

Multilevel governance and decentralisation in territorial planning:

Sustainable development analysis in García Rovira

Gobernanza multinivel y descentralización en la planificación territorial:

Análisis de desarrollo sostenible en
García Rovira

Governança multinível e descentralização no planeamento territorial:

Análise do desenvolvimento sustentável em García Rovira

Gouvernance multi-niveaux et décentralisation dans la planification territoriale :

Analyse du développement durable à García Rovira

Source: Own authorship

Recibido: 24/2/2024
Aprobado: 28/6/2024

How to cite this article:

Llanez Anaya, H. F., Ortiz Guerrero, C. E., Sacristán Rodríguez, C. P., Mesa Salamanca, C. A. y Márquez Mendoza, M. A. (2024). Gobernanza multinivel y descentralización en la planificación territorial: Análisis de desarrollo sostenible en García Rovira. *BITÁCORA URBANO TERRITORIAL*, 34(II): 264-276.
<https://doi.org/10.15446/bitacora.v34n2.113139>

Authors

Helmer Fernando Llanez Anaya

Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia
Helmerf.llanez@campusucc.edu.co
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3156-3813>

Claudia Patricia Sacristán Rodríguez

Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia
claudia.sacristanr@campusucc.edu.co
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0254-498X>

Cesar Enrique Ortiz Guerrero

Pontificia Universidad Javeriana
c.ortiz@javeriana.edu.co
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3835-7609>

Camilo Andrés Mesa Salamanca

Universidad Militar Nueva Granada
camilo.mesa@unimilitar.edu.co
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7989-3056>

Marco Antonio Márquez Mendoza

Centro de Estudios y Docencias
 Económicas A.C. División de
 Estudios sobre el Desarrollo
marco.marquez@cide.edu
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2647-4912>

[1] This article is part of a progress report for a doctoral thesis funded by the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the governance of the planning regime in the province of García Rovira, in order to understand the connections between the levels and actors of territorial planning in a context of decentralisation and sustainability agendas. The research contributes to the scarce literature related to planning actors, multilevel governance and decentralisation. This network analysis shows that municipal technical entities have little influence on the planning network and that the lack of an actor to formally coordinate the interaction between the different levels limits the implementation of sustainability agendas. It is also found that, despite the implementation of a decentralisation process, the multilevel governance analysis reveals that planning is still governed by a top-down logic. The methodology focused on primary data offers a deeper understanding of the reality, which allows for cross-checking the results with secondary documents and interviews. In conclusion, there is evidence of low coordination between planning actors and a disconnect between national sustainability levels and goals. This suggests that national policies are not always adjusted to the specific needs of municipalities.

Keywords: governance, regional planning, environment, regional development

Authors

Helmer Fernando Llanez Anaya

PhD in Environmental and Rural Studies from the Pontifical Xavierian University. Economist, Specialist in Regional Development, and Master's in Interdisciplinary Studies on Development. Research Professor in the Economics program at the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia.

Cesar Enrique Ortiz Guerrero

PhD in Regional Planning from the University of Waterloo. Master's in Rural Development and Animal Science Engineer. Full Professor at the Pontifical Xavierian University, Bogotá. Research topics: Governance, Hydrosocial territories, Regional Development, Social Network Analysis.

Claudia Patricia Sacristán Rodríguez

PhD in Social Economics and Master's in Development Cooperation and Social Economics from the University of Valencia. Economist and Master's in Economic Theory from the National University of Colombia. Professor and researcher at the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences and the Global Thought Center (CEPEG) at the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia.

Camilo Andrés Mesa Salamanca

Economist, PhD in Economics from the University of Los Andes, Master's in Economics from the University of Los Andes, and Master's in Economic Sciences from the National University of Colombia. Professor at the Universidad Militar Nueva Granada and Researcher at the Economic Analysis Unit of the Agricultural and Forestry Chains Directorate of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Marco Antonio Márquez Mendoza

Economist, Specialist in Economic Development and Productive Structure. PhD in Economics from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Tenured Research Professor at the Division of Development Studies at the Center for Economic Research and Teaching A.C., Mexico City.

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar la gobernanza del régimen de planeación de la provincia de García Rovira, para entender las conexiones entre los niveles y los actores de la planeación territorial en un contexto de descentralización y agendas de sostenibilidad. La investigación aporta a la escasa literatura relacionada con actores de planificación, gobernanza multinivel y descentralización. Este análisis de redes evidencia que las entidades técnicas municipales tienen poca influencia en la red de planificación y que la falta de un actor que coordine formalmente la interacción entre los distintos niveles limita la implementación de agendas de sostenibilidad. También se encuentra que, a pesar de haberse implementado un proceso de descentralización, el análisis de gobernanza multinivel revela que la planeación aún se rige por una lógica top-down. La metodología centrada en datos primarios ofrece una comprensión más profunda de la realidad, lo que permite contrastar los resultados con documentos secundarios y entrevistas. En conclusión, se evidencia una baja coordinación entre los actores de la planificación y una desconexión entre los niveles y las metas nacionales de sostenibilidad. Esto sugiere que las políticas nacionales no siempre se ajustan a las necesidades específicas de los municipios.

Palabras claves: gobernanza, planificación regional, medio ambiente, desarrollo regional

Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est d'analyser la gouvernance du régime de planification dans la province de García Rovira, afin de comprendre les liens entre les niveaux et les acteurs de la planification territoriale dans un contexte de décentralisation et d'agendas de durabilité. La recherche contribue à la rareté de la littérature relative aux acteurs de la planification, à la gouvernance multi-niveaux et à la décentralisation. Cette analyse de réseau montre que les entités techniques municipales ont peu d'influence sur le réseau de planification et que l'absence d'un acteur pour coordonner formellement l'interaction entre les différents niveaux limite la mise en œuvre des agendas de durabilité. On constate également que, malgré la mise en œuvre d'un processus de décentralisation, l'analyse de la gouvernance multiniveaux révèle que la planification est toujours régie par une logique descendante. La méthodologie axée sur les données primaires offre une compréhension plus approfondie de la réalité, ce qui permet de recouper les résultats avec des documents secondaires et des entretiens. En conclusion, on constate une faible coordination entre les acteurs de la planification et un décalage entre les niveaux et les objectifs nationaux en matière de durabilité. Cela suggère que les politiques nationales ne sont pas toujours adaptées aux besoins spécifiques des municipalités.

Resumo

O objetivo deste artigo é analisar a governação do regime de planeamento na província de García Rovira, a fim de compreender as ligações entre os níveis e os actores do planeamento territorial num contexto de descentralização e de agendas de sustentabilidade. A investigação contribui para a escassa literatura relacionada com os actores do planeamento, a governação a vários níveis e a descentralização. Esta análise de rede mostra que as entidades técnicas municipais têm pouca influência na rede de planeamento e que a falta de um ator que coordene formalmente a interação entre os diferentes níveis limita a implementação de agendas de sustentabilidade. Verifica-se também que, apesar da implementação de um processo de descentralização, a análise da governação multinível revela que o planeamento continua a ser regido por uma lógica top-down. A metodologia centrada em dados primários oferece uma compreensão mais profunda da realidade, o que permite o cruzamento dos resultados com documentos secundários e entrevistas. Em conclusão, há provas de uma baixa coordenação entre os intervenientes no planeamento e uma desconexão entre os níveis e objectivos nacionais de sustentabilidade. Este facto sugere que as políticas nacionais nem sempre são ajustadas às necessidades específicas dos municípios.

Palavras-chave: governação, planeamento regional, ambiente, desenvolvimento regional

**Multilevel governance and decentralisation
in territorial planning:**
Sustainable development analysis in García Rovira

Mots-clés : gouvernance, aménagement du territoire, environnement, développement régional

Introduction

The analysis of planning has increasingly focused on the relationship between development, growth, and the environment (Campbell, 2016). Latin American literature on planning emphasizes aspects such as territorial development and the multiscalar perspective (Cuervo, 2019). Consequently, planning in Colombia stems from an economic approach aimed at achieving balanced and sustainable development across all regions of the country, with little emphasis on environmental connections (Moncayo, 2018).

However, according to Zapata (2020), to address these regional disparities, Colombia has emphasized municipal-level analysis but with national sustainability guidelines. Additionally, the integration of environmental and productive aspects has been delegated to territorial planning, with few advances at the municipal level (Umaña & Quilindo, 2018).

In this context, a planning regime has emerged, conceived as a system structured around national regulations. Its primary goal is to improve living conditions for the population while pursuing sustainability, and to achieve this, instruments like development plans (PD) and territorial planning schemes (EOT) are used. The two differ in terms of duration: while PDs are created for a four-year period, EOTs are planned for 12 years. Furthermore, EOTs define land use.

Since the implementation of the Colombian Constitution in 1991, this regime has deepened decentralization processes and aligned with trends observed in other Latin American countries. In Colombia, the evolution of regulations, both in planning and decentralization, shows a close interrelationship between both processes.

According to Montero and Chapple (2018), since the 1980s, decentralization in Latin America has led to an increase in responsibilities and competencies related to planning and economic development in several cities and municipalities. This change has occurred despite the limited institutional capacities that persist in many municipalities. This transfer of power has required significant learning and adaptation from local authorities, who have had to cope with growing economic, social, and environmental challenges (Fisher, 2021).

At the same time, decentralization has opened new opportunities for citizen participation and decision-making at the local level. However, the lack of resources and technical capacity remains a significant obstacle to fully realizing the potential benefits of decentralization. In this regard, Dalla (2017) argues that territorial governance is a process of citizen participation that acknowledges the capacity of individuals and defines a complementary and coherent development path aligned with national, provincial, and local approaches.

Decentralization is essential in territorial governance, particularly in declining rural areas such as the García Rovira province, because it empowers local actors and creates favorable conditions for sustainable development. However, for decentralization to be truly effective, it must be accompanied by significant efforts to transform pre-existing power struc-

Decentralization is essential in territorial governance, particularly in declining rural areas such as the García Rovira province, because it empowers local actors and creates favorable conditions for sustainable development. However, for decentralization to be truly effective, it must be accompanied by significant efforts to transform pre-existing power structures within communities, as there are asymmetries and exclusion of less powerful group

tures within communities, as there are asymmetries and exclusion of less powerful groups (Fisher, 2021; Bardhan, 2002). Moreover, according to Schreuder and Horlings (2022), empowerment of community organizations, other relevant private sector actors, international aid entities, and, fundamentally, citizens is crucial.

In this sense, subnational and local governance structures are key to aligning state support with local challenges, particularly in sustainable development (Fisher, 2021). This has led to an increased emphasis on 'community-based adaptation' and decentralized climate planning strategies, giving local governance a central role in integrating state support and adapting to the changing dynamics on the ground (Fisher, 2021). In this context, it is essential to understand the dynamics and power relations between actors to effectively facilitate the transition toward sustainability, as demanded by a planning regime such as the one studied here (Williams et al., 2023).

Therefore, governance involves collaboration among a broad range of actors influenced by the planning regime. The way these actors interact and connect with each other becomes an essential factor for decision-making within a territorial development process (Serrano, 2011).

In this perspective, Dempwolf and Lyles (2011) argue that for the study of networks in planning, it is important to highlight the coordination between multiple organizations and actors in planning processes that span various political jurisdictions at the local, regional, and national levels. In this regard, network analysis helps identify key actors, which is crucial for understanding the structure and dynamics of interactions and their influence within the network.

Since the 1991 Constitution in Colombia, policies and instruments have been promoted for sustainable and equitable regional development. However, the results show a concentration of economic activity in a few cities (Moncayo, 2019). To address these disparities, emphasis has been placed on municipal plans based on national guidelines. However, this has created a disconnect between government levels and ambiguous local actor participation in planning (Zapata, 2020).

In the case of the García Rovira province and its twelve municipalities, the goals set by the planning regime regarding the reduction of the Basic Needs Index (NBI) and the promotion of sustainable productive development have still not been achieved, especially in comparison with the Santander department. The 2018 Census data show persistent gaps in these areas. For example, the NBI is 19.31% for Santander and 15.64% for the province, while García Rovira's value-added output is less than

1% compared to Santander. At the same time, national agendas address issues of productivity and sustainability, with little translation into municipal realities. This is the case with the Sustainable Development Goals, which come from a national planning level and should be included in municipal plans, though in practice, this is done with little context.

These objectives, although crucial, are rarely reconciled with the public, which contributes to the disconnect with territorial governance. While citizen participation in the planning process is defined in legislation, it is only specified for the design phase of instruments and is not included in the monitoring and evaluation phases (Law 388 and Decree 1077 of 2015). This aspect is essential, as it impacts the construction and monitoring of the land-use model, which represents the ultimate goal to be achieved in a land-use planning process.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyze the governance of the planning regime in the García Rovira province, to understand its relationship with the implementation of sustainable development agendas and the influence of the decentralization process. To this end, it analyzes information from municipal planning instruments, planning legislation in Colombia, data from the last three censuses (1993, 2005, and 2018), and interviews with development actors at the provincial, departmental, and national levels to examine the networks and connections between levels.

Governance and Planning

The literature on governance, levels, and networks provides a valuable framework for the case studied. Although a gap is recognized in connecting the different levels, authors such as Cuervo and Delano (2019) and Moncayo (2019) have addressed the importance of governance and planning at multiple scales. However, it is uncommon to analyze aspects such as levels, interscalar flows, and both formal and informal regulatory institutions together. Cash et al. (2006) point out the persistent challenge of adequately connecting municipal, departmental, and national levels, with a predominant trend toward a municipal-centered perspective.

The issue of the top-down perspective persists at all levels, as at the national level, the focus is primarily on strategic issues (Cuervo and Delano, 2019). Cash (2006) explains that this trend arises from the need for simplification and control. Different government levels tend to frame problems in ways that are manageable within their jurisdictions, which increases the disconnection between them. This issue is exacerbated when problems are defined purely on a global or local scale.

Additionally, governance is defined as the structures and processes through which social actors interact, make decisions, and exercise power in a given space (Montero and Chapple, 2018). These processes involve various types of flows that cross multiple levels, from the local to the international (Dalla, 2017). The disconnection between these levels can represent a significant challenge for effective governance, potentially leading to ineffective policies.

The analysis of governance helps identify how actors at different levels interact in decision-making processes (Dalla, 2017). However, for Stuhldreher (2021), while governance provides an effective analytical framework for territories, it may also involve the promotion of a minimal state. In this context, local actors are forced to manage their own development.

For Dempwolf and Lyles (2011), the empirical understanding of how participants in planning processes are incorporated into networks, and how the structure of these networks can either facilitate or constrain decision-making, is still in its early stages. Additionally, in a governance system, the interaction and collaboration between different actors (which can include governments, private organizations, and civil society) are essential for decision-making and the planning of territorial development (Farínós, 2008).

Context of the Research

The case study refers to the García Rovira Province in Colombia, which is located in the eastern part of the Santander department and comprises the following twelve municipalities: Capitanejo, Carcasí, Cerrito, Concepción, Enciso, Guaca, Macaravita, Málaga, Molagavita, San Andrés, San José de Miranda, and San Miguel.

According to the most recent census (2018), the province has a population of 70,294 inhabitants, 51% of whom reside in rural areas. The province, primarily based on smallholdings, is focused on the agricultural sector with low added value. Its social indicators, such as the Unsatisfied Basic Needs (NBI), are below the Santander average (Santander Development Plan, 2020).

Methodology

This study employs a case study methodology due to its ability to provide an in-depth and contextualized analysis (Creswell, 2013). This methodology allows for the detailed exploration of governance structures, sustainable

development planning policies, actors, dynamics, and processes in the García Rovira Province.

The period from 1990 to 2024 was chosen for its relevance to this study, as it encompasses the Colombian Constitution of 1991, which initiated the decentralization process, impacting governance and planning at all levels. A contextual analysis was conducted focusing on the decentralization established by this Constitution and the regulations related to planning. Furthermore, the power structures of the actors involved in planning and decentralization were examined to understand the conditions of the governance process and the implementation of sustainability agendas in the province.

Regarding the connections between municipal, departmental, and national levels, the following was considered: for the municipalities and the department, the active development plans for the 2020-2023 period were reviewed. For the national level, the 2018-2022 development plan was considered, as it aligns with the current development plans of the municipalities and the department. Consequently, this work is framed within a territorial development perspective. This guarantees a coherent and structured view of development and governance across different levels of government.

The governance analysis was conducted using categories identified by various authors, including Nieminen (2020), Serrano (2011), and Farínós (2008), as fundamental in governance: coordination, interaction, coherence, resource management, information flow, citizen participation, and cooperation.

For the network analysis, this study followed the approach proposed by Buciega and Esparcia (2013) and Galaso et al. (2018), to explore how the involved actors are connected. The analysis incorporated several variables grouped into two categories: **cohesion social capital** and **bridging social capital**. Within these two categories, trust, information exchange, joint projects, and metrics such as density and mediation were analyzed, among others.

Specifically, to analyze relationships between actors, this study conceptualizes both **nodes** and **social actors**. These can be individuals, organizations, or companies. In contrast, **links** are interpreted as the relationships that establish connections between these actors (Galaso et al., 2018), constructed and regulated by a specific set of formal and informal institutions.

This approach allows for the detailed examination and understanding of the structure and patterns of social networks, as well as the identification and characterization of the predominant social capital (flows between actors).

Both **cohesion social capital** and **bridging social capital** were analyzed. **Cohesion social capital** refers to relationships within homogeneous and closed groups with high levels of cohesion and trust (Putnam, 2000). To analyze this, indicators such as density, closeness, trust, and centrality were used. Centrality measures the number of direct connections a node has with other nodes (Bodin et al., 2006).

Regarding **bridging social capital**, this refers to less intense and more varied relationships, such as those we maintain with distant friends (Buciega and Esparcia, 2013). In this case, the indicators used were: density, existence of relationships between actors with different characteristics, and mediation. **Density** is defined as the proportion of existing connections in the network compared to the total number of possible connections (Bodin et al., 2006). This measure provides an overview of how interconnected the network is.

During the data collection phase, relevant documents were analyzed, including development plans at the municipal, departmental, and national levels. This involved a detailed examination of sustainable development goals such as the SDGs, strategies, initiatives, and policies reflected in these plans.

Regarding the identified actors, they were diverse, as shown in **Table 1**, where 40 institutional, productive, environmental, political, and NGO actors are listed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these actors, with an average duration of 38 minutes. Specialized questionnaires were used to analyze networks and governance. A measurement scale from 1 to 5 was employed for the defined analysis categories. The actors were selected using a snowball sampling strategy, and the sample was convenience-based, ensuring representation across all levels of planning.

Results

The Planning Regime in Colombia: Normative Structure and its Relationship with Sustainable Development Agendas

First, it is important to note that the Santander Development Plan (2020-2023) explicitly includes the Sustainable Development Agendas through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), aiming to integrate them into provincial realities. However, this integration lacks adequate contextualization. For instance, although the SDGs are mentioned in the structure of the provincial development plans, the goals related to clean production are limited

to the inclusion of three specific training sessions (Cerrito Development Plan 2020-2023, p. 12). These national agendas have, in terms of planning, a normative structure that can be summarized below in terms of a regional and sustainability approach.

We can observe, as a starting point, that the available instruments, such as **Law 1454 of 2011** and **Law 388 of 1997**, include specific guidelines that promote a regional perspective, favoring the integration and collaboration of municipalities at the regional level. This aspect has the potential to facilitate alternative planning methods that balance the challenges of economic growth with ecosystem conservation, taking into account municipal development processes.

Law 388 of 1997, specifically in Article 5, conceptualizes municipal land-use planning as a set of political-administrative strategies and physical planning actions carried out collaboratively by municipalities, districts, and metropolitan areas. This set of actions aims to guide the development of the territory under its jurisdiction, regulating the use, transformation, and occupation of space according to socioeconomic development strategies, and always in harmony with environmental respect.

In this regard, **Law 1454 of 2011** establishes various associative forms between municipalities and, between them, departments and regional corporations. This law offers significant potential for intervention in regional land-use planning and overcoming the divisions between economic and physical planning.

The realization of the above aspects related to development planning and conservation, as well as the direction of associative strategies and addressing regional gaps, requires the formulation of a coherent planning system, particularly at the regional level studied.

In the García Rovira Province, an analysis of the municipal development plans, as presented in the following sections, revealed criteria that transcend the political-administrative boundaries of municipalities and underscore the need for a regional approach to planning for development and land-use management. This includes shared productive initiatives, low development levels, land reservation delimitations, and risk management, among others.

So far, the implementation of the previous regulatory framework has not been effectively realized in the province, and municipalities continue to adopt autonomous actions. As will be explored in the following findings, considerable challenges related to a regional perspective emerge, as well as a disconnection between different levels of planning, decentralization, and governance.

Actors Interviewed	Key Actor	Responsibility	Level of Influence
12	Municipal Mayors	Develop the municipal development plan	Municipal
7	Planning Secretariats of the Province	Monitoring and implementation of the development plan	Province
2	Santander Department Government	Develop the departmental development plan	Department and province
3	Departmental Planning Secretariat	Monitoring and execution of the departmental development plan	Department and province
3	National Planning Department (DNP)	Develop the national development plan	National, Departmental, and Provincial
1	Development Projects Financial Fund (FONADE)	Funding for development projects	National
1	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MADR)	Rural development programs	National
1	Málaga Chamber of Commerce	Participation in the development of municipal and departmental plans	Province
1	Regional Autonomous Corporation of Santander		Department and province
5	Producer Associations		Province
2	Community Action Boards (JAC)		Province
2	ONG		Department and province

Table 1: Key Actors in the García Rovira Province

Source: Developed from information obtained through interviews and development plans.

Decentralization and Key Actors: Effects on the Planning Process in the Province

In Colombia, the institutional context surrounding planning is shaped by decentralization and citizen participation in the process. The **1991 Constitution** marked a pivotal moment in deepening political, administrative, and fiscal decentralization, granting greater autonomy to departments, municipalities, and districts (Barberena, 2021). Although progress has been made, challenges persist, such as the need for more active participation of municipal entities in the design of national policies (Barberena, 2021).

However, according to **Zapata (2020)**, the institutional model remains centralist, with municipalities facing limited capacities for management and planning. Colombian legislation, such as **Law 388 of 1997**, provides guidelines for territorial planning but often fails to account for local realities (Zapata, 2020). While citizen participation in development planning is encouraged, as established in **Law 152 of 1994**, this participation tends to follow a **top-down approach**, reflecting a gap between legislation and practice (Zapata, 2020).

According to three interviewees (1, 3, and 7), decentralization in the province focuses primarily on the perspectives of political actors. Although mayors are democratically elected and expected to present government plans that guide development, **clientelist structures** prevail, wasting public resources and reducing plans to mere formalities. Coordination among political actors is limited to the electoral period, where alliances are driven by power interests rather than community benefit, undermining the integrity of local development.

Consequently, in the García Rovira province, decentralization has mainly centered around the dynamics of accessing and benefiting from power. As a result, spaces meant to analyze opportunities for change—such as those that could be provided by a development plan—have been relegated to the background.

In the previous context, and according to Table 1, in the province of García Rovira, various actors participate in development planning and the coordination of sustainability agendas. In the planning process of the province, municipal mayoralties hold the greatest importance and

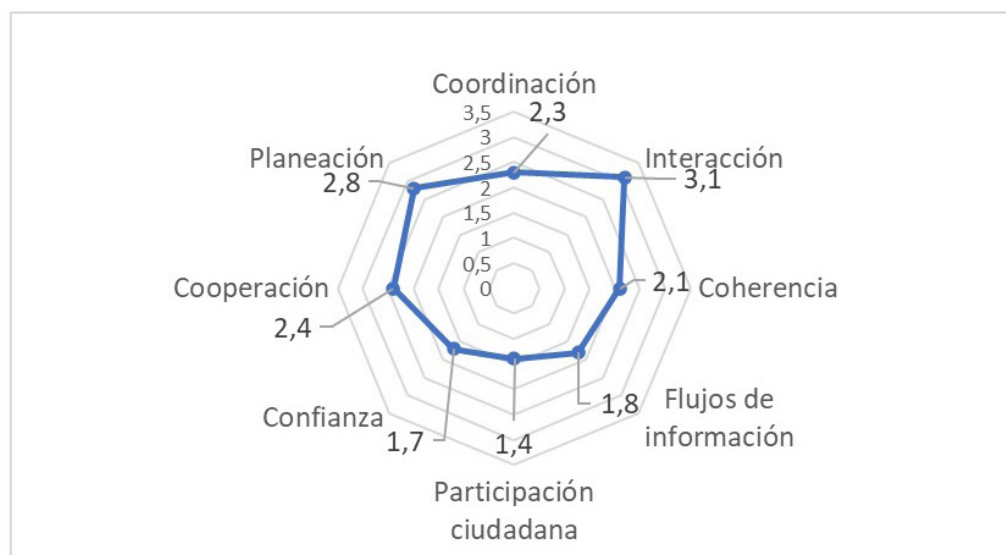


Figure 1: Key Variables in the Governance of García Rovira Province

Source: Prepared based on consultations with local actors from Table 1.

hierarchy when making local strategic decisions. The National Planning Department is also key in setting general guidelines that the mayoralties adapt to their realities. The Santander Government plays a crucial role by contributing to the implementation of municipal development plans. Additionally, producer associations and the chamber of commerce have the potential to boost the local economy, with their interaction being essential for the success of the planning process.

The participation of various actors, such as NGOs, producer associations, and social organizations, is crucial for development planning and sustainability in García Rovira. These actors provide knowledge, a voice, and solutions to the planning process. However, governance and the connection between actors still present challenges that need to be addressed in order to achieve effective development and meaningful reforms.

Governance of the Development Planning Regime in the García Rovira Province

This section offers an analysis of the variables, defined in the methodology section, that influence the planning regime in the province. It integrates both a **quantitative** analysis, developed from an instrument using a 1-to-5 scale, and a **qualitative** analysis, derived from semi-structured interviews with the actors identified in Table 1. This combination of approaches provides a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of governance in the studied context.

Figure 1 shows that governance in García Rovira province faces significant challenges in **citizen participation**,

information flows, and **trust**, with low values in these areas (1.4, 1.7, and 1.8, respectively). These challenges highlight the low level of connection between actors. Interviewees point out that citizen participation is perceived as more of a formality rather than an integral process in decision-making (Interviewee 27). Trust in governmental planning is also low, with criticism directed at the lack of tangible results (Interviewee 29). Cooperation between public institutions, producers, and NGOs is scarce, with planning not translating into concrete actions (Interviewees 14, 27, and 34).

These concerns reflect a **disconnect between planning and practical reality**, limiting the province's ability to achieve its development goals. The current governance structure restricts the planning system's capacity, as key actors demonstrate low levels of trust and cooperation. Aspects such as **interaction**, **coherence**, and **coordination** will be analyzed later in the context of **multilevel governance**.

Connectivity Between Actors and Planning Levels in García Rovira Province

In this section, we examine the relationships between the actors in the García Rovira province within the context of the planning process, focusing on cohesion social capital and bridging capital, which also highlights the weak connections between these actors and the planning levels. Regarding cohesion capital, the homogeneous actors—those most directly linked to the planning process—are those highlighted in Figure 2 with dark lines: the Municipal Mayors' Offices, Planning Secretariat, Chamber of Commerce, Community Action Boards (Juntas de Acción Comunal), NGOs, Governorship of Santander, National Planning Department (DNP), FONADE, and the Ministry of Rural Development (MADR).

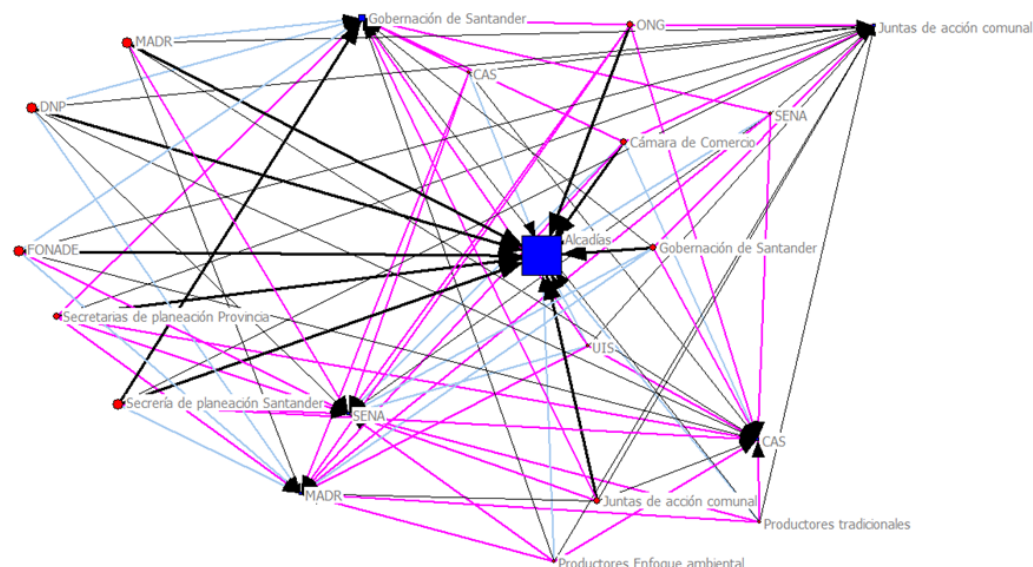


Figura 2. Red social sobre actores locales de la planeación del desarrollo de la provincia de García Rovira

Fuente: Elaboración a partir de UCINET con base en información suministrada por los actores locales de la Tabla 1.

Group Capital	Indicators	Value
	Mayor Intermediation	429
	Density	0,59
Social Capital of Cohesion	Centralization	0,73
	Trust	14%
	Shares information	19%
	Uses infrastructure	27%
	Common Projects	29%
Social Capital of Bridges	Intermediation (Chamber of Commerce)	387
	Relations with Direct Planning Actors	5%
	Shares Information with Direct Planning Actors	3%
	Common Projects with Direct Planning Actors	2%

Table 2. Metrics of the Social Network on Planning Process Actors

Source: Created using UCINET and information provided by local actors. The grouping by capital types is an adaptation of the proposal by Buciega and Esparcia (2013).

Regarding **bridging social capital**, this refers to actors with a less direct role in the development planning of the province. These actors are represented in **Figure 2** with purple and blue lines, and include **traditional producers, environmentally-focused producers, SENA, and CAS**.

In **Figure 2** and **Table 2**, the analysis of the social network categorized by capital types highlights the central role of **Mayors** in the planning process in **García Rovira**. The high **centrality (0.73)** and **intermediation (429)** values for Mayors indicate their significant influence within the network and planning process. However, this prominence tends to limit the role of **Planning Secretariats**, which face technical deficiencies and often lack the capac-

ity to contribute meaningfully to development (as noted by interviewees 14, 21, and 28). Despite this, the network shows low **density (0.59)**, **trust (14%)**, **information sharing (19%)**, **use of shared infrastructure (27%)**, and **common projects (29%)**, signaling challenges in cooperation and information flow.

While Mayors are crucial in the planning process, reducing their intermediation is necessary to enhance information sharing and trust. **Municipal development planning** is often seen as a bureaucratic process with minimal impact. The **Chamber of Commerce** also plays a key role in the network, with significant intermediation (387), facilitating dialogues like the **Competitiveness Ta-**

ble. However, the interaction between actors directly involved in the planning process and those less involved is minimal, with only 5% indicating relations with direct actors, as per **Table 2**.

In terms of connectivity across planning levels in **García Rovira**, specific challenges such as **discordance**, **ignorance**, and **plurality** were identified. The '**bridge organizations**' (e.g., the Chamber of Commerce) play an essential role as mediators and facilitators between different levels.

Figure 1 illustrates three key variables of interaction (3.1), coordination (2.3), and coherence (2.1), which are fundamental for analyzing **multilevel governance** in the province. These scores reflect weaknesses in the governance of the planning system, especially regarding the **lack of coherence** between national and municipal levels. As noted by three actors (interviewees 15, 22, and 37), there is initial collaboration in the development of municipal and departmental plans, but each level diverges after that. National policies often fail to be properly contextualized for local realities, as indicated by a mayor, a representative from the government, and a national official (interviewees 5, 20, and 37).

This lack of coherence is evident in the absence of concrete goals for implementing provincial projects and national agendas like the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** in municipal development plans. Furthermore, the lack of coordination between municipalities in **García Rovira** limits regional planning and the implementation of sustainability agendas. The **Competitiveness Table**, led by the **Chamber of Commerce** of **Málaga**, could facilitate collaboration, but more progress is needed to turn dialogue into actionable projects.

Moreover, **interest alliances** and actors shown in **Figure 2** are essential for development. The **Chamber of Commerce** serves as a central point, facilitating spaces for reflection and synergy. **Mayors** seek technical support, especially from **SENA**, to manage resources and execute local projects. **Producer organizations** try to connect with **Mayors** and **SENA** to strengthen the value chain through training and technical support. Although sometimes overshadowed by **Mayors**, the **Planning Secretariats** are crucial for strategic planning and connections. Additionally, alliances with **departmental** and **national** government levels are vital to define strategies and secure resources, fostering a cohesive and long-term regional development.

Discussion

This article provides a detailed analysis of the interconnection between decentralization and governance in the planning regime for the implementation of national SDG agendas in the planning regime of the **García Rovira** province. It highlights how various actors create new forms of connectivity within networks, influencing flows related to sustainability agendas. Decentralization, focused more on the redistribution of power than on planning, limits the capacity to generate change. The lack of coherence, coordination, and citizen participation in planning reflects weaknesses in the regime, affecting its ability to achieve sustainability and development goals.

The study points out deficiencies in the interaction between planning levels and actors, making it difficult to effectively implement sustainability policies. The disconnection between levels and limited collaboration between municipalities hinder the adoption of a regional perspective, which also makes it difficult to contextualize national SDG agendas. While initiatives like the **Competitiveness Table** exist, there is still a lack of coordinated and consensual planning that addresses shared challenges at the provincial level.

The research emphasizes the importance of methods like interviews for a deeper understanding of planning issues in the province. It reveals the need to align planning levels and promote greater collaboration between actors to improve the effectiveness of sustainable development planning. However, a limitation of the research is that it focuses on the municipal scale, providing valuable insights into local needs and challenges in the context of **multilevel governance**.

Conclusions

This research shows that decentralization processes do not necessarily lead to the strengthening of the technical capabilities of planning bodies at the municipal level, which hinders the implementation of sustainability agendas such as the SDGs. In the context of this case study, a discrepancy was observed between technical capacities at the national level and the competencies developed by the municipalities that make up the province. This gap reinforces a top-down planning perspective, rather than promoting a more collaborative approach between different levels of government.

This perspective leads to planning that is not adequately contextualized according to the specific realities of municipalities with limited technical capacities, such as those in the García Rovira province. The disconnect between national sustainability goals and local needs means that policies and programs developed at the national level do not always reflect the particularities and requirements of the municipalities. Additionally, these municipalities are often overshadowed by departmental entities that contribute little to the articulation of these policies with local realities.

The study also contributes to understanding the role of network analysis in planning processes. By applying this approach, the links and relationships between various actors involved in planning at the municipal, departmental, and national levels were identified. This helped better understand the dynamics of collaboration and interaction among planning actors, revealing weaknesses in both bridge and cohesion social capital.

Furthermore, network analysis contributed to understanding the existing governance structures and the interactions between different planning levels in the multilevel governance perspective, of which the García Rovira province is a part. By revealing connections within the network, opportunities were identified to improve coordination, cooperation, and the participation of actors in the planning process. This is particularly relevant in the context of multilevel governance, where effective interaction between different planning levels is crucial to achieving consistent and harmonized planning.

Bibliographical references

- BARBERENA NISIMBLAT, V. (2021). Balance de la descentralización en Colombia: propuestas para el desarrollo y equidad territorial. *RTR. Revista Territorios y Regionalismos*, 5(5), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.29393/rtr5-1bdvb10001>
- BARDHAN, P. (2002). Decentralization of governance and development. *The Journal of Economic Perspectives: A Journal of the American Economic Association*, 16(4), 185–205. <https://doi.org/10.1257/089533002320951037>
- BODIN, Ö., CRONA, B., & ERNSTSON, H. (2006). Social networks in natural resource management: What is there to learn from a structural perspective? *Ecology and Society: A Journal of Integrative Science for Resilience and Sustainability*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-01808-1102r02>
- BUCIEGA, A., & ESPARCIA, J. (2013). Un análisis a partir de dinámicas relacionales en el desarrollo rural. *Redes. Revista Hispana para el Análisis de Redes Sociales*, 24(1), 81–113. <https://raco.cat/index.php/Redes/article/view/264618>
- CASH, D. W., ADGER, W. N., BERKES, F., GARDEN, P., LEBEL, L., OLSSON, P., PRITCHARD, L., & YOUNG, O. (2006). Scale and cross-scale dynamics: Governance and information in a multilevel world. *Ecology and Society: A Journal of Integrative Science for Resilience and Sustainability*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.5751/es-01759-110208>
- CONGRESO DE COLOMBIA. (1997). Ley 388 de 1997. *Diario Oficial*. http://www.secretariassenado.gov.co/senado/basedoc/ley_0388_1997.html
- COMISIÓN ECONÓMICA PARA AMÉRICA LATINA Y EL CARIBE (CEPAL). (2019). Planificación para el desarrollo territorial sostenible en América Latina y el Caribe (LC/CRP.17/3). Santiago, Chile. <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/44731-planificacion-desarrollo-territorial-sostenible-america-latina-caribe>
- CUERVO, L. M., & DELANO, M. P. (2019). Planificación multiscalar, regional y local. Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe. (Serie Seminarios y Conferencias, N° 91) (LC/TS.2019/53). <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/12f0d476-2e95-456c-a4c2-84c735a09b2a/content>
- DALLA TORRE, M. A. (2017). “Gobernanza territorial en Mendoza, Argentina. Limitaciones y desafíos en la planificación colaborativa del territorio.” *Bitácora Urbano Territorial*, 27(1), 47. <https://doi.org/10.15446/bitacora.v27n1.47597>
- DEMPWOLF, C. S., & LYLES, L. W. (2011). The Uses of Social Network Analysis in Planning: A Review of the Literature. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 27(1), 3–21. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885412211411092>
- FARINÓS DASÍ, J. (2008). Gobernanza territorial para el desarrollo sostenible: Estado de la cuestión y agenda. *Boletín de la A.G.E.*, 46, 11–32. <http://www.dhl.hegoa.ehu.es/ficheros/0000/0563/Gobernanza.pdf>
- FISCHER, H. W. (2021). Decentralization and the governance of climate adaptation: Situating community-based planning within broader trajectories of political transformation. *World Development*, 140(105335), 105335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105335>
- GALASO, P., & GOINHEX, S. (2018). Local development, social capital and social network analysis: Evidence from Uruguay. *REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS REGIONALES* No. 113, 137–163. <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=6920012>
- PLAN DE DESARROLLO DE SANTANDER 2020-2023. (n.d.). <https://santander.gov.co/publicaciones/7651/plan-de-desarrollo-2020-2023/>
- MONCAYO, E. (2019). Las políticas regionales y la planeación en Colombia: Una visión panorámica. Período 1958-2018. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332109630_Las_politicas_regionales_y_la_planeacion_en_Colombia_una_vision_panoramica_Periodo_1958-2018
- MONTERO, S., & CHAPPLE, K. (2018). Regiones periféricas, gobernanza frágil: Desarrollo económico local desde América Latina. Ediciones Uniandes. <https://ediciones.uniandes.edu.co/library/publication/regiones-perifericas-gobernanza-fragil-desarrollo-economico-local-desde-america-latina-1659479368>
- NIEMINEN, J., SALOMAA, A., & JUHOLA, S. (2020). Governing urban sustainability transitions: Urban planning regime and modes of governance. *Journal of Environmental Planning and Management*, 63(1), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09640568.2020.1776690>
- PLAN DE DESARROLLO TERRITORIAL PDT MÁLAGA SOMOS TODOS. (2020). Alcaldía de Málaga. <http://www.malaga-santander.gov.co/planes/plan-de-desarrollo-de-territorial-pdt-malaga-somos-todos>
- PRESIDENCIA DE LA REPÚBLICA DE COLOMBIA. (2015). Decreto 1077 de 2015. *Diario Oficial*. <https://www.funcionpublica.gov.co/eva/gestornormativo/norma.php?i=77216>
- PUTNAM, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Touchstone Book. <https://www.socialcapitalgateway.org/content/book/putnam-r-d-2000-bowling-alone-collapse-and-revival-american-community-new-york-simon-sc>
- SCHREUDER, W., & HORLINGS, L. G. (2022). Transforming places together: transformative community strategies responding to climate change and sustainability challenges. *Climate Action*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44168-022-00024-3>
- STUHLBREHER, A. M. (2021). Cambio climático y gobernanza multinivel en Uruguay: percepciones tras diez años del Sistema Nacional de Respuesta al Cambio Climático. *Perfiles Latinoamericanos: Revista de La Sede Académica de México de La Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales*, 29(58). <https://doi.org/10.18504/pl2958-004-2021>
- UMAÑA MALDONADO, M., & QUILINDO BOLAÑOS, D. C. (2018). La organización territorial de Colombia y la estructuración de su sistema de planeación y ordenamiento territorial [Data set]. University of Salento. <https://doi.org/10.1285/I26113775N2P85>
- WILLIAMS, T. G., BUI, S., CONTI, C., DEBONNE, N., LEVERS, C., SWART, R., & VERBURG, P. H. (2023). Synthesising the diversity of European agri-food networks: A meta-study of actors and power-laden interactions. *Global Environmental Change: Human and Policy Dimensions*, 83(102746), 102746. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2023.102746>
- ZAPATA, O. (2020). Reflexión sobre los planes de desarrollo en Colombia. *Revista Bitácora Urbano Territorial*, 30(3), 233–246. <https://doi.org/10.15446/bitacora.v30n3.86811>