

## Citizen participation and planning: Citizen nonconformity in Aipe, Huila, Colombia

### Participación ciudadana y planificación: la inconformidad ciudadana en Aipe, Huila, Colombia

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**Abstract:** Unconformity and distrust are the results of the socio-political attempt aimed to socially and economically evolve under the Top-Down system, finding that “there is no hell like a small town,” a Colombian expression meaning that despite the small size of a social group, its problems could be as big as those of a metropolis. Aipe is one of the Huila’s municipalities that benefited from the oil bonanza, inversely proportional to the social, economic, and environmental bonanza bounty, produced amid a context of political problems of governance and detriment of the public treasury. This article shows results on the relationship between citizen participation and state planning processes in Aipe, which is incoherent, dysfunctional, and inadequate for Aipe’s society, and breeds a citizen climate of distrust and nonconformity towards the authorities and planning instances. Nonetheless, the hope for a prosperous municipality persists because community experiences motivate them to know and empower their territory.

**Keywords:** Politics, public policy, planning, and participation.

**Resumen:** Inconformidad y desconfianza, resultado del intento socio-político para evolucionar social y económicamente desde el sistema Top-Down, encontrando que “pueblo pequeño, infierno grande”, una expresión colombiana para manifestar que, pese al pequeño tamaño de un grupo social, los problemas pueden ser tan grandes como los de una metrópolis. Aipe, es uno de los municipios del Huila que ha gozado la bonanza petrolera, algo inversamente proporcional a la bonanza social, económica y ambiental, generado en un contexto de problemas políticos de gobernanza y detrimento al erario público. El presente artículo muestra resultados de la relación entre participación ciudadana y procesos de planificación estatal en Aipe, cuya relación es incoherente, disfuncional e inadecuada para la sociedad de Aipe, generando un clima ciudadano de desconfianza e inconformidad frente a las autoridades e instancias de planeación; no obstante, la esperanza de un Municipio próspero persiste porque las vivencias comunales motivan al conocimiento y empoderamiento de su territorio.

**Palabras clave:** Política, política pública, planificación y participación.

## INTRODUCTION

Within the framework of public administration, problems generated by public treasury malfeasance have produced latent difficulties in the country's history, in some cases with greater intensity than others. In light of the multiple consequences affecting society, the community gradually moves away from public subjects, forgetting its right and its duty of empowering to develop its local territory. That could be done by following up on policies and their leader's government plans and programs. Achievements fell short of expectations as it was reported in the 2004-2011 management reports, showing that Aipe municipality was second among the ten municipalities with the higher number of fiscal responsibility processes (Nación, 2013), due to the lack of commitment of their inhabitants in doing control and follow up. At the same time, problems arise in the context of low citizen participation in public affairs and everything of a public nature.

According to the National Administrative Statistics Department (DANE), it has a population of 23,513 inhabitants; geographically it is located north-west Huila on the Magdalena valley; its northerly and western neighbors are the Tolima department, the municipalities of Planadas, Natagaima, and Ataco; to the south, the municipality of Neiva; and to the east, the Magdalena River and the municipalities of Tello and Villa Vieja. Its total area is 801.04 Km<sup>2</sup>, almost 4% of the department. The highest point in its territory is found in the small town La Unión, reaching 2,300 m above sea level and an average temperature of 13.67 °C. On the other hand, its minimum height is found in the Pata river mouth, reaching 350 m above sea level and an average temperature of 28°C (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2004).

The analysis focuses mainly on three periods of government: 2004-2007, 2008-2011, and 2012-2015, years of instability in its territorial government.

## METHODOLOGY

The research has a qualitative approach from Patton's perspective (2002, cited in Vasilachis et al., 2006). Analysis units were the planning instances, planning authorities, and community organizations. An information triangulation is performed with three central activities: the document analysis according to Peña Vera & Pirela Morillo (2007), the in-depth interviews conducted according to (Morgan, 1997; Veiga & Gondim, 2001, cited by Gondim, 2002) guidelines. The Atlas.ti program was used for the analysis of information, and three analysis categories were defined: citizen participation, policy, and planning processes.

Summarizing, the study was conducted with qualitative methodology, techniques of information gathering like document analysis, in-depth interviews, and discussion groups. The analysis units were planning instances, planning authorities, and community organizations.

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The study's theoretical foundation used some authors on the subjects of public policy, decision-making, democracy, citizen participation, and planning. Roth Deubel (2002) is referred in the public policy subject, who considers that public policy is the union of collective purposes perceived as necessary and indispensable and likewise, these seek to transform situations perceived as problematic or comfortable by channeling behavior patterns of a single or many individuals with the treatment that a government institution will grant. "Top-Down" and "Bottom-Up" models used to implement public policies, according to (Roth Deubel, 2004, cited in Ordoñez Matamoros et al., 2013), are also taken into account.

As a fundamental element in the planning and political issues, decisions making is analyzed by Lindblom (2010) with the branch and root method. According to the author, the first one appears when building from the present:

(...) step by step and in small degrees. The second one would start from each time new fundamental facts, would build on the past given that experience is embodied in theory, and is always ready to start all over again as a fresh start (Lindblom, 2010, p. 3).

In the subject of democracy, representative democracy is treated from Velásquez & González (2003) and Madinson (1961:82, cited in Manin, 1998). These two authors conceive representative democracy as the representation of those large-scale complicated societies that fall short including minority identities, so the representatives seek that political will fits public welfare instead of being the result of the community pronouncement. The participative democracy is also treated by Dagnino et al. (2006, cited in Peralta Varela, 2013) and Velásquez & González (2003). They consider that participation transcends beyond politics, participative democracy is very bonded to citizen participation, discussions, and debates in public spaces and all that drives the change in the relationships between the state and the society itself. Likewise, the subject is analyzed in the local realm seeking to determine identities, strengthen social ties, and increase citizen participation.

Milbrath (1965, cited in Borba, 2012) is taken regarding the citizen participation subject. He shows that the first standings bonded to citizen participation were directly related to electoral processes and the influence it had on the actions of public officers. Likewise, from Sánchez (2009) and the integrative element by Kunrath Silva & Larangeira (2001), it is found that citizen participation is used not just in sporadic difficult situations or opportunities, but as the creation of a collective, voluntary vision with a participative approach. Taking into account the existence of situations where the economic factor and the individual interest favors over the public, Díaz Navarro (2011) states that they influence the diminishing of the political practice, reducing it to mere technical guidelines.

The planning subject is emphasized by Coraggio (1979, cited in Rengifo Rengifo, 2012) who emphasizes that society does not start from a system of categories exclusive for people, but from planning that integrates social elements and natural resources, necessary for smooth functioning. The preferred type of planning is the one that implies a participative, open, and inclusive process, where everybody contributes and knows about the problems and possible solutions, and where, in a significant way, permits reflection and understanding of the social group from its history and possible projection. Furthermore, it is observed how it is built from the bottom, from the most minimal citizen expressions, conceived also with the characteristics of decentralization, democracy, and in the long term, according to Velásquez & González (2003). Likewise, it is stood in contrast to the functioning of planning under the sustainability approach considered by Leboireiro (1999).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### CONTEXTUALIZATION

To guide the reader, the socio-historical, environmental, and political information of the Municipality of Aipe is initially presented, from the review of three periods of government: 2004-2007, 2008-2011, and 2012-2015.

#### History and demographics

Historically, the first settlements formed by the Aipe colonists go back to 1530 on the banks of the Magdalena River. Mr. Enrique Cortés and Mrs. Teresa Perdomo, considered as the founders of Aipe, institutionalize the founding of the municipality in 1741 through the concession of 80 hectares of land. The economy of the municipality was transformed by 1965 when it ceases being an agrarian town and turns into one of the main crude petroleum producers in the country (Alcaldía de Aipe 2012a).

By 2004, it had a gradual demographical growth of about 19,976 inhabitants, 54% of which was located in the urban area, and the remaining 46% in the rural area. The most important populated rural centers are Praga, Santa Rita, Cruce de Guacirco, Mesitas, Ventanas, and Patá. The main challenges and problems the 2004 administration took on were water potabilization in the municipality to face public health problems such as those produced by intestinal parasitosis. Similarly, the E.S.E San Carlos Hospital lacked enough capacity to deliver health care services to the community, their coverage did not reach the whole population of the urban area and in some cases, they did not reach either the ten health stations in the rural area, organized as 29 small towns and six populated centers. (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2004). Civil insecurity

was another negative factor for the community, especially in rural areas. In parallel, a high poverty index grew up in the territory, 38.01% of the Aipe's people were living in poverty conditions, and 14.2% of the population in misery. Overcrowding and the poor quality of public services were affecting the quality of life, according to the indications of the National Administrative Statistics Department (DANE) census in 2005 (Gobernación del Huila; Universidad del Rosario, 2011).

By the period 2008-2011, its demographical growth has no change rate, and the population continues migrating from rural areas but tending to create settlements in the periphery of urban areas to find jobs in oil companies. The administration approach was socio-culturally oriented, directing efforts with "59.23%" of the budget to improve the quality of life of Aipe's people through social protection, housing, education, recreation, sports, and culture (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2008).

By 2012 the population growth shows significant changes compared to those of the first period in which the study started because the Aipe's demographical growth rose to 23,513 inhabitants, 62.53% located in urban areas, and 37.47% in rural areas. The population growth is not directly related to the increase in birth rate but to the migration to the urban core, both because of the forced displacement and the search for better job offerings in the municipality's oil activity. The population structure by gender shows a high and equable growth between men and women, the former amounting to 50.50% of the population and women the remaining 49.50%.

There is a higher ethnic representation of the black, mulatto, and afro-Colombian population for a total of 31 people and 11 who consider themselves as indigenous. Regarding health and disabled people, the population found suffering most of some disabilities suffer from body, hands, arms, and legs mobility problems, followed by those concerned with the cardiorespiratory system and defenses. The latter has produced diseases such as ischemic heart disease –the main cause of death in Aipe– followed by the formation of malignant tumors, cardiovascular diseases, chronic lower respiratory tract, and digestive system (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2012b).

### **Environmental Context**

During the 2004-2007 administration, the environmental subject was relevant under Municipal Resolution 009 of 2000 that adopted Land Use Planning (EOT). The process of study, review, and reset started during this period, but, due to inconsistencies in its structure, it was sent back several times by the Autonomous Corporation of the Magdalena River (CAM). The principal causes were normative framework weakness, lack of clarity in the urban perimeter land use, lack of policies for public spaces in threatened and risky areas, among others. On the other hand, the building sector presented progress in urban development thanks to the approval of 16 construction licenses. The process of sensitization and environmental education was also fully engaged in building a culture of respect and preservation of natural resources. Also, the municipal administration implemented two management plans, one for the livestock benefit plant and the other one for the management of healthcare and similar waste.

By the period 2008-2011, it is observed that there was no control of public services problems, deforestation process, and intensive use of land for some economic activities. Nonetheless, two relevant environmental situations arise: first, due to the permanent oil activity, agricultural and mine workings intensified under the administration's approval. Second, the progress of land desertification in the municipality turned into a public problem and a state of alarm for the community and the Municipality and Department authorities (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2008b).

The environmental subject and the need to preserve it improve during the 2012-2015 period concerning the previous years; the problem of land desertification becomes more notorious to a serious level of 33.67% and a very serious level of 41.87% (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2012). The need to designing an environmental agenda also arises, and it is prepared in 2009 as a technical instrument for regional planning and as environmental guidelines and policy. It was regulated by decree 068 of 2011 and EOT is updated to solve current problems

regarding the award of construction licenses, apportionment, land use, and relocation of buildings located in high-risk areas (Alcaldía de Aipe, 2012).

### **Political Context**

The political subject issue during the period 2004-2007 in Aipe was featured by political tension and instability. Attention focused on electoral processes and candidates' behavior, who once took office distinguished not by their proposals, but by their behavior; complex situations generate disagreement and disputes, disturbing public order and in some cases confrontation with the Colombia National Police – Mobile Anti-Riot Squadron (E.S.M.A.D)

The period saw three atypical administrations. The first one arises with the popular elections held in 2003, with Hugo Garzón as mayor, elected with 2,664 votes, who took office on 2 November 2003. But his administration lasted eight (8) months because on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2004 he was removed from office according to what the Huila's Contentious-Administrative Tribunal established in the minute 47 filed with number 41 001 23 31 005-2003-01244-00 on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, two thousand four (Tribunal Administrativo del Huila, 2004).

Mr. Jorge Luis García's administration was the second one, who immediately after the removal of Mr. Hugo Hernán Garzón Garzón provided leadership for the process of summoning the people of Aipe to a new election, where he was elected and on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2005. He took office as municipality mayor for the period 2004-2007; nonetheless, during his administration, the competent authorities found splitting of contracts, which ended in removal from office and deprivation of his liberty for 48 months in jail.

Mr. Severiano Lugo Vargas was in charge of the third and last administration, finished his administration without interruptions, took office on 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2006, and turned over his responsibilities on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007; however, the Regional Prosecutor's Office bars him from holding public office for 11 years. The main motives found by the controlling body are: awarding a contract for more than 2,500 million pesos without publishing as the law determines so, not performing a reforestation contract which assigned budget appeared as performed, and the demolition of Educational Institutions of Santa Helena and Santa Rita, which he never renovated or built facilities to replace them (Aipe Lea, 2015).

The second period, 2008-2011, had also atypical administrations. Luis Felipe Conde Lasso was initially elected in 2007, but his mandate was revoked by the community due to wrongdoings in contracting school transport and in the study, design, and construction of Praga town's sewage and water treatment plant, among others. He is known as the most investigated mayor, with more than 70 proceedings conducted by the controlling instances.

He was followed by Jesús Ernesto Álvarez, who, unlike the previous ones, did not distinguish himself by governance problems, electoral issues, dismissal, and the inability by the relevant authorities or mandate revocation.

The Council for the three administrations distinguished as follows: during the 2004 to 2007 period, it had the presence of three parties: Movement Colombia Viva, Civic Independent Movement, and the Colombia Liberal Party. From 2008 to 2011, a growing role and influence by the Colombia Liberal Party were observed and the equable integration of new ones such as Liberal Opening (Apertura Liberal), National Unity Social Party (Partido Social de Unidad Nacional), and the Green Party. Finally, in the period 2012-2015, two important elements stood out: first, the party which won most seats was the U party with six seats, Independent Social Alliance (Alianza Social Independiente), and the Colombian Liberal Party two seats each, and the Green Party won one seat. The second element to highlight was the strong political support the mayor had in the Council during his administration.

### **PARTICIPATION AS A CROSS-CUTTING ISSUE**

The crosscutting nature of the participation issue is remarkable because it turns into an articulating element between the political and the planning subjects.



In developing discussion groups, the conversation followed the categories mentioned in the methodology. The first category used keywords such as participation, normative knowledge, citizen participation instances, participation organization, and training improvement. The second one used general policy knowledge and Aipe's government policies, and the last one used general knowledge on planning, standards, follow up, assessment, control, and improvement in planning processes. All this permitted structuring the information and understanding that participation has influenced public policies in the three administrations and the Municipality planning processes.

Even though not everyone in Aipe went to high school or superior education, most of them claimed to have notions regarding citizen participation, and even some of them related it more to the decision-making process for specific issues as stated by Velásquez & González (2003), because most of them feel that citizen participation provides the opportunity of having spaces for free expression and learning from the experience of those most experienced in the field.

In harmony with contributions made by Sánchez (2009), the interviewed consider that to participate is not just attending meetings summoned directly by the City Hall, but it is necessary to give your opinion and being listened to in the dialogues and decision-making. Besides, they understand citizen participation in two ways: from the concept of the Constitutional Court in sentence C-1338/00, which conceives citizen participation as the principle of working together in the community to influence the development of projects and collective interest subjects led by the agent on duty. And from Sánchez (2009), because they consider that the Colombian citizen has the duty of participating to express community claims to the State about everything that concerns the people in general. It is starting from the Aipe's people public interest and also because they know that participative democracy work under the popular power.

With the constitutional reform of 1991, the country experienced the transformational process of changing a representative democracy by a participative democracy. Indeed, consciously or unconsciously the citizens in Aipe identify that there are still elements, actions, and behavior patterns more from a representative and slightly participatory democracy, where most believe that participating is voting and electing their representatives, Milbrath (1965, cited in Borba, 2012). Therefore, leaders have the duty and the obligation of taking care of the decisions involving all the public property, but, unfortunately, they get out of their duties and the freedom granted to them only generates "opportunistic mayors" (G.D.02), because while performing to satisfy people's needs, they manage to stay in power or at least to keep some power, according to Schumpeter (1988, cited in Velásquez & González, 2003). This kind of strategies to keep power has earned sympathizers whose type of participation is immersed in a tainted political system seeking to ensure power to make decisions. This generates clientelist conduct in the population and the thought of "you as councilwoman must speak well because I gave you 200 votes, so this is cronyism" (G.D.01).

Citizen participation is about taken the people into account for what it is to be done, to plan together with the people, not waiting or not doing things and calling the people after that to tell them that things are already done, just coming to inform you what was done, and you do not have the right to give your opinion because everything is already done (EP.01).

Regarding the subject of citizen participation itself, we are here useful dupes as the fellow said because we are useful dupes because as you said, sir, it is true, we are invited only to socialize for the sampedrino meetings (G.D. 02)

For years it has been thought that the capacity to be disconnected from the world<sup>[3]</sup> was exclusive for those who practiced meditation to reach spiritual peace, just as happened with the belief that people living in society could not live a self-sufficient life<sup>[4]</sup>. With society's heyday over the last century, the changes in the economic system, the fall of borders in the world, the opening of the technological world, and the ease of access to information, the number of people adapting to these changes increases, the distance to people

far away diminishes, but opposite to that, people nearby gets away, and this situation brings about self-absorption.

This community isolation and segregation towards important subjects such as politics and citizen participation produces the disappearance of the public sphere, as emphasized by Díaz Navarro (2011).

The disappearance of the public sphere is a symptom that political practice has been reduced to its technical aspect. Leaders take charge of indicating the means to reach a given end (security, welfare, etc.) while the rest of citizens turn into mere *homo economicus*, devoted only to seek goods that satisfy their private interest (p. 23).

In this way, the mass subject got away and hidden from virtual social relationships; and the marketing, which creates the need for acquiring material goods and the drive to consumption and entertaining, has created an inveterate man after the satisfaction of his own self, forgetting the public and social realms. It is like "... when someone by thinking lives completely out of the world, away from others and knowledge. If active life boosts human beings to meet each other, the contemplative life pulls them over to isolation" (Díaz Navarro, 2011, p. 27). In these situations, it is observed that others make decisions, most of the time they do not partake in the issues or do it in an unarticulated way. In the study, the members of the planning instances and community leaders show low participation, many of them little or not at all interested in these subjects and also working in an unarticulated and slightly collective way. All this causes that factors such as resigning their duties and statements like: "No, since two years ago I have not come back, I almost did not go ..." (EP.02), led many to justify their absence from the participation spaces and the few remaining members have no credibility to work with and for the community.

The discussion groups information shows that the municipal council, the city hall, and the community, have tried to foster participation and be more receptive to the subject of participation, resorting to media such as Teleaípe and Aipelea, although some consider that the latter propagates bad news and misinforms because it only addresses the problem but not the possible formulation of proposals, which is understandable given that ...

The existence of public communication media, not reduced to being a speaker of the state propaganda which are not limited to being state spokespersons for government propaganda, but rather set up themselves as a realm where the diversity of voices of the citizen organizations social fabric materialize, even to criticize government decisions. The possibility of making public that tension and contradiction between the Civil Society and the State launches a dialectics of democracy in the true sense (Lázaro, et al. 2015, p. 97).

Interviewing people in their territory enriches the analysis with the participant's opinions regarding their knowledge about politics and public policies while remembering the government periods from 2004 to 2015. The conception of politics is usually associated with cronyism and satisfaction of personal interests, a strong conception given that the local government adopted the stance of a paternalistic State until about three years ago. According to Meny & Thoenig (1992), it is a rather permissive negotiation towards every attitude and action intended to manipulate decisions made by the mayor and its team, producing actions of political cronyism that generated conflicting emotions – indignation among some and acceptance among others.

The community also perceives some elements that fix the bases for politics such as the capacity to work in partnership and not as autarchic beings according to Hanna Arendt (Díaz Navarro, 2011), but as people living and sharing collectively. Another element is the community's search for a leader who provides orientation and guidance, in an attempt to break the paradigm regarding the dignitary on duty that represents the Aipe's people, whose image is of the supreme authority in town. They show awareness in the sense that power is the people's power, but that people do not take action to take charge of their development.

For Ordoñez Matamoros et al. (2013), it is clear that politics and public policies will always work transversely and support each other. That is why the purpose of this work is to attempt to understand the concept or idea the Aipe's people have about public policy. This is seen by some people as the pending actions of the municipalities to respond to the community's needs and requests, which is coherent with Roth Deubel

(2002). Those needs, to be partially satisfied, become the main objective of the administration to modify events in the region and community's quality of life and development so that ...

Politics are the pending actions of the government to satisfy the community's needs and the different actions that seek to improve the socio-economic, cultural, and environmental conditions of an entire region, an entire community. It seems to me that public policy is the fundamental tool for bringing development to a community (G.D.04).

When inquiring the community about something to define or highlight current and former administrations, its answers are "... we were described as the municipality with the most corrupt government during the last years ... God" (G.D.04). About the three last administrations, they expose a negative picture. Many considered that instead of having public servants, during those years they had people exercising public functions and abusing their power to satisfy particular interests at the expense of the municipality's public treasury. At least, the measures taken by the current administration were a little controlled nationwide from the year 2012 with law 1474 of 2011<sup>[5]</sup>.

"The way of governing societies has always been the core of philosophical and political concern for human beings" (Roth Deubel, 2002), and it is no wonder: actions to lead a territory and the lives of those who inhabit it, is a function requiring commitment and shared responsibility.

Starting from the case of Aipe, the importance of public opinion in every society is essential for the political process because it generates and builds society. According to Habermas (1962), "the true public opinion could only take place insofar as there is critical public notoriety through the participation of people in a guided communication process" (cited in Díaz Navarro, 2011, p. 55). When inquiring if the society felt like contributing with its opinion to the political processes, few expressed their will to do it, and those who wish it view that they have no opportunity, for example, "... we have not been given spaces, you are not received not even as president, you are only called here in May, to show you the proposals for San Pedro" (G.D.03), and others feel excluded because they do not have a participation space ... "There are no meetings here, we are not summoned for anything, they do not take us into account, we have been asking them to give us some equipment, computers, something, a place to hold meetings and work well, not even that" (EP. 01). On this perception, the local government's actions have generated a hindrance to the community to get involved in the subjects belonging to its social and territorial development.

It is natural that each one seeks its interests in socialization, as Lindblom (2010, p. 4) would say "the first difficulty is that citizens, congress people and public administrators disagree on many crucial values and objectives" so that conflicts arise, but according to the Political Constitution, our society is ruled by isonomia<sup>[6]</sup> and isegoria so as member of a community everyone can express itself under any approach (Díaz Navarro (2011).

In light of the freedom to express, some took advantage to lie and achieve their clientelist objectives. So, the essence of politics is underestimated and lost for the community. These practices within the framework of politics run against Arendt's (Díaz Navarro, 2011) thought where politics must be performed in brotherhood and friendship, not between enemies because there will always be disputes and confrontations and in the end, nothing is created because it is not done based on a shared interest.

For planning authorities responsible for making decisions about the formulation of public policies, they followed, according to Lindblom (2010), the method of successive limited comparisons or branch method, because based on the political steps taken by previous administrations, they gained knowledge to avoid similar mistakes. "Today, the mayor with fewer resources carried out seven projects, while the other one did not carry out any because they proposed only one, but left it halfway; that is the comparison" (G.D.04). On the other hand, leaders, planning instances, and the community have perceived that "the last three or four mayors did not do any projects under the previous system of sharing royalties –received money was spent" (G.D.02).



Currently, under the national regulation, structured projects for the development of the community must be submitted to obtain resources from the General Royalties System.

The ideal expressed by the community is to build public policies based on their own needs in a participative way, guided by the “Bottom-up” implementation models following Roth (2004, cited in Ordoñez Matamoros et al., 2013, p. 214-215). However, they perceive them implemented under the “Top-Down” system, with the peculiarity that dignitaries' behavior is incoherent according to Parson (1995, 464), because they make promises beyond what they can offer to the community and generate feelings of disagreement, distrust, disbelief, namely ...

Where are we, each one of us who holds the right to participate and give an opinion regarding the decisions made in the municipality, allowed to participate? Right? Decisions about what to do and, I imagine, giving works or projects to the municipality” (G.D.03).

They have to produce what is called a development plan and must be done based on the registered government program. Then, things turn upside down, they will say, “the thing is, there is lack of resources, there is no money” then advisors say “No, we cannot do that”, “remove it so that my performance will not be affected” (G.D.02).

It is a government plan, but not really. However, they must fulfill, but somehow they mask that, so apparently, they comply, but not. For example, now on the last administration, social investment was like the other broader subjects in that government program, but actually, they did not reflect it” (G.D.03).

Regarding the subject of planning processes, understanding the concept of community and its relation to a government plan, it is observed in the fieldwork that some have a clear definition of planning. They express that praxis builds in the interest of the community that, is the proper scenario to propose clear goals through programs and projects (Velásquez & González, 2003).

For Aipe's people, planning is associated with organizing and teamwork capacities of people to join efforts and forge a vision that will be accomplished as goals are reached. It is easier for the population to bind planning to some of its three fundamental processes as it was determined by the National Statistics Department & Higher School of Public Administration (DNP & ESAP, 2007). They mentioned the development plan tool that has to be formulated in agreement with the community, including the proposals established in the government plan. Besides, they bond planning to the land use plan that takes into account the potential distribution of resources and land use (Rengifo, 2012) in conformity with EOT.

Planning subject is also familiar to them as one way of doing control in Colombia, which implies to supervise and assess projects and programs formulated by leaders; it is important for the community to highlight that, as they see planning as a control tool, they stressed that municipality council and controlling associations such as citizen overseers play a fundamental role because they exert political control ... “we elect council people for that, for them to exercise political control over the mayor here” (G.D.01), and overseers are in charge of “control, accompaniment, verification that something is being done” (G.D.03), identifying them as verification mechanisms for a preventive control, similar to the healthcare subject, for they consider that “in due course, control is like health, health is preventive and curative, it is the most logical thing the should have done, right? If you prevent, you do not get sick in this government subject” (G.D.04).

State appeared as the solution gradually imposed, maybe unconsciously, to solve the crisis of the feudal society.” According to Badie (1997:131, cited in Roth Deubel, 2002, p. 20), modernization of politics is a process with two main features: centralization of power in the state and generation of political and social integration in society, it is, the participation of citizens from the very moment improvement alternatives are designed, down to their satisfactory performance and finishing.

According to Hogwood (1984, cited in Roth Deubel, 2002), deeming public policies as such needs to focus on a scenario of governmental procedures, influences, and organizations. This means that both the State and the society will work systemically, but inclusively at the same time. Aipe's community acknowledges that no administration has been efficient in planning, have had their ups and downs, which lead to highlight

actions of some more than those of others, so to recognize the mayor who better managed or performed more projects, it is reinforced with Fischer & Forester (1993) statement.

Inappropriate behaviors identified and non-compliance of policies by some dignitaries triggered irregularities in the management of public resources and affected Aipe's development. One cause of it has been the slight control corresponding to the planning instances and to the community itself. While it is true that DNP & ESAP (2007) affirm that they are instances, there is an important element that cannot be omitted: the non-compliance of the municipality council and the people in the territory, who should do it, but not, and people who do it lack knowledge about its functioning or find themselves overshadowed, persecuted or pointed at.

If you aim to perform a total follow up, they will say, 'look, son', those on duties duty () will not choose from other duties, so everybody points at us and will say, those 'hp'<sup>[7]</sup> from the overseer go after that, you understand? So, because of it, participation, as my fellow says, citizen participation becomes of secondary importance just as following up projects (G.D.02).

If the overseer or the ordinary citizen becomes an enemy of the administration because 'what you want is to send me to jail' and it is not so, what we want is that things are well done, that is the difficulty (G.D.02).

According to Leboreiro (1999) and the community itself, planning in Aipe has not found the balance to operate under the sustainability approach because those sectors that boost the economy take priority over low productive ones, such as the environment. It is so because of the ease of getting the environmental permits for draining the river, carrying out pisciculture and agricultural activities, and building small hydroelectric plants.

## CONCLUSIONS

Conclusions drawn from this research are structured around the three subjects developed in this article, participation, public policy, and planning.

### **Regarding participation.**

About this subject, the community has no good relationship with planning authorities, and it generates an unarticulated work in opposite directions; besides a chaotic relationship between governors and governed, objectives to meet social needs were not set because of the inadequate communication between the local government and the community.

Aipe's people fell short to participate in different scenarios, limiting themselves to attend voting processes to elect mayors and/or council people following Milbrath (1965, cited in Borba, 2012). They prefer to satisfy personal needs instead of social needs that are public, according to Díaz Navarro (2011). This promotes paternalistic behavior in the state that triggers somehow political cronyism according to (Velásquez & González, 2003). An important element to rescue is the desire of the community to learn about issues, to train, improve, and gain confidence when it is time to work on political and planning subjects.

### **Regarding public policy.**

The community's claim to be the central axis of its development arises. The community expresses noticing lack of commitment of the planning authorities, which generates distrust and institutional apathy. So, Aipe's community claims for its space that, following (Roth Deubel, 2002), develop public policies based on the community –the real suffering– agreement processes and needs, guided by the "Bottom-Up" model, instead of continue using the "Top Down" model, according to Roth Deubel (2004, cited in Ordoñez Matamoros et al., 2013), used in Aipe.

Meetings are only held at the beginning of a dignitary's period to expose the structure of the development plan, just to inform. Therefore, the process that starts with the government plant down to its materialization

by implementing the development plan affects the proper cycle of the public policy stated by (Roth Deubel, 2002).

#### **Regarding planning.**

Planning at Aipe has been marked by issues in the formulation of projects that are incoherent with people's needs and in general contracting by political patronage and not with objectivity and transparency, especially in the three government periods 2004-2007 and 2008-2011.

This situation could improve as far as the community and its rulers understand that planning requires open and inclusive work. It implies a long-term view under principles of democracy and decentralization as indicated by Velásquez & González (2003), aimed to solve situations with structural problems.

Planning authorities need learning to understand, trust, and invest in the civil organization because they are caring for the public interest. Efforts have been made to take into account the territory's natural resources as a tool for planning (Coraggio, 1979, cited in Rengifo, 2012) to make it sustainable. But according to the development plans by the three administrations and their management reports, analyzed following (Leboreiro, 1999), they were not taken into account, and their preservation is not a priority concerning the development of the economic activities prevailing in the Aipe's territory.

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