

THE ROLE OF THE CITY COUNCIL IN A COLOMBIAN CITY: BARRANQUILLA AS A CASE STUDY*

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Resumen

Este trabajo discute el rol del Concejo Distrital en una ciudad colombiana y su relación con otros actores, particularmente con el alcalde. Mediante entrevistas a la elite política y encuestas al público en general, el trabajo explora el rango de acción del Concejo y de qué manera logra incidir en los resultados o decisiones políticas en la ciudad. Por medio del análisis de tres casos de estudio de diferente impacto para la ciudad, se argumenta que el Concejo está al servicio del alcalde en todas las dimensiones de las decisiones estudiadas. Adicionalmente, no se cuenta con una sociedad civil que ejerce control social permanente sobre los actos del Concejo, y esto, junto con la presencia de una debilidad institucional del Estado, facilita este comportamiento por parte del mismo.

Palabras claves: Concejo municipal o distrital, sociedad civil, elite política, Estado.

Abstract

This paper discusses the role of the City Council in a Colombian city and its relationship with other actors, particularly the mayor. Through interviews to the political elite of the city and mass public survey data, I explore the range of action of the council and to what degree it is able to shape political outcome in Barranquilla. Using three case studies of public decisions with different scope of influence I contend that regardless of the type of decisions or the scope of action, the city council serves at the Mayor is pleasure. In addition, there is no real sense of accountability exercised by civil society over the council and this, together with a weak institutional development of the state fosters the council's behavior.

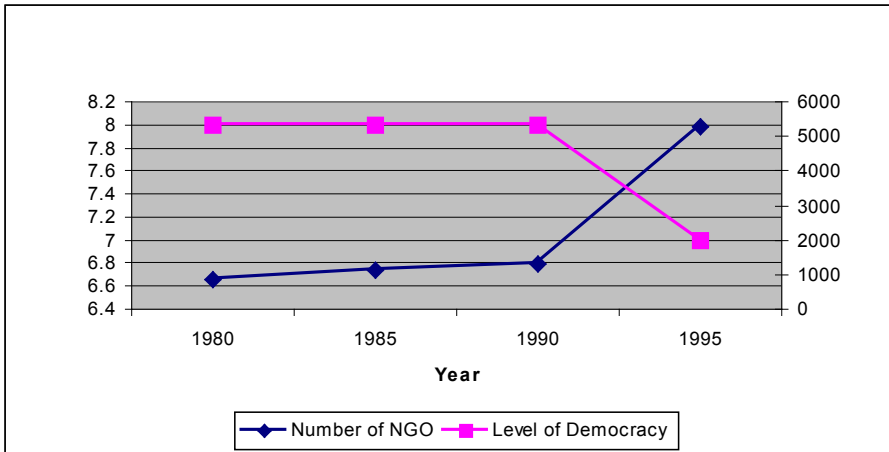
Key words: City council, civil society, political elite, state.

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Introduction¹

This paper is part of a major project that addresses the relationship between civil society and democracy². Neo-Tocquevillian scholars posit that a dense and vibrant civil society is positively correlated with the quality of democracy. Therefore, by increasing the number of groups and associations in a particular society, we will be fostering democratic consolidation (Putnam, 1993; Chazan, 1994; Gellner, 1994; Diamond, 1994; Foley and Edwards, 1996; Tarrow, 1996; Seligson, 1999; Huntington, 1968; Berman, 1997; De Tocqueville, 1840; Encarnacion, 2000). However, in some societies like Colombia, we find a negative correlation between number of groups and democracy (Villar, 2001). If, according to scholars, a vibrant and dense civil society is needed for democracy to deepen, then why is Colombia's democracy decaying as the number of its NGOs or civil society organizations is increasing? (figure 1).



Source: Number of NGO: Directory of NGOs in Colombia. Fundación Social; Level of Democracy: Democracy Score Polity III.

Figure 1
 NGO and democracy in Colombia
 1980-1995

¹ The data provided for this work was gathered during 2000-2002. Therefore the findings relate to that period. There are new developments in the city that will need to be discussed in a later paper.

² Research Project funded by: The Pennsylvania State University, PA. USA and Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia.

I believe that the answer lies not in the number of NGOs, but in their behavior, specifically in their involvement or not in policy-making. In the major project I contend that scholars fail to consider the actual effect that groups and associations have on democracy, as many groups that exist are not able to participate in the process of policy-making. Using survey analysis, interviews, participatory observation and content analysis, I study this topic by centering the analysis on three main political actors: the political or ruling elite, civil associations, and the mass public³. My findings indicate that an organized, strong and able civil society, together with an open and accessible local government are necessary – but not sufficient- conditions for democratic consolidation.

When studying the relationship between elected representatives and the state several findings proved interesting as it was clear that in a society with the characteristics found in Barranquilla, there is a limited role for elected bodies. In this paper I discuss the political dynamics in Barranquilla and how the process of policy-making is centered on the executive, more precisely on the Mayor.

I support my conclusions on the discussion of three main examples that describe how a project or idea is turned into policy in Barranquilla and identify the role that the administration, civil society representatives and elected bodies have in each case.

For this paper I have selected three issues that were discussed in Barranquilla during the from 2001 to August 2003 period. Each has a different characteristic as the radio of influence and impact varies across the city. The first case is the decision over the massive transportation system that is being considered for Barranquilla; the second case refers to the implementation of new parking zones proposed by the mayor's office and the third issue is related to the transformation of the functions of Local Administrative Boards whose members are popularly elected. All these cases had ample discussion through the major newspapers of the city and each has different impact. The case of the massive transportation system affects the entire population and more particularly those that use public transportation, which is around 80% of the population. The case

³ From July 2001 to August 2003 field research was undertaken in Barranquilla. 600 surveys were applied to the public, 94 surveys were conducted of NGO and social groups, and 60 interviews were done to the political and ruling elite (members of the administration, city councilors, politicians, and members of the private sector).

of the parking zones has a major impact on the car owners around the sites where the zones were to be build or adapted and the issue related to the local administrative boards has a more limited effect as the impact is mainly directed towards those elected and their functions.

The main focus of the argument presented here lies on the idea that in order to comprehend and explain civil society's engagement in policy-making, it is necessary to perform an integrated analysis where the different spheres of power are considered (Migdal, 1994, 2001; Katzenstein, 1978). In this sense, it is not enough to identify the density of civil society, or the amount of individuals that participate in groups and associations; it is also necessary to assess the perceptions and behavior of the state, and most importantly, the local administration.

I argue that if we are confronted with a weak state, and a weak civil society, it is expected that the local administration will be strong and able to execute non-democratic behaviors. To be sure, the lack of counterbalance among the former actors, allows the administration to be closed to citizen and group participation, which at the end, has an impact on the intensity of local democracy and the degree of system accountability (Migdal, 2001: 64; Downs, 1999).

In the next sections I discuss the methodology used, offer an overview of the city, its socioeconomic indicators, and the political structure. I continue by presenting the cases mentioned above and follow with a discussion of how the relationship between these three actors characterize the city. I will give special attention to the behavior of the city council and the image the citizens have over it.

Methodology

In order to study civil society and its interaction in Colombia, I designed a multi-actor research strategy that allows for a comprehensive view of how citizens take part in the political process in a medium size city called Barranquilla. Through interviews and survey analysis supported with newspaper research and secondary sources, the main work presents the experiences and perceptions of the most important actors in the city: the political elite, social groups and the mass public. In this particular paper I use the findings of the political elite in order to support my argument.

The Political Elite

Although Barranquilla is a city of more than 1.2 million inhabitants, there is a group of people that could be identified as the main political actors and leaders in the city. As such, it is possible to recognize traditional politicians who have dedicated their professional life to act as political leaders, competing in popular elections, and serving as senators, representatives, Mayors, council members or the like. There are also those that represent second-generation politicians – sons, daughters or in-laws of traditional politicians.

Within this group of influential actors we also find those individuals that are currently exercising power as members of the administration or as elected officials be it council members, or neighborhood/commune representatives. Although they might not have a long history as political actors, public officials have access to certain degree of power that makes them important for our research. It is through these officers that public policy is not only executed, but also many times made. Knowing their views and attitudes towards citizen and group participation is crucial in understanding the factors that hinder or foster such involvement.

Other key actors we need to consider within the political elite, are those individuals that although not having an elected position, are well respected within the city and regarded as thoughtful and influential because of their economic status or business activity. These individuals many times represent economic guilds, business associations, or industry. For example, comments or criticism made by the Chief Executive of the Chamber of Commerce or by the president of one of the main industries of the region, are always reported in the main newspaper of the region and voiced through the radio, too. For this project it is important to be able to interview and know the position and beliefs of these individuals.

In order to select the group of people to interview, I divided my attention in two different sectors: 1) the administration, and 2) all other influential individuals. Identifying those to interview within the administration was simple; I requested to interview each cabinet member (9) by sending them a letter presenting the project and asking them to kindly participate. I followed up with phone calls and e-mail messages. As I was able to interview some of the city officials, they

helped me contact some of their colleagues and asked them to give some of their time to see me. Within this group I included elected officials as council members and neighborhood / commune representatives.

As there are 21 Council members for Barranquilla I invited all of them to participate in the study by giving their views in an interview. For those that asked to have some questions in advance I sent a protocol of topics and interests that I needed to cover during our talk (Casper, 1995). Concerning neighborhood / commune representatives, I used a different method. As the city is divided in 21 communes and each commune has a Local Administrative Board (*Junta Administradora Local- JAL*) of 7 to 11 representatives, I asked to interview the president of each board. The district office of citizen participation provided the list of names and addresses.

For the second group of actors that exercise some influence in the city, I used a combination of methods to identify who they were. To start, I created a first list of individuals that appeared several times and seemed to be involved in issues concerning the city and its policies through newspaper research. Then, using the snowball technique, as I interviewed some of them I asked them to indicate one or two individuals that they considered important for me to interview and learn about their experience and views (Casper, 1995; Baumgartner, 1989). In addition, I requested interviews from those individuals mentioned by more than one interviewee, even if they were not in the newspaper or were not apparently well known.

During more than a year I interviewed 58 members of the political elite in the city. Within the group I was able to include local cabinet members, city council members, Local Administrative Board members and positioned individuals –those that although not in power, exercise pressure at the local level i.e. former mayors or senators. The purpose of studying this group of actors is to know to what degree do their daily activities include interaction with social groups. If their job required social group participation, how was it handled; which is their perception of what makes social groups efficient and what hinders their participation, and if they believe participation is always positive.

Each interview lasted around one hour. I started by describing the purpose of the project and why it was important to know their

views and made special emphasis on the degree of confidentiality and anonymity they would receive. If I was interviewing a city official I continued the interview by asking him/her to describe the issues that had their attention at the moment and then explored who they were working with and to what degree were they familiar with the participatory spaces provided for the community. In case the interview was with one of the elected officials, I asked them to give their views about their participatory experience, how they would describe the policy-making process in the city and who they perceived to be more powerful in Barranquilla (see Appendix A).

This set of interviews not only allowed me to know the views of political actors and leaders, but also gave me an insight into the political context of the city, the internal dynamics between members of the local government and the degree of legitimacy that local officials have among these actors. This information was also useful to compare with the one gathered from the other actors of the study -mass public and social groups- as they were also asked to respond in similar terms.

Barranquilla

While in most Latin American countries industrialization led to development concentration in one major city, in Colombia, due to topographic difficulties we find several development centers throughout the country (Galvis and Meisel, 2001: 68). In this sense, Colombia is a country of regions with central cities in each region: Central Region - Medellín, Pacific Region - Cali, Oriental Region-Bogotá and Caribbean Region - Barranquilla. Barranquilla as the central city of the Caribbean Region is located on the northern part of the country with shores on the Caribbean Sea.

Barranquilla, the capital of the Atlantic department (*Departamento del Atlántico*) and regional center was formed around 1629 as a spontaneous settlement but it was established as a Villa in 1813 by the Spanish government where import and export activities took place. Based on its development as an area of increased population and commercial exchange, in 1857 the Villa was erected a city (González, 2004).

Barranquilla became the center for immigrants, engineers, technicians and national and international businessmen that found in the city

a cultural climate that encouraged commercial and industrial activities, which contributed with the city's industrial development in the 20th century. According to scholars, no town in Colombia experienced a radical change as strong as the one Barranquilla faced thanks to the influence of immigrants and foreigners that brought with them expertise, know how and a positive attitude towards business and commerce in general (Parada, 2000: 294-295).

Taking advantage of its position as a sea and river port, the city started to develop as an important business and industrial center during the first part of the 20th century. Accordingly, Barranquilla was one of the four main cities in the country with similar population and economic development as Medellín, Cali, and Bogotá (Galvis and Meisel, 2001: 69). However, by the end of the 1940s, Barranquilla started to lose its presence and dynamism due to the opening and competition of Buenaventura's Port on the Pacific coast of Colombia (1935), the import substitution model adopted by the nation since the 1930s and the narrowing of the internal market in the Caribbean Region because of the agrarian pattern based on cattle raising by large state owners. The winners of the nation-wide import-substitution model were the cities known as the «Golden Triangle» formed by Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali (Meisel, 1993). According to many scholars in the region, the cities that were part of the Golden Triangle were always the focus of major efforts of public investment and projects that led to their development. Indeed, Galvis and Meisel (2001) argue that today the most prosperous cities tend to be located around the Andes or center of the country, and the least dynamic on the periphery, especially along the northern coast (70-73).

Since the late 1960s Barranquilla received a strong rural migration that generated great pressures on the basic infrastructure of the city i.e. water, sewage, electric power, health, education, main roads, and the like that generated a change of the political structures fostering clientelism, and corrupt practices and deepening fiscal problems. At the same time, industrial growth began to falter being unable to absorb increasing labor surplus coming from the rural-urban migration process.

By 1995 the municipality was deeply in debt. According to a study-called the «Montenegro Report»- funded by the Chamber of Commerce

and the thinking tank *Fundesarrollo* by 1996 there were signs of clear lack of expenditure for education, health and the coverage of basic needs. Findings of a follow-up of Montenegro's study, determined that by 2000 the financial crisis of the city paralyzed the administration and prevented any further public expenditure on social welfare (Montenegro and Vargas, 2000). To give an idea of where the city is, a recent study by the National Planning Office (*Planeación Nacional*) classified Barranquilla in the place 572 out of 1068 municipalities in the country. This ranking means that the city is well below other medium and small cities. The ranking was done based on the percentage of income used for government expenditure consumption, the amount of debt, the percentage of income that comes from national state grants, the percentage that comes from local income, the percentage used for investment and the saving capacity of the district.

In addition, during the last decade the majority of *Barranquilleros* earned less than the minimum wage as income. According to recent studies, by 2000, 84.7% of citizens earned less than the minimum wage compared to 73.6 % in 1990, and the population with earnings over six times the minimum wage decreased from 6.2% in 1990 to 2.6% in 2000 (Beltrán and Hernández, 2002).

Other indicators show that the city, as many cities in Colombia and the hemisphere, continues to struggle for survival (see table 1). For example, little more than 40% of the population with low or no income has health coverage in 2000. In 1997 the city had only about 50% of the population with health service. Regarding education things are not any different. By the beginning of 1990, Barranquilla had 60% coverage for pre-school compared to 57% in 2000, 89% for elementary compared to 81% in 2000, and 69% for high school in 1990 compared to 70% in 2000 (Beltrán and Hernández, 2002).

In sum, the economic crisis that started by the end of the 1950s influenced Barranquilla's political development as the state and its institutions were not able to face the social crisis that affected the city. Scholars claim that clientelistic behaviors had their origins during this time as people negotiated a roof or piece of land and materials for their votes and political support⁴ (Camacol, 1990; Bell and Villalón, 2000).

⁴ Indeed, by 1965, 15% of the population lived on subnormal areas with no public services

Table 1
Socio-Economic Indicators Barranquilla 1990, 1997, 2000

INCOME INEQUALITY	1990	2000
Income Less than minimum wage	73.6%	84.7%
Income higher than six times minimum wage	6.2%	2.6%
HEALTH COVERAGE	1997	2000
Percentage of covered citizens	50%	40%
EDUCATION	1990	2000
Pre-school coverage	60%	57%
Elementary	89%	81%
High School	69%	70%

Political Structure

In order to have a clear understanding of politics in the city, it is important to know how power is organized and the political structure the city follows (Banfield, 1961). According to the 1991 National Constitution Colombia is a democratic, participant, pluralist unitary Republic with decentralized territorial entities (Art. 1). The national territory is politically divided in 32 departments, 4 districts, and 1097 municipalities (Hernández, 2002). Within the limits imposed by the Constitution and the law, each territorial unit is autonomous to handle the issues that directly affect their interests. In this sense they are entitled to choose their government officials, administer resources and impose taxes when deemed necessary. State and local entities are also entitled to national rents (Art. 287).

At the local level, each municipality has a popularly elected Mayor who acts as city manager, political leader, and legal representative of the municipality. This public official is to be elected for 4 years with no immediate re-election. According to the National Constitution, it is the Mayor's responsibility to enforce the constitution, the law and other governmental decrees as well as state and local decisions. In addition, as the main police authority in the city, the Mayor shall guarantee

or infrastructure; in 1990 16.3% of the population belongs to low-low income groups, and 27.5% belong to low-income bracket for a total of almost 44% of citizens earning less than two minimum wages (Bell and Villalón, 2000: 270).

public order within its territory. It is also within the Mayor's attributes to present proposals to the municipal council regarding economic and social development, public works, municipal budget and other issues directly related with the activities of a territorial entity.

Twenty-one (21) popularly elected individuals for a period of 4 years with possibility of immediate reelection form the municipal council. The council is considered as an *administrative corporation* with specific functions such as to approve the plan and programs proposed by the Mayor, authorize the Mayor to sign contracts and for a specific period of time to assume functions that are regularly performed by the council. It is also the council's function to discuss and approve the annual budget for the administration and to regulate the use of the territory within the limits of the law.

In accordance with the national commitment to foster community participation in public affairs, councils are allowed to divide the municipalities in communes (*comunas*) making it easier for individuals to relate with the political authority. Each commune has a Local Administrative Board (*JAL* – *Juntas Administradoras Locales*) composed by citizens popularly elected for a 4-year period. Each *JAL* has as its function to participate in the process of elaboration of municipal plans and programs concerning local economic, and social development. They are also asked to monitor and control how public utility companies perform their services in the commune and to be vigilant concerning the type of public investment that takes place in their area. *JALS* are authorized to present a bill for the council's discussion if it is directly related to their regular activities.

Thus, in Colombia, the municipal level has at least 3 entities that are popularly elected: the Mayor, the municipal council, and the local administrative boards. The Mayor and the municipal council appoint all other government officials. Therefore, politics in the city is concentrated on the relationship between the Mayor and the council as both carry popular legitimation through their election. *JALS* are not considered an important political actor as their members are elected with less than 5% of the votes required to elect a council member. In this sense, and as it will be discussed later on, their role as political actors is weak.

The relationship between the Mayor's office and the city council is determined by the functions that the National Constitution and by-laws

attribute to each. The initiative to present a bill for discussion within the council, lays on the Mayor, or any council member. The *personería*, comptroller or Local Administrative Boards are allowed to present a bill only for issues that specifically pertain to their functioning; in particular cases the mass public is allowed to file a bill for the council's consideration (Art. 71 Law 136/94).

In order for a bill to be approved as a 'municipal agreement' it has to be discussed in two debates in different days. The first debate shall take place in the commission assigned by the secretariat. The second debate will take place in plenary within 3 days of the commission's approval. If the commission rejects the bill it may be presented again. It will be filed if there is no approval for the second time. If a bill is approved by the plenary then it is sent within five days of its approval, to the Mayor for signature (Art. 73 - 76 Law 136/94).

The Mayor is allowed to object or veto a bill based on inconvenience or because it goes against the constitution, the law or an ordinance. If the bill has less than 20 articles the Mayor is asked to decide in 5 days; if the bill has from 21-50 articles the Mayor is able to study the bill for 10 days and if it has more than 50 articles will have up to 20 days to render a concept. If the council is not in sessions the Mayor is required to call for a special session within a week when the objections are made (Art. 78).

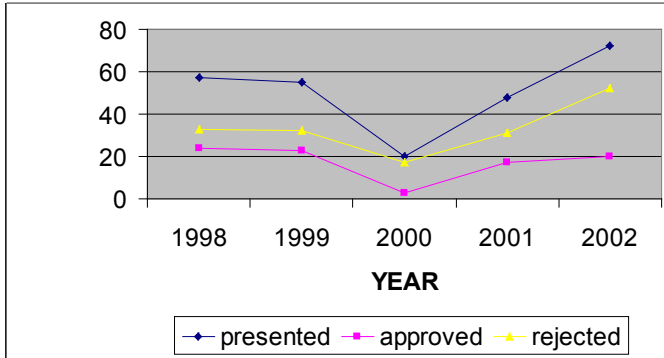
According to the law, the power of the Mayor's veto has different effects depending on the reasons that give support to the decision to veto the bill. If the veto is based on inconveniences, and the plenary rejects the veto, the Mayor is forced to sign the bill within 8 days. In case the Mayor refuses to sign, the council's president will do it and order its publication (Art. 79) (see figure 3).

If, however, the Mayor's objections are based on legal arguments –the bill goes against the constitution, law or ordinance– and the council rejects the objections, the Mayor shall send the bill to the Administrative Court within 10 days. The Court will study the bill and if it finds that the Mayor's reasons are appropriate the bill will be filed. If the court believes that the reasons expressed by the Mayor are not appropriate the Mayor shall sign the bill within 3 days. In addition, if the Court finds the bill partially inappropriate then it will ask the

council to reconsider. If the council reconsiders, the bill will be sent back to the Court for final consideration. Once the bill is signed it shall be published within 10 days in a newspaper with ample circulation or radio station (Art. 80-81).

From 1998 to 2002 the City Council in Barranquilla received 252 bills for consideration, 87 were approved and 165 rejected, which gives an average approval rate of 34%. However, during 2000 the approval rate went down to 15% as only 20 bills were presented and 3 approved as Figure 2 shows. This is important information as it relates to the dynamics played in the city. The year 2000 was an electoral year as the country was to elect governors, Mayors, council members and other local representatives. As on electoral period politics in the city are concentrated on electoral campaigns, alliances, agreements and issues directly related with the election city officials and political actors avoid major commitments and decisions that would compromise resources and bureaucratic quotas.

During this period the bills approved by the council were mainly related to issues concerning the general administration of the city and few were directed towards basic services and needs such as education or health. To be sure, 46 of the bills approved referred to projects related to taxes and budgeting, 12 to the central office and the rest were scattered around i.e. 5 for education, 3 for health, 1 for sports, 1 for public utilities, 1 for security, 1 for citizen participation and so on. Although this could be interpreted as a lack of attention to education or health, the reality is that the role of the council is to regulate and authorize especial programs or decisions on the part of the Mayor's office. What this information really indicates is that during this period the Mayor must have needed additional processes, authorizations or resources in order to accomplish what was planned in his program. In order to determine the degree of attention that the administration gives to those sectors in more need, it is necessary to direct our analysis to the District Investment Plan.



Source: City Council Archives, Barranquilla. Data gathered by the author

Figure 2
City Council activity 1998-2002

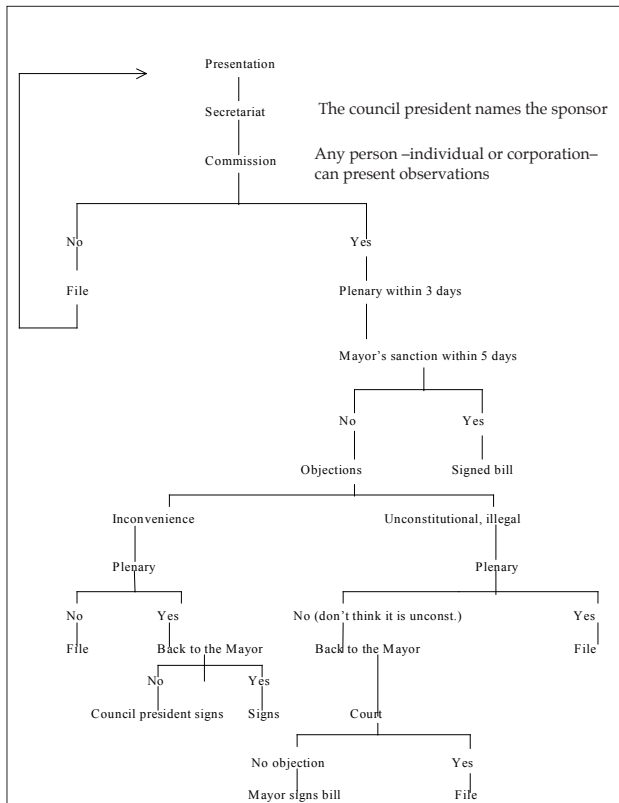


Figure 3
Policy-Making Process in Colombia - Municipal Level

The District Investment Plan includes all the projects presented by the administration, its representatives, the community or guilds that have been approved through the Development Plan for the District. In this sense, the Investment Plan offers a comprehensive view of the different investment activities to take place within the city. For example in 1998 there were, among others, 60 projects for education, 28 for health, 16 for citizen participation and 9 for security. This however, does not mean that all 60 projects for education were actually executed. In fact, out of these 60 projects, only 18 were completed (table 2).

As we can see from table 2, in order to know the real degree of investment and activity performed in a particular sector it is necessary to conduct a specific research identifying those projects that are executed in their totality. This however, is not an easy task. Many times I have found that it is not possible to conclude with a fair amount of certainty that a particular project was actually developed because from one instrument to the other the names change or the degree of specificity varies. For example, in the investment plan it is possible to find funds allocated for education i.e. for new schools, physical plant renewal, remodeling and the like. However, when reporting the execution of the budget, there is no indication of how many resources were devoted to particular schools or type of activities, it mainly says that certain amount was spent in education with no specification of individual projects.

It is important to place some attention to the issue of citizen participation during this period. Until 2001, the office of citizen participation had cabinet status; this means, besides having an appointed officer with the status of Secretary of Citizen Participation, the office had its own budget and representation within the Mayor's government council. With an administrative reform initiated in 2001, this office became a department within a new office called Social Secretariat. This office was to coordinate several programs related to social development like women issues, youth, senior citizens, and citizen participation. In other words, citizen participation went from being a Secretariat to being one more program.

What this reform means is that instead of giving more emphasis and resources for citizen involvement, the administration reduced the budget and personnel working for this issue. This is an example of how there tends to exist a divorce between legal norms and regulations

Table 2

Sector	NUMBER OF INVESTMENT PROJECTS APPROVED AND EXECUTED IN BARRANQUILLA											
	1998		1999		2000		2001		2002			
	Approved	Executed	Approved	Executed	Approved	Executed	Approved	Executed	Approved	Executed		
Mayor's office	8	3	16	8	11	7	13	1	1	3		
Treasury	5	4	5	2	4	1	2	1	1	1		
Security	9	4	11	6	3	2	5	2	1	3		
Public works	10	7	5	5	30	8	140	5	10	53		
Education	60	18	22	11	34	7	43	5	39	50		
Planning	20	8	21	6	7	1	15	9	7	10		
Communication	3	3	9	5	12	3	12	2	0	0		
Citizen Participation	16	7	20	7	20	12	18	6	4	12		
Health	28	3	16	9	12	8	24	18	21	14		
Acquisitions and supplies	8	4	15	6	10	4	10	3	0	0		

Source: Approved: District Planning Office, Investment Plans 1998-2002. Executed: District Treasury Office, Budget Unit, Executed investments 1998-2002.

and actual procedures as the 1991 National Constitution emphasizes the importance of offering participatory spaces for citizens to interact and get involved with issues that concern their well-being.

An additional indicator of the degree of attention that the administration gives to issues of citizen participation is the number of projects developed related directly to this topic. From 1998 to 2002, the administration presented 90 projects in the Investment Plan, executed 38, which is around 42% and only 10 projects were directly related to citizen participation (11% of all projects presented). A review of these projects show that most of the resources allocated for citizen participation are related to education and workshop activities where youth leaders, elected officials at neighborhood levels, and other interested citizens receive information on how to write proposals and present development projects. However, it is necessary to mention that in the year 2002, the project designed to consolidate and broaden youth organizations within the city, lost its funds for no apparent reason. In addition, programs that gave support and voice to citizen surveillance activities have been struggling during this period. Although the program was included in the Investment Plans of 1998, 1999, 2000 and 2001, only during 2000 it was able to execute 50% of the resources allocated for it, for all other years there were no resources, and in 2002 the program was not even included in the plan. Together with this, an additional project concerning support for citizen/civil culture in the district was only funded for 1998; after this year it was taken out of the plan (Investment Plan 1998 to 2002).

Political Dynamics in the City

From 1950 to 1988 Barranquilla had an unstable political system with an average of one Mayor every two years. Considered as one of the most corrupted and clientelistic societies in the country, Barranquilla and the rest of the municipalities in the country entered into a new phase with the popular election of Mayors in 1988 (Bell and De la Espriella, 1988). According to the 1986 Constitutional Reform, Mayors were to be elected for a three-year period. In the case of Barranquilla, the first election was questioned by the runner-up and after a prolonged period of legal procedures the Mayor (Gustavo Certain) was removed from power and the runner up (Jaime Pumarejo) was sworn in.

In 1991 the political history of the city was divided into before and after the election of the former priest Bernardo Hoyos. Hoyos, an immigrant from Medellín, was an active community leader working in one of the most deprived zones in the city, and with constant community works helped transform the surroundings of the southeastern part of Barranquilla. From an area full of served waters, it became a place of decent and adequate living for the community. Based on this work, Hoyos was asked to run for Mayor and with the increased support of low-low and low-income citizens, he won the election.

His leadership was different to say the least. During his first period in government (1991-1994), (he was reelected three years later) he concentrated on creating infrastructure, roads and upgrading the living conditions of those more in need. However, this was done while attacking those from 'the north' as he called them; citizens from the northern part of the city were those who had better income and living conditions, to whom he attributed responsibility for allowing people from the south to live in such deplorable state. His political manners created a wide gap between people in the city and the degree of polarization made for guilds and politicians to form alliances in order to prevent his protégé from winning the next elections.

However, Hoyos' political position was so strong that he was able to elect Edgar George as his successor and both promised to work in tandem to continue Hoyos' political and social reforms. This did not last long; after less than one year in power, George and Hoyos split and Hoyos decided to run again for Mayor in order to gain back political power lost with George's administration. This dispute led to a continuous confrontation between local political forces where the main interest was to harm or hinder each other from direct benefits. Council activity was as its minimum due to the permanent risk that the majority coalition would change. The obvious outcome of this was that the city failed to be oriented with leadership towards its development and was faced with selfish and narrow-minded politicians that increased clientelistic and patronage policies (Parada, 2000).

In 1997 Hoyos was reelected and this time his administration was faced with the challenge of recovering lost spaces and political strength. Although the first administration is considered good for Barranquilla and even better for those areas in real need, the second

term is widely questioned. For many, Hoyos' last term was surrounded by corruption, personal benefits, disregard for institutional procedures within the administration and signing of contracts that compromised the city's financial resources for more than 20 years i.e. Concesiones Los Angeles (Carbó, 2002). However, Hoyos claims that those contracts were necessary for the city, as they were the only way out because the municipality had lost all credits and the national government was not willing to help (Hoyos, 2002). He argues that thanks to signing those contracts he was able to pay salaries to the public employees that had not received payment for the last 8 months. It is also his impression that the second term was even better than the first and that it was due to envy and political jealousy that other groups criticized his administration.

Anyhow, after Hoyos' second term, the city elected Humberto Caiaffa who had the support of entrepreneurs, guilds and some social groups and was the clear opposite to Hoyos who had his own candidate. Although his administration was seen as the opportunity for Barranquilla to organize its finances and institutional procedures, many active political forces in the city were not happy. Constant confrontation between, in one side groups like the Chamber of Commerce, Fundesarrollo, Protransparencia and positioned individuals, and in the other the administration is palpable through newspaper news, editorials, official communications and the like. The situation was so critical that the aforementioned groups had to write to the President of the country (Alvaro Uribe) as a way of requesting his intervention. In one of Uribe's traditional community councils he called the Mayor's attention by saying that the city could not afford to be in between a childish confrontation, and that they needed to act as grownups (Televised community council; *El Extra*, 2002).

Although the 1986 Constitutional Reform called for popular election of Mayors as a way of deepening democracy, it seems that for Barranquilla this has not been the case. Albeit the continuity that a fix term grants to any administration, popular election has led to question administrations, to procedures where hard drives disappear after one administration so that the new has no historical information or databases (personal interview, Government Official, September 2002). In addition, there is the idea that regular individuals have no impact on the administration as the elections are most of the times tinted with

fraud i.e. Mayor election Certain - Pumarejo 1988, Governor election Ventura - Char 2000, null council elections for three councilors 2000.

In sum, Barranquilla's current situation can be analyzed from several points of view. In the economic realm the city is in crisis, it filed for Law 550, which is a bankruptcy regulation that freezes all major accounts until the city comes to an agreement with its creditors. Thus, there are no funds for social expenditure or to develop new projects. Besides, the great amounts of unbalanced contracts that create a huge burden for the city make its financial future very uncertain. In the political realm, we find a questioned administration that lost its credibility over the private sector, the community, the media and to a certain point the national government. On the same venue, the city council also shows signs of failure as it is seen as permissive towards the Mayor's regulations. Only one or two council members attempt to bring some dignity to the office and try to bring to the forefront discussions and regulations that benefit the city as a whole instead of particular actors (personal interview, group representative, September 2002). In the social arena we saw how the city is reaching dangerous levels of poverty and facing difficult crises in education, health, housing, transportation, electricity and security.

Decision – Making Process

In order to have a better understanding of the dynamics that take place between the power elite, the council and other groups in the city, will next I discuss three cases that provide insightful information. As mentioned before, the idea is to present issues with different scope of influence to determine if the role of the mayor or of the council varies according to the possible impact the policy has. In other words, does the role of the council vary depending on the scope of impact that a policy may have? Is it likely that the council will have greater saying on issues that have broader impact on the city?

Broad Scope Decision – Transmetro

Barranquilla's public transportation system is inefficient, dangerous and inadequate for the city and its metropolitan area. During the last 20 years the city has experienced changes concerning the number of vehicles that transit moving from 60.000 to 160.000. In addition the ac-

cident rate has increased from 1,621 in 1982 to 7,604 in 1998 (Chamber of Commerce, 2004).

In order to deal with the vehicular chaos and the limits of public transportation, the city has been discussing the idea of building a massive transportation system with funds from the national government and local resources. However, there is no agreement on the issue. Some consider that by changing the way current buses and transportation companies are organized it is possible to solve the problem of public transportation. This group believes that the problem lays on the way drivers are remunerated as they are paid by the number of passengers they have and the trips they make in a day. If, this group argues, drivers were compensated with a fixed salary and benefits, they would be less prone to speeding and competing among them for passengers, putting at risk not only those using the system, but also the community in general. Other set of actors believe that a city like Barranquilla with 1.2 inhabitants and around 300,000 commuters needs to have a reliable transportation system even if it entails demolition and re-building of most of the streets and areas where it should run.

The idea of a massive transportation system originated from a group of specialists whose intentions were to offer options regarding how to solve the problem of public transportation in Barranquilla. Coordinated by the Chamber of Commerce, the group included representatives of public and private entities such as the District Planning Office, District Environmental Office, Transit Authority, Universidad del Norte and the Chamber of Commerce among others. During almost 8 months from August 2000 to April 2001 the group worked to design a project that was later on given to the administration. The Mayor included the project as part of his government program.

However, as the transportation guilds (ANALTRA) were not included in the process, they became concerned with the idea of having such a system, as it could be a very strong threat for their business. Based on this, the guild decided to hire a consulting firm called Pablo Bocarejo and Associates from the capital city –Bogotá– to confront the initial proposal presented by the public and private entities.

According to the coordinator of the Urban Development Area of the Chamber of Commerce who led the process, the Bocarejo study reached

the same conclusions as the one offered by the first group changing the view the transportation guild had towards the project. After this, in July 2002, the administration decided to ask The National Planning Office to formally order a series of studies to analyze the real possibility of developing a massive transportation system in Barranquilla (*El Heraldo*, February 13, 2003, 6B).

The Planning Office assigned the contract to Bocarejo and Associates who presented the project in January 2003. However, for many people in the city, the report presented by this firm is not satisfactory. According to business guilds, NGO Protransparencia, surveillance Civic Community Group, Commerce Association (Fenalco), Construction Guild (Cama-col) and other NGOs like *Amor por Barranquilla*, and *Barranquillemos*, the recommendations and projects presented by Bocarejo lack rigor and do not address issues like the space available in the city to build this system (*El Heraldo*, February 13, 2003, 6B).

In addition, the Associations of Professional Architects and Engineers publicly declared that the specifications for the transportation system presented by Bocarejo and accepted by the administration were inadequate, lacked design and functionality and will likely generate chaos in the city. The groups, together with the Chamber of Commerce, the NGO Protransparencia, and other actors, presented professional and technical studies explaining how it was not possible to build and fund a massive transportation system the way the administration claims. In addition, these groups state that the government did not consult the project with the community or other entities that might contribute or be affected by the process, as is the case of the transportation companies currently running in the city.

Consequently, the discussion around the transportation system became a confrontation between the administration and groups and associations that disagree with the contents and implementation process assumed by the Mayor's office. From technical discussions related to whether or not the streets in the city were wide enough to handle the vehicles designed by the administration, to issues about the interest behind the administration. As the process developed, the administration started to criticize and belittle the comments made by those opposed and at the same time, the other group doubted the administration's intentions and the community started to consider the idea that the Mayor's office has

vested interests on assigning the contract to a company of their choosing (*El Herald*, February 20, 2003, 5A).

According to comments made by one council member that belongs to the minority coalition in the City council, those council members that belong to the ruling majority are pressuring the Mayor asking him for public jobs in exchange for a positive vote to approve the bill that deals with Transmetro.

There is a robotic majority. That tries to blackmail the Mayor asking for jobs to vote things, to behave and do not talk (El Herald, Feb. 5, 2003, 4B).

In other words, the issue of the massive transportation system for Barranquilla became one of negotiations between the administration and the council for approval. Although the council questions if the District has the economic resources required for the project, the bill was not discussed in terms of technical design, or pertinence. For a project of such magnitude it seems insufficient for the council to study and approve it in around 2 or 3 weeks, which means 4 to 6 sessions.

Commenting on the discussion process surrounding the initiative, the chief executive of an NGO stated:

We have our eyes on the issue of the Transmetro day and night. We are trying to create an interdisciplinary association to be able to fulfill our duty more effectively. This thing started with such unclear intentions, that even before the City Council approved the project there was an appointed manager and president of the future company that was to own Transmetro. But the puppet was disarmed immediately, because they need to realize that Barranquilla no longer remains quiet (El Herald, February 13, 2003, 6B)

However, in spite of the criticisms, formal complaints and technical reports presented by those against the project, the administration was able to secure the votes in the council and got the bill approved. NGOs and other groups are left with the feeling that there is no sense in spending time and money writing reports and proposals if the administration usually gets what they initially look for.

In this case the majority coalition of the city council worked in tandem with the mayor's office seeking community approval for the project as it has not only a citywide impact, but also an important economic

component regarding public contracts. In a sense, the community was concerned that vested and particular interests were the main motive city councilors had in order to support the project and not the collective benefit. This, generated doubts and distrust over the project.

What happened was that we do not know what is behind all this. The negotiation process is so complex that we are not able to visualize all the different arrangements and ties that this might create. Our position has been a technical one; the administration seems to be having a political or economic one. How do we work with such different goals? (personal interview, NGO representative, April, 2004).

Medium Scope Decision - Parking Zones

Based on the existence of a contract signed by the previous administration, the current Mayor decided to implement the project of creating parking zones within the city using paid meters. The Mayor's office has called the project «Yellow Zones» to indicate the color that will be placed in the authorized parking areas. According to the contract, a private company will be able to charge for the time and space vehicles use to park on certain areas of the city and give back to the District 15% of the total income (*El Heraldo*, September 5, 2002, Editorial). Most of the investment that the private company will have to execute is directed towards the arrangement of the areas to facilitate and control public parking (*El Heraldo*, September 29, 2002, 5A).

Associations, regular citizens and home and business owners of the areas where the parking zones will be habilitated complain for several reasons. First they claim that there has been no discussion or formal presentation of the project by the administration to the community (*El Heraldo*, August 16, 2003, 4A; August 23, 2002, 7C). There is scarce information regarding how the process works, how were the rates decided, which zones in the city will be affected, and how is the commitment of the contracting company towards the city and the financial arrangements included in the contract. In addition, many of those affected by the works, argue that installing meters around the city is not the solution. There is concern that the administration did not consider other options like building vertical parking spaces in abandoned buildings (*El Heraldo*, September 19, 2002, 4A).

Besides, groups and associations consider that there is a lack of planning on the administration's part and they believe the administration is improvising as it goes. When the project started the Chief Secretary of Public Works stated that for now they were going to implement the project in 2 or 3 blocks in the city and then they would decide the others. For the citizens this was a clear indication of how there is no serious plan and study that guides the project (*El Heraldo*, August 23, 2002, 7C; September 3, 2002, 5A)).

According to the administration the project has many benefits for the city as it organizes traffic and returns the sidewalks to pedestrians and at the same time creates more green areas for all. In addition, it provides more opportunities for people to have access to public spaces as drivers will not be able to use a public space as their private parking when they go to work and leave their car for 8 hours or more in one spot (*El Heraldo*, September 4, 2002, 4A; February 5, 2003, 5A).

For those that question the project the main aspect they disagree with is the idea of giving the administration and management of a public good as such as the public space to a private company. According to this group, the project also lacks the environmental study to determine its impact and has no construction and environmental license. Based on this, a group of small business owners, and inhabitants of the areas affected, joined by the Association of Commerce (Fenalco) presented a popular action against the project to the Superior Court of Barranquilla asking to stop the work. More than 500 persons that felt affected by the measure undertaken by the Mayor signed the petition. In addition to this, the group stated that they would organize a silent march to protest by walking through the different zones where the project is to be implemented (*El Heraldo*, September 4, 2002, 4A).

After several months of discussions, protests, editorials and negotiation meetings between the administration and those opposed to the project some changes were made like a reduction on tariffs for the first 6 months. However, for those opposed to the project this is not enough. Guilds and groups wanted the administration to discuss the project and make the appropriate changes like including more green areas and modifying the structural design for some of the areas included.

Although the most prominent economic groups and associations like the Association of Industries (ANDI), Commerce Association (Fenalco), and Construction Guild together with other groups and individuals questioned the project, the Mayor was able to continue to implement the program and proceed with minor changes. The community organized protests, and more than one demonstration against the parking zones, used legal mechanisms to attempt to stop them and nothing they did was enough. The parking areas are operating in the city although many people willingly avoid using them.

As in the case of the Transmetro, the mayor is supported by a coalition in the council that is willing to approve the projects presented by the mayor. Before each project is presented the mayor negotiates with the coalition its support and confirms its commitment with the programs and agreements reached when the coalition was formed.

The mayor knows that in politics nothing is granted. Council members are willing to form a majority in order to support the government in exchange for benefits that range from bureaucratic quotas to public contracts. If you want to be able to fulfill your campaign promises you better align with the group that supports the mayor. If like me, you are in the excluded minority you have no chance to pass a single bill (personal interview, city council member, October, 2002).

Furthermore, during this process of discussion and negotiation between the community, city council and the Mayor's office, the Mayor, arguing that they went against his moral integrity sued some of the more outspoken contradictors of the administration: one entrepreneur and one council member. For many this action by the Mayor only confirms the idea that there is no real possibility for citizens to participate in public affairs if those that attempt to voice their inconformity end up being prosecuted by the government. As the director of the NGO Protransparencia stated:

I think that the judicial suit has been the last resort the Mayor has used knowing that he has no other possible argument he could use to demerit the moral authority of these two contradictors whom it is not possible to say have a political interest. More so in the case of the council member who has been the only councilor that the city recognizes as exercising political control with no personal interest in mind (Acosta M., 2003).

The case of the parking zones show once more that politics in Barranquilla are concentrated on the Mayor in particular and the administration in general. NGOs, associations, private entities, guilds, independent council members, and other groups attempted to modify a decision made by the Mayor and were unable to do so. Although in this case those opposed to the measures organized and joined in action to protest against the project, their combined actions were insufficient as the Mayor continued with the contract. This is an example of how NGOs and other groups are not able to influence the content of a decision made by the administration, their role seems to be limited to participate in the implementation process when the administration asks them to.

In Barranquilla the only thing that worse is what the Mayor wants. To stop this contract it is enough for the Mayor to say so, but that will not happen during this administration because there is no political interest in doing so. As groups we may protest, but we know the decision is on the Mayor's hands (personal interview, group representative, October, 2002).

Although the media presented the views of more than ten groups, chamber of commerce, universities, professional associations and the like, the projects of Transmetro and parking zones are currently being implemented in the city. The main newspaper in the region wrote:

«Against everything, for good or worst, the process to build the polemic Yellow Zones started» (Contra viento y marea, para bien o para mal, ya arrancaron las obras para la implementación de las polémicas «Zonas Amarillas»)(El Herald, August 8, 2002).

In this case the majority coalition of the council was active and willing to support the mayor by approving the Project as it was presented. At the same time, in order to provide some degree of legitimacy to the decision, they required that city officials responsible for the project attended the council for special hearings about the criticisms and doubts citizens had. However, when the Mayor sued a council member that was against the project the council had a timid reaction manifested through a short press release.

Narrow Scope – Local Administrative Boards

Created through Constitutional Amendment in 1968, but actually organized since 1986, JALs are organs of territorial representation whose members are popularly elected during the election process of municipal and state authorities. Law 136/94 defines the Local Administrative Boards as those groups that serve as liaisons between the administration and the community, designed as channels for discussion and interaction between these two actors. The city is divided in 21 territorial spaces called communes (*comunas*), citizens elect 9 to 11 commune representatives for each territory depending on its population. Thus, there are 21 JALs in Barranquilla representing the same number of territories. JALS do not receive local funding *per se*; the administration is required to provide them with office supplies (official paper) and a place to meet. Board members receive no salary or funds to operate, make copies, buy equipment or the like.

According to administration officials it is not very useful to work with commune representatives in general. The overall view they have is that these officials tend to be aggressive, intolerant and demanding; at the same time, many believe that they do not facilitate but harm the process of policy-making:

The administration's experience is that it is better not to work with *ediles* [commune representatives] because they end up complicating everything. Working with *ediles* and council members is very complicated (personal interview, City Official, October, 2002).

Many accuse commune representatives of using their character of public officials to earn personal benefits. In particular, one civil servant mentioned the case of *ediles* using their office to sell certificates that will allow individuals to receive free medical attention (SISBEN certificates). However, the administration does not charge for these certificates, there is no cost in getting one. Other officials mentioned many similar cases where JALS take advantage of their position with no regard of the collective impact their actions might have. This type of actions, officials contend, leads to distrust and rejection of JAL initiatives by the administration.

It is very hard for the administration to control the actions of commune representatives, and some of them instead of serving as true liaisons between us and their community are only searching for opportunities to take advantage

of their power, even if this means going against those they are supposed to represent. Those that sell SISBEN certificates may be a few of them, but they harm the image of all (personal interview, City Official, October, 2002).

Although most city officials acknowledge that some commune representatives are hard working, devoted and honest individuals that are really committed to their communities, as an institution JALS are seen as organs used by politicians to secure votes. Instead of having a participatory image, JALS are regarded as political tools for candidates to manipulate votes and political support. In order for individuals to run for a seat on the JAL board, they need to participate in public elections and receive about 5% of the votes that a city councilor receives. Consequently, council candidates usually sponsor the campaign of these representatives in order to secure their votes; for the administration, «*ediles* are not clear representatives of a particular community, but representatives of a particular council member» (personal interview, City Official, November, 2002).

Recent legislation changed the formation, functioning, and election process of JALS. Today instead of 21 communes, there are 3 localities, 3 local Mayors, and 3 JALS in the city. Based on the provisions included in the law, municipalities were required to design many of the by-laws that will bind JALS actions and functions. Accordingly, the administration initiated a process of discussion and preparation of the bill that was to be presented to the council for approval. The purpose of the bill was to determine whether commune representatives were to have a salary, which functions would the local Mayors have, who would control them, and how they would be controlled. In other words, the purpose of the new legislation was to deepen the decentralization process in the city, and transfer more functions to the organs with the lowest territorial level like JALS (Slater, 1985; Ballon, 1986; Boisier, 1987; Castells and Borja, 1988; Bell and García, 2000; Wiesner, 1995).

According to reports of some of the members of the committee that discussed the administration's bill, there was a great concern with the idea of having to transfer so much authority and decision-making power to the JALS. In particular, the source argues, the hesitation came not only from the Mayor's side, but also from guild representatives and many members of the planning committee. There is a general consensus that groups like JALS are not to be trusted with «so many resources and responsibilities» (personal interviews, October, 2002).

Even though the administration reports to be concerned with the effectiveness of working with commune representatives, they report to be open and accessible to them and their needs. Different officials I spoke with contend that their office is always attentive to JAL and other groups needs and interests, although most of their efforts are directed to serving the community in general, not particular groups or boards. Above all, officers whose main function is to work with the community state that the relationship with JALS and groups is good, that they tend to organize multiple seminars and workshops for the community and especially for commune representatives in order to form them and empower the community in general.

No, we really think that what we need to do is to provide enough tools for groups to participate effectively. People that are part of JALS sometimes lack basic education skills and it is important for us to help them understand what this is about. We try to offer workshops that deal with leadership and teamwork issues. In addition, now that we are discussing the issue of localities we also organized seminars to discuss with them possible ways of organizing the new structure of the city. I think we did three of those seminars, but if we have to, we will do more (personal interview, City Official, September, 2002).

However, commune representatives argue that when the administration has been faced with issues that directly affect them it has not been as open as it claims. For example, during the process of writing the by-laws for their new functions, they state that it is true that the administration organized workshops and seminars and invited them in several occasions, but not to discuss the contents of the by-laws, but to socialize with them the bill. Commune representatives state that they were not able to question the decisions already made by the administration, that they feel they were invited to those meetings only to legitimate the process for the administration. As such, the administration was able to claim that multiple meetings with JALS took place, only to know that according to JAL members they were not participatory spaces.

Oh yes, we have been invited to several meetings and reunions in City Hall, but not to discuss things, but to hear what they are going to do. They brought us there to tell us that they are going to divide the city in 3 localities, north, central and south. They informed us how the localities would look like and when we tried to complain about that division they said that it was the only possible one, that other divisions were not appropriate. They did not even hear our point of view (personal interview, Commune Representative, October, 2004).

When we explore deeper, we find that groups and commune representatives are very limited in their actions towards the administration. Although JAL members are elected officials, they are not free to enter City Hall and visit public officials. In order to be authorized to enter the building, they need to have an appointment with an official or the like. In other words, they receive the same treatment that any regular citizen does. In addition, if ediles want to propose projects for government consideration, they are expected to search for information to document their request and prepare the proposal to fulfill technical requirements. However, the administration will not provide this to them; if they need documents they have to pay for the copies from their own pocket, as they do not have official funds. Ediles also complain that they usually ask and fund outside help to prepare their proposals, even for something as basic as to have it typed, as they have no office space or resources. Thus, participatory spaces might be available, but according to the JAL members, this does not translate into participation, as the state does not provide the basic elements for their functioning.

We have nothing. The only thing they give us is the letterhead paper, besides that it is up to us. I wish you would see the «supposed» offices assigned to all 21 JALS. They are located on the old City Hall building on the 10th floor, in a building where the elevator is out of order since I do not know when. The windows are broken, no one dusts or cleans and there are no office equipments available, not even a phone. Do you consider this to have resources? (personal interview, Commune Representative, July, 2002).

During the discussion in the city council of the bill that contained the changes proposed for the organization of the Administrative Boards, their members attempted to participate and wanted to present a project with a different way of restructuring the functions and scope of action of the boards and the territorial division of the city. However, the farther they were able to go was to capture the attention of one council member who decided to organize a set of discussion tables to go over their proposal with the community. This action was centered on the willingness of one council member and was not part of a council activity *per se*. The majority coalition of the council granted time for the commission to organize the discussion groups but were clear that the project presented by the mayor was not to be changed.

In this case the city council, or more particularly the majority coalition within the council, had no real interest as the scope of impact is

limited to the functioning of the boards and there is no major economic component attached to the bill. The modifications proposed through the bill are more related to issues of political representation at the city level as the number of members of the board that are popularly elected were reduced in more than 80%⁵.

CONCLUSIONS

The discussion of three cases of policy-making in Barranquilla provides important elements to comprehend the way political actors interact in the city and to what degree the council is able to affect public policy. Based on the interviews, survey research and newspaper information, the case of Barranquilla allows us to make some contentions.

First, the city council serves at the pleasure of the Mayor. Although it is clear that as a local elected body of a republic its role is limited to co-administer the municipality with the executive branch. According to the National Constitution the council also has as one of its main functions to exercise political control over the administration. However, as the data from the 1998-2000 period shows, from 51 bills approved, 71% were projects presented by the mayor, and only 14% were presented by members of the city council (Acosta Madiedo, 2002).

In addition, citizens and groups perceive the city council as a non-relevant actor. More than 90% of the citizens that participated in the survey stated that they have never had contact with the city council, and about 20% of the groups interviewed contend to have addressed the council. When asked to what degree they consider the council to be responsive to their requests, 63% stated that there is no level of response, 30% believe there is a low degree of response and only around 10% consider the council to be responsive when a request or proposal is made (García, 2004).

What is even more revealing is the view that some members of the council have of their scope of action. Most of them realize that their actions are permeated by particular political interests and agree with the idea that in order for the council to be more responsive to citizens and

⁵ In 2002 the city elected 189 ediles and for 2006 will elect 33.

exercise more political control over the administration, it is necessary for the community to pressure and monitor their actions. To the extent that the council is not accountable to the city, they are more able to negotiate political agreements with the mayor to support his programs with less regard to the impact they may have on the city in general.

Second, the executive and its strength play an important role in the city (Wiarda, 2001; Banfield, 1961; Stone and Sanders, 1987; Migdal, 2001). As long as the executive realizes that the actions performed during the administration are subject to accountability by the state and citizens, the official will be less prone to over step the boundaries of his job and more likely to act according to the law (Downs, 1999). If, as is the case of Barranquilla, the state is not able to control public life, it has a limited ability to protect citizens and guarantee their security, and has no real means to make officials accountable for their actions. It is very likely for civil servants and elected officials to rule with particular interests in mind, and not collective ones. As Migdal posits:

Where... effective supervision has all but disappeared, implementers can use their leverage for personal gain with little regard for the overall purpose of any given policy... Bureaucrats at the regional and local level remain key actors in determining who gets what and what they can do with it. The state bureaucracy, then cannot avoid but being a major factor in the local allocation of resources. The limitation on state power, of course, is that the allocation may deviate tremendously from the prescriptions set out in law and policy statements in the capital city (2001, 90).

The weakness of the state in Barranquilla and the lack of organization of its civil society have generated a strong executive with no political, social or judicial mechanisms to control it. A weak state is unable to establish comprehensive political authority; citizens do not follow regulations and very likely avoid consequences (Migdal, 2001; Smith, 1973; Malloy, 1977). An important reason for this is the inefficient judicial branch – national and local- together with a shortness of physical, human or economic resources (O'Donnell, 1998).

At the same time, the analysis shows that the executive in Barranquilla is strong, as it is able to make decisions in an independent way with no regards to the interests and petitions of the community. According to some of the actors of the study, the way things work in the city are through the Mayor; only those projects that have the Mayor's blessing

will go forward. Thus, there is no balance of power between the Mayor's office and the council. What is more revealing is that although council members and *ediles* are popularly elected, they are at an inferior position from that of the Mayor's office.

An additional issue that is worth mentioning and contributes with the weakness of the state and the strength of the executive is the problem of institutionality. The degree to which processes and actions within the administration are executed uniformly and equally towards different patrons is a sign of institutionality. Thus, the failure or success of a citizen's request to the administration shall not depend on his/her income level, partisan orientation, or connections with the Mayor or members of the office. Having clear, uniform and efficient processes is not only a sign of a proper degree of formalization within the administration, but also a control mechanism for the Mayor's actions. To the extent that every action has a determined procedure to be followed by the official in place, it becomes harder for the administration or politicians to exercise clientelistic or partisan pressure over public officials. In other words, the lack of political institutionality is an additional factor that helps consolidate the executive power by allowing improvised and arbitrary behavior by the Mayor and city officials.

In addition, institutionality is also determined by the degree to which the administration is able to exercise its power over citizens and contractors. In this sense, the issue of the historical archives is a case in point. According to officials, it has become almost a tradition for administrations to destroy the hard copies of official documents – contracts, agreements and the like, together with extracting the hard drives from the computers before leaving office (personal interviews, Nov. 2002, Feb. 2003). This behavior leaves the administration with no proof of its actions and very difficult ways to identify its major obligations with contractors and citizens in general. At the same time, it leaves citizens with the burden of gathering proofs against the administration as it argues that they have no real evidence of a contract or communication that oblige them.

The study of the behavior of local or state elected bodies in Colombia is at the initial stages of development. There are no statistics or records across time that allows for more detailed analysis of the dynamics that take place within the council. For example, there are no studies

of the way commissions work within the council, the factors that determine their membership, leadership or outcomes reached through committee work. At the same time, gathering basic information as the number or type of bills discussed and the content of the discussions is a overwhelming task that requires patience and persistence as the council administration is not used to having citizens or scholars request information that will facilitate political or social control.

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APPENDIX A

Questionnaire for the political and ruling elite (public officials, influential individuals, guilds, elected representatives)

1. Quisiera que me contara un poco sobre su trabajo, su día a día. Por ejemplo, en un día como hoy, ¿en qué focaliza su acción?
2. ¿Cuál diría usted es su prioridad en la agenda? En cuanto a asuntos que debe realizar, objetivos.
3. Es ésta una prioridad desde el inicio de su gestión o ha sido producto de su experiencia en el cargo?

4. En esta labor, ¿quiénes diría usted lo acompañan más a menudo?
5. ¿Qué tipo de compañía es? ¿En qué forma lo ayudan?
6. ¿Estas personas u organizaciones que lo ayudan lo hacen porque usted lo solicita o ellos están pendientes para ofrecer su ayuda?
7. ¿Cuáles grupos, ya sean nombres particulares o tipo de grupos, diría usted que dificultan la gestión pública? ¿Piensa que hay momentos donde existe una excesiva participación por parte de organizaciones no gubernamentales o de otros actores?
8. Hay quienes dicen que a veces las ong o grupos sociales carecen de información o formación y pueden dificultar procesos. ¿Está de acuerdo con esta afirmación?
9. En cuanto a actores sociales o políticos que se mueven en su mismo ámbito, ¿existe alguno con quien usted considere debo entrevistarme? ¿Grupos que se caractericen por su interés en las áreas en las cuales usted trabaja?
10. ¿Cuáles de los siguientes recursos considera usted son más o menos efectivos para su labor?

RECURSO	Más efectivo	Menos efectivo	Más Efectivo para oficinas similares	Menos efectivo para oficinas similares	Le gustaría mejorar
Personal					
Presupuesto					
Experiencia					
Liderazgo reconocido en el medio de la oficina o del funcionario (aclarar)					
Reputación funcionario					
Contactos funcionario					
Financiación internacional					
Información –oportuna, actualizada					
Otro					

11. Colombia enfrenta tiempos difíciles. ¿Ha afectado eso sus acciones? En caso afirmativo, ¿cómo? ¿Ha sido usted o algún miembro de su

grupo contactado por miembros de grupos extremos? De ser así, ¿ha afectado eso sus acciones o ha influido en las actividades que realiza? ¿Y qué hay de presión de otros grupos? (Mide: Factor Miedo)

	Situación general del país			Contacto con otros grupos		
	Genera participación	Limita la participación	No afecta	Sí	No	Efecto
Situación general						
Contacto con grupos extremos						
Presión de otros grupos						
Otro						

12. ¿De quien diría usted que depende la formación de políticas públicas en Barranquilla? Si alguien desea que una decisión se tome, ¿cuál considera usted es el mejor camino a seguir?

13. ¿Ha presentado usted propuestas de legislación al gobierno? De ser así, ¿cómo fue el proceso de elaboración? ¿Con quién trabajó, en qué se apoyó? Si no lo hizo, ¿existe alguna razón en particular?

14. ¿Considera usted que su oficina tiene alguna incidencia en la formación de políticas públicas en Barranquilla? ¿O es más una incidencia en la aplicación o ejecución de las políticas?

15. ¿Ha tratado usted de involucrar directamente a organizaciones sociales en su gestión? Si es así, ¿de qué manera y en qué tipo de actividad?

Table A.1
Elite Interviews

Actors	Number of Interviews
Public Officials	8
City Council	10
Political actors and Positioned individuals	22
Elected Community Representatives - <i>Comuneros</i>	16
Total Interviews	58