

# The Bogota – Sabana Region: The Political Economy behind the struggle to implement a Sustainable Urban Development Model

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# The Bogota – Sabana Region : The Political Economy behind the struggle to implement a Sustainable Urban Development Model

Patricia Acosta R.<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Bogota has become internationally renowned for its advancements in urban management, transport and institutional innovation, in its attempts to cope with the challenges of informal growth, economic struggle, and permanent inflow of new population. However, the surrounding region is showing signs of the severe environmental, social and economic repercussions of these inflows on neighbor municipalities. Concerns about the way Bogota and the agglomerations in its surrounding region are spontaneously sprawling over the Sabana's territory, have been on the institutional and academic agenda for several decades; nonetheless, because key decisions to structure the economic development of the nation's primary region, such as transport, are pending; those issues are now also reaching the political agenda.

Colombia's decentralized system emphasizes municipal autonomy, making it very difficult to integrate efforts to deal with these regional dynamics in an integrated fashion. Yet, the small municipalities suffer the consequences of their comparatively weaker institutions and lack of financial muscle to be able to handle both, the pressures of the market and the social challenges that come with the evolving demographic trends.

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Recent studies show that disconnected land use decisions, public investments, tax policies and local development strategies of the region's municipal governments, have negative impacts on the development potential of the Sabana as a whole, and promote unsustainable urbanization patterns. The paper discusses these impacts; the proposals that have been put on the table to structure the development of a regional urban network that balances current urbanization trends; and the tensions that define the political economy of a complex arena where basic agreements about the broader concerns of the Sabana, need to be made.

# The Bogota – Sabana Region : The Political Economy behind the struggle to implement a Sustainable Urban Development Model

## Introduction

The 2009 WDR<sup>2</sup>, emphasizes the benefits and seemingly unavoidable attraction leading regions exert over populations that seek opportunities of employment, human development and a better quality of life. In Colombia, migration has nevertheless also been historically related to the impacts of conflict and violence in lagging regions. Today, in contrast to the more even distribution of urban development produced by the intraregional nature of migration patterns of the past, economic restructuring and an increasing differential development of the Bogota-Sabana region in relation to the rest of the country, has redefined and concentrated those trends. Authorities estimate that these inflows in Bogota alone, represent over 300.000 people a year<sup>3</sup>; while recent studies of the Region show that on average, the population of surrounding municipalities is growing at twice the rate Bogota does.

Bogota, the nation's Capital District, stands in the center of Colombia's Andean region, on a fertile plateau, abundant of water, 2600 mts a.s.l. Across the mountains, by land, it is about 500 kms. from the nearest Pacific port, and close to 1000 kms. from the nearest Atlantic port. In spite of being a landlocked region, and still today relatively inaccessible, it is the country's prime economy and most important market. Bogota's economy alone is about the size of Bolivia and Paraguay's national economies put together; therefore, it is not only significant because it concentrates about 32% of the national GDP, and a key economic engine; but because of its significance in relation to other economies in LAC.

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<sup>2</sup> World Development Report 2009: Reshaping Economic Geography. World Bank

<sup>3</sup> Secretaría del Habitat. 2009

Bogota has had an important physical and institutional transformation over the past fifteen years, which has been followed closely by many scholars and public administrators in the world. Continuity and innovation in public policies such as parks, transport and fiscal discipline are said to be some of key components of that transformation process, but also important changes in citizen's culture and public administration's management and accountability practices have been acknowledged as part of the success.

Since the Constitutional Reform in 2001, several important institutional changes have taken place at the national level, two of which largely shape the context of the Bogota-Sabana Region's current development debate: first, the municipal decentralization process; and second, the definition of a territorial development planning system, centered on resolving the issues of urban development and management at the municipal level. In spite of the multiple economic, environmental, social and functional reasons to argue in favor of the need to shift from current regional occupation trends towards an alternate more sustainable regional model, existing institutional arrangements fall short of being able to align local decisions to face common problems and attain broader regional benefits.

This paper outlines the impacts of current dynamics on the Sabana territory; the proposals that have been put on the table to structure the development of a regional urban network that balances current urbanization trends; and the tensions that define the political economy of a complex arena where basic agreements about the broader concerns of the Sabana, need to be made. In the first section, the paper briefly characterizes the Bogota-Sabana region and its current territorial occupation. The second section, identifies the impacts of current dynamics through specific components of the territory, and synthesizes the proposed alternate occupation model that is currently on the table. Finally, the third section, highlights some of the elements that configure the municipal agendas in this regional debate and the political challenges behind this initiative to integrate municipal policy around a common vision. By making reference to some government models for metropolitan areas that are being used around the world today, it concludes with some thoughts about the institutional options that have been explored for the Bogota - Sabana Region.

In the end, what the paper intends to highlight is that from very early on, planners that include figures such as Le Corbusier and Lauchlin Currie, as well as the local scholars who have produced detailed studies to guide the more recent institutional initiatives; have anticipated many of this region's development challenges. Many variations of a proposal for a more sustainable, functional urban network that could take better advantage of the region's qualities have been made. Nonetheless, despite substantial advancements in the legal and institutional frameworks required to put these intentions to practice; at the

moment, it is not clear that it will be possible. For this reason, these debates need to become public, bringing to light the nature of clashing interests that are currently at the table and openly discussing reasonable principles that ought to balance regional and local interests.

## 1. Bogota and its Broader Region: Cundinamarca

Bogota and the municipalities of the Sabana share a geographically well defined territory, that is quite rare: hundreds of thousands of hectares of flat land amidst the Andes mountains. This plateau has a well defined urban system that has been rapidly populating during the last 60 years, particularly by virtue of the flows and economic dynamics Bogota has historically generated. The agglomeration itself has created sizeable markets that promote enormous local supply chains of food and goods that flow from various regions of the country, through the Sabana. In consequence, small and medium processing industries, primarily for local consumption, have consolidated around Bogota, and more recently similar industries escaping the city, have joined them<sup>4</sup>.

Whereas the municipalities in the immediate area of influence of Bogota, enjoy relatively healthy economies as a result of these dynamics, other municipalities in the Departamento of Cundinamarca<sup>5</sup>, despite relative proximity, are divided from those markets, as well as the specialized services available in the Bogota-Sabana region. This is why, it is a priority in the Governor's political agenda to promote regional integration and advance on project initiatives that articulate lagging areas, currently isolated by virtue of deficient infrastructure and communications.

Similarly, the Mayor of Bogota has interests in the region, particularly in the Sabana, because decisions that are made by surrounding municipalities have significant impacts on the sustainability and governance of the Capital. On the one hand, the Sabana's territory is by definition the extension of the city's environmental and competitive platform, that guarantees vital environmental services and new development opportunities; and on the other, because neighbors' weaker institutions tend to neutralize the potential effects of public policies and incentives that Bogota is implementing to shape the behaviors of key urban agents in its jurisdiction.

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<sup>4</sup> See Annex 1. Quick facts – Context

<sup>5</sup> The “Departamento” is the subnational entity above the municipality in the Colombia, similar to a province, which has coordination functions and some economic planning functions. However, Municipalities are by definition autonomous in territorial development decisions and investments.

These tensions naturally arise in metropolitan areas because, more often than not, they are integrated by different administrative entities. Fortunately for Bogota, with the early annexation of the first ring of municipalities in 1954, unitary planning and government has been a major advantage to produce visible results and to progressively develop reasonably effective, institutionalized urban management practices. On the other hand Cundinamarca, can attempt to voice the agglomerate interests of the 116 municipalities that constitute it, but given that municipal autonomy is a politically contentious issue, it can only persuade municipalities to engage in planning practices that respond to broader regional policies, through incentives.

When thinking about the Bogota-Sabana, the challenge of geopolitical fragmentation has become THE critical factor that potentially determines the feasibility of any integrated model for regional development. In that context, an alliance between the Governor and the Mayor, though politically convenient, requires more stable, formal institutions to be able to withstand in time the tensions created by municipal conflicts of interest.

## 1.1 Transforming Urbanization Trends

The Bogota-Sabana region has always been an important development pole at the national level, as well as a major attractor of migration flows. Nonetheless, recently its primacy has become much stronger, in the measure that the economies of other regions have declined.

Whereas the general pattern of urban concentration in one main center, is common in the rest of the LA region, in Colombia an urban system that evenly supported five different regions developed early on, distributing population in three mayor urban poles of over 1 million and other intermediate magnets, until about the 1980's. Like the rest of Latin America, rural populations in Colombia flocked by the thousands to cities as the country dramatically urbanized in the 60's and 70's<sup>6</sup>, consolidating this special urbanization pattern, which prevented excessive pressure on the capital. Many experts attribute this pattern to geographical isolation of the country's regions by virtue of topography; but also to their relative cultural and economic autonomy, which encouraged intraregional migration. Nonetheless, at the close of the XX<sup>th</sup> century, persisting violence and economic restructuring, broadly redefined national migration flows, which have been redirected primarily towards Bogota.

This shift, implies roughly an inflow of over sixty thousand families a year, into a city where the housing deficit is already over 300.000 units. Indeed,

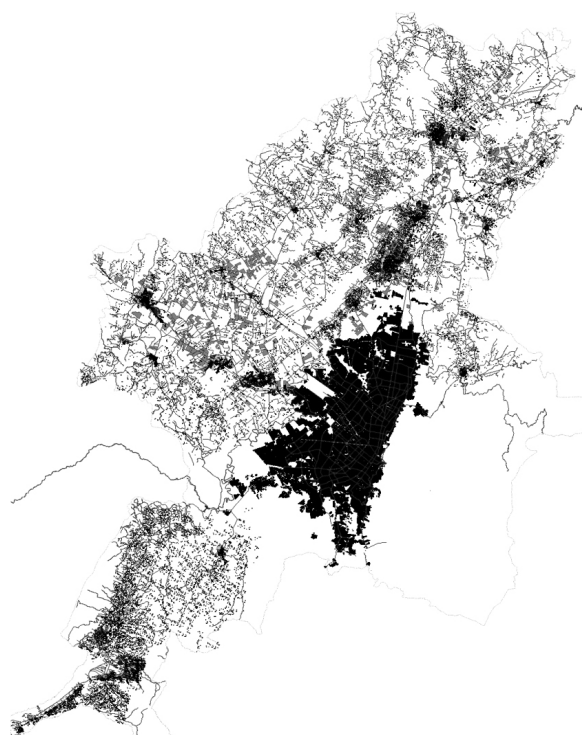
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<sup>6</sup> During those decades growth rates were between 5 and 7 percent in the country's four major cities.

recent studies show that as cheap land has become more and more scarce, the impact of the capital's attraction has grown stronger on its surrounding municipalities. Some regional poles of the Bogota-Sabana have shown growth rates close to 6% that resemble only, the rates major cities showed in the 70's at the peak of urbanization.

Today, as the economic primacy of the Bogota-Sabana Region continues to consolidate, the real question is whether municipal planning instruments and local governments' individual attributions are enough to deal with the challenges posed by these dynamics. The 2008 detailed study of the occupation of the Sabana suggests that the general suburbanization of the rural territory around Bogota, produced by the absence of a common vision of this territory, risks its opportunity to become a well balanced, sustainable urban network. If indeed, growth seems unavoidable, this metropolitan region has had a unique, delayed opportunity to understand that it is not only important to envision alternate, more balanced development models, but to pursue the necessary institutional arrangements to achieve them.

## 1.2 Current Occupation



Enhanced 2007 satellite image of the process of Suburbanization of rural areas across the Bogota-Sabana region.

TODAY

Source: Gobernación de cundinamarca, 2008

The Sabana region is a plateau covered by some of the most fertile soils in the country; however, agriculture is not a primary activity. With the exception of flowers, a water intensive crop cultivated for export, much of this land is idle. Experts assure that this is partly so, because of the impact urban land markets are having on rural markets in their proximity, particularly when different forms of development which produce higher rents are implicitly allowed.

Satellite images reflect a reality about the Bogota-Sabana region that has not been properly acknowledged until now. Contrary to what municipal master plans reflect, where 94% of the land is said to be rural, what has been found is that there is a generalized high level of suburbanization of the Sabana. According to this assessment, this type of “sprawl”, is a predatory form of subdivision and partial urbanization of rural land, that is generating significant broader environmental impacts. This sort of fractioned occupation does is not only a way around producing basic public goods, but also a process that in aggregate does not produce appropriate infrastructure to handle its cumulative impacts. In sum, the current occupation of the Sabana is disperse, unstructured and it is promoting an irrational use of prime productive land, that tends to distort land markets and further discourage agriculture as well as environmental preservation.

### 1.3 Risks of Consolidating Current Trends

The phenomena of suburbanization of the region evidently responds to informal and formal land markets that are not being addressed in any way through public policy, precisely because it is a form of occupation that is not being openly acknowledged.

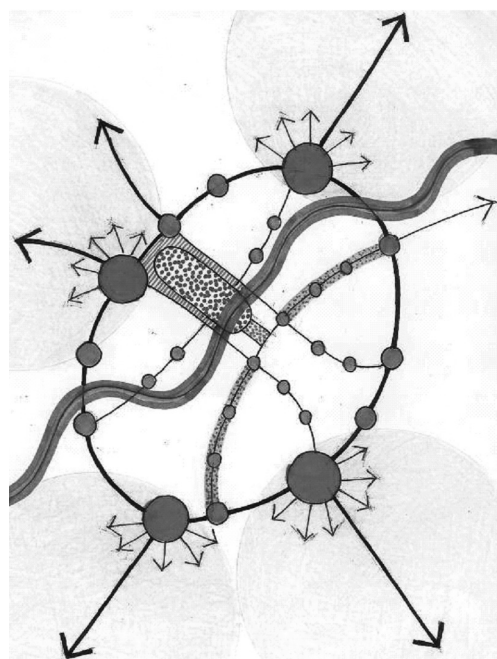
As we will see in section two, the suburbanization of rural areas is only one manifestation of an aggregate of public policies that is contributing to consolidate an inefficient and substandard regional territorial platform. In addition to speculative rural management, urban development policies are also denying the need to produce urban land near existing urban centers. The analysis of municipal master plans shows that in general, few if any of the region’s larger sub centers’ municipal plans consider the regional population trends described earlier; reducing the Sabana’s real capacity to provide, not only housing, but distributed employment opportunities and social services the broader region requires.

The existing regional environmental authority, fully autonomous to supervise municipal policy, could have a stronger role in the definition of environmental guidelines to align municipal plans around a common regional vision; however, as of yet it essentially exercises its functions as a regulatory and permit issuing organism, rather than a regional coordinating authority.

However, because issues such transport have given regional issues enough visibility to create opportunities for these structural issues to come forth in the political agenda, renewed debates that discuss the broader regional challenges ahead are taking its place in the public agenda. Two primary risks are being emphasized to frame the significance of jointly pursuing an alternate regional development model : first, the risk of wasting away the development and environmental potential of the nation's prime region, to petty interests; and second, the risk of constituting an environmentally unfeasible metropolitan area, where almost inevitably, continuous flows of population from all corners of the country will continue to pour.

In absence of a common vision of how the region should structure its territory to create favorable long term conditions that reasonably sustain livelihoods and employment opportunities, a spatial proposal has been put on the table. With this proposal, Cundinamarca is taking an important political step to outline common challenges and opportunities that could structure a discussion about how municipal decisions, national and supramunicipal public investment and private agents can be strategically aligned; and most importantly, how the burdens and benefits of this model can be balanced out.

#### 1.4 Alternate Model : Urban – Regional Network



Conceptual model of Occupation for the Bogota Sabana region.

Urban Network - Regional poles and centralities

Source: Gómez, 2008



There are several assumptions behind the idea that a regional urban network is a better option for the Bogota- Sabana region, than allowing current occupation trends to fully consolidate. First, that it would contribute to counterweigh diseconomies of agglomeration produced by Bogota by redistributing economic and institutional activity. Second, that it would redefine the possibilities of jointly solving key regional challenges that are already having highly visible costs in terms of quality of life and economic competitiveness, such as: the full saturation of the road systems and permanent gridlock, critically low regional permeability of the central city, highly speculative formal and informal lands markets in the central city, severe pollution of the region's main watershed and nearly saturated metropolitan landfills. Third, because from an environmental perspective, it could prevent occupation patterns that broadly decay the Sabana, and promote a systematic decay of its ecological platform as well as a suboptimal, wasteful use of its resources. Finally, because in spite of some difficulties in making the Colombian territorial planning system fully operational, there actually already exists a quite sophisticated institutional framework and expertise available to make such endeavors technically feasible.

The proposed model of alternate occupation, supposes a regional urban network with the airport at its center, which bridges over key environmental protection and agricultural areas; while integrated by an interregional road and transport network that supports its flows. The next section, describes some of the specific territorial impacts of current dynamics and synthesizes the proposed alternate occupation model that is currently on the table

## 2. Territorial Challenges & Options

To be able to establish dialogues amongst municipalities about a common regional vision of the Sabana territory, it is useful to establish a common understanding of the broader challenges it faces. This understanding should inform future debates about how the model affects municipal interests, and how local decisions impact regional objectives.

### 2.1 Impacts from Bogota's Urban Development and Growth.

Bogota's economic and demographic dynamics drive the entire Sabana. The mere size of the agglomeration has created economic opportunities with spillovers that have visibly benefited the development of its different neighbors in different ways. Nevertheless, these same dynamics have also generated severe negative impacts on the region, such as the generalized distortion of

land markets and a massive demand for environmental services. Furthermore, the city's accelerated expansion and precarious environmental management practices have created enormous environmental unbalances, particularly associated with the city's demand for water and its production of sewage and waste.

The distortion of land markets has been produced primarily by the city's demand for :

- *Middle and high end suburban first-residences* with large individual plots and greenery that are not available in the urban area.
- Expanding formal and informal land markets for *housing for lower income groups*, feasible only in areas where land prices reflect the poorer conditions of location and lower accessibility.
- Areas for *industrial relocation*, because medium industrial activity has progressively been leaving the city, to find larger, less congested, less expensive locations.
- *Leisure and environmental services* in the region. Hundreds of thousands of people seek warmer climates and rural landscapes in the region. In consequence, the region has specialized in a diverse supply of local tourism for all income groups that include restaurants, recreational facilities, sports facilities, hotels, resorts and country second-residences.

Finally, the most significant impact of Bogota's development on the region, and beyond, are the cumulative impacts of six decades of untreated wastewater, which continue to pollute the lower region's main water source for agriculture and fishing.

## 2.2 Impacts from disconnected local development strategies

### a. A Fragmented, Residual Road Network.

Land Subdivisions between 1 and 10 has. observed in recent analyses are one of the main evidences of the dominant trends in the region's land market. Subdivision shows the rapid transformation of rural areas into substandard forms of urbanization for different income groups and activities, including industry. The direct impacts of this kind of lot by lot development are :

- *Absence of a regional road network*. Low density, disperse occupation of the rural territory does not create the necessary critical mass to justify focalized public investment nor does it produce the required taxes to recoup sub utilized infrastructure.

- *Profusion of private and local access roads – discontinuous and substandard.* Scattered development promotes individual access roads that do not integrate a rational, environmentally sound road network. In some areas, this form of infrastructure production creates critical *ruptures in ecological corridors and affects the geological stability of mountain ranges.*
- *Low interconnectivity between settlements and saturated access through Bogota.* Informal transformation of rural areas into developed continuums, is a process that does not acknowledge interregional flows nor make the necessary provisions to reserve public land to establish well balanced intermediate mobility networks.

The highly fragmented regional road system that can be observed throughout the Bogota-Sabana region, is one of the most relevant evidences that local planning decisions are currently guided by completely disconnected, isolated logics.

Despite these impacts, there are short term economic incentives, such as a slight expansion of the tax base, and potential generation of employment, that nonetheless partly justify at the municipal level a response to those demands.

#### b. Underdeveloped Transport Infrastructure

Similarly, the strong debates between Cundinamarca and Bogota with the Nation about excluding alternatives to invest in mass transport within the region, suppose clear tradeoffs : i) a commuter rail to integrate the region, or ii) a metro line to resolve a saturated urban corridor inside the central city. These debates reflect at another level, that even amongst actors that seem to agree on the importance of regional integration. It is not clear how municipal interests should relate to regional interests when they clash.

Nonetheless, without the Nation's firm commitment to the development of the region, it is not clear how resources might be leveraged to resolve key regional challenges such as :

- The absence of a *regional transport* and logistics system.
- *The limited vision that has guided national management of Bogota's international airport.* Only recently, there has been response to the capital's initiative to undertake a strategic operation to increase accessibility from the region and to develop the necessary complementary logistics and services platforms to promote its optimal use as a port to link the region to new markets.

### c. Degradation of the Hydrological System

The region's ecological structure includes the Bogotá River's watershed, which contains over 20 tributary rivers, 400 creeks, 1000 micro watersheds, 27 marshes and hundreds of hectares of wetlands. Studies show that in practice, Municipal development strategies often promote :

- Overuse and pollution of groundwater
- Filling wetlands for urbanization
- Resistance to coordinate rational watershed management with neighbor municipalities or invest in watershed protection.

### d. Economic Impacts of Low Regional Integration and the "Geographic Tariff"

Finally, low levels of integration have evident economic impacts on the region, because they intensify the natural weaknesses that its geography already imposes. First, low levels of accessibility to sea ports elevate general transport costs reducing the Sabana's general competitiveness to export low aggregate value products. Furthermore, altitude affects air cargo costs because airplanes cannot be fully loaded, therefore only high aggregate value agro industries such as flowers, are able to pay this "tariff".

The region however, continues to depend on trucks to move most of its cargo, running on a neglected road network and no competing alternative since the freight train system, run by the national level has been practically dismantled.

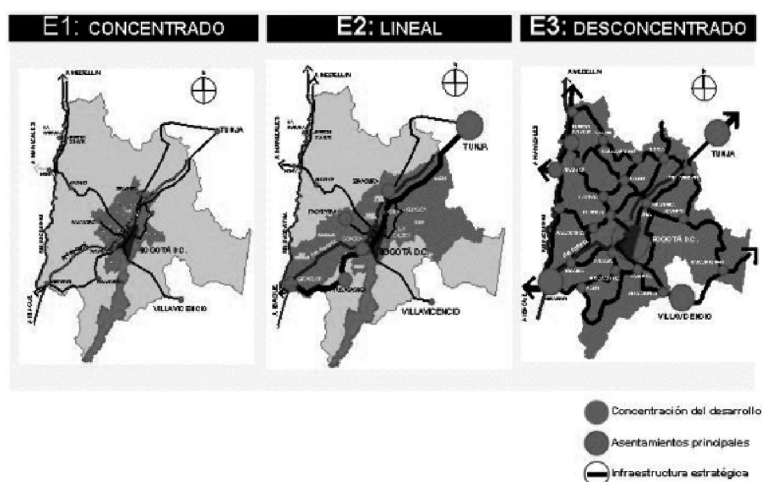
## 2.3 Earlier Ideas and Debates

The idea of a multipolar regional network for the Bogota-Sabana is not new. Since 1951, Le Corbusier proposed a basic structure for Bogota that contemplated at a different scale, the same basic principles that justify the multipolar alternate model today. In 1972, Lauchlin Currie revisited the idea at the regional scale, envisioning in the study "Fase II", development alternatives and the necessary support networks required to face the demographic explosion expected at the time.

Why haven't these and many more similar proposals been successfully implemented? The apparent difficulty to consolidate the Bogota-Sabana is certainly not the model itself, but the tradeoffs it implies between: municipal and collective priorities, as well as short term - long term costs and benefits. In short, because it has become clear that the feasibility of a distributive

regional model is mostly a political issue, efforts have shifted in two directions: i) legislative efforts to adopt a cooperative institutional model, that is responsive to the Sabana's political environment; and ii) a prospective approach, and collaborative working agenda, which guided by common principles, could produce concrete benefits under more flexible institutional arrangements.

Between 2001 and 2003 a “Regional Planning Working Table” was organized, with technical cooperation with UNCRD, to structure a dialogue between the Sabana region's municipalities about common concerns and to produce a possible working agenda based on projects of mutual interest. The main achievements of this working table were: a prospective analysis of alternate development models for the entire Cundinamarca province, and a broad agreement amongst municipalities about the benefits of jointly working towards a network model that might shift current occupation and development patterns. Contrary to recent propositions from the mainstream literature on economic geography about the benefits of agglomeration, in this specific political process, the only feasible model to keep stakeholders on the table has been the idea of a more inclusive, network system that might not only integrate lagging areas to markets and services, but also redefine urban development patterns.

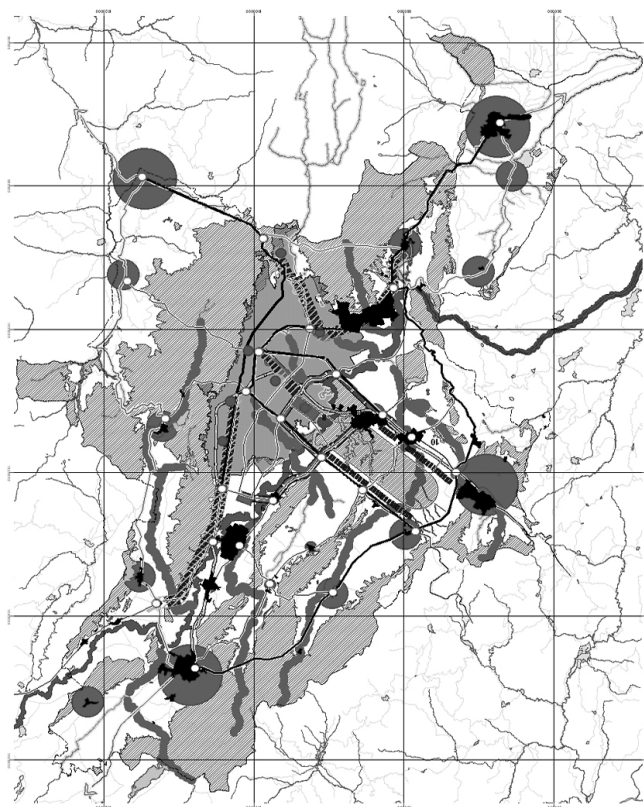


## 2.4 Proposed Territorial Strategy

The model that has been put up for discussion focuses on two issues: i) the need to establish some basic agreements between municipalities about the region's key ecological structures and processes, that should guide municipal decisions; and ii) the need to collaborate to jointly develop the structures that are required to support the region's economic and social development.

### a. Urban Network

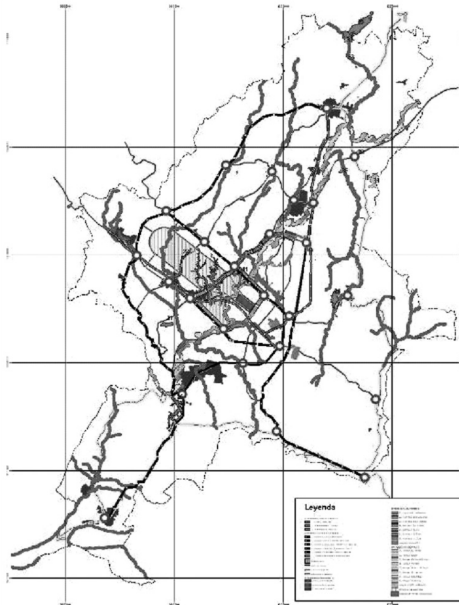
- Bogota and Subregional Centers in compact urban developments, integrated by regional road and transport networks.
- Broadly integrated housing and land policies.



Source: Gobernación de Cundinamarca, 2008

### b. Functional Structure

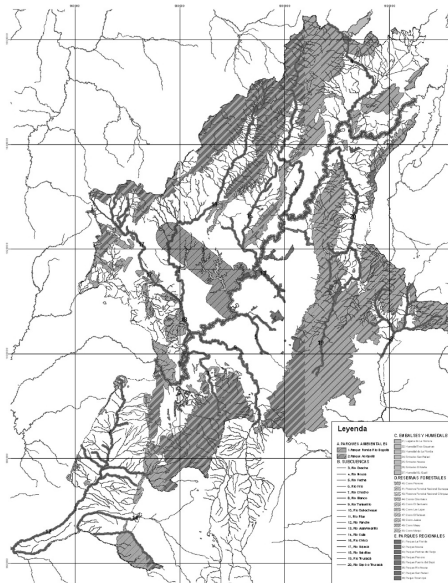
- Regional and local road and transport networks that support inter and intra regional flows, balance local connectivity and redistribute settlement patterns.
- Rationalized use of resources (including land) and coordinated provision of basic services that optimize their quality and use.
- Development of an Airport complex that clusters certain key services for the region's economic activity and transfers rent to ecological protection.
- Distribution of environmental services and development rights.



Source: Gobernación de Cundinamarca, 2008

### c. Ecological Structure

- Well defined preservation areas and an overarching regional environmental management agenda.
- Water shed management and solid waste agreements.



Source: Gobernación de Cundinamarca, 2008



### 3. Political Challenges

Despite the apparent agreements about the potential benefits of an alternate regional model, concrete decisions and investments reflect local administrations' resistance to give up their autonomy in favor of local options that support broader regional goals. Indeed, to be able to work towards an alternate regional model, the impact of several political challenges needs to be properly acknowledged and thus addressed: weak regional governance and institutions, disconnected land use decisions, divergent public investments, competing tax policies, and isolated local development strategies.

As the issues are entering the public arena, it is clear that the debate is making an important turn: First, because competing as well as common municipal interests are coming out into the open, while in the process, they are being translated to citizens in terms of their implications on the region's broader environmental and socioeconomic concerns. Second, because examples of models of metropolitan areas around the world are being examined and brought to bear into the discussions, hoping to illustrate that there are multiple options that can be fine tuned for municipalities in the Bogota-Sabana region, to be able to work autonomously under guiding principles.

#### 3.1 Governance & Institutions

Only until last year, Soacha, one of the region's most important industrial poles and Bogota's only conurbated municipality, has been finally integrated into the Transmilenio BRT network. Even though it only required a 5 kilometer extension to benefit nearly 500.000 more people with direct access to the capital's mass transport network, the operation could not be accomplished before, by virtue of local political, financial and institutional obstacles. Finally the nation stepped, in with both the finance and its capacity to undertake the infrastructure works for Soacha, so the Capital District will be able to extend its services by 2010. There are few, if any more examples of similar, successful regional projects to resolve common concerns, such as mobility, even since regional collaborative discussions began in 2001.

Why so much discussion and no real action? Many local analysts suggest that there are very strong incentives for elected officials at the municipal level to avoid collaboration, while very few operative mechanisms to actually persuade them to act more responsibly. In short, the incertitude of actually engaging in regional projects comes with the risk of not only losing out on autonomous decisions that can become local political assets, but of entering highly asymmetric negotiations with the Capital.



Enthusiasts for regional integration, however argue that the absence of an institutionalized Regional authority or agency, which administrates the initiatives and settles disagreements between municipal interests and regional interests is the reason why there has been such little collaborative work. Other experts, nonetheless, suggest that the existing regional environmental authority, which approves drafts of master plans before they are adopted could already be playing a key role in this process.

On the other hand, the Departamento (province) in the head of the elected Governor, has attempted to represent the conglomerate of municipal interests; however, it is not a figure that can genuinely influence municipalities' choices. While the Nation' transfers represent over 80% of an average municipality's budget; the subnational level's transfers represent less than 15%. Therefore, the Bogota-Sabana region's 25 municipalities have full autonomy to decline participating in key regional projects and to determine whether their land use decisions and investments harmonize or not with the proposed regional model, unless a new approach to balance these natural institutional differences, can be put in place.

Nevertheless, there have been several attempts to create new institutions to make this project possible, all of which reflect both political support and strong political resistance :

- 1994 Political Blockade of attempts to amend the Constitution to adopt RAPE (Special Administrative Planning Region)
- Metropolitan Regions Law 1994 – 5 MA's operating in the country - yet no agreement reached in the Bogota-Sabana region, apparently because it creates a regional authority.
- Regional Planning Working Table – with technical assistance of UNCRD-LAC 2001-2007 : Regional Development Scenarios and Regional Initiatives Agenda
- 2009 Agreement between the Governor of the Cundinamarca Department and the Mayor of Bogota . Joint efforts on 23 point agenda, the creation of a regional agency and the joint lobby for the RAPE proposal in Congress.

### 3.2 Disconnected Land Use and Planning Decisions

The latest regional study showed that according to current Municipal Master Plans in the region:

- 94% of the land is catalogued and regulated as RURAL. Therefore, the suburbanization phenomena and its impacts are NOT being acknowledged, nor addressed through proper policies.

- Land requirements for low income housing are being ignored; therefore, insufficient expansion areas are being planned around secondary urban poles, making them highly vulnerable to unexpected, informal expansions and accelerated suburbanization.
- Ecological corridors and mobility systems are not continuous, but fragmented and poorly managed.
- Excessive Industrial land is being offered: Over 10.000 has. in rural areas and corridors, even though REAL demand is about 94% less.

The preliminary findings of the mentioned study, which emphasizes the physical analysis of the aggregate Municipal decisions on the region's territory, suggests that the Bogota-Sabana is developing irrationally, as a marginal result of independent, uncoordinated local land use, infrastructure policy and investment decisions.

### 3.3 Divergent Public Investments

The absence of a common vision for the Bogota-Sabana is most evident through an analysis of public expenditure from the different levels, as a reflection of public policy. There are tensions between the National and District levels, as well as between Bogota and neighbor municipalities about key investments for the region's connectivity and mobility such as the international airport and transport.

The National government and the city of Bogota have clearly acted on different perspectives of the role the airport plays for the city and the region. While investment from the District had centered on developing project proposals to develop a large urban operation to use the airport's expansion as an opportunity to create a new state of the art logistics and services platform around it; in tandem, the Nation single handedly had designed and signed a long term concession agreement to finance its interior renovation, which broadly aimed to improve airport management and service standards.

In fact, the debates that emerged from the tensions between the city's administration and National officials about the limited scope that guided those commitments, became the issue that finally caught public attention and put the region in the agenda.

Another example, are the current tensions between Cundinamarca's Governor and the Mayor of Bogota about the way the Nation should prioritize subsidies for transport. While Cundinamarca, expects the commuter rail to receive priority funding, Bogota's newly elected officials are focused on a metro line, which not only competes for the same transfers, but will also fully commit the city's transport budget until 2030. This decision not only

potentially prevents the Capital's participation in its own share of the regional commuter rail, but from other projects key investments including the expansion of Transmilenio.

Not only do different visions about how strategic infrastructure needs to be prioritized and focused affect the region, but the way sector plans and institutions attempt to address the region's challenges. For instance, in the face of the low income housing crisis, the Nation has partnered with the municipality of Soacha, to develop 325 has. of rural land at the outskirts of that city, for a 36.000 unit project, that is equivalent to about 1/3 its current size.

Once again, while Bogota endorses a regional model that would distribute the population, to avoid further expanding over the Sabana, because Soacha is already conurbated, this type of public investment from other government levels defy, the Capital's long term land and growth policies.

### 3.4 Competing Tax Policies

Municipal public policies across the region's municipalities are also strongly influenced by their short term strategies to broaden their tax base. Unfortunately, in the measure Bogota becomes more demanding and sophisticated in the use of taxes on gas, car registration, property and more severe with utilities' tariffs, as incentives to change behaviors and redistribute incomes, its neighbors see opportunities to compete through lower rates and exemptions.

Such is the case of the gas surcharge tax, designed to dissuade the use of private automobiles; and the annual car registration fee. Even though the city's road system mobilizes vehicles from the whole region, its competition with neighbors on both taxes has reduced the city's road maintenance budget in over US\$17.2 million a year, despite the number of cars has tripled in the last 12 years.

Similarly, taxes on property and low tariffs on utilities are used to lure developments for first and second residence of high income groups, despite the environmental impacts and low social benefits that these self contained, self supplied real estate operations actually generate. By the same token, as higher income groups are lured away from Bogota, the existing utilities' cross subsidy system, implemented to redistribute costs between income groups is gradually becoming overburdened; while the incentives to rationalize the use of water in higher income groups, for instance, are not being applied for the rest of the region.

### 3.5 Isolated Local Development Strategies

Since the 2003 master plan revision, Bogota has acknowledged the close relationship between the region's dynamics and its own socioeconomic

development. In consequence, it has integrated its own policies with those broader purposes, and focused significant share of its institutional efforts and resources towards projects that are aligned with that vision.

The region's urban centers currently have populations between 60.000 and 100.000, with the exception of Bogota (pop. 6'780.000) and Soacha (pop. 398.000). They have a clear functional and economic dependence with Bogota and the economic dynamics of the region, yet persist to establish isolated development strategies in their long term municipal master plans, as well as their short term public investment/development plans.

Isolated development strategies have led to :

- Tax exemptions, free land, low environmental standards, subsidized infrastructure and utilities, and excess offer of Industrial land, in order to attract industry.
- Relaxed land policy and standards that are promoting dispersion and fragmentation of production across the rural territory of the region, as well as a substandard development of regional corridors.
- In the long term, such policies have had low impact on local employment, while compromising local communities' social benefits and environmental sustainability.

## 4. Exploring Options

The Bogota – Sabana region is Colombia's most important economic region, yet there are no institutionalized channels to direct its development nor safeguard its environmental sustainability. Despite regional dialogues and agreements, the fact they are not binding, leads to Municipal behaviors that in the aggregate produce negative impacts and waste potential development opportunities for the region as a whole.

While studies emphasize that the current residual suburbanization process resulting from the absence of more coordinated planning and integrated management criteria, threatens to undermine the region's long term environmental sustainability, it is also clear that overall population flows towards the region, added to its vegetative growth, has begun to manifest more strongly outside Bogota than before. Therefore it is highly improbable that sustaining such trends will not have permanent long term, structural impacts on how the region actually consolidates.

Because experience has shown that in this context the informal housing market expands as formal-public low income housing policies contract, it is important that the region faces the fact that its municipalities are growing at

twice the rate Bogota is, and while municipal plans ignore this fact, the chances of structuring through key public investments and incentives, an alternate more balanced regional territory will be potentially wasted.

#### 4.1 A Model We Could Agree On?

The political economy behind the struggle to implement a sustainable urban development model for the Bogota Sabana region needs to be further analyzed and understood to be able to move forward. Only by reframing the strategy from a political perspective, some of the region's common concerns may be used frame te necessary agreements between municipalities to address competing interests. Similarly common policies and common interests may also have significant political impacts redefining the Nation's investment criteria in the region.

##### a. Common Interests

The regional development agenda already includes critical projects of common benefit, and others with redistributive impacts, that individual municipalities cannot leverage alone suchas:

- Integrated solid waste management – shared infrastructure
- Integrated watershed management – recognition for environmental services and enforcement of water quality standards.
- Regional transport systems with crossed subsidies
- Regional Ecosystem Management and Accountability
- Regional Housing policy and social development projects
- Regional Production Clusters - Land Management Operations

##### b. Competing Interests

However, local politics and market opportunities weigh strongly on municipal Mayor's and Municipal Council's decisions. These express themselves primarily through :

- A strong advocacy for Municipal autonomy in public investment, because it is a strong electoral asset, particularly in small municipalities, to show responsiveness towards interest groups, in spite of potentially limiting the real impacts of public works.
- Full exercise of Municipal autonomy in land use regulation, used by mayors to attract high income residents and industry despite the broader cumulative impacts.

- A resistance to the idea of becoming involved in regional projects (NIMBY) – because smaller communities and administrations perceive that they will be burdened with the least desirable projects such as low income housing projects, jails, land fills and other high impact public goods.

Unless there exists a transfer system to recognize environmental services, to provide incentives to balance the burdens and benefits of the regional model, many municipalities will continue to shy away from agreements.

## 4.2 Looking for Feasible Models of Government & Governance

Recent institutional efforts to renew our understanding of the Bogota-Sabana, its challenges and potentials, provide a valuable frame for dialogues and for strategically designing potential working agendas. However, since 2001 it has become clear that there is a need to establish some form of institutionalized management and planning for the region, that can sustain the overall regional vision, providing the necessary operative capacity to implement projects and follow through political agreements.

Since the issue has entered the public forum, the media has begun to play an important role informing the Bogota-Sabana debate, that could have a broader impact on both local politicians and their constituents' opinions, than the one scholarly debates have been able to have in the last decades. Experts from around the world have been invited to publicly discuss experiences in metropolitan areas and to comment on the advantages and disadvantages of the government and governance models that have been implemented to manage them.

This media strategy is actually finally placing a key issue at front and center of the public debate: the need to discuss the options to move forward and promptly commit politically to an arrangement that promotes a more sustainable development of the Sabana Territory.

A characterization of three Models for Metropolitan Regions proposed by Yves Cabbanne (UCL-DPU) is being used to frame the discussion:

- Model 1 : Metropolitan Cities (Hangzhou, Istanbul) with multiple government levels.
- Model 2: Coexistence of Municipalities and Metropolitan Structure (Metro Toronto, London, Curitiba, Bangkok, Mumbai) with an institution that plays a integrated planning role, coordinates polices and promotes large operations and partnerships with private developers.

- Model 3: Policentrism and Intercommunal Cooperation (London post GLC '86, ABC Region - Sao Paulo, Mexico – Associations), which are flexible associations around specific initiatives, where there is an absence of agreed unified vision.

Examples around the world give evidence that all three models have advantages and set backs. However locally, after such a long time, both academics and public managers are optimistic about an open political and public discussion that finally considers assessing alternatives on the basis of their management and political feasibility in this specific context.

Indeed, the Bogota Sabana region's most important challenge is to deal with the political economy that currently hinders a sustainable urban and economic development model. However, all things considered, this region's key role in the nation's economy clearly calls for the challenge to move up to the next level of Colombia's priority agenda.

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# Annex 1. Quick Facts – Context

## A. Colombia



Tot. Pop. 42'888.592

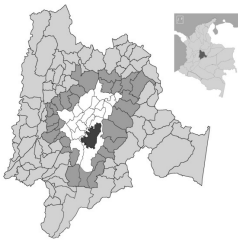
74,3% urban

25,7% rural

National GDP US\$ 4566 per cap

Bogota GDP US\$ 6427 per cap

## B. Cundinamarca : Bogota -Sabana Region



Cundinamarca is a Department or subnational administrative level between the national and the municipal entities. The 25 municipalities that neighbor with the Capital District of Bogota and configure its immediate area of influence are under the coordination of its Governor. Nevertheless, they are autonomous, particularly in regards to land use and territorial management.

Bogota - Sabana Region

Today 32% of National GDP

- Region :

25 out of the 116 municipalities of Cundinamarca

301.000 Ha

Pop. 1'319.482

- Bogota Capital District :

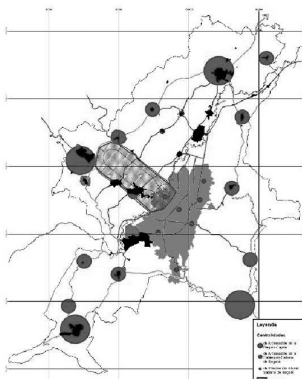
Urban Area : 36.300 Has

Developable : 3.800 Has

Future Expansion : 1.700 Has

Sumapaz – Ecological Protection 130.700 Has

Pop. 6'840.116



Bogota CD + Region :

473.598 Has

Est. Pop. 2038: 10'230.000

