. The aggregation of waste pickers into a consolidated group initially help divide activities and mainstream processes so as to benefit from economies of scale which, with appropriate leadership can be translated into a greater ability to negotiate with government or industries that form a type of monopsony coalition and set prices for the recuperated materials. Associative bonds may further help establish group agency with regards to the social and political dimensions of their work. It was not until the 1980’s that waste picker communities with the support of DANCOOP, and later the Fundación Social and SENA, began to propagate the cooperative form, and build upon technical education and private financial assistance to formalize the organizational base of these cooperatives. This formalization can be understood as a first step towards the institutionalization both of new methods of organization for informal waste workers and of new channels of dialogue between these workers and governmental entities.

### 3.6 The Governance Landscape: a Budding Relationship in Service Delivery

In order for the nature of the relationship between waste picker cooperatives and government to evolve, a shift in the structure, vision and response of Bogotá's public administration occurred. Initially administrative, fiscal and political decentralization relegated more decision making power at the lower realms of government, shifting functions from central to local governments. This also meant that mayors were no longer appointed but rather elected, allowing urban residents to weigh into the establishment of new priorities at the city level by selecting their candidate. Indeed it has been stated that "in Bogotá, there can be no disputing the fact that the local electorate has managed to vote in a series of excellent mayors" who have competently addressed issues of fiscal responsibility, public behaviour and public service delivery to name a few (Gilbert 2006: 400).

With the absorption of neoliberal principals in the management of public affairs, a new market configuration emerged where service provision could be privatized and outsourced. This reflects the tendency of NPM that acknowledges that the management of the state functions should "seek to reduce the size and activities of the state, while introducing private sector disciplines into the public sector" (Minogue et al. 1998: 2). Under the neoliberal logic, all involvement by the state inherently creates distortions of the market, and thus rolling back the state would signify that "political manipulation and corruption will be lessened (...) if politicians have less influence over infrastructure and service provision (Gilbert 2006: 402).

While Bogotá shied away from privatizing water, telephone and only partly privatized electricity, waste services on the other hand were one of the first to be privatized after the massive failure of the state enterprise. In an attempt to adopt commercial principals in the waste sector, the municipal government of Bogotá outsourced 60% of the waste management load to private operators while withholding the obligation to cover 40% of local waste services (Rodríguez Garavito 2004: 25). Yet inadequacies in service coverage on behalf of the state enterprise brought forward a sanitary emergency in Bogotá which instigated a proposition on behalf of the Fundación Social to subcontract waste picker cooperatives both temporarily and in the long term to fulfil these needs. Despite successfully resolving the issue by picking 700 tons of solid waste per day during the emergency period, the government remained distrustful of directly subcontracting these waste picker organizations, preferring to use the Fundación Social as intermediary for these contracts (Wiego 2008: 14). Due to limitations relative to its legal entity, the Fundación was obliged to refuse such a relationship, which temporarily diffused possible agreements between the recycling cooperatives and the government (Rodríguez Garavito 2004: 26).

Of important note, however, is that this was the first instance that Bogotá's municipal government put in practice the framework of governance in waste management. By governance, we are looking at the collection of networks and structures, both formal and informal that institute new types of interactions between three principal actors at the local level, including

government, private sector and civil society. It provides a new configuration for the market, so as to include the skills and contributions of multiple actors to provide more effective and efficient services to local communities. Despite the initial failure of privatizing services to social organizations, dialogue emerged between waste picker organizations and local government for a revision in their relationship.

### **3.7 ISWM: Planning a New Service Delivery Paradigm**

The 90's were a decisive period for these social organizations. On one hand, waste picker cooperatives were multiplying at a rapid rate, forming regional and national networks so as to exchange knowledge, practices and strengthen their position within their communities, all the while coordinating for larger demands and proposals. These associative networks were becoming hard to overlook, and given the edification of two important legal decrees, a shift in the relationship between waste picker coops and the government ensued.

Initially, Article 147 of Law 79 of 1998 stated that “cooperative organizations have obligatory preference and special treatment in the tendering of State contracts, while the legal requisites are fulfilled and these entities are found in equal or better conditions than other proponents,” meaning that cooperative organizations were from then on formally and institutionally linked to the issuance of government contracts (Alcaldía Mayor De Bogota 1988). In 1994, however, Law 142 iterated that bidding for urban contracts was limited to ‘anonymous societies’, in this case openly directing the bid to private capital societies, whereby removing the right of cooperatives to compete for the contracts in large cities where a large proportion of waste is generated and managed (Canalrcn 2009: Abogada Adriana Ruiz). This subsequently instigated a repudiatory action on behalf of the ARB who placed a motion against this law subsequently making its way to the Constitutional Court. This process stimulated an interesting debate which ended with the establishment of Sentence T724 of 2003 which gives way to the inclusion of affirmative action in favour of the waste pickers organization in these contracts (Alcaldía Mayor De Bogota 2003).

Currently, 49 cooperative organizations of which 26 fall below the umbrella of the ARB are present in Bogotá's waste picking scene, representing a membership or affiliation of 1,832 to 2,300 individuals depending on the source (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004: 47, Padilla Herrera 2009, Wiego 2008: 32). The coops regrouped below the ARB's leadership, have been an important actor in voicing concerns and influencing the recognition and position of waste pickers within Bogotá's solid waste management. Given the new paradigm relative to local service delivery, the shortfalls in coverage and quality of service, and the growing representation of this vulnerable group, a reconsideration of the overall system of solid waste management in Bogotá brought forward a new set of policies, streamlined and assembled through the PMIRS. The following chapter will serve as a brief outline of its principal characteristics and goals relative to the management of waste and the inclusion of the waste picker population, drawing on its implementation process for further analysis of its success.



## Chapter 4

# The Master Plan's Framework and Execution

“Without an economically viable strategy, *recicladores* are condemned to poverty, in the best of cases, to depend indefinitely of the charity of NGOs, of individual benefactors or of isolated governmental entities. Without a social strategy, the revenues derived from the transformation of the recycling market does not alter the collective conditions of exclusion of the *recicladores*” (Rodriguez Garavito 2004: 23).

### 4.1 Principal Objectives and Policies

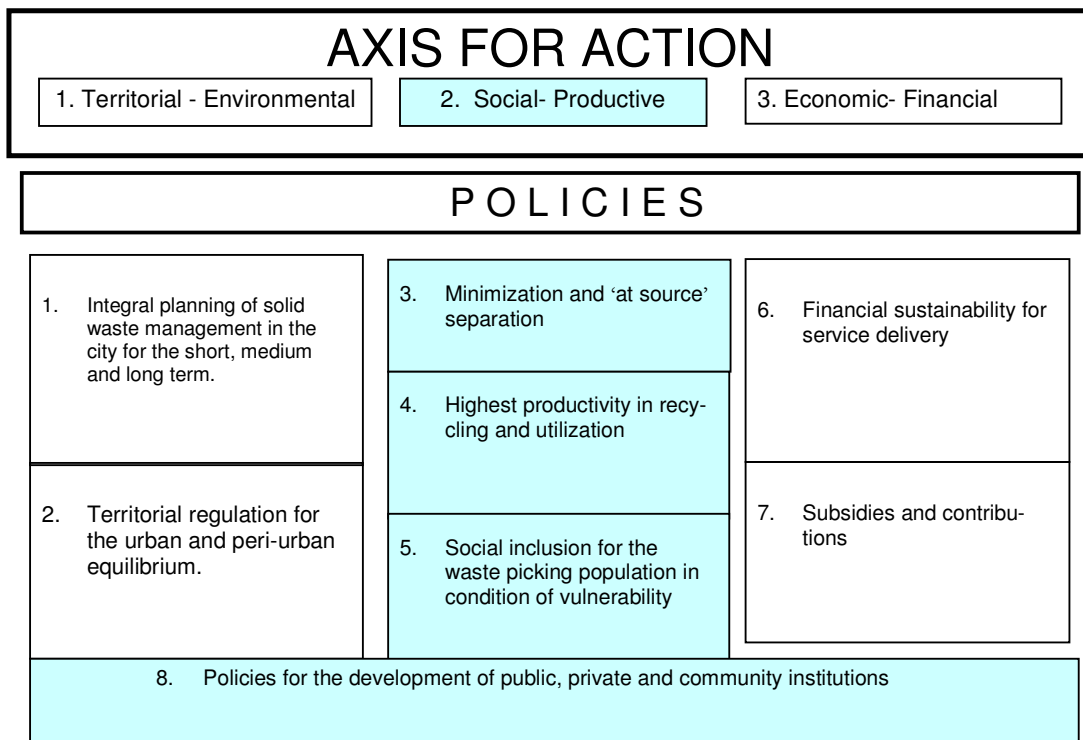
The PMIRS was born out of the social prioritization of waste issues in the capital city of Bogotá. In the early 90's waste services in the city were performed mostly on an ad-hoc basis until Mayor Jaime Castro signed into decree in 1994 the existence of an executive agency, the *Unidad Ejecutiva de Servicios Públicos* (UESP), as a dependent body of the central administration's office responsible for the design and implementation of public service policies. About a decade later, the UESP became known as the *Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos* (UAESP) as it gained greater autonomy from central planning, and took on the coordination, supervision and control of recollection services, transport, final disposition, recycling and productive utilization of waste materials, in addition to street cleaning and lighting (Pedraza Poveda 2008: 5). Falling within its functions, the UAESP formulated the PMIRS which was sanctioned in 2006, two years after the principal objectives for the intervention and formulation of a general system of solid waste had been proposed.

The plan puts forward *four structural objectives* which are later graphically articulated and resumed according to three axes for policy and action:

1. To incorporate citizens of the Capital District and of regional municipalities in a culture of 'at source' separation, minimization and productive utilization of solid waste, with an understanding of the positive impacts that these practices exert on the environment, on public health and the use of public spaces.
2. To maximize economies of scale, with high efficiency, competitiveness and productivity indicators, and the lowest social and environmental impact in the delivery of these public services so as to reduce cost for the beneficiaries.

3. To articulate regional infrastructural development for the establishment of final disposal and treatment sites, in addition to the macro routes used for the transportation of solid waste which would best make use of the competitive and comparative advantage of the different municipalities and of the capacity of their public, private and community agents.
4. To always articulate principals of efficiency and financial sufficiency in the management of solid waste in such a way to promote affirmative actions for service beneficiaries with limited financial means, and for the waste picking community in condition of poverty and vulnerability so as to socially include and recognize their work and role as actors in the general solid waste system.

(Decreto 312 2006)



(Secretaria De Ambiente 2004: 14)

## 4.2 The District Recycling Program

Given the complexity and multidimensional approach of the PMIRS, this section narrows down the focus to the dimensions of the master plan that outline the ‘inclusionary’ practices linking the waste picking community to the integrated system. The “socio-productive axis” previously outlined forms the core of the redistributive and inclusionary policies, and also forms the basis of the District Recycling Program. This plan focuses on:

1. The separation of materials at source
2. The establishment of a selective recollection route
3. The construction and operation of four recycling parks
4. Social components and strategies for waste picker population

Initially, separation at source encourages households, offices and businesses to separate materials into categories that make their transportation, processing, resale or disposal more efficient and effective. At source separation is the primary activity performed by waste pickers, whereby alteration in current practices are likely to immediately affect their everyday activities. Secondly, the selective recollection route is meant to be managed by the UAESP and carried out by formal operators, meaning that transportation is no longer a function of waste pickers’ work or of informal organizations that are not registered as transportation entities. Further, new regulation regarding the limited use of carts and animal-driven transportation in the city have meant that traditional methods have been prohibited in such a way as the entire system rely on formal mechanisms and transportation routes, even if this has hardly translated into practice.

While the first two dimensions reduce the relevance of waste pickers’ activities in the waste chain, the last two dimensions were meant to reorient and expand their utility within the overall master plan. Four recycling parks were planned to be opened to further separate materials for processing. Upon construction, the management of these parks would be open for various private and collective enterprises to place bids. In practical terms, this opportunity is only extended to cooperative entities that are sufficiently established, and withhold external knowledge and relationships allowing for formal bids to be placed so as to compete against private enterprises. Due to these limitations, there is recognition within the PMIRS that additional inclusionary mechanisms are essential in lifting the overall condition of waste pickers in conditions of vulnerability and poverty, and as such the policies for ‘social inclusion’ can be divided into three categories:

1. Linkages to the productive process, commercial process and service delivery through the expanded formation of technical competencies that improve earnings, the solidification of micro-entrepreneurial capacity and the opening of doors to alternative labour opportunities.

2. Strategies for greater work recognition and reduction of vulnerability, including such elements as the improvement of dialogue for the exchange of knowledge, the reduction of illiteracy both of adult and child groups, and the elimination of child labour due to greater integration in the public school system.
3. Strategies aimed at strengthening both the formation of new waste picker organizations and the consolidation of existing cooperatives through technical and legal counselling, supplemented by assistance to access resources from cooperative agencies at the national and international level.

(Decreto 312 2006)

These inclusionary policies aimed at altering both the position of vulnerability as well as the mechanisms reinforcing marginality and poverty. Listed below is a summary of the seven immediate objectives proposed by the UAESP.

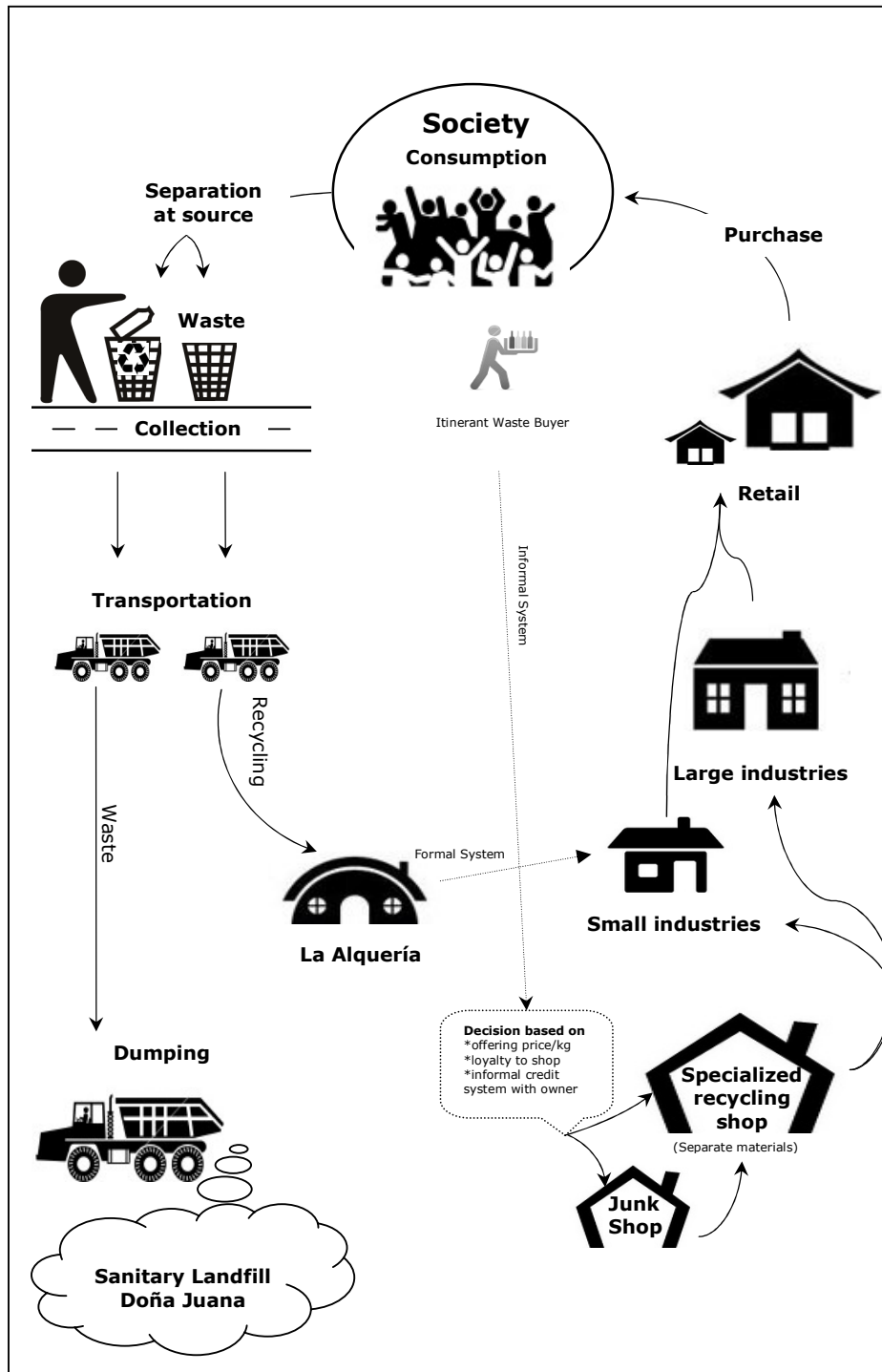
- Link 47 waste picker organizations to the program
- Promote the construction of four recycling parks to process waste
- Generate 800 formal employment opportunities in the recycling parks
- Eradicate 80% of the current child labour related to waste picking
- Promote 20 projects for the transformation of recyclable materials
- Carry out 1 program for the strengthening of waste picker organizations
- Train 2800 informal waste pickers in alternative revenue generation schemes

(Contraloría De Bogota 2007: 9)

### **4.3 Implementation Process and Primary Outputs**

Planned in 2004, the PMIRS reflected three implementation cycles with the first and most immediate initiatives being implemented between 2006 and 2008. Many organizations including the Contraloría de Bogotá, local and national media, and waste picker organizations have been consulted to provide a review and cross-examination of the proposed objectives with the current situation of solid waste management in Bogotá. With the District Recycling Program leading the way in terms of concrete goals to link waste pickers and their organizations to the integrated system, I will first briefly comment on the immediate outputs emanating from the plan's implementation, giving way to the respective successes and shortfalls of the program. A review of the initial waste chart resulting from the PMIRS may be observed in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: The Waste Value Chain Revisited (post PMIRS)



#### 4.3.1 *The Separation of Material at Source*

The separation of materials by offices, households, restaurants and businesses before disposal and recollection has changed the nature of the relationship between waste pickers and the post consumption flow. When this waste is placed in public disposal sites composed of small and large bins on the street, waste pickers are highly encouraged to pass before the trucks to take away materials with the highest economic value, as this reduces the amount of time they dedicate to extract materials (L. Gomez 2008: 1). In most cases, those who dispose of this waste are aware that these materials hold a resale value, and therefore attempt to earn a portion of this value by separating yet withholding the materials until waste pickers purchase them directly.

This encourages what is called itinerant waste buying, which effectively has three repercussions. First, a middleman is created in the chain, which extracts a flat fee from the waste pickers who will obtain lower gross revenue from the same quantity of materials. Secondly, this implies that fewer materials will enter the recollection route, hence fewer materials arrive for processing at the formal recycling plants, reducing the quantity of formal jobs created in these centres. Thirdly it encourages the co-existence of formal and informal waste management systems (Veedia Distrital 2008: 1). These three repercussions are further exacerbated by the implementation of the *Comparendo Ambiental* regulation in 2009, which has rendered the opening of bags on the street illegal and punishable by hefty fines (Canalrcn 2009). This has been a determining factor in the rise of itinerant waste buying relative to other methods of waste picking in the urban landscape.

#### 4.3.2 *The Establishment of a Selective Recollection Route*

The UAESP has been in charge of drawing effective routes for the collection of pre-divided materials, which in 2008 covered 74,300 service beneficiaries (Gomez, 2008, Pedraza Poveda 2008: 6). While this route is expected to expand in the following years for greater geographical coverage, it is in fact quite limited when considering the current population that is in excess of 6.5 million inhabitants and all the industries operating in the capital city. Effectively this recollection route is only covering 3.5% of the total population linked to the formal solid waste management system (Alcaldía Mayor De Bogota 2009).

Given the limited reach of the current recollection routes, what can be observed is a further segmentation between the formal and informal waste management systems. Naturally areas that lack collection coverage continue to provide strong incentives for waste pickers to operate and resell their materials to the 800 informal junk/recycling shops that exist in the city (Padilla Herrera 2009). It also reflects the shortfalls of the plans aspirations, both in terms of the widespread collection of materials, and the new formal employment opportunities created in the recycling plants.

#### *4.3.3 The Construction and Operation of Recycling Plants*

In order to absorb both potentially recyclable materials and a projected 800 waste pickers for the operation and administration of these centres, the construction of four recycling plants had been planned. The first proposed recycling centre, El Salitre, in fact never came into existence. Strong pressures on behalf of citizen groups living in the construction area halted progress due to demonstrations (Alarcon Moreno 2008, Contraloría de Bogotá 2007). The second centre El Tintal succumbed to similar pressures, giving way to the existence only of a third and much smaller centre for this purpose called La Alquería. The bid for the administration and operation of the centre was won by the *Union Temporal de Recicladores*, an umbrella organization representing three waste picker associations (Veira Rojas 2008).

La Alquería initially employed 42 individuals, 4 of which fulfilled administrative roles, and 38 who were dedicated to operations, including the reception of material, their classification and commercialization. At the household level, the government states that these 42 employees benefitted a dependent population of 176 individuals (Alcaldía Mayor De Bogotá 2008). With the increase in daily reception of potentially recyclable material from 4 tons/day in 2006 to approximately 9 tons/day in August 2008 and 14 tons/day in February 2009, the flow of daily processed materials has stimulated the formation of new formal employment positions at La Alquería (L. Gomez 2009). Currently more than 50 individuals work there, benefitting a group in excess of 200 individuals. The immediate benefits secured by these workers include the formal recognition of their work, a fixed monthly income at the rate of the minimum wage, coverage from the social security plan, a reduction in work accidents due to better sanitary conditions and a reduction in the competition for the materials which also reduces the potentiality of conflict/violence amongst waste pickers (Alcaldía Mayor De Bogotá 2008). We must keep in mind, however, that 50 formal jobs of the projected 800 significantly limits the transition of 8,479 individuals into the ISWM system.

#### *4.3.4 Social Strategies for the Inclusion of Waste Pickers*

Taking into account the narrowness of reach of the first three dimensions of the recycling plan, this final element was designed as a way of linking the overall waste picking population to education and training initiatives meant to reinforce organizational skills, personal skills, alternative methods of income generation, and educative opportunities to reduce child labour. Specifically, out of the 18,506 individuals linked to the process of waste picking, 5,840 were initially targeted by UAESP. Of these 5,840 individuals, only 440 were effectively linked to any of these dimensions (Contraloría De Bogotá 2007).

The process of becoming an official cooperative in Colombia requires these organizations to proceed through two years formation with external actors, as a way of strengthening administrative processes, human resources and accounting. In the 1990's, the Fundación Social was the main external actor involved in the process of upgrading organizational skills. At the turn of the century, most cooperatives were founded and operational giving priority to practical material separation courses and technological upgrading implemented

by the District University and the SENA. Prior to the PMIRS, it is said that out of the 49 active cooperatives, 73% were receiving support by national or international organizations in the fields of technical upgrading and training (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004). In other words, the PMIRS workshops proved to be largely redundant, and have proven to be glaringly unsuccessful, as only one workshop was offered to strengthen organizations, a series of workshops with the projected involvement of 2800 individuals yielded only 120 presences, and no workshops were being offered in technological upgrading which has been stated as one of the building blocks to increase the ability of individuals and organizations to capture new processes to step up in the value chain (Padilla Herrera 2009).

Last but not least, child labour was approached as a central issue relative to waste picker's situation of vulnerability. A strong link is established between children's work and low levels of literacy, which, beyond the intrinsic benefits of reading and writing represent the development of cognitive and analytical skills transferable in different spheres of life and work. This is especially relevant given that approximately 33% of waste pickers in Bogotá are children (Alcaldía Mayor De Bogota 2009). The plan aimed at eradicating 80% of child labour, yet an oversight of key underpinnings have greatly reduced the success rate closer to 10% (Contraloría De Bogota 2007). For starters, no policies at the cooperative level are designed against child labour given that the work of children is considered by the organizations to be the symptom of a problem rather than a problem in itself. Nohra Padilla from the ARB states that if the incomes of waste pickers became more stable due to a reduction of price fluctuation per ton, then most households would be confident in the consistency of their earnings, thus reducing the importance and contribution of their child's activities in relation to household's earnings (Padilla Herrera 2009). This helps readjust the cost-benefit analysis favouring long term investment in education relative to immediate productive yields. The transition of 290 out of 2240 children identified through the census indicates that despite the positive shift for a group of children, almost 2000 remain outside the education system and limits future opportunities for these youth.

As a critical observer and evaluator of the UAESP's work, the Controller's Office has resumed the preliminary outcomes of the plan as listed in Appendix II. The office further states that "the district administration must promote the conditions so that equality may be true and effective, in this case the administration did not adopt the sufficient means in favour of discriminated or marginal groups so as to allow greater material equality" (Contraloría De Bogota 2007: 8). Before concluding so boldly, let us now turn to qualitative remarks regarding the impacts of the PMIRS on the waste picking community.



## **Chapter 5**

### **A Social Approach to the Economy and to Justice: Successes, Shortfalls and Evolving Institutional Arrangements**

#### **5.1 A Starting Point for Analysis: Between Intentions and Actions**

A thorough analysis of the program outputs would not be possible without first recalling the multiple intentions that preceded the construction and implementation of the PMIRS. What is particularly complex when approaching the foundation of new forms of collaboration are in fact the divergent interests that are at the base of any partnership. As a formal decree, the PMIRS withholds the hopes and aspirations of a select group of government officials and specialists whose primary interest is to mainstream the processes of waste management in such a way that coverage and cost are indirectly correlated. In assessing their options and juggling their possibilities, the recognition of waste pickers' work and the importance of their contribution have been valued, despite a general disregard to the different segments that constitute this population, and their respective limitations relative to their linkage to formal processes. Additionally the plan overlooks the variety of activities that occupy waste-pickers' time, whereby replacing the largely labour-intensive methods of operation for capital-intensive ways of organizing, collecting and processing the materials, creating redundant activities rather than efficient and integrated systems.

Waste pickers, mostly through the medium of their organizations and the ARB, claim that the inclusionary dimensions of the PMIRS are largely a reaction to their own activism and presence in the public sphere which, over the last twenty years, has constructed a platform for discussion. The existence of the ARB is a feat in itself, as it represents the evolving nature of the institutional landscape which devolves the opportunity to voice proposals to those with the ability to organize behind a collective purpose. Within this evolving context, and accounting for the successes of representation, Nohra Padilla claims that the main goal of the Association today is to obtain a guarantee on behalf of the government for a fixed price per ton of select material. The perspective is built mostly on a market approach that places merit on the reduction of middlemen in the value chain and the stability of prices to reduce fluctuations in income. Aside from this principle goal, other issues including child labour as previously stated are seen as a symptom of the problem rather than a problem in itself worth tackling. In other words the success or failure of the PMIRS is determined primarily on the ability to create income stability and value-added production to curb deteriorating and fluctuating income trends.

The relevance of observing these major discrepancies is that the success of the PMIRS is highly contested amongst the media, the mayor's office, the controller's office and the waste picker themselves. Given the divergent interests and expectations it is hard to paint in thick brushstrokes the

colours of success or failure. Rather, what is put forward is the multidimensionality of interests which are trying to be reconciled through new modalities in service delivery at the local level.

As stated by Padilla, the results can be categorized as normal given the learning curve, representing both victories and failures for all those involved (Padilla Herrera 2009). In terms of transitioning into a system of ISWM, cleavages suggest that two operational waste circuits continue to exist side by side, fuelling the fragmented coherence suggested by Beal and Fox. At the same time, all is not lost as we now observe elements corresponding to the employment approach taken up by government and the value-chain approach taken on by waste picking organizations.

## 5.2 Divergent Outcomes for Individual and Organized Waste Pickers

The spectrum of integration into the master plan reflects the distinct linkages that have been created or encouraged during the first two years of implementation. In order to review these findings, I have resumed the outputs according to the critical subdivisions of beneficiaries in the table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Synthesized Outcomes according to Waste Picker Segment

	<b>Cooperatives – Employees of La Alquería</b>	<b>Cooperatives – Other members</b>	<b>Individual Waste Pickers</b>
<b>Work Recognition</b>	Formal position as workers within ISWM	Growing recognition of complementary contribution to ISWM	Growing recognition of their activities as work
<b>Stable Remuneration</b>	Fixed rate per hour at level of minimum wage	Earnings fluctuate. Based on market price of materials/weight negotiated by cooperative	Earnings fluctuate. Based on market price of materials/weight defined by junk shops
<b>Linkage to social security</b>	Yes	Applicable only to members of the most developed/established cooperatives	For a large majority, no
<b>Working conditions</b>	Sanitary garments provided; facilities and conditions of work regulated and improved	Established geographical coverage improves relationship with local community, but no major changes in occupational safety & hygiene	No major changes in occupational safety & hygiene

<b>Collective stance</b>	Positive discrimination in contract bids; Contract negotiation Dialogue with external actors	Positive discrimination for cooperatives in contract bids Dialogue with external actors	None
<b>Linkage to external actors</b>	Government bodies Universities Foundations & civil society groups Private sector (Tetrapack) Lawyers/ Legal System	Mostly through the ARB: Government bodies Universities Foundations & civil society groups Private sector (Tetrapack) Lawyers/ Legal System	May link at will with cooperatives. Further linkages and representation available through cooperative platform
<b>Access to training</b>	Materials separation courses	Organizational strengthening workshops	Limited attendance: -Alternative income generation schemes - Cooperative formation
<b>Access to capital investment</b>	They operate in top level facility but do not own either the plant or machinery	Limited to the availability of surplus to be reinvested in the cooperative	Limited to informal lending/borrowing
<b>Shift in the value-chain</b>	Noteworthy as a best practice between government and waste pickers, reduction of middleman (junk shop)	None	Fragmented operations; marginalized activities as police may intercept at will due to the <i>Comparendo Ambiental</i>

### 5.3 Social Justice in Production Relations?

As illustrated in the previous table, the PMIRS clearly had divergent impacts depending on the organizational status of waste pickers, notably a large divide can be perceived between members of cooperatives, and most specifically workers at La Alquería, relative to their fragmented counterparts. As a way of regrouping these findings for purposeful analysis, we now return to the main objectives which guide the organizations of the social economy and justify its presence as a market actor; that of restoring social justice in production relations. Let us recall the two primary dimensions this concept puts forward according to Fraser; that of instigating recognition through the vehicle of empowerment, and that of fostering effective redistribution as a means of securing greater access to resources for a change in socio-economic patterns. Both of these dimensions form part of a strategy to help reposition the access of the poor within the public sphere so as to break the structures relegating the waste pickers to marginal earnings, work and living conditions. Both are analyzed below maintaining the respective order.

### *5.3.1 Recognition – Empowerment Nexus*

Recognition for waste picker's work first emerged due to a gleaming victory at the level of the Constitutional Court, instigating and canalizing dialogue between the state and waste picker organizations. These organizations have been the founding motivators for the unfolding inclusionary dimensions in the PMIRS. What we observe is that consequently, recognition emerges as a reinforced outcome based on the plan's implementation which affirms the centrality of waste picking's environmental, social and economic benefits, reiterating the functional importance of waste pickers in the urban landscape. In some way, this recognition produces a positive externality for all waste pickers alike, regardless whether they are affiliated to cooperatives or operating individually. In a special television report, a female waste picker claimed that she now knows the central role and important value her work withholds in terms of the benefits this service produces in the societal sphere and for the environment (Canalrcn 2009). This affirmation goes to demonstrate that her position, as that of many other waste pickers has shifted sufficiently in the public sphere that she has cognitively assimilated a new role as a social actor, overthrowing past trends of violence against waste pickers in Bogotá.

Work recognition serves to legitimize the activity and utility of waste pickers, whereby extending greater assertion and influence to these groups. With appropriate leadership, they have managed to canalize intentions and articulate concerns, guide demands, and further mobilize and influence decision making (ibid). As part of a process of empowerment, cooperative bodies ensure not only representation of interests, but seek to establish new basis of partnerships which further strengthen their position in the solid waste management systems (Giraldo 2009). Beyond recognition from society and government, other actors including universities and foundations continue to invest time and money in the development of skills that allow cooperatives to form attractive contract bids, improve personal and organizational skills, and further negotiate with third parties beyond the realm of government- third sector partnerships. They are continuously embedding themselves in the economic and social aspects of their work and its effect on society.

It is interesting to observe that beyond the first implementation of the PMIRS, specifically between the years of 2008 and 2009, great successes at the levels of recognition and empowerment may be attributed to these cooperatives and the ARB, including the First World Conference and Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers, bringing together cooperatives from different regions of the continent and of the world to exchange best practices and methods to urge the recognition and pleas for active participation in local urban waste management. Further, March 1<sup>st</sup> was established as the National Day of the Waste Picker in Colombia, valorising both the waste pickers and the activities they perform (Wiego 2008). It has further been announced over the summer of 2009 that an agreement between the BID, Tetrapack and the ARB evaluated at \$1.8 million has been placed forward to create a economic cluster for the development of recycling (Giraldo 2009). As suggested by Berner, "to actively challenge the dominance system beyond local, reactive and spontaneous resistance, subordinate groups need alliances with factions of the upper class, in other words, existing or potentially strategic

groups” (Berner 2001: 124). Despite the prematurity of commenting on possible outcomes, it is important to highlight that by aligning energies with large established bodies, the ARB is taking a stance beyond dialogue with local government to legitimize their efforts and labour and further develop relationships with new strategic groups.

### *5.3.2 Redistribution and Access to Resources*

As this partnership between the Bid, Tetrapack and the ARB underlines, one of the greatest drawbacks from the PMIRS has been the lack of intentional investment in cooperative organizations which would strengthen and upgrade technical and technological capacity. By overlooking the fact that cooperatives perform a service yet earn their living according to a market logic, the government-proposed PMIRS misses the mark in identifying the ways in which these organizations may strengthen their stance within this market. Arguably if the UAESP is not willing or able to pay wages to waste pickers, then it must also recognize that investment in capital and training are necessary for organizations to competitively operate in service provision. This would allow for workers to further develop their skills and access assets that help upgrade processes to include such things as melting glass or plastic for reprocessing. In light of past developments and of the PMIRS, the issues of redistribution through improved access to resources at the level of the organization and of the individual is simply not addressed.

As stated above and iterated by Filion, one of the leading difficulties faced by small scale economic development initiatives “concern the limiting impact of the organizational and structural characteristics of CED (community economic development, it) ventures on their capacity to compete successfully with mainstream firms” (Filion 1998: 1112). He further argues that there isn’t sufficient flexibility and economies of scale to hold a competitive position in the industry (ibid). Flexibility and economies of scale are rooted both in organizational capacity and the capital investments cooperatives are able to make. With the exception of the 50 workers in La Alquería who operate government-owned machinery, waste pickers still operate with human or animal driven carts, resell their materials to a middleman and have limited opportunities to transform these materials beyond personal reuse of well preserved residues. Competitiveness insinuates a largely different picture.

Initially, limited access to capital has meant that waste pickers continue to rely on labour intensive methods, which on a cost-benefit-efficiency scale lose out compared to capital intensive methods. Waste pickers in countries such as Brazil and Argentina have lobbied strongly to obtain financing to upgrade their technologies, something that has altogether been a flaw of the Colombian, and specifically the Bogotá experience (Arroyo Moreno et al. 1999). Without access to capital, the trucks necessary to transport materials, the yards necessary to temporarily store materials, and the machinery necessary to transform the materials into industrial inputs limits the ability to capture additional segments of the waste value-chain. The continued presence of junk-shop and industrial transformers mean that these middlemen continue to retain a portion of the value-added dimensions of reprocessing waste, thereby forgoing the opportunity of cooperatives to upgrade in the value chain.

In practice, the lack of immediate investment by the state, and the limited access to capital, especially given the massive failure of the credit cooperative movement in Colombia in the late 90's, has meant that both the ability to capture a greater proportion of the value of materials, and the overall fluctuation of prices derived from the sale of the materials is left unaddressed, creating a vicious circle of marginal and fluctuating incomes which encourage limited reinvestment (Arango 2006: 24). Effectively, the lack of competitiveness relative to the private sector, compounded by limited opportunities for growth and capture in the value chain reaffirm the inability of waste pickers to observe a significant change in their socio-economic access. In fact, one of Padilla's greatest challenge as the director of the ARB is to continue to place pressure on the government so that they implement a guaranteed price of material per ton as a way of encouraging stability in waste pickers' revenues, because, as she states, even though cooperatives can negotiate a better price with industry as compared to individual waste pickers, there is still a concrete need to provide income security and stability (Padilla Herrera 2009).

### 5.3.3 *Additional Considerations*

While this context illustrates that social economy organizations have had more success in the *representation* analytical dimension of social justice than its *redistribution* counterpart, two crucial elements come into play. As Berner highlights, "information has become a critical resource for all actors striving for dominance (...) In the emerging knowledge society expertise is not only required to devise successful strategies but also to legitimize the privileges arising from them" (Berner 2001: 121). Arguably, knowledge helps offset disadvantages born out of a lack of information, allowing access to evolve beyond the previous institutionalized barriers. It is important to highlight that information is itself a resource which may reduce the asymmetries in the system, whereby looking beyond resources merely as embodied by physical capital. Simply put, information regarding the formalities to place bids for government contracts mean that cooperatives can legitimize their presence and relationship to the government and community agents, increasing their proximity and familiarity to formal actors and spheres of work.

Information is often embodied by the dialogue and linkages with external actors, which have proven to create a second very important dimension overcoming downfalls of competitiveness: that of building institutional arrangements that assure the rights of waste pickers as citizens and as workers. Based on the strong national cooperative policy and substantial legal advice, these organizations have managed to overcome discriminatory laws which curb waste pickers' access to the public sphere, not only on the basis of recognition but in terms of their legal rights. The creation of these institutional arrangements has effectively been the enabling environment for both past and future efforts towards representation and redistribution.

#### 5.4 The Social Economy and Institutional Poverty

In light of these findings and analysis, it is important to recognize that organizations of the social economy have concrete limitations. By observing this case study, cooperatives can in fact lead the battle for recognition by empowering their members to use these entities as platforms to engage in social and political discussion regarding policies that affect their status, but it would be naïve to ascertain that they effectively represent the entire waste picker community. As stated in the previous chapter, it is estimated that between eleven and thirty percent of waste pickers are part of these cooperatives, whereby leaving the greatest portion of workers outside the realm of their benefits. Whether due to personal or organizational impediments, these bodies effectively represent the interest of a small portion of the larger community, which would lead me to highlight that the social economy holds contiguous mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, distributing benefits primarily to those who are included rather than to the whole population it is assumed to represent. In other words the cooperatives represent a building block out of fragmented waste picking activities which yield certain benefits, yet these benefits remain limited partially in their scope, and mostly in their reach.

The noted limitations in accessing resources for upgrading and the stabilization of incomes brings us to reflect further; it is not merely a question of organizing people in hopes of raising the decibel level regarding their interests and concerns; it is a question of understanding the strategic elements that alter the condition of these individuals as social *and* economic actors. As previously stated and further illustrated in Figure 2.5, cooperatives hold incentives that brings them to operate on the fringe of private sector and civil society logic, meaning that there is a need to assess the course and nature of activities to evaluate their impact on growth and the strengthening of these enterprises so as to become competitive relative to other private actors that increasingly dominate waste management. In order to avoid obsolescence over the long term, a market analysis would lead us to view the importance of upgrading the skills and equipment of cooperatives in order to compete against the private firms who hold the technical and technological knowledge to continue capturing segments of the value chain. As cooperative entities, the ability to reinvest is dictated by the ability to set aside a portion of total revenues to this end. Yet in the case of low and fluctuating materials prices, the priority of cooperative members is to ensure their wellbeing before further reinvesting.

Returning to the initial conceptualization of institutional poverty, a central explanatory element characterizes the process of deprivation as rendering individuals more vulnerable to fluctuations or unexpected events relative to other members of society (Sindzingre 2007, Cariola 2002, Baulch and Hoddinott 2000: 19). If cooperative bodies do not succeed at stabilizing material prices, whereby failing at stabilizing incomes, what emerges is a circle of marginal returns and marginal reinvestments. This creates compounded generational effects. If families continue to struggle to feed themselves on a daily basis, they surely will continue to bring their children to work with them,

limiting future educational opportunities or posing health risks they are incapable of overcoming without decent incomes or access to social security. On an individual basis, education and health, both recognized inputs in the development of capabilities that help build the skills to overcome disadvantages, are foregone.

Arguably the presence of external actors which foment the exchange of information, address legal structures and assist in legitimizing the work of waste pickers may broaden opportunities by further assisting in accessing resources and assets, without which activities continue unabated. In this respect, and under the perspective of forming new modalities for service delivery through partnerships, the complementarities of activities is central to reallocating individuals and their processes according to a critical analysis that acknowledges the heterogeneity of the population, the nature of activities and the divergent interests hoping to be achieved simultaneously by distinct stakeholders. Ultimately yes, the institutional landscape has shifted positively in favour of the representation and linkage of cooperative groups with external actors. Yet relying on the benevolence or voluntarism of these actors can create a relationship of dependency, and certainly does not guarantee to overcome an important shortfall embedded in the social economy which effectively distribute social recognition in spite of redistributing activities that generate unstable or insufficient revenues for patterns of consumption and investment to be altered at the individual or organizational levels. In other words, without the capability of addressing both recognition *and* redistribution, the social economy foments a vicious circle of economic marginality and remains an outfit of organized poverty.



## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

The importance of analyzing the issue of waste picking is that it represents the intersection of two increasingly pertinent topics of concern to our societies; poverty and waste. On one hand, the polarization of societies into rich and poor demonstrate a tendency of wealth concentration, reflective of patterns of access to political and economic spheres which are largely directed by the interests and priorities of the elite groups at the head of many states. This entails that those who are structurally left outside the formal institutions and spheres of influence that create these cycles of accumulation, are often entangled in fluctuating and unstable conditions as a result of marginal access to economic, social and political life. On the other hand, waste is also becoming a predicament in virtually all societies where consumption and waste flows expand. This corresponds to a shift in values where consumerism embodies the metropolitan lifestyle which results from an increased in living standards and international appeal. Waste is indeed a deeply political issue that involves both vertical and horizontal conflicts between and amongst waste pickers, cooperatives, private and public sector entities and society at large, and whose impacts are increasingly visible as trends of consumption and disposal alter the nature, quantity and organization of waste and of the various groups working and earning value from the proceeds of residual materials.

As waste picking continues to provide income generating activities for the poor in absence of formal employment opportunities, the important shift in waste picking from an atomized undertaking to an organizational base provides a platform where the poor can become social actors within the local governance framework. In a time where the discourse on public services has evolved beyond delivery by state or private actors, it now accounts for the inclusion of the third sector, in this case the social economy represented by cooperatives who form alternate networks of organization that hope to reinstate social justice in production relations which have arguably been stripped by neoliberal thought from any logic beyond efficient economic dimensions. Social justice bring us to reflect on dimensions of *recognition* as overcoming injustices in patterns of representation and *redistribution* as overcoming injustices in socio-economic patterns (Fraser 1999). The question, however, is whether these cooperative bodies serve as an effective platform to overcome both of these deficiencies in a way that tackles the institutionalized nature of poverty.

The new modalities of service delivery implemented in Bogotá serve as an important case study as both waste picker associations and government entities engaged in this project. Overlooking each other's particular interests largely undermined the ability of these actors to form a true partnership built on mutual understanding of needs and aspirations, and which would surely be more propitious to develop a critical understanding of the heterogeneity of the individuals, activities and current organization of the recycling circuit. The consequences have been to foster partial separation at source, formal and informal agents operating side by side with households capturing part of the

monetary value of waste, limiting the overall residues sent to the recycling parks and finally foregoing many formal positions for waste pickers to reallocate within the chain. All these results are quite counterintuitive when considering the original drive to institute ISWM.

If the plan has been largely unsuccessful at reorganizing and mainstreaming waste processes, what have we learned regarding the ability of cooperative bodies to restore social justice in production relations? Recognition can be identified as the primary benefit brought forward by organized groups whose linkages with external actors and legal challenges of the regulatory regime transformed the institutional landscape which had originally been responsible for overlooking their activities. Waste pickers today are front runners in contract bids, are socially and environmentally engaged agents, and are increasingly valued as multidimensional stakeholders, not as trash. In the sense of redistribution, however, successes have fallen significantly short of projections, initially segmenting the waste picking population further between three beneficiary groups, with 50 out of a total of 8,479 accessing what may be considered formal employment conditions. The second group is composed of organized waste pickers falling outside the reach of jobs like those at La Alquería, whose situation is left largely unaltered due to lack of investment in targeted skill formation or the capital goods required for competitiveness relative to private sector entities or to capture new segments of the value chain (such as operating transportation or reprocessing waste to create added value to the recovered materials). The third group, which represent at least two-thirds of the waste picking population, continue to operate individually and on a piecemeal basis, side-by-side with the formal system and without any linkages to organizations that may help move their position away from marginality.

Filion clearly underlines the contradiction posed by these social economy organizations as he states they are currently “caught between, on the one hand, growing interest in this movement in a climate of economic difficulties and yearning for community economic empowerment and, on the other hand, a paucity of resources required for the success of its enterprises” (Filion 1998: 1118). Without considering the economic incentives and payoffs of the wider market, social economy enterprises will compete at a disadvantage against other private sector actors whose motivation is to fine tune and mainstream process for maximal efficiency and reduced cost. Governments are hard pressed to find ways to expand service delivery while containing costs, and it is therefore important for organizations engaged in new modalities of service delivery to be competitive amongst the potential service providers so as to avoid obsolescence. Ironically the social economy is based in the tenet that economic action is embedded in social relations, yet it sustains itself by operating as in a vacuum, implanted outside of an economic logic where competitiveness in price, efficiency or quality is the best reflection of choice, whether this is on the basis of an individual consumer or a government contract. In this sense investment, whether in knowledge, skills, machinery or capital is more than desirable, it is fundamental.

Nonetheless, boiling down the argument merely to economic shortfalls would narrowly define multiple dimensions of success and failure. The PMIRS

addressed the issue of child labour, despite providing very limited options to overcome the problem, but has fostered greater debate at the cooperative level regarding the implication of having children contribute on a full time basis to work rather than to invest in their educational development. In this sense, the PMIRS goes beyond issues of employment to offer considerations (rather than solutions) at the level of education and access to healthcare, both central in developing the capabilities necessary to overcome in the long term, structures of poverty.

In a way, the greatest successes of these social networks has been to provide previously marginalized individuals a platform for dialogue and representation, moving forward issues of recognition all the while providing an informal welfare systems to its members, which goes to support Filion's claim that when social justice falters in society, then self-sustaining economic activity is used as a substitute to a more thorough form of democratic determination and participation that is enjoyed by the non-poor (Filion 1998: 1109). In this way, cooperatives, as representative organizations of the social economy have altered the institution of poverty by combining the benefits of collective voice with those of external actors to alter the institutional landscape. It successfully does so, however, only for its members which represent a minute segment of a larger population which is left largely unaccounted and impaired by the narrow vision and reorganization of productive units and recycling flows. In fact, a new environmental law in the city, the *Comparendo Ambiental*, has gone further to virtually criminalize informal and unorganized waste picking activities by targeting individuals that open bags on the street for hefty fines summing to the equivalent of two months work (Canalrcn 2009). Taking into consideration these existing segments is the first step to reorganize the productive and operational processes of recycling units.

The remaining question is why should there be such urgency or emphasis in combining these different groups in a complex system when the cost of organizing is so high? The reason is that the issue of waste management is one that impacts all members within and across societies. In the words of the DANE report, from a macro point of view, residues are a collective product of consumption, and recycling represents a long term collective benefit (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004). Benefits are multidimensional and reach into many fields including perspectives ranging from public health, environment, industry, service delivery and poverty alleviation. As the resources fuelling our economies, production and way of life become harder to extract, we are witnessing the rise of the globalization of waste flows, with emitting and receiving countries transferring millions of tons annually to alleviate resources overproduction and misallocation. Colombia alone exported 23,888 tons of waste in 2002 to countries such as China and the United States, yet continues to extract virgin materials as inputs for production (ibid). The reorganization and management of residues is part of a holistic approach for the efficient reutilization of resources for productive capacity, all the while intelligently contributing to boosting the utility of the poor as economic agents active in a profoundly environmental and social issue. It is a matter of recognizing that our patterns of consumption are inextricably linked with our patterns of disposal and conservation, and in this way, we are all interdependent on the

labour of different agents to coherently improve the system. Waste is universal and its management affects everyone; a growing priority is therefore emerging, where recognizing and improving the conditions for those who are actively contributing to the waste cycle can yield positive spillovers for us all.

## Appendices

### Appendix I

Population Breakdown Based on Age and Sex

	<b>Total Number</b>	%Value	<b>Men</b>	%Value	<b>Women</b>	%Value
<b>Dependent population</b>	<b>18506</b>		<b>9476</b>	51.2 %	<b>9030</b>	48.8 %
<b>Full time waste pickers</b>	<b>8479</b>		<b>4704</b>	55.5 %	<b>3775</b>	44.5%
Between 5-17 years	<b>2800</b>	33 %	<b>1769</b>	63.2 %	<b>1031</b>	36.8 %
Between 18-40 years	<b>3815</b>	45 %	<b>1920</b>	50.3 %	<b>1895</b>	49.7%
Between 41- 60 years	<b>1489</b>	17.6 %	<b>786</b>	52.8 %	<b>703</b>	47.2 %
60 years +	<b>374</b>	4.4 %	<b>228</b>	61 %	<b>146</b>	39 %

### Appendix II

Success Rate of Inclusionary Mechanisms

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Programmed</b>	<b>Executed</b>	<b>% of Execution</b>
1	47 organizations linked	39 organizations	82.98
2	4 recycling parks constructed	2	50
3	800 formal jobs (in recycling parks)	30	3.75
4	80% of child labour eradicated	10.36	12.95
5	20 projects for materials transformation	5	25
6	1 workshop for organizational strengthening	1	100
7	2800 capacitated in alternative revenue schemes	120	4.29

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