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Linking the poor to new modalities in service delivery

**Partnership innovations in solid waste management in Bogotá,
Colombia**

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	4
1 INTRODUCTION	5
2 THE EVOLVING PARADIGM OF STATE INVOLVEMENT	6
3 WASTE PICKING: A DEFAULT OCCUPATION IN BOGOTÁ?	11
3.1 The profile of waste pickers in Bogotá	14
3.2 Organizations and collective action	15
3.3 A budding relationship in service delivery	17
4 THE MASTER PLAN'S FRAMEWORK AND EXECUTION	18
5 SUCCESSES, SHORTFALLS AND EVOLVING INSTITUTIONS	24
6 CONCLUSIONS	29
REFERENCES	31

List of Tables and Figures

FIGURE 2.1 THE THREE SYSTEMS OF THE ECONOMY	11
FIGURE 3.1 THE WASTE VALUE CHAIN (PRIOR TO PMIRS)	13
FIGURE 4.1 THE WASTE VALUE CHAIN REVISITED (POST PMIRS)	21
TABLE 5.1 SYNTHESIZED OUTCOMES ACCORDING TO WASTE PICKER SEGMENT	25

Abstract

Waste picking has become a prominent activity in the urban landscape, bridging the gap between shortfalls in service delivery and personal income generation in virtually all cities of the developing world. Overcoming previous stigmatization and work fragmentation through organization and dialogue, social economy organizations constituted by waste pickers are emerging as valuable actors in the governance framework, partnering at times with the public and private sectors to fulfil public service provision while aiming to improve the livelihoods of the poor and overcome the institutional nature of poverty. Bogota's Plan Maestro Integral de Residuos Solidos (PMIRS) serves as a case study to explore these new modalities in service delivery, and to delve into the theoretical dimensions and practical implications of fomenting the inclusion of informal waste pickers into integrated solid waste management systems.

Keywords

Waste picking, poverty, social economy, governance, Bogotá (Colombia).

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1 Introduction

Social economy organisations are sometimes affected by lack of resources, capacities, formalisation, legal protection and general public recognition. One of the ways in which they seek to solve these problems is by establishing partnerships with local governments. At the same time, local governments tend to see social economy organisations as actors with a high legitimacy basis that can aid them in fulfilling their public service delivery responsibilities. In the context of budgetary restrictions, such partnerships are often tied up to income generation schemes for disadvantaged groups. They thus seem low-cost solutions to achieve various goals in one go: service delivery, social inclusion, and poverty alleviation. However, these partnerships are not unproblematic and create a series of challenges for both local government and social economy organisations (Billis, 2010).

This paper will look at the partnership between waste pickers, their cooperatives and the government of the city of Bogotá, Colombia. In 2004 the Plan Maestro de Manejo Integral de Residuos Sólidos (PMIRS) was established through the active engagements of public sector entities and Bogotá's Waste Picker Association (ARB). It was a new projection of solid waste management launched with the *recicladores*, as waste pickers are locally known, to provide solid waste management services, address environmental degradation, exclusion and poverty reduction within a mutually beneficial scheme. Characteristic of informal sectors enterprises, waste picking is hard to quantify, yet in the city of Bogotá, the National Statistics Department (DANE) identified 3,692 households amounting to a total of 8,479 individuals actively taking part in waste picking activities.

This research aims to analyze the partnership between a social economy organisation and a local government that declared social inclusion, poverty alleviation and empowerment to be central goals. To what extent has the alliance between the city of Bogotá and waste picker cooperatives changed the situation of poverty and exclusion of the waste pickers? To what extent were the service delivery goals achieved? What factors explain the outcomes of the partnership? The focus of the research is the partnership itself and its impact on the actors, some of them created specifically within the PMIRS.

The case of the PMIRS was chosen for this study for various reasons. Waste picking is an income generating activity that knows no boundaries, actively engaging the poorest of the poor throughout the world to comb through streams of waste during the process of transportation, disposal or at the final dumping sites. A growing trend amongst waste pickers in Latin America has been their organization into groups within the social economy. They thus reduce fragmentation by organizing activities and demands for their members, and serve as immediate platforms to communicate with external actors. Local governments are mainly responsible for integrated solid waste

management systems and can hardly overlook the fact that their obligations are being fulfilled by informal workers who have initiated processes of waste reduction through reuse and recycling. Bogotá hence tried out an innovative scheme to address the problem, designing a new modality of service delivery that centred on the formal participation of the waste pickers' associations.

The study started with a thorough literature search, including the specific laws and decrees at the base of the PMIRS and the studies performed by the DANE regarding the waste picking population of Bogotá. This was followed by a revision of government documents, local and national newspapers, documentaries and conference proceedings. A series of interviews was conducted with the representatives of the waste pickers' organisations, the director for the ARB and the NGO WASTE. Most of the data used in this study comes from secondary sources, mainly because of the lack of resources to collect primary data and the inability to secure the personal safety of the researchers.

2 The evolving paradigm of state involvement

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

As structural adjustment programs have demonstrated throughout developing countries, cutbacks on social investment create an entirely new set of challenges which have impacted countries in different ways, from the disintegration of educational programs, the inexistence of health services, the cutbacks in service delivery and increased resource scarcity to name a few. Cutback of state action, however, has been compounded by the rise of other actors who have taken up these responsibilities, and an overall reorganization of relationships between the public sector, private sector and civil society has ensued, giving rise to what is termed a 'governance' framework. Governance has emerged out of the general recognition that the state still holds a primary position in both economic and social policy making, principally as an enabler which brings together formal and informal networks to reorient the configuration of the market. This moves actors away from traditional roles and responsibilities towards more complementary relationships.

In order to understand how governance has reshaped relationships not only at a macro-level but on a municipal scale, it is important first to underline two particular trends that have directly impacted the internal separation of responsibilities. Initially decentralization has relegated certain areas of policy

making from central to local governments. The principal of subsidiarity states that “power should devolve on the lowest, most local level at which decisions can reasonably be made, with the functions of the larger unit being to support and assist the local body in carrying out its tasks” (Bellah et al. 1991 in: Paquet 2001: 195). Paquet further argues that “while subsidiarity reduces the vertical hierarchical power, it increases in a meaningful way the potential for participation” in other words “distributed governance does not simply mean a process of dispersion of power toward localized decision making within each sector: it entails a dispersion of power over a wide variety of actors and groups” (Nohria and Eccles 1992 in: Paquet 2001: 188).

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

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

The experience with the privatization of public services such as water and education in developing countries has been highly contested (Awortwi, 2004). It is claimed that privatization often increases costs which reduces availability for the poorest of the poor, in such a way that it creates a segmented market rather than broadening access for universal coverage as appropriate when these services are considered a public good. If public delivery creates burdened bureaucracies, and privatization segments the market creating exclusion, one wonders how other actors can contribute to service delivery. Intrinsically there is no reason for services to either be entirely publicly or privately delivered. As more plural systems allow for new groups to contribute to the delivery of these services, new considerations arise regarding not only the way in which services are divided and delivered, but who will be responsible for providing these services.

From the point of view of local governments, strategic partnerships are ‘win-win’ relationships based on the mutual gain partners may reap in their area of strategic interest (Waddell, 2000). According to Awortwi (2004), there is a fundamental difference between partnerships and privatisation in public

service delivery: while privatisation means the public sector transfers all responsibilities and powers to the private sector, partnership refers to the sharing of power and responsibilities. Partnerships with social economy organisations are favoured by some local governments, as is the case in the city of Bogotá, because of their potential to improve social justice and participation in the public realm. Filion argues that “if social justice and a more thorough form of democracy is not to be achieved through government reorganization, intervention, and redistribution, one alternative is to rely on self-sustaining economic activities that promote these same objectives” (Filion 1998: 1109).

Brandsen and Pestoff argue that the third sector is becoming a key player in the organization and delivery of public services. Specifically, “the relationship between the third sector and the production process is a dynamic one” when accounting for the plethora of citizen groups involved in the actual delivery of traditionally state-led services. A growing focus on cooperation and emerging forms of public community partnerships encourages new arrangements ranging from co-production, co-management and co-governance which accounts for the participation of the third sector in the planning and delivery of public services (Brandsen and Pestoff 2006: 496-497). To further confirm in an institutional sense the growing importance of service delivery partnerships, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has recently published a set of documents to offer suggestions and best practices on the issue of pro-poor municipal partnerships.

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

For local leaders, “the metropolitan challenge is one of establishing institutional structures and processes that effectively mediate diverse interests to ensure comprehensive action at the metropolitan scale” (Beall and Fox 2009: 215). Integrated systems for service delivery would compel a new kind of approach which reduces redundancy, vertical and horizontal conflict between actors and provides opportunities to marginal groups. The distributional benefits of including marginal groups in service delivery would allow municipalities to effectively reconsider the structures of access of the poor to services and income generation opportunities, and generate spill-over effects out these new linkages.

Naturally, there is a challenge for the poor to organize and operate in such a way as their activities are compatible with the new service delivery design and requirements. Social economy organisations that are constitutive of the poor surface as a potential solution to the management and delivery of services while offering new channels of economic and social participation for the poor as the existence of such organisations is meant to reduce fragmentation by moving from an individual to a collective stance thus strengthening associative bonds and representation while in turn allowing for the collaboration between local governments and these organizations. In broad terms “a social enterprise is a business with primarily social objectives whose surpluses are principally reinvested for that purpose in the business or in the community, rather than being driven by the need to maximize profit for shareholders and owners.” (Hewitt 2002: 2).

Participation alone, however, does not guarantee that benefits will be extensive enough to overturn poverty as a structural problem. It is necessary to underline that participation must lead to alteration within the structures of access, which the social economy literature proposes as “reinstating social justice in production relations” (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005). From an analytical standpoint, social justice has evolved to represent two principle claims; one of recognition and one of redistribution which form the analytical backbone of the ensuing analysis. As argued by Fraser, recognition “targets injustices it understands as cultural which it presumes to be rooted in social patterns of representation...” (Fraser 1999: 27). The author argues that at the root, non-recognition, disrespect and cultural domination devalue identities that make it particularly difficult to overcome dominant patterns and paradigms (ibid). In this way, empowerment evolves as a vehicle to reinstate voice and plead for recognition in the public sphere, tackling the overarching social structures that have led to non-recognition and marginality in the first place.

Social justice also encompasses the need for redistribution which Fraser describes as focusing “on injustices it defines as socio-economic and presumes to be rooted in the political economy” (Fraser 1999: 27). Redistribution can mean an immediate repartition of goods, assets or income, but in broader terms refers to restructuring the economic access that creates deprivation in the first place (ibid). Providing access to these resources is key to advance the faculty of groups to cultivate their realm of influence and their ability to grow. In this way, accessing more resources reflect a change in socioeconomic patterns.

The social economy profoundly holds a distinct paradigm as it is driven by the formation of associative bonds. Hirst argues that as a social theory, associativism postulates the defence of a market economy based in the non-capitalist principles of cooperation and mutuality (Hirst 1994 in: Rodriguez Garavito 2004: 7). Association is therefore a way of countering individualization which “fosters social fragmentation, emphasizes the fault lines between different social groups and thus limits possibilities for integration” (Gerometta et al. 2005: 2008). Focusing on association, rather than individualization, helps counter the posture of mainstream economics, which make it “difficult to recognize how economic action is constrained and shaped by the structures of social relations in which all real economic actors are

embedded” (Granovetter 1992: 4). In practical terms, the collective stance provided by the social economy helps previously fragmented workers represent themselves as an entity in negotiations and bargaining, whether this be in contract bidding, the subsequent terms of engagement or conditions and benefits of their work. Further, it helps these entities represent themselves and liaise with external actors from universities and non-governmental organizations to obtain external information and knowledge, further aiding in the structuring of the organization, the training of its members to upgrade skills and processes, further providing recognition from society at large.

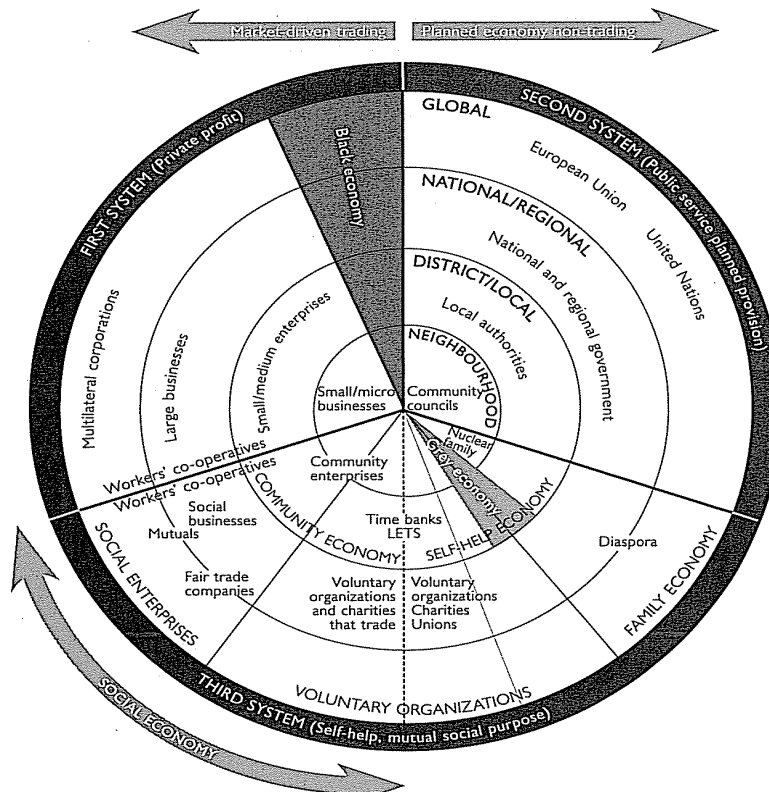
Cooperatives are an interesting case study as they have often been claimed to straddle between the logics of private firms and civil organization groups, inherently creating value-added production, yet redistributing earnings between members of the enterprise or community (See Figure 2.1). Being one of the main actors of the social economy, it has given way to the organization and participation of the poor in numerous fields of activity from agriculture to waste-picking. Yet as any organization of individuals, participation is selective.

In the case of workers’ cooperatives, the egalitarian redistribution of earnings between members puts pressure on these members to reduce the inclusion and participation of undesirable or underperforming individuals in the group, meaning that while cooperatives commonly represent the poor, they represent a selected group within this heterogeneous population (Abarca 2009). Yet the reflection goes further to account that “contrary to the ubiquitous optimistic assertions about the benefits of public participation, there are numerous documented examples of situations where individuals find it easier, more beneficial, or habitually familiar not to participate” (Cleaver 1999: 607). Abarca further highlights in the context of waste picking that at times individual waste pickers prefer to operate on their own because this provides greater flexibility in terms of the quantity of hours worked, personal scheduling, pace of work or final resale point (Abarca 2009). In other words, it is important to keep in mind that widespread representativeness is not a systematic outcome of waste-pickers’ cooperatives.

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

The question remains whether the representation of collective interests and the inclusion of workers’ cooperatives in public service delivery will inevitably create social justice in production relations and reduce poverty. The case of Bogotá’s integrated solid waste management plan which proposes to promote the inclusion of waste picker cooperatives in service delivery will be analysed for deeper insight into these theoretical dimensions.

FIGURE 2.1
The three systems of the economy



(Amin 2009: 26)

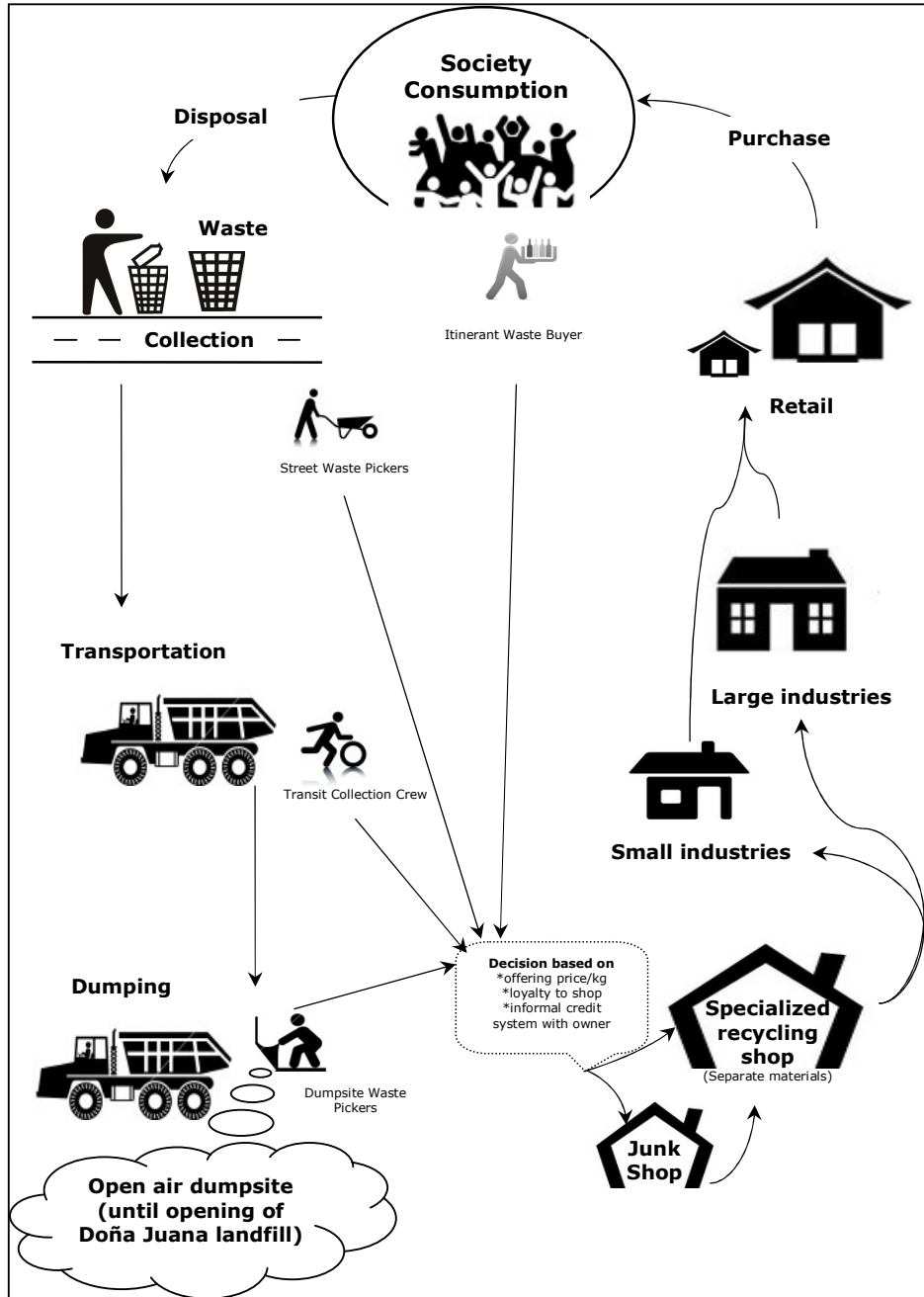
3 Waste picking: a default occupation in Bogotá?

The armed conflict in Colombia has displaced the population of entire villages from rural to urban locations. The flow of migrants outstripped the quantity of jobs created by industrial growth, meaning that many individuals were relegated to informally produce goods and services to generate an income, segmenting the economically active population in a dual economy (De Oliveira and Roberts 1994: 53). Born out of these historical trends, and due to a lack of functional redistributive social policies until the edification of a new constitution in the early 90's, Colombian cities have fostered the propagation of waste picking as one of these precarious forms of informal employment. In Bogotá, "the money generated by the collection of activities that compose the recycling circuit (...) was 22 million dollars" in 1990 (Rodriguez Garavito 2004: 15).

The significance and logic behind these numbers and the occupation of waste picking is that it is accessible to all individuals who have the physical capacities to filter through waste streams, separate goods and transport them to a resale point. In other terms, barriers to entry into waste picking are low, and

based more on physical ability than education, skill or capital requirements. Waste picking is a labour intensive independent activity which can be taken up as a permanent or temporary income generator for virtually any migrant, unemployed or underemployed individual, which is why its popularity and presence in the urban landscape has survived the cyclical up and downturns of the larger economy.

FIGURE 3.1
Waste Value Chain (prior to PMIRS)



Waste pickers' ability to earn a living is largely dependent on the generation and disposal of waste by society, and as such it is important to broadly define its categories, volume and movement. Indeed, waste management is a complex construction of the post-consumption flows instigated by households, commerce, organizations and industry and integrated into multi-scalar processes of recollection, separation, transportation, transformation and disposal (See Figure 3.1). Waste takes on many forms from organic to toxic, meaning that each category requires different methods of transformation and disposal to ensure limited environmental impact.

Mainstream household and office waste, more specifically non-organic recyclable materials including paper, cardboard, plastics, glass and corrugated metals are central to this study, as these are the principal materials that waste pickers in Bogotá recuperate and transform for resale. These materials not only withhold the most concrete economic value for waste pickers, but constitute a significant bulk of the waste that local governments want to deduce from overall waste flows in order to extend the lives of sanitary landfills and dumps existing in the municipality.

In 2008, approximately 25,079 tons of waste was generated daily throughout Colombia, averaging the disposal rate of .56kg/person/per day at the national level (Superintendencia De Servicios Publicos 2008). Specifically speaking, Bogotá alone produces 6,500 tons of waste daily, which is disposed at the Doña Juana sanitary landfill which not only serves the Bogotá community, but further absorbs the residual waste of six neighbouring municipalities (Jaramillo Henao and Zapata Marquez 2008: 32). Given a significant rural-urban divide in waste management characterized by higher trends of consumption and disposal in urban areas, the volume, flows and organization of waste management systems differ. In fact “higher volumes of garbage are associated with rising levels of affluence, cheaper consumer products, built-in obsolescence, increased packaging and the demand for convenience products” (Beall and Fox 2009: 144).

In terms of non-organic waste, Bogotá accounts for approximately a quarter of all waste produced in the country despite representing less than 18% of the overall population (Superintendencia De Servicios Publicos 2008: 46). This means that residents of Bogotá dispose on average more solid goods per capita, posing a stress on current systems of municipal management, which, according to a 2005 census formally covers only 7 out of 45 million Colombians (Superintendencia De Servicios Publicos 2008: 21). The significant gap in coverage stimulates the spread and reliance on alternative systems, specifically fostering economic opportunities for different groupings of waste pickers including itinerant waste buyers, street waste pickers, transit collection crew and dumpsite waste pickers who operate at different transit points along the waste value chain illustrated in Figure 3.1. This goes to demonstrate the centrality not only of waste picker's purpose and role in complementing or altogether fulfilling municipal waste services, but further confirms the need to revisit current systems for more integrative strategies.

3.1 The profile of waste pickers in Bogotá

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

Returning to our core population of full-time waste pickers, segmentation on the basis of sexes yields a rather balanced proportion of 45.5% women and 55.5% men. When divided into age groups, men are over represented between the ages of 0-17 years, while women are more present in other cohorts, particularly between the ages of 18-40. Given the important dependent population that represents almost 10,000 individuals, a socio-demographic analysis of households is particularly important in understanding the wellbeing of its members. Out of the total amount of households, approximately 28% are headed by males and 72% headed by females. Particularly, out of the total amount of households, 34.4% are headed by single parents. What is particularly striking, however, is that in the case of female single-headed households the average amount of dependents is 4.5 people, relative to male single-headed households that sustain 2.5 people on average, demonstrating that a greater stress is placed on most waste picking women to sustain their dependents.

This partially explains why child labour in this domain is so prominent. It is estimated that out of the 8,479 overall full-time waste pickers, 2800 are children between the ages of 5 and 17 years, representing 33% of the overall workforce. These children are considered to work on a full time basis and therefore do not for the large part partake in the formal educational system. The value of incorporating children and youth in the schooling system is initially based on the ability to expand literacy, cognitive and analytical skills yet it also withholds intrinsic benefits such as integrating children into an environment that broadens opportunities to find alternative social networks and employment opportunities in the long term. As these children become adults, it is therefore unsurprising that illiteracy rates are seven percentage points higher than the national average. In Colombia 10% of the population is considered to be illiterate, and in the case of waste pickers in Bogotá, the level

reaches 17.3%. On average more women than men are illiterate, representing 57% and 42%, respectively. Observing the levels of education is also revealing of the low level of access and attendance in the formal educational system as only 25.2% have advanced beyond primary school.

Given that the materials and working environment of waste pickers may cause serious health problems, access to health services is crucial to the ability to sustain activities over the long term. The study identifies that almost 65% have access to the health system, with respect to 35% who either do not, or do not know of their status relative to health services. What is particularly important to note, however, is that while the claim to health services is sustained, it refers to emergency health services rather than integral health care linked to social security. Usually the organizational status of waste pickers, either forming part of cooperative groups or operating individually, largely defines the relationships of waste pickers with social security coverage. In fact, the organizational status of waste pickers directly affects their linkages, not only to social security, but to other actors in the waste value chain. Let us now further delve into the existing distinctions within the waste picking community.

3.2 Organizations and collective action

While regrouping waste pickers as a homogenous body would facilitate the analysis, this would be unreflective of their respective relationship to the waste chain. Currently over 8,000 individuals actively pick through waste on a full time basis and over 5,000 do so part time. Within the full time waste picker community, a second subdivision is particularly relevant in analysing linkages given that certain individuals operate on an individual basis, and others form part of organized groups. The main logic behind organizing is to overcome the individualization of labour, which reinforces the fragmented nature of the labour market, and isolates individuals in their activities, limiting their capacity to process materials, and ultimately rendering them vulnerable to fluctuations and instability. Organizing individuals also means organizing their activities and their demands through negotiations, which help reduce overlapping activities, their transaction cost and potentially rebalance power structures. Estimates of organized waste pickers in Bogotá are quite unreliable. The National Statistics Department places the overall percentage of organized waster pickers at 11%, while the director of the Recycler's Association of Bogotá places figures closer to 30% (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004, Padilla Herrera 2009).

Individuals may operate individually by obligation because of deficient skills and habits which include working slowly, being drug or alcohol dependent, or sustaining discordant behaviour (Abarca 2009). They may also operate individually by choice valuing the flexibility sustained by autonomous employment, including the most appropriate hours of work, pick up spots and resale point which immediately affects the income level of these waste pickers. Cooperatives are undeniably central actors in altering both representation and demands at the local level, and let us turn to the Colombian context in which the rise of cooperatives may be situated.

The organization of informal or unrecognized workers has been primarily through the mediums of the “social economy”. The rise of associative

movements in Colombia may be understood as a response to the shortfalls in the implementation of the centralized economic principals of the time, which saw in the 1930's the first waves of market liberalization through foreign direct investment. The economic production and exchange models were of a fragmentary nature excluding groups with limited asset base from participating in the evolving economic model. Moulaert and Ailenei explain that "when the economic growth engine starts to stutter, formal distribution mechanisms begin to fail and new social forces develop and give rise to alternative institutions and mechanisms of solidarity and redistribution as a means of addressing the failures of the institutions of the socioeconomic movements to guarantee solidarity among economic agents" (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005: 2038).

Between the 30's and the 50's, discussions in the public sphere iterated the importance of bridging and streamlining economic and social development at the national policy level so as to address substantial discrepancies between the rich and poor. In order to do so, Law 19 of 1958 was passed in order to edify the first National Plan for Economic and Social Development which served as a necessary platform for the progressive institutionalization of the social economy (Dane 2004: 7). The "social economy" began to take form as the values and practices of cooperativism emerged as an alternative economic production base. In 1963 the first regulatory board known as the Superintendencia de Cooperativas took charge of the registration, evaluation, inspection and control of cooperatives, not only recognizing them as legal entities, but further promoting them as a vehicle for production and distribution of essential goods and services (ibid). The early 80's saw the conversion of this entity into the National Department of Cooperatives (DANCOOP) whose principal objectives were to "direct and execute the cooperative policies of the State" while "serving the popular interests and reaching higher levels of development" with a special focus on reducing the unsatisfied basic needs of the population (Dane 2004: 7). From there on, the cooperative model was adopted by alternative groups as a way to organize and be recognized as legal entities with rights and obligations relative to the State. Cooperatives have indeed been a decisive outcome of the development of associative bonds amongst waste pickers in Colombia.

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

3.3 A budding relationship in service delivery

In order for the nature of the relationship between waste picker cooperatives and government to evolve, a shift in the structure, vision and response of Bogotá's public administration occurred. Initially administrative, fiscal and political decentralization relegated more decision making power at the lower realms of government, shifting functions from central to local governments. This also meant that mayors were no longer appointed but rather elected, allowing urban residents to weigh into the establishment of new priorities at the city level by selecting their candidate.

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

Of important note, however, is that this was the first instance that Bogotá's municipal government put in practice the framework of governance in waste management. By governance, we are looking at the collection of networks and structures, both formal and informal that institute new types of interactions between three principal actors at the local level, including government, private sector and civil society. It provides a new configuration for the market, so as to include the skills and contributions of multiple actors to provide more effective and efficient services to local communities. Despite the initial failure of privatizing services to social organizations, dialogue emerged between waste picker organizations and local government for a revision in their relationship.

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

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

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

4 The Master Plan’s Framework and execution

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

objectives for the intervention and formulation of a general system of solid waste had been proposed.

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

1. To incorporate citizens of the Capital District and of regional municipalities in a culture of 'at source' separation, minimization and productive utilization of solid waste, with an understanding of the positive impacts that these practices exert on the environment, on public health and the use of public spaces.
2. To maximize economies of scale, with high efficiency, competitiveness and productivity indicators, and the lowest social and environmental impact in the delivery of these public services so as to reduce cost for the beneficiaries.
3. To articulate regional infrastructural development for the establishment of final disposal and treatment sites, in addition to the macro routes used for the transportation of solid waste which would best make use of the competitive and comparative advantage of the different municipalities and of the capacity of their public, private and community agents.
4. To always articulate principals of efficiency and financial sufficiency in the management of solid waste in such a way to promote affirmative actions for service beneficiaries with limited financial means, and for the waste picking community in condition of poverty and vulnerability so as to socially include and recognize their work and role as actors in the general solid waste system. (Decreto 312 2006)

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

While the first two dimensions reduce the relevance of waste pickers' activities in the waste chain, the last two dimensions were meant to reorient and expand their utility within the overall master plan. Four recycling parks were planned to be opened to further separate materials for processing. Upon construction, the management of these parks would be open for various private and collective enterprises to place bids. In practical terms, this opportunity is only extended to cooperative entities that are sufficiently established, and withhold external knowledge and relationships allowing for formal bids to be placed and to compete against private enterprises.

Due to these limitations, there is recognition within the PMIRS that additional inclusionary mechanisms are essential in lifting the overall condition of waste pickers in conditions of vulnerability and poverty, and as such the policies for 'social inclusion' can be divided into three categories:

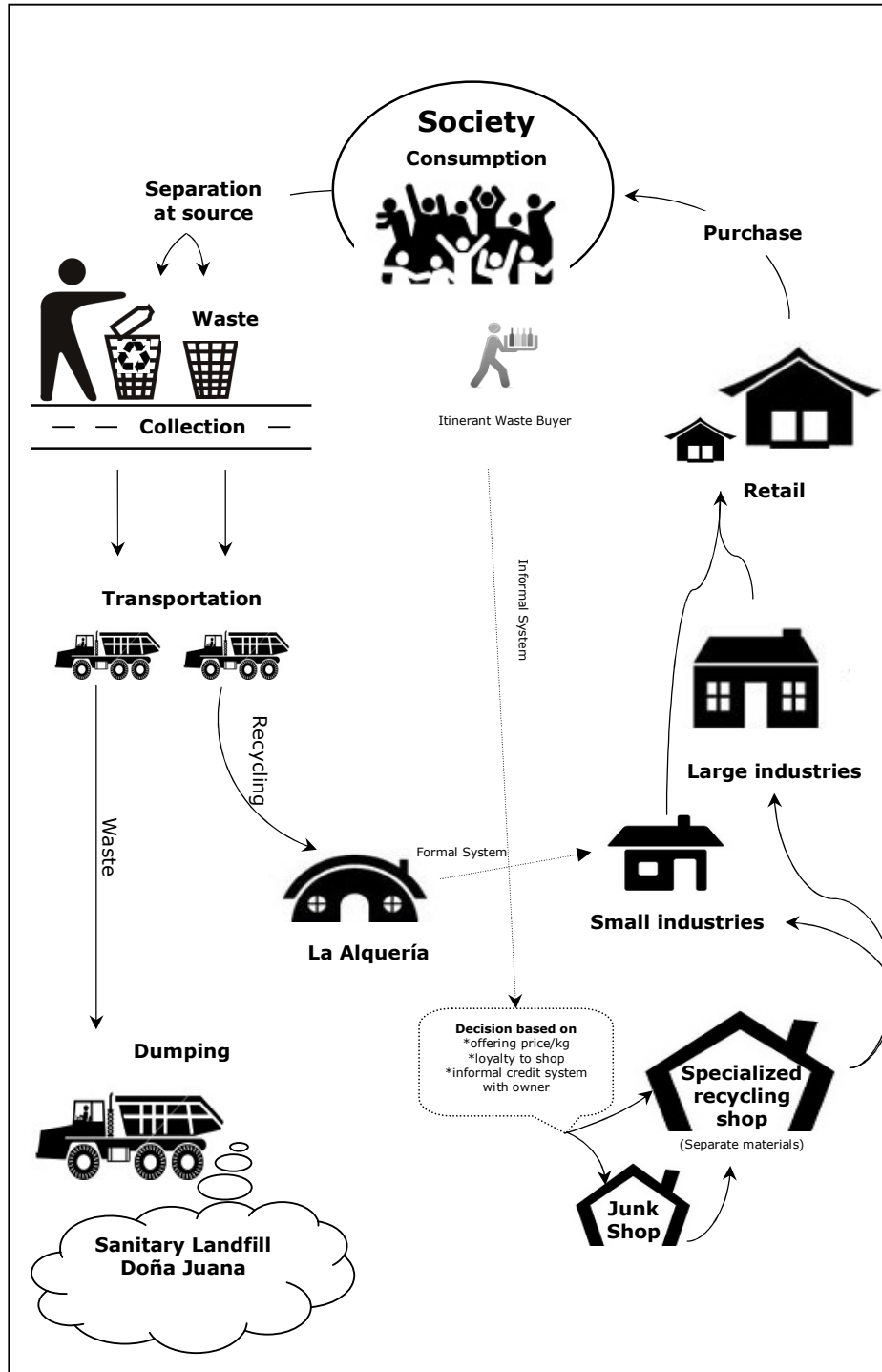
1. Linkages to the productive process, commercial process and service delivery through the expanded formation of technical competencies that improve earnings, the solidification of micro-entrepreneurial capacity and the opening of doors to alternative labour opportunities.
2. Strategies for greater work recognition and reduction of vulnerability, including such elements as the improvement of dialogue for the exchange of knowledge, the reduction of illiteracy both of adult and child groups, and the elimination of child labour due to greater integration in the public school system.
3. Strategies aimed at strengthening both the formation of new waste picker organizations and the consolidation of existing cooperatives through technical and legal counselling, supplemented by assistance to access resources from cooperative agencies at the national and international level. (Decreto 312 2006)

Planned in 2004, the PMIRS reflected three implementation cycles with the first and most immediate initiatives being implemented between 2006 and 2008. Many organizations including the Contraloría de Bogotá, local and national media, and waste picker organizations have been consulted to provide a review and cross-examination of the proposed objectives with the current situation of solid waste management in Bogotá. We will first briefly comment on the immediate outputs emanating from the plan's implementation, giving way to the respective successes and shortfalls of the program. A review of the initial waste chart resulting from the PMIRS may be observed in Figure 4.1.

The separation of materials by offices, households, restaurants and businesses before disposal and recollection has changed the nature of the relationship between waste pickers and the post consumption flow. When this waste is placed in public disposal sites composed of small and large bins on the street, waste pickers are highly encouraged to pass before the trucks to take away materials with the highest economic value, as this reduces the amount of time they dedicate to extract materials (L. Gomez 2008: 1). In some cases, those who dispose of this waste are aware that these materials hold a resale value, and therefore attempt to earn a portion of this value by separating yet withholding the materials until waste pickers purchase them directly. This encourages what is called itinerant waste buying, which effectively has three repercussions. First, a middleman is created in the chain, which extracts a flat fee from the waste pickers who will obtain lower gross revenue from the same quantity of materials. Secondly, this implies that fewer materials will enter the recollection route and hence fewer materials arrive for processing at the formal recycling plants, reducing the quantity of formal jobs created in these centres. Thirdly it encourages the co-existence of formal and informal waste management systems (Veeduría Distrital 2008: 1). These three repercussions are further exacerbated by the implementation of the Comparendo Ambiental regulation in 2009, which has rendered the opening of bags on the street illegal and punishable by hefty fines (Canal RCN 2009). This has been a determining

factor in the rise of itinerant waste buying relative to other methods of waste picking in the urban landscape.

FIGURE 4.1
The Waste Value Chain Revisited (post PMIRS)



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

Given the limited reach of the current recollection routes, what can be observed is further segmentation between the formal and informal waste management systems. Naturally areas that lack collection coverage continue to provide strong incentives for waste pickers to operate and resell their materials to the 800 informal junk/recycling shops that exist in the city (Padilla Herrera 2009). This tendency reflects immediate shortfalls relative to the plan's aspirations, both in terms of the widespread collection of materials, and the new formal employment opportunities created through the edification of formal recycling plants. Indeed, to absorb both potentially recyclable materials and a projected 800 waste pickers for the operation and administration of these centres, the construction of four recycling plants had been planned. The first proposed recycling centre, El Salitre, never came into existence. Strong pressures on behalf of citizen groups living in the construction area halted progress due to demonstrations (Alarcon Moreno 2008, Contraloria de Bogota 2007). The second centre El Tintal succumbed to similar pressures, giving way to the existence only of a third and much smaller centre for this purpose called La Alquería. The bid for the administration and operation of the centre was won by the Union Temporal de Recicladores, an umbrella organization representing three waste picker associations (Veira Rojas 2008).

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

overall waste picking population to education and training initiatives meant to reinforce organizational skills, personal skills, alternative methods of income generation, and educative opportunities to reduce child labour. Specifically, out of the 18,506 individuals linked to the process of waste picking, 5,840 were initially targeted by UAESP. Of these 5,840 individuals, only 440 were effectively linked to any of these dimensions (Contraloría De Bogota 2007).

The process of becoming an official cooperative in Colombia requires these organizations to proceed through two years formation with external actors, as a way of strengthening administrative processes, human resources and accounting. In the 1990's, the Fundación Social was the main external actor involved in the process of upgrading organizational skills. At the turn of the century, most cooperatives were founded and operational giving priority to practical material separation courses and technological upgrading implemented by the District University and the SENA. Prior to the PMIRS, it is said that out of the 49 active cooperatives, 73% were receiving support by national or international organizations in the fields of technical upgrading and training (Lievano Latorre et al. 2004). In other words, the PMIRS workshops proved to be largely redundant and glaringly unsuccessful in the face of a low rate of participation accounting for 120 individuals of a project group of 2800. Further, only one workshop was offered to strengthen organizations and no workshops were being offered in technological upgrading which has been stated as one of the building blocks to increase the ability of individuals and organizations to capture new processes to step up in the value chain (Padilla Herrera 2009).

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

marginal groups so as to allow greater material equality” (Contraloría De Bogota 2007: 8). Before concluding so boldly, let us now turn to qualitative remarks regarding the impacts of the PMIRS on the waste picking community.

5 Successes, shortfalls and evolving institutions

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

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

The relevance of observing these major discrepancies is that the success of the PMIRS is highly contested amongst the media, the mayor’s office, the controller’s office and the waste picker themselves. Given the divergent interests and expectations it is hard to paint in thick brushstrokes the colours of success or failure. Rather, what is put forward is the multidimensionality of interests which are trying to be reconciled through new modalities in service delivery at the local level. As stated by Padilla, the results can be categorized as normal given the learning curve, representing both victories and failures for all

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

The spectrum of integration into the master plan reflects the distinct linkages that have been created or encouraged during the first two years of

TABLE 5.1
Synthesized Outcomes according to Waste Picker Segment

	Cooperatives – Employees of La Alqueria	Cooperatives – Other members	Individual Waste Pickers
Work Recognition	Formal position as workers within ISWM	Growing recognition of complementary contribution to ISWM	Growing recognition of their activities as work
Stable Remuneration	Fixed rate per hour at level of minimum wage	Earnings fluctuate. Based on market price of materials/weight negotiated by cooperative	Earnings fluctuate. Based on market price of materials/weight defined by junk shops
Linkage to social security	Yes	Applicable only to members of the most developed/established cooperatives	For a large majority, no
Working conditions	Sanitary garments provided; facilities and conditions of work regulated and improved	Established geographical coverage improves relationship with local community, but no major changes in occupational safety & hygiene	No major changes in occupational safety & hygiene
Collective stance	Positive discrimination in contract bids; Contract negotiation Dialogue with external actors	Positive discrimination for cooperatives in contract bids Dialogue with external actors	None
Linkage to external actors	Government bodies Universities Foundations & civil society groups Private sector (Tetrapack) Lawyers/ Legal System	Mostly through the ARB: Government bodies Universities Foundations & civil society groups Private sector (Tetrapack) Lawyers/ Legal System	May link at will with cooperatives. Further linkages and representation available through cooperative platform
Access to training	Materials separation courses	Organizational strengthening workshops	Limited attendance: -Alternative income generation schemes - Cooperative formation
Access to capital investment	They operate in top level facility but do not own either the plant or machinery	Limited to the availability of surplus to be reinvested in the cooperative	Limited to informal lending/borrowing
Shift in the value-chain	Noteworthy as a best practice between government and waste pickers, reduction of middleman (junk shop)	None	Fragmented operations; marginalized activities as police may intercept at will due to the <i>Comparendo Ambiental</i>

implementation. In order to review these findings, Table 5.1 resumes the outputs according to the critical subdivisions of beneficiaries. The PMIRS clearly had divergent impacts depending on the organizational status of waste pickers, notably a large divide can be perceived between members of cooperatives, most specifically workers at La Alquería, relative to their fragmented counterparts. As a way of regrouping these findings for purposeful analysis, we now return to the main objectives which guide the organizations of the social economy and justify its presence as a market actor; that of restoring social justice in production relations. Let us recall the two primary dimensions this concept puts forward according to Fraser (1999); that of instigating recognition through the vehicle of empowerment, and that of fostering effective redistribution as a means of securing greater access to resources for a change in socio-economic patterns.

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

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

However, great successes at the levels of recognition and empowerment may be attributed to the cooperatives and the ARB, including the First World Conference and Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers, bringing together cooperatives from different regions of the continent and of the world

to exchange best practices and methods to urge the recognition and pleas for active participation in local urban waste management. Further, March 1st was established as the National Day of the Waste Picker in Colombia, valorising both the waste pickers and the activities they perform (Wiego 2008). It has further been announced over the summer of 2009 that an agreement between the BID, Tetrapack and the ARB evaluated at \$1.8 million has been placed forward to create an economic cluster for the development of recycling (Giraldo 2009). As suggested by Berner, “to actively challenge the dominance system beyond local, reactive and spontaneous resistance, subordinate groups need alliances with factions of the upper class, in other words, existing or potentially strategic groups” (Berner 2001: 124). Despite the prematurity of commenting on possible outcomes, it is important to highlight that by aligning energies with large established bodies, the ARB is taking a stance beyond dialogue with local government to legitimize their efforts and labour and further develop relationships with new strategic groups.

As this partnership between the BID, Tetrapack and the ARB underlines, one of the greatest drawbacks from the PMIRS has been the lack of intentional investment in cooperative organizations which would strengthen and upgrade technical and technological capacity. By overlooking the fact that cooperatives perform a service yet earn their living according to a market logic, the government-proposed PMIRS misses the mark in identifying the ways in which these organizations may strengthen their stance within this market. Arguably if the UAESP is not willing or able to pay wages to waste pickers, then it must also recognize that investment in capital and training are necessary for organizations to competitively operate in service provision. This would allow for workers to further develop their skills and access assets that help upgrade processes to include such things as melting glass or plastic for reprocessing. In light of past developments and of the PMIRS, the issues of redistribution through improved access to resources at the level of the organization and of the individual are simply not addressed. As argued by Filion (1998: 1112), one of the leading difficulties faced by small scale economic development initiatives “concern the limiting impact of the organizational and structural characteristics of CED (community economic development) ventures on their capacity to compete successfully with mainstream firms”. He further argues that there isn’t sufficient flexibility and economies of scale to hold a competitive position in the industry (ibid). Flexibility and economies of scale are rooted both in organizational capacity and the capital investments cooperatives are able to make. With the exception of the 50 workers in La Alquería who operate government-owned machinery, waste pickers still operate with human or animal driven carts, resell their materials to a middleman and have limited opportunities to transform these materials beyond personal reuse of well-preserved residues. Competitiveness insinuates a largely different picture.

Initially, limited access to capital has meant that waste pickers continue to rely on labour intensive methods, which on a cost-benefit-efficiency scale lose out compared to capital intensive methods. Waste pickers in countries such as Brazil and Argentina have lobbied strongly to obtain financing to upgrade their technologies, something that has altogether been a flaw of the Colombian, and specifically the Bogotá experience (Arroyo Moreno et al. 1999). Without access to capital, the trucks necessary to transport materials, the yards necessary to

temporarily store materials, and the machinery necessary to transform the materials into industrial inputs limits the ability to capture additional segments of the waste value-chain. The continued presence of junkshop and industrial transformers mean that these middlemen continue to retain a portion of the value-added dimensions of reprocessing waste, thereby forgoing the opportunity of cooperatives to upgrade in the value chain.

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

Although the waste-pickers' cooperatives have made progress in the battle for recognition of their members, it is estimated that between eleven and thirty percent of waste pickers are part of these cooperatives, whereby leaving the greatest portion of workers outside the realm of their benefits. Whether due to personal or organizational impediments, these bodies effectively represent the interest of a small portion of the larger community, which would lead me to highlight that the social economy holds contiguous mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, distributing benefits primarily to those who are included rather than to the whole population it is assumed to represent. In other words the cooperatives represent a building block out of fragmented waste picking activities which yield certain benefits, yet these benefits remain limited partially in their scope, and mostly in their reach.

Cooperatives hold incentives that bring them to operate on the fringe of private sector and civil society logic, meaning that there is a need to assess the course and nature of activities to evaluate their impact on growth and the strengthening of these enterprises so as to become competitive relative to other private actors that increasingly dominate waste management. In order to avoid obsolescence over the long term, a market analysis would lead us to view the importance of upgrading the skills and equipment of cooperatives in order to compete against the private firms who hold the technical and technological knowledge to continue capturing segments of the value chain. As cooperative entities, the ability to reinvest is dictated by the ability to set aside a portion of total revenues to this end. Yet in the case of the low and fluctuating prices of materials, the priority of cooperative members is to ensure their wellbeing before further reinvesting.

In the perspective of forming new modalities for service delivery through partnerships, the complementarities of activities is central to reallocating

individuals and their processes according to a critical analysis that acknowledges the heterogeneity of the population, the nature of activities and the divergent interests hoping to be achieved simultaneously by distinct stakeholders. Ultimately yes, the institutional landscape has shifted positively in favour of the representation and linkage of cooperative groups with external actors. Yet relying on the benevolence or voluntarism of these actors can create a relationship of dependency, and certainly does not guarantee to overcome an important shortfall embedded in the social economy which effectively distribute social recognition in spite of redistributing activities that generate unstable or insufficient revenues for patterns of consumption and investment to be altered at the individual or organizational levels. In other words, without the capability of addressing both recognition and redistribution, the social economy foments a vicious circle of economic marginality and basically reorganises poverty.

6 Conclusions

The importance of analyzing the issue of waste picking is that it represents the intersection of two increasingly pertinent topics of concern to our societies; poverty and waste. As waste picking continues to provide income generating activities for the poor in absence of formal employment opportunities, the important shift in waste picking from an atomized undertaking to an organizational base provides a platform where the poor can become social actors within a local governance framework. In a time where the discourse on public services has evolved beyond delivery by state or private actors, it now accounts for the inclusion of the third sector, in this case represented by cooperatives that form alternate networks of organization. These cooperatives hope to reinstate social justice in production relations which have arguably been stripped by neoliberal thought from any logic beyond efficient economic dimensions. They seek to tackle the dimensions of recognition to overcome injustices in patterns of representation, and of redistribution to overcome injustices in socio-economic patterns (Fraser 1999). The question, however, is whether these cooperative bodies serve as an effective platform to significantly affect these deficiencies and overcome the institutionalized nature of poverty.

The new modalities of service delivery implemented in Bogotá serve as a case study as both waste picker associations and government entities engaged in this partnership. Understanding the heterogeneity of the individuals, activities and current organization of the recycling circuit led formal and informal agents to operate side by side with households capturing part of the monetary value of waste, limiting the overall residues sent to the recycling parks and finally foregoing many formal positions for waste pickers to reallocate within the chain. All these results are quite counterintuitive when considering the original drive to institute ISWM. While the plan has been largely unsuccessful at reorganizing and mainstreaming waste processes, recognition can be identified as the primary benefit brought forward by organized groups whose linkages with external actors and legal challenges of the regulatory regime transformed the institutional landscape which had originally been responsible for overlooking their activities. Waste pickers today

are front runners in contract bids, are socially and environmentally engaged agents, and are increasingly valued as multidimensional stakeholders.

In the sense of redistribution, however, successes have fallen significantly short of projections, initially segmenting the waste picking population further between three beneficiary groups, with 50 out of a total of 8,479 accessing what may be considered formal employment conditions. A second group is composed of organized waste pickers falling outside the reach of jobs like those at La Alquería and left largely unaffected by the programme due to lack of investment in targeted skill formation, the capital goods required for competitiveness relative to private sector entities or to capture new segments of the value chain (such as operating transportation or reprocessing waste to create added value to the recovered materials). The third group, which represent at least two-thirds of the waste picking population, continue to operate individually and on a piecemeal basis, side-by-side with the formal system and without any linkages to organizations that may help move their position away from marginality.

Filion clearly underlines the contradiction posed by these social economy organizations as he states they are currently “caught between, on the one hand, growing interest in this movement in a climate of economic difficulties and yearning for community economic empowerment and, on the other hand, a paucity of resources required for the success of its enterprises” (Filion 1998: 1118). Without considering the economic incentives and payoffs of the wider market, social economy enterprises compete at a disadvantage against other private sector actors whose motivation is to fine tune and mainstream processes for maximal efficiency and reduced cost. Governments are hard pressed to find ways to expand service delivery while containing costs, and it is therefore important for organizations engaged in new modalities of service delivery to be competitive amongst the potential service providers so as to avoid obsolescence. The social economy is based in the tenet that economic action is embedded in social relations, yet it seeks to operate outside of an economic logic of competitiveness.

All in all, the case of the partnership between waste-pickers, their cooperatives, and the local government in Bogota shows that unless the cooperatives are provided or facilitated with the technical skills and capital upgrades required to compete in a sector driven by a market logic, they are unable to capture value-added processes that facilitate redistribution. With recognition and redistribution at the core of social justice, if partnerships serve to promote one of these dimensions at the expense of the other, then partnerships are instrumentalized to advance the narrow interests of select actors rather than act as a true parting point from institutionalized poverty. Progress in achieving both of these goals at the same time, therefore, requires a considerable investment by both government and social economy organisations that can hardly be aligned with cost-cutting pressures in public service delivery. The promotion of participation of social enterprises is significantly costly in terms of time, resources and organisational skills that increase transaction costs, so it should not be assumed at face value that partnerships reduce costs.

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