



Faculty of Environment and Natural Resources

**Integration of the informal recycling sector in Bogotá, Colombia: A discourse analytical approach**

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By

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## **Abstract**

Informal recycling is a widespread phenomenon in developing countries. Whilst it has been pivotal in reducing the negative impacts of waste in the absence of proper disposal waste and recycling systems, waste pickers face hardships and marginalization. In the last decades, owing to the strengthening of their image as environmental actors, their inclusion in the formal waste management systems has been demanded by different actors. This thesis approaches the issue of waste picker inclusion from a discourse perspective by analyzing the case of Bogotá, Colombia under the Argumentative Discourse Analysis framework. Two major storylines are identified in relation to waste management policy: the dominant one prioritizing the avoidance of negative impacts on human health and the environment through an adequate waste disposal system and an alternative storyline, primarily concerned with the inclusion of waste pickers as a matter of human rights and achieving sustainable development. After examining the interplay between the storylines in the context, this thesis concludes that by securing the reproduction of its discourse at a high judicial level, other actors were forced to endorse it, yet its translation into institutional arrangements was harder to attain. Building on the discursive affinities between this storyline and the new local governments' discourse, it has begun to be institutionalized in the city's policies.

The thesis is structured as follows: after an introduction on the issue of informal recycling and previous discourse-analytical work on the topic, as well as presenting the objective and research questions, the second chapter provides an account of the theoretical underpinnings of the research and the framework used for the analysis. Subsequently, the methodological process is described in the third section. Chapter four provides the context for interpretation by relating the main events in the waste picker inclusion debate in Bogotá. The identified storylines, discourse coalitions and the issue of discourse hegemony are presented in chapter five. Finally, the last chapter contains the conclusions, a reflection on the methodological process and recommendations for future research.

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Freiburg im Breisgau,

09. December 2013

## **Declaration of Honesty**

I herewith declare that I have written this paper on my own and that I have not used any other sources and materials than those indicated. I properly cited the materials I have relied upon. Finally, I have not submitted this document as a master thesis in any other place.

Freiburg im Breisgau, 09.12.2013

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Camila Castañeda Quintero

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADA	Argumentative Discourse Analysis
ANDESCO	National Association of Public Service and Telecommunication Companies
ANR	National Association of Recyclers
Arambiental	Association of Recycling and Environmental Recovery Organizations
ARB	Recycler's Association of Bogotá
ASE	Areas of Exclusive Service
BCP	Basura Cero Program
CRA	Regulatory Commission of Water and Sanitation
CEMPRE	Corporate Commitment to Recycling
CONPES	National Council of Economic and Social Policy
EAAB	Water and Sewerage Company of Bogota
EDIS	Public Service Company of the District
FS	Social Foundation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
ISWM	Integrated Solid Waste Management
NGO	Non-governmental organizations
PDR	Recycling Program of the District
PGIRS	Integrated Solid Waste Management Plan
PMIRS	Integrated Solid Waste Management Master Plan
PSS	Public Sanitation Service
SKAD	Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse
UAESP	Special Administrative Unit of Public Services
UESP	Special Public Service Unit

# 1. INTRODUCTION

*The first lesson [you learn from studying waste] (and it's not a trivial one) is that few rewards come the way of those who take rubbish seriously. (Thompson, 1994, p. 199)*

The absence of proper or formal disposal waste and recycling systems in many developing countries, coupled with a lack of opportunities and employment has led many poor people to find in waste a source of income (Wilson et al. 2006). It is estimated that 1% of the urban population, approximately 15 million people, in developing countries obtain their livelihood from collecting, segregating and selling recyclable materials (Medina, 2008). Besides providing poor and marginalized societal groups with a source of income, informal recycling<sup>1</sup> has been paramount in reducing the amount of waste that is openly dumped, burned or land filled (Gerdes & Gunsilius, 2010; Medina, 2007; Wilson, Velis, & Cheeseman, 2006).

Waste pickers are considered a vulnerable group, given the amount of problems and hazards they are exposed to (Medina, 2005). Owing to the nature of their work, they are associated with dirtiness and backwardness, seen as a nuisance or criminals, and thus discriminated by society (Medina, 2005; Wilson, Araba, Chinwah, & Cheeseman, 2009). Furthermore, they have a limited capacity in terms of infrastructure and means to recover, store and transform recyclable material. This makes them dependent middlemen and intermediaries, which in turn hinders their chances of value addition and obtaining a better income (Martínez Arce, Daza, Tello Espinoza, Soulier Faure, & Terraza, 2010; Parra & Fernández, 2012). As a way to overcome these difficulties, many waste pickers around the world have joined in cooperatives and associations, seeking to dignify their work, strengthen their networks and bargaining power and improve their quality of life (Medina, 2005, 2007).

Although informal recycling is a relatively old phenomenon, it started to be discussed in relation to waste management in the 1980s, when social aspects became a salient issue in forums and publications from international organizations on the topic (Furedy, 1984). For many years, the main concern of developing countries has been to improve waste disposal and sanitation, which led them to adopt technologies from industrialized countries. As a result of the differences in labor and capital availability, waste stream and other context-specific characteristics, many of these technologies failed (Medina, 2005). Moreover, the modernization and privatization of waste management often led to the exclusion of informal

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<sup>1</sup> Understood as the recycling activities of waste pickers (Wilson et al., 2006)

waste workers (Gerdes & Gunsilius, 2010). Generally, the public sector's approach to the waste picker issue was either to utterly ignore them, repress them or reinforce their exploitation (Medina, 2007).

Under the discourse of sustainable development, however, the perception of waste pickers has fundamentally changed. In fact, the implementation of inclusive recycling systems is considered desirable, as a way to achieve economic, environmental and social objectives. By creating economically efficient models based on the entrepreneurial skills of waste pickers and their ability to obtain high recovery rates, it would be possible to reduce the environmental impact of waste and at the same time, improve the livelihoods of waste pickers (Gerdes & Gunsilius, 2010). Consequently, many governments have become supportive of informal recycling and pursued its legalization and the organization of waste pickers in cooperatives (Do Carmo, 2012; Medina, 2007). Medina (2008) further argues that by supporting informal recycling, one has a "*perfect illustration for sustainable development*" (Medina, 2005, p. 1):

*when organized and supported, waste picking can spur grassroots investment by poor people, create jobs, reduce poverty, save municipalities money, improve industrial competitiveness, conserve natural resources, and protect the environment...These can lead to more efficient recycling and more effective poverty reduction.* (Medina, 2008, p. 1)

In line with these changes, Colombia, the Latin American nation with the largest number of waste pickers (Martínez Arce et al., 2010), has also been the scenario of discussions on waste management, waste pickers and their rights for the last 20 years. The organization of waste pickers in the country can be traced back to the 1980s and it was at some point considered "*the most dynamic waste picker cooperative movement in the world*" (Medina, 2005, p. 21). Waste pickers associations in Colombia have actively participated in different scenarios at the national and even international level, in order to demand changes in the public policy (Ruiz-Restrepo & Barnes, 2010). A landmark victory was achieved in 2003, when the Constitutional Court demanded the inclusion of waste pickers in all future waste management tendering processes (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003). By the end of 2012, a new waste collection system was set in place in Bogota, having as its main tenets delivering recycling exclusively to waste pickers and mandating recycling in the city (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2012a). The case is considered relevant because it involves an active role of civil society in bringing about policy change.

A possible approach for analyzing this case would be to focus on waste pickers, public authorities, industries and waste collection companies and analyze the dynamics in terms of interests and the power of the parties involved to understand the outcome (Hajer, 2006, p. 65). Instead, this thesis explores the changes in waste management policies and waste picker inclusion in Bogota, Colombia, under a constructivist approach by applying the Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) developed by Marteen Hajer. While there is no doubt that a realist view on the subject could provide a valid explanation for it, the assumption here is that politics is more of a struggle over meaning than a conflict of interests. Therefore, by choosing this analytical lens, I expect to have a deeper understanding of the changes that occurred in the Colombia waste management policy arena (Hajer, 2006, p. 65).

For this purpose various documents and news relating to the topic published between 1991-2013 were read and analyzed. In addition, eleven in-depth interviews were conducted, including members of waste picker associations, public institutions and private actors.

## **1.1 Objective and research questions**

The main objective of the thesis was to identify the discourses formed around waste management, particularly in relation to waste pickers, along with the storylines and the practices through which they were uttered, as a means to understand policy change.

The overarching research question was: how far can the policy change regarding waste management and the informal recycling sector in Bogotá be explained by competing discourse coalitions, and what are the main narratives associated with them?

Further questions were i) how prominent was the role of waste pickers in setting the discourses, ii) how are the processes of discourse structuration and institutionalization present in the case and iii) to what extent is discourse analysis an appropriate framework for analyzing the present case.

## 1.2 Of waste, waste management and waste pickers

*Everything that we discard, shun, abhor, wash our hands of or flush away should, in an ideal world, go away and stay away* (Thompson, 1994, p. 199)

Many scholars agree that “waste” is a social construct. What is defined as waste is more closely related to what a society, at a particular time, considers valuable or not, than to a set of physical and chemical features an object might have (Keller, 2009; Thompson, 1994). Human excrement, for example, was used for many centuries as fertilizer, until the hygiene discourse and chemical fertilizers stripped it of its value (Keller, 2009). As waste is something that is “out of place”, it stands as a symbol of dysfunction (Keller, 2009; Thompson, 1994). Therefore, society has established ways to carry “worthless items” from the private sphere, where they are produced, visible and disrupt social order, to the public sphere where they become invisible (Keller, 2009, p. 29).

Similarly, waste as a synonym for dirt acquires a moral value, for it is equated with badness, just as cleanliness represents purity (Douglas 1996; as cited in Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999, p. 416). This “negative semantics of waste” are also projected upon activities, jobs and people dealing with it (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999; Do Carmo & Puppim de Oliveira, 2010). Such is the case of recycling, which has been for centuries a profitable way of managing waste, but typically branded as dirty and insalubrious (Do Carmo & Puppim de Oliveira, 2010). Waste pickers by virtue of doing “dirty work”<sup>2</sup>, are likewise attributed the negative connotations associated with waste.

Waste management has been practiced for centuries and transformed in accordance to the dominant definition of cleanliness (Keller, 2009). Initially, waste became a public concern as a health issue, inasmuch as it related to the avoidance of diseases (Do Carmo, 2012; Keller, 2009). Given this understanding of the problem, the appropriate solution was a technical one, namely, finding the best way to dispose or store garbage (e.g. landfills, incinerators). Thus, waste management was for many years “monopolized” by engineers (Furedy, 1984; Lederer, 2009).

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<sup>2</sup> Ashforth and Kreiner (1999) citing Hughes (1958) define “dirty work” as tasks that are “physically, socially or morally” tainted (p. 414). In this case, for example, it is a physical taint, since they work directly with waste (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999).

Since the 1970s, waste management policy started shifting its focus from public health to environmental protection and resource conservation, particularly in industrialized countries (Lederer, 2009). This change can be attributed to multiple factors: first, the issue of health and sanitation was no longer a pressing concern in these countries (Lederer, 2009). Second, the emergence of the environmental discourse brought attention to the issue of resource scarcity, the role of society and consumption patterns in the production of waste, as well as the ineffectiveness of some waste disposal methods to mitigate waste's environmental impacts (Do Carmo, 2012; Viehöver, 2000). Third, the changes in the waste stream since the industrial revolution and the technological innovations on re-use of materials led to a rediscovery of the value of recycling (Do Carmo, 2012, p. 45). With regards to non-industrialized countries, international organizations, such as the World Bank, have had an influential role in the diffusion of waste management policies in developing countries (Do Carmo, 2012; Lederer, 2009).

Keller (2009) and Viehöver (2000) provide a good illustration of the discursive debates on waste and its effects on public policy. Keller (2009), who analyzed discourses on household waste in both France and Germany, found that in the former a single discourse dominated the discussion. Framing the problem as a sanitary issue, product of civil society's inadequate practices and inefficient waste disposal methods, it called for a technical-administrative intervention. Conversely, in Germany two discourses shared the political arena. The first attributed the problem to the gap between the amount of waste and depository infrastructure, while the second, constituted a cultural critique, arguing that the solution to the waste problem required a fundamental change in consumerist societies and the economic system (Keller, 2009, 2011; Roald-Bern & Winkel, 2011). Viehöver (2000) also focused on German waste management policy, chiefly on the discussions around a packaging ordinance. He asserted that there were three competing discourse coalitions: the soft regulators, for whom the problem was lack of infrastructure for dealing with waste, the market regulators, who denied that packaging material was the problem and pointed the fingers at consumers, and the strong regulators, who framed the issue as an environmental problem that had to be solved by transforming the waste management infrastructure (Viehöver, 2000, p. 289). Both authors agree that the presence of a challenging discourse coalition, rooted in environmental arguments and the resonance of its storyline in the public arena had an effect in the proposed solutions and brought about a change in the German waste management policy (Keller, 2009; Viehöver, 2000).

In relation to waste pickers, discourse analytical work is scarce. A common theme in existing studies is stigmatization, as waste pickers are often associated with dirt, backwardness and

danger (Do Carmo, 2012; Gutberlet & Jayme, 2010). Gutberlet and Jayme (2010) find that binners in Canada, were branded as thieves through laws and campaigns produced by the local authorities and the media. The existence of binners was construed by the local government as a social issue, in no way related to waste management. The solution involved facilitating their transition to “worthier” occupations (Gutberlet & Jayme, 2010, pp. 3345–3346).

In Latin America, before the 1990s, informal recycling was viewed as a problem to get rid of. With the rise of environmentalism after the Earth Summit in 1992, the democratization of most Latin American countries by the end of the 1980s, and the newly gained image of waste as a resource, the public perception of waste pickers changed (Do Carmo & Puppim de Oliveira, 2010, p. 1261). Henceforth they became “environmental workers”, whose labor brings environmental and economic benefits to society (Do Carmo & Puppim de Oliveira, 2010; Do Carmo, 2012). Accordingly, the traditional pejorative terms used to denote waste pickers throughout the continent changed (Do Carmo, 2012; Medina, 2007). In Colombia, for instance, instead of being referred to as “gallinazos” (vultures) and “basuriegos” (“trashers”) they became “recicladores” (recyclers<sup>3</sup>) (Medina, 2007).

Do Carmo (2012) studied the effects of policies, prompted by this new positive semantics, on waste pickers in Rio de Janeiro. She identifies a transition, from repressive to supportive policies, that does not, however, necessarily translate into better incomes for waste pickers. In addition, the positive semantics of waste have also paved the way for the appearance of other actors willing to undertake this activity, hence displacing waste pickers from their traditional occupation. As for the discourses, there seems to be a concomitance between environmental and economic discourses regarding recycling (Do Carmo, 2012), in Do Carmo’s words:

*The issue’s importance to environmental concerns also lends itself to its importance vis à vis economic concerns, and vice-versa. In this sense, although environmental and economic issues may be distinct, they are composed of elements that transcend the boundaries of each other’s discourses. (Do Carmo, 2012, p. 53)*

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<sup>3</sup> For facilitating global networking, the term “waste pickers” was adopted at the First World Conference of Waste Pickers in 2008 (WIEGO, n.d.-a). As in Colombia they are commonly known as “recyclers”, these two terms will be used interchangeably in this thesis.

Moreover, Do Carmo argues that waste pickers are not the ones setting the discourse, but instead appear as a compositional element (targets of a policy) or as subjects (e.g. marginalized) (Do Carmo, 2012, p. 54).

Against this background this thesis seeks to add to the existing scholarship on waste pickers by discerning how the issue of informal recycling and its integration into the formal waste management scheme is understood from a discursive perspective. In addition, it gauges how waste pickers construe themselves, the issues affecting them, alongside the corresponding policy solutions, against their depiction as a marginal population. Similarly, their role as discursive agents is explored by drawing on the storylines and discursive practices through which they sought to impose their problem definition in the policy arena. Furthermore, the analysis of the case provides some hints on factors that have enabled or hindered the formalization of waste pickers' activities, by understanding which institutional structures are firmly entrenched and which are prone to change (Fischer, 2003, p. 85). Finally, it points out to venues for future research on the topic.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Policy analysis can be approached through many different theoretical backgrounds, from rational choice models, to post-empiricists approaches like Ostrom's Institutional Analysis Development, or Sabatier's Advocacy Coalitions Framework, up to discourse theories and analysis (Camacho, 2010). Nevertheless, by choosing any particular theory, there is a set of underpinnings that will be used to interpret or analyze the results, which can lead to fairly different interpretations over the meaning of the same phenomena. Consequently, it is the job of the analyst to be mindful of the consequences of choosing an analytical lens and how this will influence the conclusions of the analysis.

For the present research, I will follow a constructivist approach and follow "argumentative turn" in policy analysis to understand the waste management policy changes, particularly regarding the inclusion of informal workers, as waste pickers are. This approach was chosen based on the assumption that it allows to go beyond interest-based and institutional analysis, and that this view can shed light on how the institutions related to waste management in Colombia function, how the power is structured and most importantly, how change comes about (Hajer, 1995, p. 264). The theoretical framework will be subsequently explained in detail.

## 2.1 The “argumentative turn” in policy analysis

The so-called “argumentative turn” in policy analysis questions a particular notion of science and rationality, which have dominated the way knowledge and policy are understood and studied. According to this conception, science is meant to establish unambiguous causal relationships through a universal set of procedures, in order to determine the “*best means to a given end*” (Dryzek, 1993). This has led to a technocratic approach to the analysis of public policies<sup>4</sup>, based on rational decision making and quantitative analysis, that has failed to deliver in terms of finding solutions to social problems and the improvement of policy making (Fischer, 2003). Such limitations have led many scholars, based on the contributions from critical theory, post-structuralism, postmodernism, social constructivism and discourse analysis, to adopt a different epistemological approach (Camacho, 2010).

The concept of social constructivism, introduced by Berger and Luckmann, asserts that while there is “one reality” (ontological realism), it is impossible to access it, because each subject will attach different meanings to the same phenomena, influenced by its own cultural frame and background (epistemological relativism) (Jones, 2002). Many scholars have now accepted that “reality” is a social construction and that scientific practices are contingent and depend on the context. Accordingly, knowledge can be redefined as a “*dialectically generated consensus*” (Fischer, 2003, p. 124).

Social constructivism is relevant to policy analysis in two ways: first, it restates science as a social process, the result of consensus in scientific elites rather than an objective methodology; second, it understands social problems as constructions that are pushed forward by social groups (Fischer, 2003, p. 54; Hajer, 1995, p. 42). Therefore, “*...policymaking is a constant discursive struggle over the definitions of the problems, the boundaries of the categories used to describe them, the criteria for their classification and assessment, and the meanings of ideals that guide particular action*” (Fischer, 2003, p. 60)

Under this view, policy analysis should focus on arguments and actual practice, for by giving emphasis to the context-specific character of analytical practices, it becomes clear how policy arguments are related to relations of power and the exercise of power, expressed through the way that some concerns are included instead of others, responsibilities and causalities are attributed and particular rhetoric strategies are used to frame problems (Fischer & Forester, 1993, p. 7; Fischer, 2003, p. 183). This focus on meanings and

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<sup>4</sup> Following Fischer (2003), policy here is defined as a political agreement on a course of action (or inaction) designed to resolve or mitigate problems on the political agenda (Fischer, 2003, p. 60)

arguments is expected to add another dimension to policy analysis complementing the usual analysis of actors, interests and institutions (Hajer, 1995; van den Brink & Metze, 2006).

## 2.2 Discourse Theory and Discourse Analysis

In recent years, there has been an expansion of discourse related perspectives in different fields (Keller, 2013). Although there are multiple definitions of “discourse” and different approaches on discourse research, there are some common concepts: i) They all focus on the use of language (written or spoken) and other symbolic forms in social practice, ii) accept the concept of social constructivism, iii) assert that individuals and their actions are framed in a discourse structure and iv) rest on the assumption that it is possible to reconstruct the rules of interpretation and action that guide symbolic orders (Keller, 2013, p. 3).

Though the term “discourse” does not originate with Michel Foucault, it was through his work that the concept began to be widely known and used (Keller, 2011). When discourse analysis focuses on knowledge production, as opposed to linguistic and pragmatic production of meaning, some authors classify it as Foucauldian discourse analysis (Feindt & Oels, 2005). Foucault’s approach tends to differ from other methods such as Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and more linguistic-centered analysis, in that these do not “*account for the socio-historical processings of knowledge and symbolic orderings in larger institutional fields or social arenas*” (Keller, 2011, p. 47). For Foucault, “discourse” corresponds to a number of dispersed statements uttered in different places, but that have been formed under the same “rule-system” (Keller, 2013). In consequence, discourse analysis requires asking “*...according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules could other similar statements be made?*” (Foucault 2010 [1969], p. 27-28; as cited in Keller, 2013, p. 47).

A Foucauldian perspective on discourse focuses on its productive function, that is, on the way it physically shapes “reality”, by establishing what is “true” on a particular context and thus “*allocating empowering or disempowering subject positions*” (Feindt & Oels, 2005, p. 164). In this sense, power is perceived as immanent because it is not only expressed through repressive practices, but also through the constitution and production of meanings and norms, that can originate everywhere (Feindt & Oels, 2005). At the same time,

discourses function as a structure to behavior (Hajer, 1995, p. 48) by both enabling and constraining actors, in terms of what can be done or said at a particular situation or place, distinguishing legitimate speakers from non-legitimate ones (Feindt & Oels, 2005; Keller, 2013).

For the present analysis I will use a Foucauldian perspective on discourse, by applying the Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) framework proposed by Maarten Hajer, and adopt his definition of discourse, namely, "*an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena, and which is produced and reproduced by an identifiable set of practices*" (Hajer, 2006, p. 67). Practices here refers to a set of socially established norms and routines, through which discourses are uttered (Hajer, 2006, p. 70).

Although Hajer builds on Foucault's conceptual contributions, he also draws on Harré and Billig's social interactionism, in order to re-center actors and develop a theory of discourse permanence and change (Feindt & Oels, 2005; Hajer, 1995), something he believed Foucault's approach was lacking (Hajer, 1995, p. 51). By regarding human interaction as an argumentative exchange over how to make sense of reality (Hajer, 1995, p. 53), actors are constantly practicing discourse, albeit intuitively, by trying to make others see their point of view and positioning themselves and others in a certain way (Hajer, 1995). Permanence and change are determined by discursive reproduction and transformation, where actors, though embedded in a structure (enabled and constrained by it), are able to challenge routinized forms of discourse (Hajer, 1995, p. 55). Furthermore, Hajer also departs from Foucault by stressing the need for democratizing policy making, and gauging the role of discourse analysis for this purpose (Feindt & Oels, 2005; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005).

Hajer's analytical frame is considered suitable for finding answers to the research questions posed, because it emphasizes on the analysis of discursive production in policy making, as well as occurrence of discursive shifts and the role of actors in these changes.

### **2.3 Argumentative Discourse Analysis**

By looking at policy-making through discourse analysis, political conflict is conceived as a struggle on the meaning of social phenomena, where different actors try to position their view of what should be defined as a problem, hence which are appropriate solutions (policies) to tackle it (Hajer, 1995, p. 59).

The assumption that language can make politics, by setting the terms in which a problem is discussed, thus determining what is considered relevant or meaningless, is central to Argumentative Discourse Analysis (ADA) (Hajer, 2006). In consequence, the framework “focuses on the constitutive role of discourse in political processes” (Hajer, 1995, p. 58), namely, “*what is being said, to whom and in what context*” (Hajer, 2006, p. 72). For the materialization of the analysis, Hajer introduces the concepts of storylines, discourse coalition and discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization.

### 2.3.1 Storylines

As aforementioned, discoursing subjects are at the heart of ADA, in line with the “duality of structure<sup>5</sup>”, whereby actors are the source of social action, and concurrently, embedded in structures that both enable and constrain their deeds (Hajer, 1995, p. 58). Once actors have adopted a particular position, they interpret the world from that perspective and discuss it in specific terms, by using certain images, metaphors, storylines and concepts (Davies and Harré 1990; as cited in Hajer, 1995, p.56).

A storyline denotes a “*condensed statement summarizing complex narratives, used by people as “short hand” in discussions*” (Hajer, 2004, p. 302). Instead of drawing on comprehensive discourse systems, people rely on short narratives, in order to explain an issue, its causes and solutions, and to position actors in a certain way (Hajer, 1995, p. 56). Because storylines summarize complex phenomena, actors from different backgrounds are able to fill in the gaps with their own knowledge and experience and fit themselves into the narrative (Hajer, 1995, p. 67). When interacting with others, the storyline conveys the idea of mutual understanding, hence becoming the basis of discourse coalitions (Hajer, 1995, p. 66). Discursive affinity is another concept that underpins this mutual understanding. It refers to arguments that conceptualize the world in a similar way, albeit having different origins (Hajer, 2006, p. 71). When the discursive elements are not only akin, but flow over into one another, he talks about a particularly strong discursive affinity or “discursive contamination” (Hajer, 1995, p. 67)

Regarding discourse change and permanence, storylines play a pivotal role, as the instrument through which problem definitions can be changed (Hajer, 2006, p. 69). Thus, finding an appropriate storyline can be a form of agency (Hajer, 1995, p. 56). Similarly,

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<sup>5</sup> Concept introduced by Anthony Giddens cited by Hajer (1995, p. 48).

storylines signpost shifts in a discursive field, particularly when new subjects, objects or problematizations are brought in (Feindt & Oels, 2005, p. 165).

### **2.3.2 Discourse coalitions**

A discourse coalition is defined as “*groups of actors that, in the context of an identifiable set of practices, shares the usage of a particular set of storylines over a particular period of time*” (Hajer, 2004, p. 302, Original emphasis). Through this set of shared storylines, discourse coalitions try to impose their view of reality on others, by framing themselves and other actors in a certain way (Hajer, 2004). Three factors are key for gaining support to a particular depiction of reality: i) credibility, meaning that people believe in and accept the defined actor-positioning; ii) acceptability, that is, ensuring that a position is regarded as necessary or attractive; iii) trust relates to the suppression of doubts or uncertainties and securing confidence in an actor by drawing on, for example, the process by which the definition of reality was achieved (Hajer, 1995, p. 59).

Because discourse coalitions form around storylines and the set of practices in which these storylines are uttered, instead of interests or beliefs, one can accept the fact that a particular actor helps reproduce different discourse coalitions depending on the context (Hajer, 2004).

Practices can be understood as the sites where the argumentative struggles occur and where new positionings are created, hence the analysis should focus on both, how are discourses are reproduced through them, and how these routinized procedures are interrupted (Hajer, 1995, p. 60). This is exemplified in the so-called “science-politics interface”, which according to Hajer (1995) is an important field of practices, where actors exercise power by deriving legitimacy from scientific discourse (p. 138).

### **2.3.3 Discourse structuration and institutionalization**

As a way to link power and dominance with discourses two concepts are introduced, *discourse structuration* and *discourse institutionalization*. Through these notions it is possible to assess the influence of a particular discourse (Hajer, 2004, p. 303). When a discourse starts dominating a policy domain and setting the terms in which people conceive reality, this is referred to as discourse structuration (Hajer, 2004). If in addition, the discourse translates into institutional and organizational practices we talk about discourse

institutionalization (Hajer, 1995). A discourse that has these two characteristics will be considered hegemonic.

A dominant discourse can express its power through institutional practices (Hajer, 1993, p. 68). Since these practices are the context in which discursive struggles take place, they are a hindrance for the appearance and institutionalization of competing discourses (Hajer, 1993, 1995, p. 60). In his analysis of the British Acid Rain debate, Hajer argued that because the contending eco-modernist discourse tried to beat the dominant traditional pragmatist discourse by discussing in their own terms (drawing on “proper science”), they were embedded in the inherent logic of the dominant discourse and consequently failed to impose their storyline (Hajer, 1993, p. 68).

As an illustration of the above mentioned concepts, I take the example of the waste hierarchy model. Understood as a ranking of waste management options (reduce, reuse/recycle, disposal), it was introduced in the waste management field in the 1980s-1990s, and since then it has become intrinsically linked to waste management, to the point that most publications on the topic refer to it (Lederer, 2009). Although Lederer (2009) does not refer to the terms of discourse hegemony, his analysis seems to conclude that the concept has become mandatory in waste management publications. Moreover, as many countries have included this principle in their waste management laws (Lederer, 2009), one could consider the possibility that this is a case of discourse institutionalization.

### **3. METHODS**

On his analysis of the ecological modernization discourse in Great Britain and the Netherlands (Hajer, 1995), Hajer implements the ADA framework and later proposes ten steps that are relevant for doing discourse analysis (Hajer, 2006). Whereas, these steps are the basis for the methodological approach used in this thesis, they fall short as guidelines for data analysis and the identification of storylines and discourses. Therefore, I drew on the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD), which offers a more explicit methodology on this matter.

**Figure 1. Ten Steps of Argumentative Discourse Analysis**

1. Desk research: general survey of the documents and positions in a given field; newspaper analysis, analysis of news sections in relevant journals. This all to make a first chronology and come up with a first reading of events;
2. 'Helicopter interviews': interviews with three or four actors ('helicopters') that are chosen because they have the overview of the field be it from different positions. They might comprise a well informed journalist, a key advisor to the government, an expert-policy maker;
3. Document analysis: analysing documents for structuring concepts, ideas and categorizations; employment of story lines, metaphors, etc. This should result in a first attempt at defining structuring discourses in the discussion. At this stage one would get a basic notion of the process of events as well as the sites of discursive production;
4. Interviews with key players: on the basis of the proceeding steps interviews can be conducted with central actors in the political process. The interviews can be used to generate more information on causal chains ('which led to what') that will always be the assumed core of the meeting on part of the interviewees, but the interviews might also be used to get a better understanding of the meaning of particular events for the interviewees. [...]
5. Sites of argumentation: searching for data not simply to reconstruct the arguments used but to account for the argumentative exchange. Examples might be parliamentary debates, minutes of inquiries (a very rich source), presentation and interpretation of evidence presented to a particular research commission, panel discussions at conferences;
6. Analyse for positioning effects: actors can get 'caught up' in an interplay. They might force others to take up a particular role, but once others are aware of what is going on, they might also try to refuse it (indicators: 'No, that is not what I meant', 'That is not what it is about at all'). This positioning not only occurs on the level of persons but can of course also be found among institutions or even nation-states;
7. Identification of key incidents: this would lead to the identification of key incidents that are essential to understand the discursive dynamics in the chosen case. As much as possible, these key incidents are then transcribed in more detail allowing for more insights in which determined their political effects;
8. Analysis of practices in particular cases of argumentation: rather than assuming coherence on part of particular actors, at this stage one goes back to the data to see if the meaning of what is being said can be related to the practices in which it was said.

9. Interpretation: on this basis one may find a discursive order that governed a particular domain in a particular time. Ideally, one should come up with an account of the discursive structures within a given discussion, as well as an interpretation of the practices, the sites of production that were of importance in explaining a particular course of events.
10. Second visit to key actors: discourses are inferred from reality by the analyst. Yet when respondents are confronted with the findings, they should at least recognize some of the hidden structures in language. Hence to revisit some key actors is a way of controlling if the analysis of the discursive space made sense.

Source: (Hajer, 2006, p. 73)

### **3.1 Desk research**

Plenty has been written on Bogota's case regarding the informal recycling sector's inclusion from very different perspectives. Thus the task of crafting a first picture of the case and identifying relevant stakeholders was not as demanding as choosing those which could be relevant for the analysis.

One important source of information were documents published by NGOs. The case of waste pickers in Bogotá is recounted in the National Study of Recycling, a series of documents sponsored and published by the NGO CEMPRE, with a chapter dedicated to the history of recycling and waste pickers (Aluna Consultores, 2011a). The Fundación Social – FS (Social Foundation), one of the first institutions to work with waste pickers, narrated their experience, in particular in relation to the waste picker associations, their development, challenges and successes since the 1980s (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003). Several documents from the NGO Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing – WIEGO<sup>6</sup> have presented the case of Bogotá from different perspectives (Parra & Fernández, 2012; Ruiz-Restrepo & Barnes, 2010). In addition, the NGO ENDA Colombia has done extensive research on the topic and offered a critical view on the Integrated Solid Waste Management Master Plan of Bogota (Sylvestre, Bojacá, Parra, & Antolinez, 2004). Also the NGO Civisol, which supported some of the legal processes, has an extensive collection of documents on this matter.

An academic perspective on the case was found in Parra (2007), Betancourt (2010) and Turcotte & Gómez (2012). All describe the case of waste management and informal

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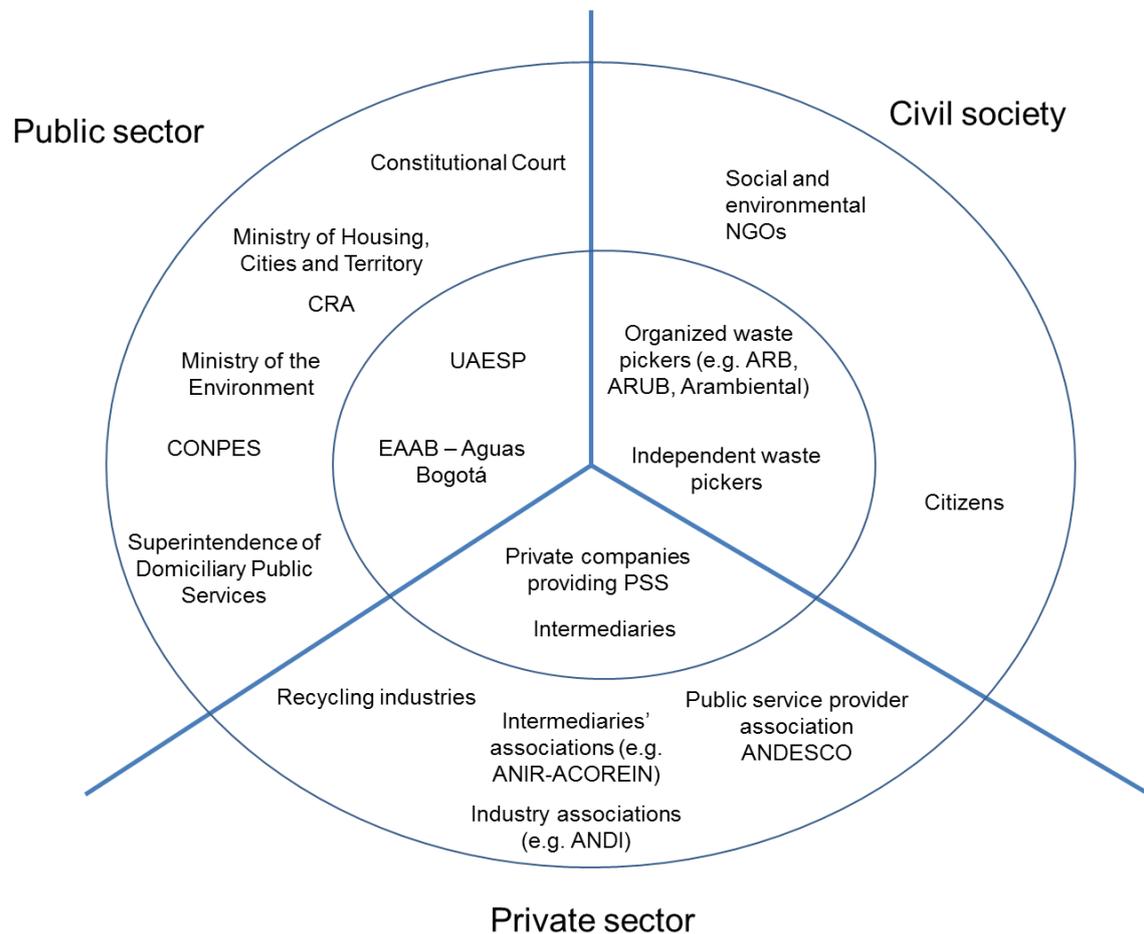
<sup>6</sup> WIEGO is a global action-research-policy network pursuing the improvement of the status of the working poor in the informal economy. One of its occupational groups are waste pickers (WIEGO, n.d.-b).

recycling in Bogotá and relate to public policy and the effects it has had on waste pickers (Betancourt, 2010; Parra, 2007; Turcotte & Gómez, 2012).

For the more recent events, the websites of two newspapers, El Tiempo and El Espectador, as well as the Semana magazine were consulted.

The desk research allowed the identification of governmental, civil society and private actors involved in the waste management topic in Bogotá, depicted in Figure 2. Two considerations are in place here. First, this is not an exhaustive list of actors; second, not all of them have participated actively in the waste picker inclusion debate.

**Figure 2. Main actors involved in waste management**



## 3.2 Document analysis

With the aim of reconstructing the discursive space, the following documents were analyzed: legal texts, such as laws and decrees, as well as policy guidelines on waste management enacted at the National and local level; rulings and supervisory decisions issued by the Constitutional Court of Colombia; documents published and provided by the Asociación de Recicladores de Bogotá - ARB (Recycler's Association of Bogota), and documents from the private providers of sanitation service. Finally, as a way to understand the public resonance of the discourses also news were included in the analysis.

*Table 1. Selected data by author*

Organization	Documents
<b>National government</b>	<b>4</b>
<i>Congress of Colombia</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Presidency</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>National Planning Department - CONPES</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>Constitutional Court of Colombia</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Local government</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Private sector (providers of sanitation service)</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Waste picker associations (ARB)</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Newspapers/Magazines</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>

The sentences of the Constitutional Court of Colombia, as well as its supervisory decisions were a good source of information as “sites of argumentation”, for they summarized and cited the main arguments of each side regarding the contended issue.

As the research had an explorative nature, breadth was privileged over depth, therefore, the documents tried to encompass the views of the central actors. Both publications from NGOs as well as academic documents were used as a source of information rather than as part of the data corpus.

For choosing texts from the media five key periods were identified based on the information collected during the desk research, where waste management and/or waste picker inclusion became the focus of public attention:

- 1992-1993: Sanitary crisis in Bogota and subsequent privatization of sanitation public service. Waste pickers murdered in Barranquilla.

- 1997-1998: A landslide in the Doña Juana landfill provokes a discussion on the need for improving the waste management model in the city.
- 2002-2003: A writ filed by waste pickers against the tender of the public sanitation service (PSS), which results in a declaration from the Constitutional Court that the state must provide affirmative actions to guarantee waste picker participation in the PSS.
- 2008-2009: Issuing of law 1259 restricting waste pickers activities and controversy over the appearance of new actors in the recycling business.
- 2011-2013: The PSS tender is cancelled for lacking effective affirmative actions. The new local government introduced the Basura Cero Program - BCP (Zero Waste Program) and re-organized waste collection in the city.

The websites of the two main newspapers in Colombia, El Tiempo and El Espectador were accessed for this purpose. Also, the website of the magazine Semana was consulted. The search of news was restricted to the foregoing periods and it started by entering the terms entered used to denote waste pickers (“recicladores”, “basuriegos”), as well as “reciclaje” (recycling). Only those that focused on waste pickers’ concerns/role and on recycling were selected. If for a period this did not draw any meaningful results, then terms related to the particular events were also entered (e.g. Doña Juana for the 1997-1998 period).

### **3.3 Interviews with key actors**

Drawing on the actors identified in the first step, 11 semi-structured interviews were completed. The interviewees were stakeholders representing the many sides of the debate.

The interviews were planned to cover the entire stakeholder spectrum, however, due to time constrains and difficulties with contacting some actors this turned out to be impossible. During the interviews with the actors that were previously identified, they suggested other persons and institutions and sometimes provided contact details. All but one interview were recorded and subsequently transcribed. The average duration was 50 minutes (See interview guideline in Annex 4).

**Table 2. Interviews by type of actor<sup>7</sup>**

<b>Actor</b>	<b>Interviews</b>
<b>Organized waste pickers</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>ARB-ARN</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Arambiental</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Association of Carreteros</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>NGOs</b>	<b>3</b>
<i>Civisol</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>CEMPRE</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>ENDA Colombia</i>	<i>1</i>
<b>Independent waste picker</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Middlemen in the recycling value chain</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Municipal Public institution – UAESP</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Private sector (public sanitation service)</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>

Despite having approached other actors, including, waste picker associations, national and local government institutions and all four private consortiums, it was not possible to conduct more interviews. Although I contacted the Vice-ministry of Water and Sanitation in the Ministry of Housing, they were not available for a meeting while I was in Bogotá, and also did not answer the questionnaire via e-mail. An appointment was made in the Comisión de Regulación de Agua Potable y Saneamiento Básico – CRA<sup>8</sup> (Regulatory Commission of Water and Sanitation) but the person could not be there at the convened time. As for local institutions, I was not able to contact directly the person in charge in Aguas de Bogotá<sup>9</sup>, nor the director of the Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos – UAESP (Special Administrative Unit of Public Services), although I did interview the Sub-director of Recycling. Thus, I could not follow a recommendation made by various interviewees of contacting different people from the public entities, even within the same institution, in order to contrast their views. Furthermore, since 2012, there have been conflicts between the

<sup>7</sup> See Annex 2 for a description of the organizations.

<sup>8</sup> The CRA is in charge of promoting competition among the providers of the drinking water and basic sanitation services or regulating monopolies, when competition is not possible. They are meant to ensure that PSS providers' operations are economically efficient, that there is no abuse of dominant positions and to guarantee quality in the service. (Comisión de Regulación de Agua Potable y Saneamiento Básico, n.d., para. 10).

<sup>9</sup> Subsidiary of the Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá – EAAB (Bogota Water and Sewerage Company), responsible for the BCP.

local governments and the private companies doing waste collection. Consequently, these stakeholders were reluctant to be interviewed, and those who agreed asked to remain anonymous and one did not consent to being recorded. Finally, another shortcoming is that it was not possible to ascertain the recycling industry's position on the matter, as no interviews with this stakeholder group were made.

Besides the interviews, I attended three different events related to the topic. The first, was a seminar on "Informal Recycling or Social Innovation" organized by the UAESP. Next, was a meeting of the National Recycler's Association and lastly, a discussion organized by CEMPRE titled: "Tariff Framework Proposal. Opportunities and challenges", on the topic of the new tariff calculation method proposed by the CRA. Although the recordings of the events were not transcribed and therefore not included in the analysis, they provided some insights that were reflected in the results.

Finally, I sought to contact those whom I had cited textually per e-mail, in order to confirm if the context in which they were being cited corresponded to what they had meant. Only two of them replied my query, both affirmatively. One of them suggested a rephrasing, as a way to make it more adequate for written expression, though also adding certain aspects that were not mentioned in the original quote, thus I abstained from changing it.

### **3.4 Interpretation**

#### **3.4.1 Finding themes in data**

For identifying recurrent themes, metaphors and storylines uttered, I drew on grounded theory strategies, following Keller (2013) and Merriam (2009). The documents and transcripts of the interviews were analyzed and coded using the MaxQDA software. In addition, several memos were created in the process, which were later used for conceptualizing the categories and writing the results. Initially the in-vitro coding of the data followed an inductive process, with the aim of spotting as many topics as possible. After the analysis of the first documents, some initial categories were defined and subsequently tested and revised with each additional text. Hence in the end, the method was primarily deductive (Merriam, 2009).

**Figure 3. Categories/Themes/Findings**

<p>Must be <i>responsive</i> to (i.e., answer) the research question(s) and...</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Be as <i>sensitive</i> to the data as possible</li> <li>2. Be <i>exhaustive</i> (enough categories to encompass all relevant data)</li> <li>3. Be <i>mutually exclusive</i> (a relevant unit of data can be placed in only one category)</li> <li>4. Be <i>conceptually congruent</i> (all categories are at the same conceptual level)</li> </ol>
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Source: (Merriam, 2009, p. 186)

As a way of testing the consistency of the categories, I adhered to the criteria proposed by Merriam (2009). The process that followed was particularly hard and led to the merge, modification and elimination of some categories. Finally, the categories responded to the factors supporting or hindering waste picker inclusion, based on the topics and arguments that were repeatedly found in the documents and interviews. Though I believe the final categorization suited the purpose of drafting the storylines, I am aware that it corresponds to my interpretation of the data and could be significantly different from that of another researcher.

**Figure 4. Factors supporting/hindering waste picker inclusion**

<i>Supporting factors</i>
<p>Collective Identity          Positioning as victims          Role in recycling system          Environmental benefits</p>
<i>Hindering factors</i>
<p>Efficient provision of PSS          Feasible/profitable recycling schemes</p>

### 3.4.2 Phenomenal structure

The concept of *phenomenal structures* proposed by the SKAD research program was used for reconstructing the discourses (Keller, 2011). The assumption underpinning this concept is that discourses arrange different elements to create a problem structure around an issue, that is, they determine the nature of the problem, the causal relationships, the consequences, solutions, values and positions ascribed to it (Keller, 2013, p. 114).

Consequently, the next step was to see how the elements of the identified categories related to the following questions (Keller, 2013; Roald-Bern & Winkel, 2011):

- Causes: What causal links can be identified?
- Responsibility: Who is given responsibility for the issue?
- Need for action and mode of problem solving: What is the proposed solution?
- Self-positioning: Who are “we”? How are “we” described?
- Other-positioning: Who are “others” or “they”? How are “others” or “they” described?
- Reference values

Through this process, it became clearer how the different supporting and hindering factors linked and reinforced each other.

### **3.4.3 Narrative structure**

The storylines are the threads that link all discursive elements together in a seemingly coherent and communicable form (Keller, 2011, p. 59). Hence they synthesize occurrences into a plot, assigns actors a particular role (e.g. hero, culprit, helper, victim) and organize value structures (Keller, 2013, p. 125).

In order to ascertain the storylines in the discourses on waste pickers, I looked mainly at the actor positioning, that is the heroes and anti-heroes of the story and how recurrent topics were used to justify actions and required solutions.

Finally, I revised the utterances in relation to the contexts in which they were made, in order to identify the practices.

## **4. CASE STUDY: WASTE PICKER INCLUSION IN BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA**

Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, is home of 16%<sup>10</sup> of the country’s population and the main economic and political center of the country. Bogotá’s economic activity makes up for 26%<sup>11</sup> of Colombia’s GDP.

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<sup>10</sup> National Administrative Statistics Department – DANE: Proyecciones de población, [www.dane.gov.co](http://www.dane.gov.co)

<sup>11</sup> DANE. Departmental National Accounts, [www.dane.gov.co](http://www.dane.gov.co)

**Table 3. Bogotá by the numbers**

<b>General<sup>12</sup></b>			
<i>Population</i>	7.674.366	<i>Unemployment rate</i>	9.7%
<i>GDP (USD millions)</i>	94.112	<i>Incidence of poverty</i>	11.6%
<i>GDP per capita (USD)</i>	10.650	<i>GINI Index</i>	0.497
<i>GDP Growth</i>	4.5%	<i>Labor Informality</i>	44.6%
<b>Waste generation and recycling<sup>13</sup></b>			
<i>Residential waste production (kg/capita per day)</i>			0,32
<i>Residential waste (tons per day)</i>			2.350
<i>Waste disposed in land fill (tons per day)</i>			6.300
<i>Potentially recyclable material (tons per day)</i>			
<i>Organic</i>			3.619,4
<i>Inorganic</i>			1.838,3
<i>Recycling rate</i>			16.1%

Sources: DANE, Bogotá Chamber of Commerce, UAESP, CEMPRE.

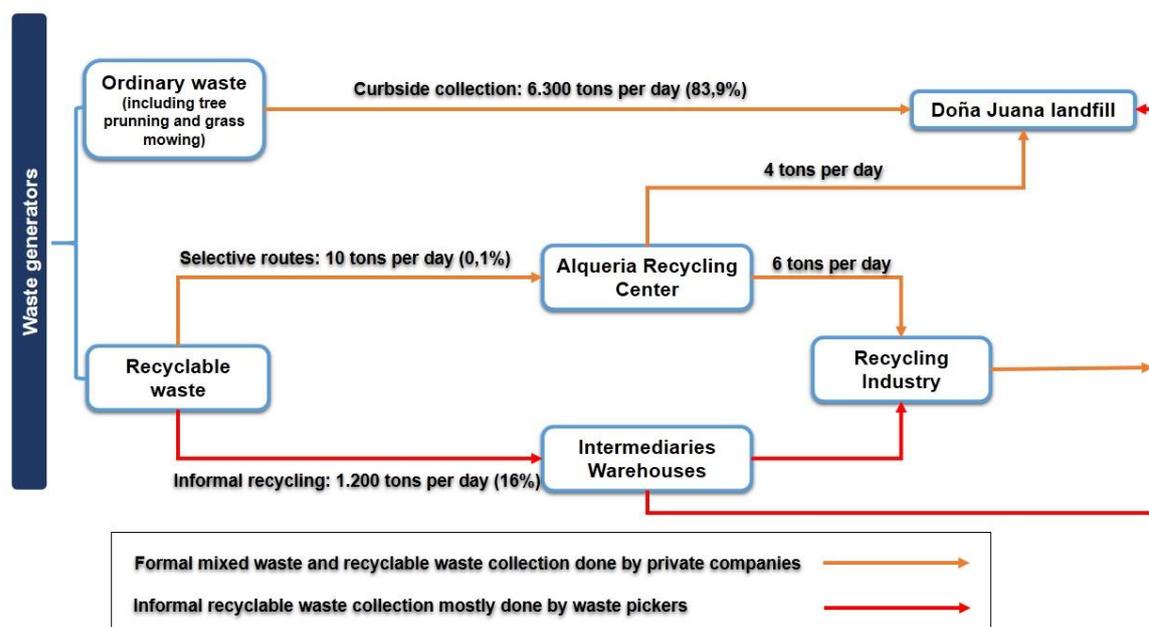
The public sanitation service in Colombia encompasses the collection of municipal solid waste, its transport, treatment, re-use and final disposal, as well as street sweeping, lawn mowing, and tree pruning in public areas (Colombia. Presidencia de la República, 2002).

From 1995 to December 2012 waste management in Bogotá was exclusively in the hands of private companies. As a way of organizing curbside waste collection, six Areas of Exclusive Service – ASE, were established and later assigned to private organizations through a competitive bidding (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos, 2011). The concessionaries were in charge of collecting ordinary waste from the ASE assigned to them and transport this waste to the Doña Juana landfill on the outskirts of the city (Aluna Consultores, 2011b). In addition, they operated 73 selective routes that collected potentially recyclable material throughout the city (Aluna Consultores, 2011b). This material was taken to the La Alqueria Center, which is conjointly operated by three waste picker associations since 2008 (Aluna Consultores, 2011b).

<sup>12</sup> Most indicators are from 2013, except the Incidence of Poverty and GINI index, which are from 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Since the indicators were taken from different studies on waste production and recycling in Bogotá, they correspond to different periods (Aluna Consultores, 2011b; Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos, 2011, 2012a)

Figure 5. Bogotá's Waste Management Scheme (until December 2012)

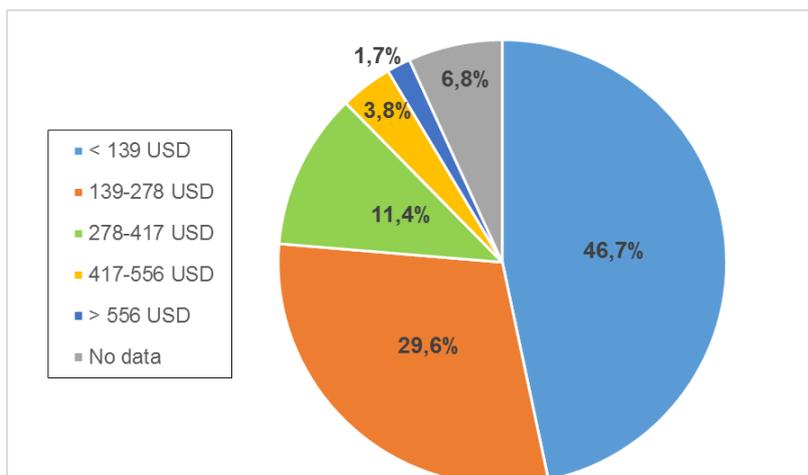


Source: Adapted from Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos (2012a, p. 20)

Parallel to the waste collection system, approximately 13,984 waste pickers, 68.7% men and 31.3% women<sup>14</sup>, are doing recycling activities in an informal way. Around 23% belong to some type of association (Parra, 2007). They mainly work on the classification of the collected waste to later sell it to different intermediaries, who own warehouses for storing or processing recyclable waste. To collect waste, recyclers use different means: sacks, pushcarts and “zorras” (animal traction vehicles), and often travel long distances (Betancourt, 2010; Parra, 2007). According to the last census applied in 2012, 75.7% of the waste picker population in Bogotá earned less than the monthly minimum wage (approximately 315.14 USD in 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Based on last census made in 2012 (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos, 2012b)

**Graph 1. Percentage of waste pickers by monthly income.**



Source: Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos (2012b)  
Central Bank of Colombia (Own calculations).

In order to provide the context for understanding the analysis and results, in the following sections I relate some major events that have happened in the last 20 years, where waste management and/or waste picker inclusion was discussed.

#### **4.1 Birth of waste picker associations and privatization of public service**

The emergence of an informal recycling sector in Colombia is linked to the lack of employment opportunities in urban areas, but also to the high internal displacement, caused by the armed conflict in the country (Aluna Consultores, 2011a; Parra & Fernández, 2012). While the origins of waste picking activities can be traced back to the 1960s, it was only until the late 1980s that they first started to organize in associations and cooperatives. Around this time, in an effort to improve waste management and sanitary conditions, many open dumps were closed all around the country and replaced by privately managed landfills. Landfills are viewed as adequate waste disposal solution for developing countries, owing to its low-costs and smaller health and environmental impact when compared to dumping and burning. The closing of dumps restricted waste pickers' access to recyclable materials, hence threatening their livelihoods. As a way to counteract the effects of this change, organizations like the Fundación Social - FS, a religious Jesuit organization, and the National Administrative Department of Cooperatives supported the creation of waste picker associations in various cities (Aluna Consultores, 2011a; Medina, 2005). In 1989 the ARB was born from the merge of four small cooperatives, with the objective of guarding waste pickers' rights (Terraza & Sturzenegger, 2010).

The setting up of associations would be paramount for the development of leadership and organizational capacities, as well as the creation of national networks and a group identity. In 1990 the First National Encounter of Recyclers was organized with the support of the FS (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003) and shortly after the Asociación Nacional de Recicladores – ANR (National Recyclers' Association) was founded. By then waste pickers had linked their work to the conservation of natural resources, as evidenced by this fragment of the Encounter's Memoirs:

*In 1989 the Colombian recyclers recovered 340.000 tons of paper and cardboard. This meant not cutting 6.800.000 trees...We are protecting our natural resources, protecting our flora and fauna. We are taking care of our hydric resources. But this work we have done is not being taken into account, its contribution has not been quantified.* (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003, para. 22, Own translation)

Building on this argument, they would demand a recognition as bearers of rights and as dignified workers. In 1992 an appalling crime, would bring attention to their claims: the bodies of 11 waste pickers were found in the University of Barranquilla, who had been murdered, in order to be used by medicine students (Gallardo & Castro, 2004). Recyclers all around the country manifested and several marches took place. The event became a rallying point for gaining the public's and media attention to issues affecting waste pickers (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003).

Concurrently, major political transformations were taking place in Colombia. The enactment of the new constitution in 1991 would profoundly shape the future debate on waste picker rights. First, it paved the way for the entry of private consortiums to public services (Terraza & Sturzenegger, 2010). Second, it had a strong focus on the defense of human rights, citizen participation and plurality. Finally, it acknowledged clean environment as a right and introduced the concept of sustainable development (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003; Gallardo & Castro, 2004).

In accordance with the neoliberal discourse, the Colombian government spearheaded the establishment of a new economic and political model in the country (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003). This included the privatization of public services, as the panacea for the corruption and inefficiency that plagued public companies and providing a better and cheaper service to the population (Páez Pérez & Silva Ruiz, 2010, p. 13). In Bogotá, the Empresa Distrital de Servicios Públicos - EDIS, had been in charge of the sanitation service since 1959. However, by the 1980s it was facing several institutional and financial issues

that affected its capacity to provide the service, thereby leading to a “sanitary emergency” in 1988, after which private companies started doing waste collection alongside the EDIS. In light of this circumstances, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) issued a report in 1992 avowing that privatization was the most suitable alternative for improving the sanitation service in the city (León Paime, 2006). The following year when the EDIS workers went on strike, the municipality hired the ARB through the FS, in order to provide the service in some areas of the city, until in 1995 the six ASEs were assigned to four private operators for a five year period (Terraaza & Sturzenegger, 2010). During this time there was little to no concern on recycling, which did not make a significant part of the scheme (Betancourt, 2010).

#### **4.2 Land-fill crisis and strengthening of recycling program**

*Before the waste landslide in the Doña Juana landfill, the waste problem was viewed as a matter of removal and transport. Today the need of doing integrated solid waste management is recognized...(Sylvestre et al., 2004, p. 226, Own translation)*

After a landslide in the Doña Juana landfill brought down 800.000 tons of waste in 1997, the local government had to re-consider the suitability of its waste management policy (Betancourt, 2010, p. 81; Parra, 2007; Sylvestre et al., 2004). The landslide triggered a sanitary and environmental emergency, affecting several adjacent neighborhoods and polluting the Tunjuelito River. Subsequently, the district appointed a consultancy firm for the task of developing a plan to manage waste, given the limited capacity of the landfill. The result was the Plan Maestro Integral de los Residuos Sólidos de Bogotá – PMIRS (Integrated Solid Waste Management Master Plan), wherein a main objective was to reduce dependency on the landfill by increasing recycling and setting a formal recycling scheme (Betancourt, 2010, p. 97; Sylvestre et al., 2004). According to Sylvestre et al. (2004), although the PMIRS explicitly acknowledged the value of waste pickers’ work, it was still more concerned with hygiene and urban image and did little to improve their situation (Betancourt, 2010). Instead by maintaining that “*recycling is economically profitable and self-sustaining*” (UESP, Fichner/Cyder 2000; as cited in Sylvestre et al., 2004, p. 207, Own translation) it precluded the remuneration of their activities via tariff. Conversely, Sylvestre et al. (2004) contested the validity of this argument, on the grounds that the price of recyclable materials was linked the industry’s demand and not to the costs of collecting and segregating waste. Thus, the permanence of waste pickers was explained by their subsistence needs and not by recycling’s profitability (Sylvestre et al., 2004).

Alongside these changes, waste picker associations continued a process of organizational strengthening, for which they obtained funds from national and international organizations. It was also a transition period for many associations, as the FS gradually closed its program on waste pickers (Gallardo & Castro, 2004; Ruiz-Restrepo & Barnes, 2010). Their image as environmental agents was reinforced by their involvement in environmental education campaigns, academic discussions and public service provision in small municipalities. In 1998, for instance, the Ministry of the Environment awarded the ANR with an environmental prize. A year later, the Law 511 established the 1<sup>st</sup> of March as the National Waste Picker and Recycling Day (Gallardo & Castro, 2004). While both at the national and local level there was an acknowledgement of the waste pickers' role and rights, this did not translate into effective inclusion in the formal waste management system (Betancourt, 2010, p. 37).

### **4.3 The tendering process of 2002**

*You'll see, he said, they'll re-distribute everything (...), and nothing [will be left] for the poor... because they will always be so screwed that the day shit is worth money, poor people will be born without an asshole....* (The Autumn of the Patriarch, Gabriel Garcia Marquez; as cited in Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009, para. 124, Own translation).

In 2002, when the new tendering for providing waste collection and recycling started, the ARB, assisted by McKinsey Colombia, prepared a proposal to bid for one of the ASEs. Nonetheless, they soon encountered legal obstacles in their way. First, according to the Law 142 of 1994, only stock companies were allowed to provide public service in big cities. In addition, the Terms of Reference set requisites regarding capital and equipment that could not be fulfilled by waste pickers. Furthermore, the Decree 1713 of 2002 handed over property rights on waste to the concessionaires as soon as it was in public space, with the implication that waste pickers' activities could be branded as theft (Betancourt, 2010, p. 109).

Supported by legal advisors and NGOs, the waste pickers sought to overcome these hindrances. On the one side, two legal processes against the hurdles set by the Law 142 and Decree 1713 were carried out. The former on the basis of discrimination of non-profit organizations and the latter pursuing the clarification of the legal nature of waste when left in public space (Ruiz-Restrepo & Barnes, 2010). Concurrently, waste pickers made use of

a legal recourse introduced in the Colombian Constitution of 1991, and filed a “tutela<sup>15</sup>”, i.e. a writ demanding the protection of several fundamental rights, amongst them, the right to work and right to equality. They claimed that the tendering was designed to benefits certain groups and without the provision of affirmative actions, waste pickers faced an uneven competition. Moreover, by excluding those people whose livelihood depended on waste, their subsistence was jeopardized (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003). After an unfavorable ruling in the court and subsequent appeal, the case was remitted to the Constitutional Court of Colombia. The Court acknowledged the arguments waste pickers’ raised, accordingly granted the writ and avowed that the Executive Unit of Public Services – UESP, the local institution in charge of the sanitation service, would have to:

*include affirmative actions to favor Bogota’s recyclers, when hiring the provision of the public sanitation services in the future, for the activity they develop is linked to this service, with the purpose of achieving real equality conditions and comply with the social obligations of the state...* (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003, para. 113, Own translation, Emphasis added).

This event is considered a landmark victory for the waste pickers and the ARB and became the basis of future claims (Parra & Fernández, 2012). Nevertheless, since the tender had closed prior to the Court’s ruling, such actions were to be implemented in future processes. Under the new contract, the four private consortiums introduced selective routes to pick up recyclable material and transport it to recycling centers. In addition, they were tasked with carrying out informational and educational campaigns to promote source segregation and recycling in their assigned ASE.

The Court’s decision was reflected in the PMIRS introduced in 2006. One of the major aims was to:

*Link the principles of financial efficiency and sufficiency in solid waste management to social objectives, in order to promote affirmative actions for low-income users and the recyclers’ population, who are subjected to poverty and vulnerability, for achieving social inclusion and recognizing their role in the general solid waste system.* (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2006, para. 104, Own translation)

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<sup>15</sup> The “acción de tutela” is a legal recourse introduced by the Constitution of Colombia of 1991. It is a writ for the protection of constitutional rights, which can be filed without the need of a lawyer in a court of general jurisdiction. The tutela must be filed in connection to the violation of an individual right and has priority over other legal processes, since it is meant to ensure the immediate protection of the fundamental rights that are being transgressed (Universidad de Antioquia, 2003).

According to the PMIRS, four recycling centers would be constructed, whereby 800 waste pickers could be employed. In the end, only one in La Alqueria was built, as a result of the strong opposition from citizens in the areas where these centers were to be built (Turcotte & Gómez, 2012). Both the Routes and the Alqueria recycling center have operated sub-optimally due to the existence of a parallel informal recycling system and the piecemeal attention that consortiums and local authorities gave this component (Betancourt, 2010).

On the other hand, the local authorities, through one program of the District's Recycling Plan (PDR) delivered training for waste pickers, in order to develop their organizational and entrepreneurial capacities, as well as improving their skills regarding recycling. Moreover, since 2008 La Alqueria is co-managed by three waste picker associations: the ARB, ARUB and Ambiental<sup>16</sup> (Betancourt, 2010). This has been considered a successful example of a public-private partnership that could be followed in other countries (Medina, 2008).

By the end of the 2000's decade, waste picker associations experienced a high level of internationalization. Since the 1990s, the Latin American waste pickers had been sharing experiences (Ruiz-Restrepo & Barnes, 2010), and understood their struggle as a fight, to be fought without frontiers, just as exploiters knew no frontiers (Fernández, n.d.):

*We, waste-pickers, will keep the hands in the garbage bag that provides our livelihood, but the head outside of the bag, to fight for the public policies that we need to improve our situation... United we can fight for what is needed. (WIEGO, 2008, p. 15)*

In March of 2008, the First International and Third Latin American Conference of Waste Pickers were held in Bogotá with the participation of waste pickers from all around the world, along with NGOs, private companies and public authorities. Waste pickers' voices had become globalized and they would declare their commitment to promote social and financial inclusion of waste pickers and the recognition of the role they play in waste management, through the revision of laws and policies. All at once they pledged to maintain international networks and expressed their support for technologies that maximize the use of waste, while rejecting incineration and burial-based ones (WIEGO, 2008).

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<sup>16</sup> The ARB is the oldest waste picker organization in Bogotá. Ambiental was founded in 2006 and ARUB in 2007, product of workshops organized by the local government to promote the organization of waste pickers (Betancourt, 2010; Cárdenas, H. Interview. July 26, 2013).

#### 4.4 The surging of new competitors

*In its majestic equality, the law forbids rich and poor alike to sleep under bridges, beg in the streets and steal loaves of bread (Anatole France as cited in Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009, p. 69)*

A new episode on the waste picker inclusion debate began in 2008, when Law 1259 of 2008 was enacted. The purpose was to create an environmental sanction for the inadequate management of solid waste and debris (Colombia. Congreso de la República, 2008). Notwithstanding the good intention of promoting environmentally friendly practices, by penalizing persons who “*open and remove, partially or totally, without authorization, the contents of garbage bags and containers, once placed for collection*” and the “*transport of waste and debris in inadequate vehicles*” (Colombia. Congreso de la República, 2008, para. 47, 57, Own translation) it was directly impacting waste pickers.

Furthermore, the passing of the law coincided with the appearance of business companies in the recycling scene (Ruiz-Restrepo & Barnes, 2010). One in particular, Residuos Ecoeficiencia, was in the “eye of the storm”, for it belonged to the sons of the then President of Colombia Alvaro Uribe. Waste pickers construed the situation as a direct attack against them and as uneven competition, so again they enlisted the support of NGOs for complaining against the law. The case garnered media attention and was also addressed in a popular TV-show in Colombia, thus raising sympathy for waste pickers (Betancourt, 2010).

At the same time, in Cali, the third biggest city in Colombia, the closing of the Navarro dumpsite, in accordance to the environmental laws, cause the displacement of 200 waste pickers. Since the local authorities did not take sufficient measures to mitigate the impacts this had on them, various writs for the protection of fundamental rights were filed. Likewise the NGO Civisol supplied an *amicus curiae*<sup>17</sup> brief in defense of waste pickers’ rights to the Constitutional Court, urging to stop the legal impoverishment of the poor. The resulting sentence T-291 besides reaffirming the need for effective inclusion of waste pickers in recycling activities, would also state that their “*participation cannot only be fostered by their [waste pickers] incorporation as employees, but instead must contemplate the possibility*

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<sup>17</sup> Means literally “Friend of the court” and refers to an adviser to a court of law in a particular case.

Amicus Curiae. 2013. In Merriam-Webster.com.

Retrieved December 02, 2013, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/amicuscuriae>

*that they can continue acting as waste entrepreneurs”* (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009, para. 218, Own translation).

#### **4.5 Struggles over the implementation of affirmative actions**

With the issuing of tenders for operating the Doña Juana landfill in 2010 and for taking over the public sanitation and cleansing service in the city in 2011, a struggle on what constituted affirmative actions in the public sanitation service began. As established by the aforementioned sentences, the local authority responsible for waste management, now called UAESP, had to guarantee the inclusion of waste pickers, preferably as waste entrepreneurs. The UAESP developed a similar scheme for both tenders, in which the chief affirmative action consisted in making waste pickers shareholders of the private consortiums who would participate in the bidding. Both times, the ARB, backed by other associations, filed a contempt order and the cases were again remitted to the Constitutional Court. In the Supervisory Decision 268 of 2010 the Court argued that since the measures included in the Doña Juana bid did not arrange for a way to benefit as many waste pickers as possible, they did not constitute an effective affirmative action<sup>18</sup> (Corte Constitucional de Colombia, 2010). The Terms of Reference were subsequently modified as per the Court’s recommendations and the tender was later assigned.

As for the tender for the public sanitation service in 2011, one criterion for evaluating proposals was the percentage of shares assigned to 2nd level organizations of waste pickers. Recycling was left exclusively for waste pickers under a free market scheme. Through the Supervisory Decision 275 of 2011 (Auto 275) the Court concluded that while these measures seemed to constitute affirmative actions, in reality they were not, because the utilities derived from the shares (if there were any) did not guarantee an income for waste pickers and the proposed scheme was neither substantially changing their situation nor strengthening their labor. On the contrary, waste picker associations were instrumentalized, as a token for entering the competition. What’s more, the Terms of

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<sup>18</sup> The waste picker association would both receive a shareholding percentage and be hired to work on an on-site recycling project. The bidders were asked to pair up with grassroots associations, as opposed to 2nd level organizations, which have more members, thus limiting the number of waste pickers that could benefit from this. In addition, the Terms of Reference established that maximum 20% of the waste dropped in the landfill would have to be recycled; however, it did not request bidders to commit to a specific percentage. Since this related directly to the manpower needed, it was impossible to determine which bid would translate into more jobs for waste pickers (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2010).

Reference went against the rights to equality of both waste pickers and bidders, had restricted the participation of waste pickers in the process and overlooked several inconsistencies and irregularities (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011; León, 2011). In consequence, the Court annulled the tender and instructed the local government to develop and present an inclusion plan for waste pickers before the end of March of the following year and recommence the tender process. Henceforth, the CRA, the national institution responsible for regulating the PSS and setting the tariffs, became part of the process and was given the task of defining general parameters for the recycling component of the public sanitation service and incorporating these parameters in the new tariff (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011, pt. 115).

#### **4.6 Basura Cero Program and the re-organization of the waste collection**

The same year, Gustavo Petro was elected mayor of Bogotá. Since his mandate started in January 2012, he inherited the task of designing the inclusion plan and finally implementing an inclusive waste management scheme, in keeping with the Court's rulings. In his inaugural speech, Petro placed some emphasis in the re-organization of the urban environment, considering both social and environmental issues, as well as the defense of public goods (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2012b). In the Development Plan for Bogotá 2012-2016, the government adopted the Zero Waste concept, and substituted the PDR with the Basura Cero Program (Zero Waste Program) aiming at minimizing the impact of waste on the environment and people's health through a cultural, educational and public policy change that would involve government, citizens and businesses (Concejo de Bogotá, 2012, art. 30).

In the Inclusion Plan for the Recycler's Population presented to the Court, the local government acknowledged *"the waste picker population, particularly, but the citizens in general, as the center of the waste management public policy"* (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos, 2012a, p. 8). Correspondingly, the BCP promotes acquiring responsibility for waste generation and management, as well as re-organizing the public sanitation service around the re-use and recycling of waste, where waste pickers would participate as service providers (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos, 2012a). This assertion implies a major shift regarding previous governments, which viewed recycling as a voluntary and complementary activity, as opposed to a mandatory component within the sanitation service (Betancourt, 2010, p. 123).

After the failed tender process in 2011, the contracts with the private concessionaries were extended twice in 2012 to avoid a sanitary emergency (“Anuncian prórroga para contratos de aseo en Bogotá,” n.d., “Contratan el servicio de aseo por otros seis meses,” 2012). At the same time, there were delays in the design of the new tender, an issue that was highly criticized as it meant higher costs for the citizens, because the lower tariff set by the CRA could not be adopted in the current contracts (Cantillo, 2012). In light of these circumstances, the mayor unexpectedly declared that a public company, the Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarrillado de Bogotá - EAAB (Water and Sewerage Company of Bogota) would start providing the sanitation service (“Acueducto asumirá directamente el servicio de aseo en Bogotá,” 2012). The announcement provoked doubts and concerns regarding the future of waste management in the city and the experience of the EDIS was recalled as a warning of the dangers of this strategy (Ardila Arrieta & Cantillo, 2012).

The last months of 2012, were marked by a heated dispute between the local government, the national government, the regulatory agencies and the private concessionaries. A main point in the discussion was whether the non-realization of a bid to assign the ASEs, implied that Bogotá’s public sanitation service would operate under a free market scheme. The local government opposed vehemently to this notion, and the mayor himself affirmed that *“those who speak of free market, ...are defending the interests of William Vélez y Alberto Ríos [Owners of private companies]”*, whom he referred to as *“paramilitary mafias”*. (“La pelea de Petro con el Gobierno por las basuras,” n.d., para. 18, Own translation). The National Government had threatened to intervene if the mayor’s plans failed (“Gobierno Nacional intervendría si hay problemas con aseo en Bogotá,” 2012) and after a visit from the Superintendence of Industry and Commerce to the EAAB with the purpose of inquiring about the plan for providing the service, Petro construed it as a raid and asked the President to respect the *“city’s territorial autonomy”* (“La pelea de Petro con el Gobierno por las basuras,” n.d., para. 4).

The quarrel with the private concessionaries was linked to the waste collection vehicles. On the one hand, the UAESP argued that since they had been paid with public moneys, they had to be returned to the District at the end of the concession. On the other hand, the private companies refused to do this on the grounds that it was not stipulated in the contracts (“Crece pleito por carros de aseo en Bogotá,” 2012).

As most strategies of the Inclusion Plan had not yet been implemented, the waste pickers protested in front of the town hall in November. After listening to their complains and reiterating the government’s commitment to include waste pickers, the mayor prompted

them to join him “*to fight against the power of money [the four concessionaries] with the power of social movement*” (Maldonado, 2012b, para. 14).

On the 18<sup>th</sup> of December, the EAAB started providing the sanitation service through its subsidiary Aguas de Bogotá. The process was closely followed by the press and heavily criticized for the high degree of improvisation (Herrera, 2013; “Las primeras horas del nuevo esquema de aseo en Bogotá / Análisis,” 2012). Other critics consider that the mayor had distorted the Court’s mandate, by framing waste picker inclusion as a class struggle to go against the concessionaries, but not solving the issue of exploitation by intermediaries and recycling industry (León, 2012; Ruiz-Restrepo, 2013). As a result of this whole process, various legal and administrative actions were filed against the mayor. Ultimately, despite the conflicts between the local authorities and the private concessionaries, they were again hired to provide the service in some areas (Ardila Arrieta, 2013). Nonetheless, most waste pickers remain supportive of the mayor’s actions and perceive this change as a success in their long struggle for inclusion (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, 2012, 2013a; Ceaser, 2013).

An analysis of the impacts of the BCP on the livelihoods of waste pickers is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth pointing out that according to the UAESP, until September 2013, 3.469 waste pickers had been remunerated via tariff revenue, 4.958 had opened a bank account, and 672 horse drawn vehicles were substituted for motorized vehicles (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos, 2013), making it the most concrete action in favor of Bogotá’s waste pickers so far.

## **5. DISCOURSES ON WASTE PICKER INCLUSION**

In the discussions regarding the issue of waste picker inclusion in Bogotá, two main discourse coalitions were identified. Whereas the first discourse adhered to the idea of avoiding sanitary and environmental problems through adequate waste disposal, considering both recycling and waste picker inclusion as desirable but additional concerns, the second has strongly promoted the inclusion of waste pickers in waste management, as the core issue to solve. Hence the issue has been discussed in relatively different terms, with one storyline building mainly around sanitary, technical and economic arguments, and the other drawing on human rights and justice. Both have appealed to the environmental discourse as way to legitimize their claims. The phenomenal structures of each discourse

coalition are summarized in Table 4, while the struggle over particular elements of the debate on waste picker inclusion are illustrated in Figure 6.

The results are organized as follows: first the two coalitions are presented and linked to the different events that have spurred the debate of recycling and waste picker inclusion. Next the storylines I identified for each coalition are introduced, along with the recurrent themes and the practices through which the discourses were uttered. Finally, I address the issue of discourse structuration and institutionalization with regards to the waste pickers discourse.

**Table 4. Discourses on waste picker inclusion**

Interpretative repertoire	Technical-Sanitary focus of waste management	Sustainable Development through waste pickers
<b>Main proponents</b>	National state (regulatory agencies), local government (until 2011), private waste collection companies.	Waste picker associations, independent waste pickers, intermediaries, NGOs, local government (since 2012)
<b>Problem structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoiding environmental and health impacts of waste</li> <li>Informal recycling has negative impacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Informal recycling provides no chances for improving waste pickers' situation</li> <li>Re-organization of public sanitation service threatens waste pickers' subsistence</li> </ul>
<b>Causes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizens not segregating at source</li> <li>Lacking infrastructure</li> <li>Underdeveloped markets and value chain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizens not segregating at source</li> <li>Lacking infrastructure</li> <li>Not recognizing value of waste pickers and their job</li> <li>Corruption limits waste pickers' participation</li> <li>Current public sanitation service is based on wrong paradigm: "hiding waste under the rug".</li> </ul>
<b>Responsibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National government (regulation)</li> <li>Local governments (implementing policies)</li> <li>Citizens (segregating at source)</li> <li>Waste pickers (avoid issues in public space, mobility)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Citizens (acquire responsibility for waste generation, segregate at source)</li> <li>Government (supporting waste picker inclusion)</li> </ul>
<b>Solution</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Guaranteeing efficient provision.</li> <li>Recycling system under economic rationality</li> <li>Incentives/sanctions for citizens</li> <li>Collaborating with industry</li> <li>Improving infrastructure and formalizing existing value chain</li> <li>Improving conditions for waste pickers (other jobs, working in recycling centers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognizing waste picker labor (giving rights over recycling, paying from tariff)</li> <li>Supporting inclusion as waste entrepreneurs</li> <li>Developing infrastructure for supporting waste pickers.</li> <li>Changing paradigm in public sanitation service</li> </ul>
<b>Self-positioning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Setting proper ISWM following technical, economic, environmental and social factors.</li> <li>Thinking of common good.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Doing valuable job under difficult conditions.</li> <li>Waste pickers as victims of other actors</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capable of providing public service, having earned rights over recycling</li> </ul>
<b>Positioning of others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Waste pickers lacking capacity to take over recycling immediately, causing other problems</li> <li>People having unreal expectations on recycling, not considering supply and demand market for recyclable materials</li> <li>Citizens lacking waste management culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State unwilling to recognize waste pickers' skills. Criminalizing poverty and threatening their subsistence. Seeing recycling as secondary issue. Corrupt.</li> <li>Private companies focused exclusively on profit, wanting to take recycling from waste pickers</li> </ul>
<b>Value reference</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State guaranteeing collective interest (common good) → efficiency in sanitation service.</li> <li>Rational actors → looking at feasibility and viability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Defense of human rights → marginal population</li> <li>Historical justice</li> </ul>

The first discourse coalition encompasses the views of the national government and private providers of the PSS, whose storyline corresponds to a *technical-sanitary focus of waste management*, in which a major preoccupation is an efficient waste management system, in order to avoid the negative health and environmental impacts from waste. Consistent with the international trend, in Colombia and consequently in Bogotá the topic of waste also entered the policy realm as a sanitation issue, becoming relevant given the rapid urbanization trends in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (León Paime, 2006). Guaranteeing an efficient public service provision was regarded as an important governmental duty. This was, for instance, the initial consideration mentioned in the Agreement 30 of 1958, whereby the EDIS was created (Concejo de Bogotá, 1958). Subsequently, the link between waste management and environmental issues was established in the National Code of Renewable Natural Resources and Environmental Protection (Télez Maldonado, 2012). However, when dictating sanitary measures in relation to solid waste the main concern was still the avoidance of health problems, pestilent odors and aesthetic impacts (Colombia. Congreso de la República, 1979, art. 22-35).

After the sanitary emergencies in Bogotá, which paved the way for the entrance of private actors in the public sanitation service, the idea of efficient public service provision, would be related to privatization. The neo-liberal discourse which underlined the recommendations issued by the IDB, framed the inefficiencies of the EDIS as inherent in public companies, hence making a case for it (León Paime, 2006). The view was also reproduced by the press, who during the sanitary emergency of 1993, often compared the EDIS performance with that of the private companies, remarking how the latter surpassed the former (“Basuras: Los privados blanquean a la EDIS,” 1992, “Bogotá, está con la basura hasta el cuello,” 1993; Gómez, 2003). This linkage of efficiency with privatization underpins the coalescence

of the two main actors in the discourse coalition, the national government and the private business sector.

Against this background, a second discourse coalition formed around the storyline of *Sustainable Development through waste pickers*. The main actors in the coalition are waste picker organizations, particularly the ARB, informal recycling workers, NGOs supporting them and the Constitutional Court. Since 2012, the local government also became part of it. The lack of recognition of waste pickers' role as environmental agents and public services providers, is portrayed as a central problem, as it has hindered the implementation of decisive actions in their favor.

When the FS began to work with waste pickers in Colombia, the underlying assumption was that it was impossible to organize waste pickers because they had no way of participating in decision-making spaces or negotiating and integrating themselves into economic circuits. Moreover, they were not considered strategic actors for development and were generally distrustful of governmental organizations (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003, p. 11). Thus, in accordance to marginality theory, waste pickers were perceived as actors doing an informal activity on the fringe of society (Medina, 2007, p. 13). In order to help the “*poorest of the poor*” (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003; Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009), the FS aimed to obtain recognition of waste pickers' work, but most importantly that they saw themselves as holders of rights and duties (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003). Gradually, the development of a collective identity brought forth the idea that despite the conditions in which they carried out their job and the stigmatization they were subjected to, informal recycling constituted an honest way of deriving income. This positioning was expressed during the First National Recycler's Encounter in 1991:

*The people recovering recyclable material have been seen for many years as the dregs of society, a society that has never learned to value the most important: mankind... Although we are honest workers and have the right to a clean country, a clean bed, a clean roof, we don't have it because the authorities meant to protect citizens, have persecuted us. We don't have it because society has not realized that we are providing invaluable services...We are 50.000 families that carry misery, but we are not ashamed, because it is also the responsibility of society as a whole, that every day deepens the gap between ones and the others. (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003, p. 13, Own translation)*

Thus, waste pickers framed themselves as proud, honest workers, whose activities brought benefits to society, but at the same time as victims of society's indifference. The incident in Barranquilla would further reinforce this image and compelled a reflection on the issue of discrimination and the unacceptability of pejorative names, such as “desechables”

(disposables) (Rodríguez Gonzalez, 1992). Waste picker associations would claim for a legal recognition of their labor, as way of guaranteeing their fundamental rights (“No más muertos,” 1992).

After the landslide in the Doña Juana landfill, recycling figured prominently as a solution to the waste problem in Bogotá. Although the topic had long been introduced in national and local policies, implementation of recycling schemes remained a challenge. Since the discussion of recycling inevitably linked to waste pickers, this gave organizations promoting waste picker integration a chance to position them as necessary actors when developing recycling schemes, given their vast experience (Tibaná & Carvajal, 1997).

A result of the landfill crisis was the introduction of Bogotá’s PMIRS, wherein recycling was said to be one of the pillars for integrated solid waste management in the city and the solution to the landfill’s allegedly short lifespan. Nonetheless, according to ENDA, in practice, recycling was still secondary in importance to the public sanitation and final disposal services, evidenced by the fact that in contrast to these activities, it would not be paid via tariff, nor was its efficient provision guaranteed through the establishment of adequate working conditions (Sylvestre et al., 2004).

Thus, although laws and policies at the national and local level promoted recycling, raising awareness among citizens, creating a zero waste culture and identified as a problem the fact that waste management so far had only focused on sanitary and cleanliness issues (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, 1997, p. 6), little action was undertaken to change this situation.

As the sanitation service tender process began in Bogotá in 2002, the issue of waste picker invisibility would come up again, for both the Terms of Reference and the regulations on public sanitation service hindered waste picker participation. At this point, the ARB emerged as an important actor in the Bogotá’s waste management arena. Owing to its active networking efforts at the national and international level, the ARB got a pro bono consultancy from McKinsey for the elaboration of a proposal for setting the recycling scheme and presented it to the then mayor Antanas Mockus (Ruiz, S. Interview. July 31, 2013). As they realized they were not able to participate, they started a process to bring about changes in public policy that would open possibilities for inclusion in the PSS. The underlying argument in the writ filed by the ARB demanding the halting of the tender was:

*Why would you create a recycling route, as if there were no thousands of people [doing recycling] here since 100 years ago, so you are like the Spanish discovering America, pretending there was no one here, ignoring and invisibilizing chibchas [indigenous people], you are doing the same with*

*waste pickers, and it's not fair, because the access to material is from what they eat, from what their living wage depends on. (Ruiz-Restrepo, A, interview, July 19, 2013, Own translation)*

It was further claimed that because waste pickers were a marginal population, the state had the obligation of ensuring their participation through affirmative actions, for otherwise their right to equality would be contravened by putting them to compete under uneven conditions (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003). In addition, waste pickers would position themselves as victims of the national government, who had created policies for waste but overlooked the people linked to it (Ruiz, S, interview, July 31, 2013), and of the local government, who had pointedly ignored their efforts to participate and sought to benefit the private waste concessionaries by excluding waste pickers:

*We believed that tenders were clean processes. Therefore you could bid in the tender and you would be included for what you were, who you were, what you aspired to do, for what you knew. Then we bid as the ARB in the tender, and we said: yes we can provide the service in Bogota because we've done it before...we said: this is easy, they will consider us. When we began to study the documents we realized...it was a custom-made suit and we didn't fit in it (Ruiz, S, interview, July 31, 2013, Own translation).*

Conversely, the UESP requested the dismissal of these arguments on the grounds that the conditions set in the Terms of Reference were the minimum requisites that the potential bidders had to fulfill in order to guarantee that they had the capacity to provide an efficient service (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003, para. 33). Shortly before the writ was filed, the UESP's director had answered the concerns of waste pickers by asserting that the services tendered were waste collection, sweeping and cleaning, while recycling would be assigned in the future, once the proper infrastructure was in place. Moreover, she declared that any waste collection centers that were built would be managed by waste pickers ("Reparos a la licitación de aseo y reciclaje," 2002). Hence, given that waste picker organizations lacked the capacity and resources to provide the PSS, their inclusion was conditioned to the building of the recycling centers.

Ultimately, the Court granted the writ and this ruling (Sentence T-724) became the basis of the ARB's arguments against the local government's actions. The Constitutional Court was hereafter perceived as an ally who stood for the rights of marginal groups against discrimination and corruption. What is more, it is construed as a hanging threat for the local government, should they not able to deliver solutions for the waste picker issue (Maldonado, 2012a).

Despite these developments, the publication of the CONPES<sup>19</sup> 3530 of 2008 titled: *“Guidelines and Strategies to strengthen the Public Sanitation Service framed in the Integrated Solid Waste Management”*, proved that the linkage between waste pickers and public sanitation service was not reflected in the national policies. The CONPES highlighted the achievements obtained in the provision of public sanitation in terms of coverage and quality, and how the private sector had contributed to it. Also the role of the recycling industry was deemed crucial for the development and strengthening of the recycling value chain, as well as for introducing the issue of extended producer responsibility. On the other hand, none of the identified problems related to waste pickers, but rather dwelled on the lack of feasibility and viability studies which had led to unsuccessful recycling schemes. The only reference to waste picker organizations was as required participants in the regional workshops for establishing recycling systems in municipalities (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008).

In line with previous documents on waste management, the relevance of recycling was recognized, as contributing to the reduction of the impacts of waste and prolonging the lifespan of landfills. Notwithstanding its importance, its implementation was conditioned to it being both technically and financially feasible (Colombia. Presidencia de la República, 2002; Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008; Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, 1997). On the whole, recycling continued to be construed as an optional rather than mandatory activity.

In the same year, the enactment of the law 1259 combined with the appearance of companies providing recycling service provoked a huge controversy. The press' portrayal of the issue raised sympathy for waste pickers, who had been forced to take on this job to survive, to be later displaced when it became profitable: *“...now recyclers cannot take out garbage, or transport it, or store it ... We managed waste when it had a low value and now that it has a great value it's taken from us”* (León, 2009, para. 17, Own translation). On the other side the state, aligned with “the rich”, was guilty of perpetuating poverty by excluding recyclers and thus opening the way for large companies to take over the activity. Journalist Daniel Samper would ironically comment:

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<sup>19</sup> The Consejo Nacional de Política Económica y Social (National Council of Economic and Social Policy) is the highest national planning authority and serves as an advisory body to the Government on all aspects of economic and social development of the country (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, n.d.).

*If trash makes money, my dear friends, it cannot be managed by the poor, but by good people. Why? Because if one lets the poor manage it, the balance breaks: the poor might cease to be poor and we cannot afford such luxury.* (Samper Ospina, 2009, para. 12, Own translation)

The 1<sup>st</sup> of March of 2009, on the commemoration of the recycler's day, waste pickers' marched in rejection of the law in Bogotá. During the protest they chanted: *"but still the rich, the rich want more, to take waste from us and give it to Tomás [President Uribe's eldest son]"* ("La Marcha de los Recicladores," 2009, Own translation).

The problem was framed as an uneven fight between powerful economic groups, who influenced policy-making in order to sustain or increase their profit at the expense of poor waste pickers:

*We didn't have a job...then what is the solution: recycling, it's at hand, we can do it and for that reason we keep doing it. But we just look at it from that point of view, "subsisting" and the others don't look at it from that point of view, they look at it from the point of view of business and profit, that's the big difference.* (Cárdenas, H, interview, July 26, 2013, Own translation).

Through this comparison between waste pickers and private companies' motivation for doing recycling, a moral tone was added to the debate, underpinning the notion that waste pickers had earned rights over recycling.

This idea was also pushed forward by the NGO Civisol when supporting the writ filed by waste pickers in Cali in 2009. Aiming at deepening the affirmative action of 2002, they portrayed waste pickers as entrepreneurs, thereby redefining their inclusion as a matter of supporting them to thrive in the activities they had done for years, instead of turning them into employees in the PSS (Ruiz-Restrepo, A. interview, July 19, 2013).

This argument was also part of the Auto 275 issued by the Court in relation to the tender of the public sanitation service in 2011. The local government's proposal for integration as entrepreneurs, seemed to reflect reservations regarding the abilities of waste pickers, as the responsibility of ensuring a percentage of recycling in each ASE fell upon the waste concessionaries, even though recycling would not have been directly undertaken by them (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011). In the contempt order filed by the ARB, they claimed *"that they [waste pickers] were supposed to be taken into account, not only as a work force, which includes the knowledge they have acquired throughout the years, but as strategic partners"* (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011, para. 68). Hence, they positioned themselves as waste entrepreneurs and as capable of assuming this role in the city, albeit

recognizing that some support would be needed. The Auto 275 while recognizing this role of waste pickers, added that affirmative actions implied responsibilities and duties for waste pickers, derived from being the providers of a public service (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011).

In 2012, as a new mayor took office, the government had to deal with the pending issue of waste picker inclusion. In keeping with the Court's mandate, an inclusion plan was submitted in March, but was not be implemented until December. As the pressure for deciding how to solve the public sanitation issue increased, the mayor Gustavo Petro surprisingly announced that the service would once again be provided by a public company. Whereas this was not explicitly mentioned in the Auto 275, it was construed by the mayor as the way of complying with the Court's sentence. Petro, a left-wing politician and former militant of a guerrilla group, had highlighted in his government program and his inaugural speech the importance of the right to water, which along with the right to sanitation had been recognized by the United Nations as human rights, and stressed how as a fundamental right it *"must not be commercialized, or prey to the price and profit market, because this would be as placing in the market the essence of life"* (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2012b, para. 10, Own translation). Thus, the need for changing the PSS, fitted this focus of avoiding the marketization of human rights. He would also justify this decision on the defense from the interests of the four private concessionaries, which he strongly criticized and framed as economic mafias profiting from the state (Petro, G, presentation at the Seminar "Informal Recycling or Social Innovation", July 17, 2013).

In relation to waste pickers, Petro would not only reaffirm his commitment their inclusion, but also incited them to join in him in his fight against this economic groups, who had for years controlled and profited from burying waste (Maldonado, 2012b). Thus, the issue was framed not only as a class struggle but as clash between two different models, on the one side poor waste pickers, who were pioneers of an environmentally friendly model against the private waste concessionaries, who profited from burying waste.

After the enactment of the Auto 275 and the changes taking place in relation to the public sanitation service, the Grupo Sala<sup>20</sup> published a book in 2012 expressing their concern about the *"emerging threats of "re-nationalization" in the service provision"* (Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012, p. 12), for this jeopardized the positive impacts on the environment and people's welfare that had been achieved with privatization (Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012, p. 9). Likewise, they reminded how public companies

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<sup>20</sup> Private company providing public sanitation service in various Colombian cities

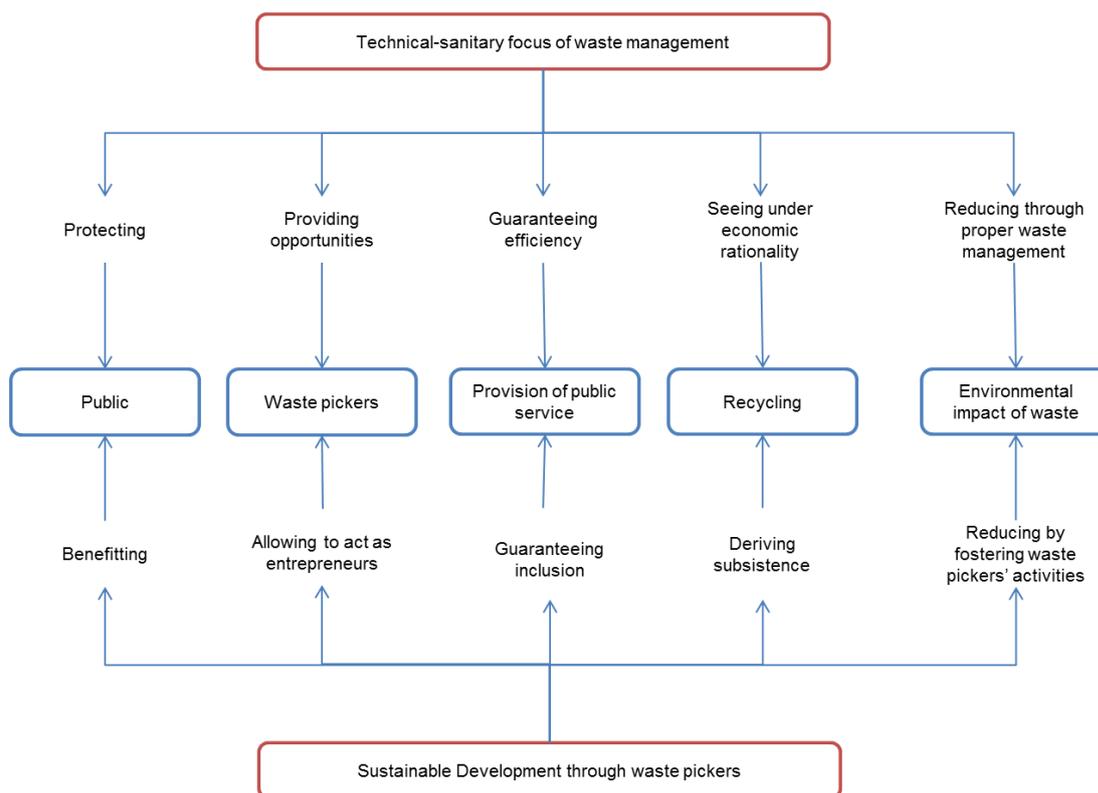
(including EDIS), the predominant model before the 90s, were associated with bad service provision. Finally, they stressed the importance of making previous studies for determining technical and financial feasibility, as well as having a greater involvement of the recycling industry.

In general, while private companies recognized the role of waste pickers, they alluded to the negative impacts of informal recycling (e.g. child labor, hygiene, drug addiction, mobility and public space issues), as well as the challenges to organization given the way they have conducted their activities (E.A, Planning director of private concessionary, interview, July 26, 2013). Thus, just as the implementation of recycling is conditioned to its economic feasibility, the integration of waste pickers in the public sanitation service is conditioned to acquiring the organizational capacity:

*...there is a strong interest group in the city of Bogota, who simply sees the problem as the no remuneration for their activity via public service fee. For us the problem is broader. ... I think everyone talks about how to get money from the public sanitation system but nobody is talking about how to organize them [waste pickers]. (F.J., member of ANDESCO. Interview, August 15, 2013)*

For the most part, the actors of the waste picker coalition have adhered to the BCP and the changes made by the local government. For waste pickers, this is a first step in the process of including them in the public sanitation service, though there are still plenty of tasks ahead (Cárdenas, H., interview, July 26, 2013; Ruiz, S. interview, July 31, 2013; Diaz, F., interview, August 9, 2013). For their part, ANDESCO has expressed its doubts on the short and long-term viability of the Basura Cero Program (F.J., interview, August 15, 2013).

**Figure 6. Discursive struggle on waste picker inclusion**



## 5.1 Technical-sanitary focus of waste management storyline

This first storyline revolved around two main issues, namely, the efficient provision of public sanitation service and an economic perspective on recycling, which correspond to the two hindering factors identified in the analysis. In addition, their views of the waste picker issue are also briefly discussed. In general, they positioned themselves as rational actors, acting on regulations and “solid information” to ensure common good.

### Efficient provision of public sanitation service

Given the adverse effects that inadequate waste management has on environment and public health, as evidenced by the soil and river pollution caused by dumpsites and the sanitary emergencies that occurred in Bogotá, guaranteeing an efficient provision of the service from its collection to disposal was considered paramount by the national and local governments. An efficient service according to the Decree 1713 is provided with:

*...the appropriate technology to local conditions, regular schedules and frequencies for collection and sweeping, making the best social and economic use of the available administrative, technical*

*and financial resources, in order to benefit users and ensure public health and environmental protection.* (Colombia. Presidencia de la República, 2002, para. 59, Own translation)

Hence, the laws and regulations on the public sanitation service have been directed towards ensuring this. The organization of Bogotá in ASEs as opposed to free market in the PSS responded to this logic, as it guaranteed that all areas and users would be covered. Similarly, setting the tariff on the amount of tons collected was meant to give the proper incentives to private concessionaries. In keeping with the regulations and past experience, the local authorities' way of guaranteeing service provision was to assign the areas to companies who could prove that they had the financial resources for carrying out the activities of the public sanitation service, a condition that excluded waste pickers (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003).

Furthermore, since the privatization of the public sanitation service delivered good results in terms of coverage (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008), efficiency was linked with private companies:

*Ten years ago the citizens walked on and breathed waste. Today the situation is different: the capital city is cleaner and this transformation is mostly due to the contracting of private companies for providing the service, which began in 1994, after the closing of the Empresa Distrital de Servicios Públicos (EDIS). Undoubtedly a revolution.* (Gómez, 2003, para. 3)

The “*indisputable advances*” in public service since the privatization are also repeatedly mentioned in the documents issued by private waste concessionaries and ANDESCO (National Association of Public Service and Telecommunication Companies) (Chona Avendaño, 2010; MAG Consultoría S.A.S, 2012; Martínez Cepeda & Roza Vengoechea, 2012).

### *Economic perspective on recycling*

Undertaking recycling activities is considered relevant and desirable, particularly, due to its capacity to reduce the amount of waste landfilled, which extends their lifespan and dwindles their environmental impact (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008). Nonetheless, both the government and the private companies stressed the importance of seeing recycling under an economic rationality. Therefore, the adoption of recycling schemes depends on whether they are technically feasible, economically viable and environmentally convenient in a particular context. That is to say when the cost of undertaking recycling activities is lower than the cost of final disposal in landfills (Departamento Nacional de Planeación,

2008; Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012; Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, 1997). Accordingly:

*The costs of the collection and transportation of recyclable household waste can be charged to the user provided that the remuneration of these activities plus the service costs of the non-recyclable part of the waste, is less than or equal to what the user would pay for the collection, transportation, transfer, treatment and disposal in the event that the no reincorporation of reusable waste to productive economic cycle took place (Colombia. Presidencia de la República, 2003, para. 32).*

Thus, the underlying premise for establishing the tariff framework has been that the users cannot be affected (overcharged) by the realization of recycling activities (MAG Consultoría S.A.S, 2012).

Furthermore, both the CONPES and private actors warned on the dangers of implementing recycling schemes without previous studies, as this had often led to failed schemes (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008; Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012). Instead they maintained that recycling should respond to the market's demand for these materials, and not be framed as a goal in itself:

*Regarding the promotion of integrated solid waste management, the existing regulation aims at developing recycling processes that are sustainable from an economic, social and environmental perspective. However, there is a tendency in society and some local governments to overestimate recycling as a priority in the solution of solid waste management, without having clarity on the appropriate mechanisms to encourage it, nor clear rules on the role that the companies providing the public sanitation service should play. (Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012, para. 13, Own translation)*

The high expectations placed on recycling placed by other actors are reproached, for they are not supported by information on the recycling market. Thus, recycling should only be implemented when certain conditions are met, for otherwise it can result in the failure of scheme leading to higher social costs, or in a negative net environmental benefit (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008; Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012). The formalization of waste pickers exemplifies this risk, because the viability of the current scheme can be attributed to its informal character. Thus, formalization could have a negative effect on their income, which in turn would imply additional support from the state and lead to an inefficient allocation of resources offsetting the environmental benefits (Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012).

### On waste pickers

Informal recycling is recognized as a relevant issue, not only in terms of the condition under which the activities are done, but also for issues such as child labor, and the negative impacts it has on mobility and the public space (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2006; E.A, Planning Director of private concessionary, interview, July 26, 2013; F.J., member of ANDESCO, interview, August 15, 2013).

Under the assumption that waste pickers lacked the capacity to provide the service, the local government's idea of formalization was the creation of recycling centers to be managed by waste pickers, given their expertise and skills (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2006; "Reparos a la licitación de aseo y reciclaje," 2002; Sierra, 2003). On the other hand, the laws and policies at the national level have required their participation in the different policy-making scenarios, such as the workshops for establishing recycling systems in municipalities, and mandated local authorities to promote their participation as well (Colombia. Presidencia de la República, 2003; Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008).

With regards to the private companies providing the public sanitation service, they consider the activity done by waste pickers as complementary of their own, arguing that they are almost strategic allies, rather than competitors (F.J., member of ANDESCO, interview, August 15, 2013). In Martínez & Rozo (2012) waste pickers are depicted as economic actors, who undertook the activity out of necessity, as opposed to environmental agents. In addition, they partially question the justification of affirmative actions based on the environmental benefits that waste pickers bring to society, arguing that these benefits do not depend on the type of organization that carries out the activity (Martínez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012). Interestingly, their interpretation of the Auto 275 is that the vested responsibilities on waste pickers, such as formalization and compliance to the laws on public service provision, could be potentially harmful to them by reducing their income (F.J., member of ANDESCO, interview, August 15, 2013).

*Thus, in the technical-sanitary focus of waste management the heroes are the actors interested in the common good, who guarantee through their actions that citizens won't be affected by the negative impacts of waste. In order to ensure this, they support establishing and following minimum standards for the efficient provision of the public sanitation service, while supporting only feasible and economically viable recycling schemes, as opposed to regarding it as end in itself. They argue for the improvement of the informal recycling scheme to reduce its negative impacts, as well as fostering waste picker participation and inclusion but without compromising the quality of the sanitation service. This includes the*

*managing of recycling centers, the inclusion in other activities of the public sanitation service or establishing partnerships with private companies. The development of the recycling value chain requires generating an environmental culture among citizens and deepening the collaboration with recycling industries.*

### **5.1.1 Practices**

According to Hajer, discourse should be understood in relation to the practices through which it is produced, reproduced and transformed (Hajer, 2004, p. 302). The practices through which the technical-sanitary discourse coalition reproduced their discourse were mainly policy-making and knowledge production.

As one of the main actors in the discourse coalition has been the national government, their way of problematizing waste management has been reproduced through laws, official documents and institutional practices. In this sense, while the government adhered to the idea of changing the waste management paradigm by generating awareness among the citizens and shifting the focus from final disposal to alternatives like recycling (Ministerio del Medio Ambiente, 1997), at the implementation level, waste management has still been mainly concerned with increasing coverage, service quality and improving waste disposal methods (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008). Thus, social and environmental concerns have been often precluded. The tariff structure, for example, has hindered recycling by giving little incentive to private waste concessionaries to promote this activity, as they are paid based on the tons collected (Aluna Consultores, 2011a).

In relation to private waste collection companies, ANDESCO has been a channel for communicating their views and informing on the main challenges in the public sanitation arena and how to tackle them (ANDESCO, 2008; Chona Avendaño, 2010; MAG Consultoría S.A.S, 2012). After the enactment of the Auto 275, which instructed the CRA to develop a new tariff which included the remuneration of recycling, ANDESCO prepared a proposal suggesting how this could be modified, based on an analysis of the Court's demands, existing regulations and economic factors (MAG Consultoría S.A.S, 2012). Similarly, the report from Martínez & Roza (2012), sponsored by the Grupo Sala on the challenges and threats to the water and sanitation services, sought to make a case for the adoption of a recycling systems based on cost-benefit analysis and focusing on fostering

both demand and supply of recyclable materials, as well as advocating for the inclusion of waste pickers under adequate conditions but without generating market distortions (Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012, p. 62). Both publications have supported the legitimacy of these claims in the fact that it is based on official data, previous studies and reports, academic research and international case studies. (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008; Martinez Cepeda & Rozo Vengoechea, 2012).

## 5.2 Storyline of Sustainable Development through waste pickers

The actors in this coalition built their storyline around five main topics, which have been drawn together to make a case for waste picker inclusion. While some of them have been present since the waste picker organization process began, others have been incorporated in recent years.

### *Finding dignity in working with waste*

Recycling emerged as *“the only thing from which they [waste pickers] could subsist, from any paperboard, any bottle, whatever they can recycle out of trash”* (Zambrano, G, interview, July 26, 2013, Own translation). Whether in a dumpsite or in the streets, the hardships inherent to the activity, forced waste pickers to *“survive in a hostile social and physical environment”* (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009, para. 177). The creation and strengthening of associations provided a space where waste pickers shared their experiences and problems but also their goals and dreams (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003). This soon led to the development of a collective identity as honest workers, which was the first step in the struggle for obtaining recognition and inclusion:

*Before we were invisible and the work we were doing was not decent, not recognized. Today, we are going to fight for two important things, first for dignity, that waste pickers' job is considered like an employee, housewife, a bricklayer, driver etc., that it is legally recognized, that's the first point, the second point, what we are seeking today is that this dignity of recognizing our work, provides waste pickers with a good quality of life, for we have always been marginalized (Cárdenas, H, interview, July 26, 2013, Own translation).*

Concurrently, the linkage between their activity and the preservation of natural resources was established and used to ask for improvements in their livelihoods on the basis of the benefits they brought to society. The quantification of this benefits, either in terms of resources saved (Alvarez Maya & Torres Daza, 2003) or in the number of years that waste pickers have *“prevented, silently and under adverse conditions, a greater environmental*

*damage in the country*” (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009, para. 124, Own translation) was frequently mentioned by the actors of the coalition.

Henceforth, they would identify themselves as environmental actors, an image that became widespread in Latin America by the beginning of the 90s (Do Carmo & Puppim de Oliveira, 2010): *“We are in a way empirical environmentalists, we are doing an activity out of necessity but later we realized what we were doing and the impacts we were having”* (Cárdenas, H, interview, July 26, 2013). This role would be endorsed by the Constitutional Court, who declared them subjects of special constitutional protection, attributable to the marginality and poverty conditions in which they had lived and the environmental benefits they brought to society (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011).

Standing on this argument, waste pickers would reason that besides deserving recognition as environmental agents, they had also earned rights over recycling:

*We have always said that we invented recycling more than 80 years ago, recycling belongs to waste pickers, recycling should not continue in poverty and misery, it must improve but with us, we don't want other waste pickers and we don't want to stop being waste pickers. In this sense our position is that it is a decent occupation, that we have developed it and that it should be developed with, as we called it, not with social inclusion, because that means accepting we are excluded, no, we are the popular providers of a service, but with improvements, technology, economic recognition, revenue.* (Ruiz, S, interview, July 31, 2013, Own translation)

### Role as victims

Another recurrent theme was the framing of waste pickers as victims. Certainly, the definition of the word “victim” encompasses many things: from being adversely affected (e.g. injured, attacked) by something or someone, to being tricked or lied to, or subjected to oppression, hardship and mistreatment<sup>21</sup>. In the case of waste pickers in Bogotá and Colombia, victimization has been linked to exploitation (by economic groups), discrimination, unequal treatment, threatening subsistence (by the state) and violence (by armed and “social cleansing” groups).

The exploitation of waste pickers by intermediaries and industry has been explored in the literature on waste pickers (Medina, 2005). The market is characterized as a monopsony, mostly controlled by the industries, who are able to manipulate prices by choosing from whom to buy materials and thus are the one who benefit the most from recycling (Díaz, F., interview, August 9, 2013; Pinzón, A., interview, July 25, 2013; F.J., member of Andesco,

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<sup>21</sup> Victim. 2013. In Merriam-Webster.com.  
Retrieved November 9, 2013, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/victim>

interview, August 15, 2013). Regarding the role of the intermediaries, there is no common position. Whereas in some cases they are portrayed as allies of the waste pickers, or as people who like them found in recycling a way of life (Díaz, F., interview, August 9, 2013), they have also allegedly used waste pickers to obtain benefits and exploited them (Ruiz-Restrepo, A., interview, July 19, 2013; Rodríguez, L., interview, July 31, 2013).

The framing as victims of inequality and discrimination was employed, in particular, in the legal processes against the Constitutional Court. Indeed the main argument in the writ that led to Sentence 724 of 2003 was that by not taking measures to ensure waste pickers, as a marginal and discriminated group, had the capacity to compete in the tender, the state violated the right to equality (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003). As Valencia (2013) would put it: *“One cannot say that in Bogotá everybody has the right to move in public spaces and then not build ramps for people who are in wheel chairs, because it’s declaring a right that doesn’t exist”* (Valencia. R., interview, July 29, 2013). Similarly, issuing apparently neutral laws (e.g. Law 1259 of 2008) but that had an adverse and disproportionate impact on a particular group, in this case waste pickers, also constituted indirect discrimination (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2009).

Another aspect of victimization was limiting waste pickers’ access to waste, as this compromised their right to subsistence:

Waste pickers without access to waste, are like fishermen without access to fish, or landless farmers, we cannot survive unless we ensure that recyclable materials are left in our hands and not in the capitalist business of waste management that for instance, incinerates our source of livelihood. The fight continues, for the forces interested in stealing our activity ..., are the corporations that place business above people. (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, 2013b, para. 7)

Consequently, actions like privatizing recycling, by making it a responsibility of the private concessionaries (Public Tender 001 of 2002) or assigning waste ownership to them (Article 28 of Law 1713) were ignoring waste pickers, deepening poverty and criminalizing the poor (Pinzón, A., interview, July 25, 2013; Ruiz-Restrepo, A, interview, July 19, 2013). When access to waste is related to waste pickers’ rights, the companies providing public sanitation service, are also involved in the issue, as they are perceived as competitors for recyclable material (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011):

For the actors of the coalition, the corrupt nature of the National and local governments is a given. Consequently, economic groups (or mafias) influence policy-making in their favor and have been behind the attempts to exclude waste pickers, in order to sustain or increase their profit (Pinzón, A., interview, July 25, 2013; Rodríguez, L., interview, July 31, 2013).

Both the companies providing public service and the recycling industry fall under this category. For instance, the maintenance of the waste management model of “*hiding waste under the rug*” (Pinzón, A., interview, July 25, 2013, Own translation), instead of promoting recycling is attributed to wanting to protect the business of private waste concessionaries.

Whereas waste pickers have also been affected by Colombia’s armed conflict, it was mostly their victimization by “social cleansing” groups, that became a symbol for the adversities they face. Particularly, the episode that occurred in Barranquilla on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March of 1992, is said to have played a crucial role in waste pickers’ fight for their rights (Ruiz, S., interview, July 31, 2013; Valencia, R., interview, July 29, 2013). Moreover, this event would translate in the enactment of Law 511 in 1999. Although the law was more symbolic than anything else, the waste pickers have capitalized this National Waste Picker and Recycling Day, and also “exported” it (Valencia, R., interview, July 29, 2013). This episode also triggered a reflection on the citizens’ role in this events and a prospect of possibilities for waste pickers:

*The grim incident in the Free University of Barranquilla, should serve to reflect on the responsibility that civil society has on these workers that cannot be labeled with the awful and despicable nickname of “disposables”. And if this is about reflecting and seeking solutions, it is good to analyze how in some Colombian regions, with a little help, encouragement and organization on the part of society, these men, who are viciously stigmatized today, demonstrate their ability to coexist, their will of serving the public and even their entrepreneurial skills. You just have to watch in Bogota, how through subcontracts done by EDIS, many marginal people from the famous Cartucho street, ..., have started to work, to associate economically and provide the social service of contributing to cleaning the capital city’s streets. (Rodríguez Gonzalez, 1992, para. 2, Own translation)*

### Entrepreneurs and providers of public service

Ten years after the abovementioned article was written, the issue of waste pickers as entrepreneurs was addressed again. As of 2002, the ARB had begun preparing itself to become a public service provider by competing for one of the ASEs. They had the experience during the last sanitary emergency of the EDIS, when they were sub-contracted through the FS, and had also provided the service in other municipalities (Ruiz, S., interview, July 31, 2013; Valencia, R., interview, July 29, 2013). While their initial concern was being excluded from recycling altogether (Ruiz-Restrepo, A., interview, July 19, 2013), it seems clear that they considered themselves capable of becoming a formal part of the public service:

*I think the biggest achievement is that they [waste pickers] understood, at least their leaders ... understood that the fight was for recognition of their work. I would summarize it like this: they*

*realized that their work was quite similar to the garbage truck, gather material, transport material and bring it to a final destination. And then understood, how was it possible that society made the effort to pay the truck and no effort to pay recyclers, who did the same job with an additional benefit that was to incorporate it back into the value chains. This new epistemology of recyclers, I think it has produced a lot of transformations and has really helped the institutions to take the next step... We are entering a new phase, we are beginning a new phase in waste management public policy, combining on the one hand the struggle of recycling organizations and in my opinion, the epistemological improvement of that struggle, realize that it not just a matter of survival of a vulnerable population, but the recognition of a service that they had been providing to society without payment. (Valencia, R., interview, July 29, 2013)*

With this re-shaping of their labor as a component of the public service, a new claim was issued: recycling should be remunerated via tariff revenue, just as waste collection and final disposal was. At the same time, the solution to the waste picker problem is construed as simple in comparison to other vulnerable groups, for they are part of the public sanitation service and have a role in the recycling value chains. Therefore, the Colombian institutions had the capacity to ensure this could happen. (Valencia, R., interview, July 29, 2013). This argument is reinforced by the fact that there are many techniques for recycling that can be potentially implemented by waste pickers, such as the management of debris and organic waste (Ruiz, S., interview, July 31, 2013).

According to Pinzón (2013) waste pickers would now start demanding “the whole cake”, namely managing all the components of the recycling chain (Interview, July 25, 2013). They advocated for the separation of the waste collection and recycling services, and assigning the latter exclusively to them. Moreover, their territoriality and skills should be recognized and strengthened to built on what is already there, as opposed to re-inventing the wheel (Ruiz, S., interview, July 31, 2013). In this respect, they seem to have the support of the local authorities, for the Sub-director of Recycling in the UAESP in relation to the Auto 275 asserted that: “*waste pickers are the owners of that material, they are per se providers of a public service, society has the obligation of recognizing them as such and the state has to guarantee the mechanisms to do it*” (Rodríguez, L., interview, July 31, 2013, Own translation).

#### Acquiring responsibility for waste

Initially waste pickers related to environmental discourse in terms of reducing the amount of resources needed and contributing to prolonging the lifespan of the landfill. Under the context of climate change and the green economy, environmental and social factors gained prominence and waste pickers role was also more intricately linked to it. Hence, the collect

and bury waste model is equated to “*hiding the waste under the rug*” (Pinzón, A., interview, July 25, 2013) and no longer considered a solution. Recycling is no longer an optional activity to help protect resources but an obligation, thus the system needs to re-organize to pave the way for these changes, and waste picker play a pivotal role in it (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá & Pacto Gremial Reciclador, 2012). The prevailing consumption model and the lack of environmental education and culture are seen as a key problem:

*The Zero Waste Program started another very important thing that people start to see and keep in mind that if I generate waste, I also have to be responsible for that waste, not leave it in the corner or throw it on the block. But I am also responsible, if I consume more, I'll generate more waste, but if I consume less and biodegradable materials, obviously I'll have less trash. It's to raise awareness that we have to start changing this consumerism stage, not buy and buy. We have to start looking at what things we can buy and the things we cannot buy because if we remain a consumerist country, what can I say, tomorrow Mr. Carlos Slim , Mr. Bill Gates will have no place to put their money, but we will be screwed up. (Cárdenas, H, interview, July 26, 2013)*

#### *The defense of the public service*

A final theme, which has been recently introduced by the local government is the criticism of privatization of public services. Whereas waste pickers opposed to privatization of recycling, the privatization of waste collection was seemingly not much of a concern until 2012, when the BCP was implemented. However, waste pickers seemingly have embraced this view promoting the re-introduction of a public company, for it would in the benefit the users through ensuring fair competition and a fair tariff (Ruiz, S., interview, July 31, 2013).

Thus, the storyline *Sustainable Development through waste picker inclusion* can be summarized as follows:

*Waste pickers are construed as heroes, who for decades have avoided a greater environmental impact and prolonged the useful life of the landfill. Despite the importance of their role, they have been the objects of unfair treatment from different segments of society. The state, in particular, but also the powerful economic groups emerge as the anti-hero, by either ignoring the situation of waste pickers or willing to exclude them from their only source of income as long as they can make profit. The helper is the Constitutional Court as sole defender of their rights against a corrupt state. Action is needed to transform the current waste management system and promote the adoption of a Zero Waste culture and recycling. This activity should be done exclusively by waste pickers, because they have*

*earned the right to have it, with some support to ensure that it will provide them with an opportunity for improving their situation. This would be a win-win solution for all actors.*

### **5.2.1 Practices**

I turn now to the discursive practices employed by the actors of the coalition. Among these were policy-making, knowledge production, aligning themselves to international networks and demonstrations.

As for many years recycling was a *de facto* rather than *de jure* activity, waste picker associations were initially inclined to ask for laws that would legitimize their labor (“No más muertos,” 1992). After the new Constitution was introduced and the ARB achieved a victory in the Constitutional Court through a tutela, they have gotten acquainted with different legal recourses. Thus, legal action on the basis of human rights protection has become one of the most important means for demanding inclusion. The Court’s rulings have been the entry ticket for participating in decision making spaces and are a source of legitimacy for their claims.

Rooted in the legal successes, the case of waste pickers in Bogotá has become an interesting case study for scholars. To a degree this has been also capitalized by the ARB and NGOs, who through the collaboration with these studies have managed to reproduce their storyline in academic publications. Similarly, the ARB displayed an interest in collaborating with the academia, particularly around topics that could strengthen their arguments (Duque, M.E., personal communication during visit to the ARB, July 31, 2013).

The participation in international networks has also been a platform to share experiences with other waste pickers Latin America and the world and learn from them. The Brazilian case, for example, is frequently mentioned as the model to follow (Cárdenas, H, interview, July 26, 2013; Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, 2013c). The international NGO WIEGO, not only has featured the case of Bogotá in many of its publications but has also supported the participation of the ARB’s leaders in international spaces, such as their participation in the 102nd Session of the International Labour Conference - Building a future with decent work at the ILO in 2012. The intervention of Nohra Padilla, the ARBs director, portrayed many of the elements of the coalition’s storyline:

*...as a spokesperson of waste pickers’ global force...we are here to seek the recognition and realization of:*

1. *Recognize that waste pickers have contributed substantially for 8 decades to Sustainable Development.*
2. *Change the current conditions of poor workers to decent self-organized or cooperative-organized workers.*
3. *Strengthen social technology that effectively combats the greenhouse gases' emission, conserves natural resources, energy and mitigates climate change.*
4. *Governments should finance the required infrastructure in the green sector to improve and promote the work in the sector.*
5. *Promote and materialize justice to the sector in terms of both financial remuneration for the work within the frame of public sanitation systems, compensation of their environmental labor and income from the sale of recovered materials at a fair price.*
6. *Ensure transitions in each country for waste pickers to have social protection floors, safety and occupational health and active participation in decision making.* (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, 2013b, para. 12–18)

Furthermore, the ARB has been awarded with several prizes at the national and international level (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, 2013c), the most recent was the Goldman Environmental Prize, bestowed to the director of the ARB Nohra Padilla (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, 2013d). Thus, it is clear that the international networks have played a role in the way waste pickers in Colombia have portrayed themselves. The effect has been reciprocal, just as the global waste pickers networks have influenced the discourse of waste picker in Colombia, they have also manage to “export” ideas of their own, as evidenced by the fact that the global network of waste pickers adopted the 1<sup>st</sup> of March as the global waste pickers’ day, to commemorate the deaths of the recyclers in Barranquilla (Valencia. R., interview, July 29, 2013).

Finally, marches and demonstrations have also been sites of discursive reproduction, particularly in relation to independent waste pickers, who remain absent from other the debate otherwise. Demonstrations have mostly taken place in the light of significant incidents: the case of the murders in Barranquilla, when the Law 1259 was enacted, waste pickers marched on the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, in keeping with the symbolic importance of that day. Consequently, while the legal struggles have been led by the organized waste pickers, the role of independent waste pickers is not to be undermined for they have also joined in the struggle when needed (Ruiz, S., interview, July 31, 2013). It is important to note, that in my interview with an independent waste picker, the lack of knowledge on the processes carried out by the ARB and other associations was evident and therefore, the benefits obtained from the BCP were attributed to the actions of the current local government (Diaz, F., interview, August 9, 2013).

### 5.3 Attaining discursive hegemony?

As mentioned in the second chapter, the dominance of a particular discourse depends on fulfilling two conditions: discourse structuration and discourse institutionalization. For this particular case, it means asking if the central actors in the waste management domain have been forced to accept the new discourse, and if the actual policy process responds to the ideas of the discourse (Hajer, 2004, p. 305). I argue that while the waste picker storyline is uttered by most stakeholders, institutionalization was harder to attain.

It is clear that many of elements of the *Sustainable Development through waste pickers* storyline are reproduced not only by the discourse coalitions, but they have been introduced in national and local public policy almost since the 2000s. The press has also played a pivotal role in this respect, for example, by frequently accompanying news on waste pickers with the personal story of one of them, thus evoking the image of unfairly-treated honest workers (Cerón Coral, 2009; Maldonado, 2012a; Mercado, 2008).

Undoubtedly the turning point in recyclers' struggle for recognition was the Constitutional Court's sentence issued in 2003, wherein their portrayal as a marginal and discriminated group, entitled them to affirmative actions to foster their participation in the public sanitation service (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2003). Although waste pickers were mentioned in policies before, it is through the legal actions in 2002-2003 that their recognition goes transcends the level of symbolic policy, and there is a call for effective action in their favor. In Bogotá's PMIRS, waste pickers figured prominently and several measures whereby the recycler's population living in conditions of poverty and vulnerability would be included in the PSS or provided with alternatives to improve their capacities (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2006, sec. VII). This led to the appearance of new waste picker associations and later to the conjoint administration of the Alqueria Recycling Center by three of them (Betancourt, 2010). However, the impact of the PMIRS was piecemeal because the many planned actions were not implemented and the local government was not made accountable for this.

Nevertheless, the fact that public policy still seemed to be in accordance to the technical-sanitary storyline seems to be evidenced by the CONPES 3530 in which waste pickers are solely mentioned as required participants when defining recycling schemes in cities (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2008). The case in Cali, where the Court's ruling and waste pickers livelihoods were not considered when closing the Navarro dumpsite is another example (Ruiz-Restrepo, A., interview, July 19, 2013). Similarly, the Terms of

Reference in the tender of 2011, allowed the participation of waste picker organizations through their association with the private companies interested in bidding. Moreover, although the recycling activity was meant to be undertaken by waste pickers, the private concessionaries would be responsible for the collection of a certain percentage of recyclable material in each ASE, while the 2<sup>nd</sup> level organizations, such as the ARB did not play a significant role (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011). The UAESP would argue that recycling could not be exclusively for waste pickers because *“the law does not allow it and to do it a serious and responsible organization is required”* (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011, para. 580). Therefore, it could be inferred that the pairing of waste picker organizations with private companies could have responded to their need for an actors that could be accountable for the service provision.

With the election of Gustavo Petro as mayor of Bogotá in 2012, various changes in the public sanitation service occurred, many of which have been in line with the waste pickers' storyline. Whereas it cannot be denied that the local government had the obligation of introducing changes after the annulment of the tender process, the convergence of Petro's ideas with those of waste pickers partially drove the process. First, the environmental policy proposed by Petro considered the adoption of the Zero Waste principle, as a way of *“reducing the amount of waste generated, continuously increasing the amount of waste re-used and suppressing the social segregation, environmental discrimination and the predation of the environment cause by the current structure of the sanitation service”* (Concejo de Bogotá, 2012, art. 30). Therefore, the current waste management model of Bogotá, focused on collecting and transporting waste to the landfill was depicted as inappropriate, and instead a model centered on recycling is proposed, and waste pickers were meant to be central actors (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá & Pacto Gremial Reciclador, 2012). Second, he would again framed the issue as one of rich versus poor, economic interest versus environment and social issues, but this time, at the opposite corner were private waste collection companies, instead of companies doing recycling or buyers of recyclable material. Hence, because these actors had made business out of burying waste and according to Petro had formed a cartel agreement, he argued for the need of a public waste collection company that would take over the service and linked this decision to the Court's ruling, though this had not been explicitly suggested in it (Colombia. Corte Constitucional, 2011).

Although waste pickers seems to have been indifferent to such a proposal at the beginning, as their main concern was the implementation of the Inclusion Plan (Maldonado, 2012b), they later would profess their agreement to this decision (Ruiz, S, interview, July 31, 2013).

Thus, as Petro's ideas regarding the environment were in line with the waste picker discourse and there was some discursive affinity to the poor-rich dichotomy, he was able to co-opt the *Sustainable Development through waste pickers* storyline, and promote an additional change in the scheme. This convergence has allowed a partial institutionalization of the waste picker storyline, mainly evidenced in the issuing of the Decree 564 that established a transitory public sanitation scheme, whereby the EAAB came to provide part of the waste collection service, waste pickers are being remunerated for their services and segregation at source became mandatory (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2012a). Whether this will develop further, so that waste pickers gradually are in charge of the recycling value chain as some of them envision is not yet certain (Ruiz, S, interview, July 31, 2013, Cárdenas, H, interview, July 26, 2013). According to Ruiz (2013) the CRA's new tariff resolution does not follow these developments (Ruiz, S. at the event "Tariff Framework Proposal. Opportunities and challenges", 02/08/2013). Moreover, neither the national government nor the local government have taken steps so far to reflect the Court's rulings in laws and policies (Ruiz-Restrepo, A., interview, July 19, 2013). Particularly, the PMIRS, the main policy instrument at the local level, has not yet been updated.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

In the present thesis I sought to analyze the topic of waste picker inclusion from a discursive perspective by focusing on the case of Bogotá, where after many years of struggles, a recent policy change has included them in the public sanitation service. For this purpose I followed a constructivist approach and applied the ADA framework proposed by Marteen Hajer, in the hopes of understanding the way this policy change came about. To bridge the methodological gaps in the ADA framework, I drew on the SKAD research method, particularly the concept of phenomenal structure to identify the main storylines and subsequently the discourse coalitions that have assembled around them. After the analysis of various documents and the interview transcripts I identified two discourse coalitions. In the first one, ensuring common good by avoiding the negative impacts of waste on human health and the environment through an adequate waste disposal system is crucial. Thus topics like recycling and waste pickers play a secondary role. Since governmental organizations adhered to this discourse, it was firmly entrenched in institutional practices, thus producing only symbolic solutions and hindering the institutionalization of the competing discourse. On the other hand, the second coalition, in which waste picker associations are relevant actors, framed their inclusion as a matter of human rights that at the same time could bring economic, social and environmental benefits. By securing the

reproduction of their discourse at a high judicial level, other actors were forced to endorse it. Conversely, mainstreaming it in institutional practices proved to be harder. Lastly, the discursive affinity between the Sustainable Development through waste pickers storyline and the new local government's social and environmental views, allowed it to attain hegemony, yet whether this development will be temporary or permanent remains unclear.

Based on the findings, I argue that in contrast to Do Carmo's assertion that waste pickers' appear in discourse only as a compositional element (Do Carmo, 2012), in Bogotá, they have contributed in setting the terms of the discussion. Undoubtedly, the support of NGOs and actors with a human rights and environmental background has been pivotal in many instances, however, waste picker associations, the ARB in particular, have slowly taken the leadership<sup>22</sup>. Given the scarce scholarship on the topic, it was not possible to compare the results with similar studies; however, some themes related to issues previously discussed in the literature, like the dichotomy between the common good and individual and group rights, which Furedy (1984) identified as a persisting dilemma in relation to informal recycling and the issue of government's role in waste picker discrimination, which was partially addressed by Gutberlet and Jayme (2010).

As mentioned in the introduction, I chose to look at the case from a constructivist perspective, to have a different view on institutions, in order to understand how they function, express the power of a discourse and explain how political change happens (Hajer, 1995, p. 264). In this sense I argue that discourse analysis is useful for understanding why despite the fact that the government had long expressed its commitment to increasing recycling and opening spaces for waste pickers, this never materialized. Since at the institutional level, the concern was still ensuring an adequate public service provision, through efficient waste collection and disposal, neither the local authorities strived to develop the infrastructure for recycling, through which they expected to include waste pickers, nor did the national government make efforts to ensure this happened, or to foster changes in the regulatory agencies, so as to create incentives for this. In any case, the present thesis is a first exploration of the case from a discursive perspective, therefore, more in depth research could provide additional information on the implementation gap in waste management policies in Bogotá.

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<sup>22</sup> This has also raised some critics, as it is argued that the leaders of the ARB have co-opted the discourse for their own benefit, instead of standing for poor recyclers' interests. Moreover, they believe the participation of waste pickers need to be democratized, as the ARB exercises control over decision-making spaces, in detriment to other waste pickers and organizations (Ruiz-Restrepo, A., interview, July 19, 2013; Rodríguez, L, interview, July 31, 2013; Navarro, H, interview, July 26, 2013)

## 6.1 Discussion of methodology

According to Roald-Bern and Winkel (2011) the analyst's task in an interpretative work is comparable to that of a gate keeper, in the sense that he or she decides what to include and what to omit from the existing discursive interpretations (Roald-Bern & Winkel, 2011, p. 310). Thus, one of the main challenges in doing discourse analysis is interpreting the utterances and at the same time being aware of one's own views and knowledge on the topic and how they play a role in the interpretation. The analytical phase was then particularly difficult, as I had to constantly refer back to the data to revise the extent to which my own ideas on the issue were being reflected in the interpretation. Similarly, given the amount of information on the case, it required a careful analysis of which elements were relevant and which could be excluded for the purpose of this thesis. Inasmuch as this task, as well as the transcription of the interviews, was time-consuming, I was unable to add to the data corpus the transcription of the events in which I took part, from which potentially useful insights could have been derived from.

Another aspect that could have helped in the identification of relevant actors and the development of the questionnaire was the realization of helicopter interviews with key stakeholders. In relation to the questionnaire, it was revised prior to the interviews to assess its understandability and suitability. Nonetheless, a few interviewees, who were not actively involved in the debate, were unsure about some questions, which prompted me to provide additional information or examples. In order to check for any possible influencing of the answers, I also transcribed my own questions and referred to them while doing the analysis.

As mentioned in the second chapter, I was unable to interview actors from national governmental organizations, which would have facilitated the reconstruction of the constituents of the discourse of the storyline, as well as provided more insights on the practices. Moreover, it could have pointed out the degrees to which the storyline of Sustainable Development through waste pickers had permeated, if at all, the different organizations. This is salient in relation to the issue of discourse hegemony. Similarly, although the recycling industry has remained rather absent from the public debate, their views on the topic would have added an additional perspective to the research.

Finally, as a great deal of time was spent in the identification of themes, storylines and phenomenal structures, less time was devoted to exploring the issue of discourse structuration and institutionalization. Although for this purpose, the data was revised once

more, additional time could have allowed a deeper study of the way this processes are present in the case.

## **6.2 Suggestions for future research**

Since the topic of waste picker inclusion has not been often addressed from a discursive perspective, I believe that continuing on this path can add on greatly to the findings of this thesis. For starters it is clear that the image of waste pickers has changed considerably since the 1990s. Thus, it would be useful to understand how this discourse has evolved in the international arena and the way it has adhered to other topics like Climate Change and Green Jobs. Second, as the waste pickers' storyline in Bogotá seems to have been clearly influenced by the storylines present at the regional and international level, one could focus on the interactions between the national and international discourses. Lastly, further analysis on the competing discourses around waste picker inclusion could connect to ways of improving policy-making.

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## ANNEX 2: Interviewed organizations

Organization	Description
ANDESCO	ANDESCO is the association of public service and telecommunications companies, it represents their common interests and promotes their activities at the national and international level (ANDESCO, n.d.).
Arambiental	Second level waste pickers' organization that aims at finding integral solutions to their problems, achieving recognition for their occupation and improving environmental conditions. (Cárdenas, H., interview, July 26, 2013).
Recycler's Association of Bogotá (ARB)	The ARB is constituted by 19 local recyclers' organizations. Its main objectives are to achieve recognition and remuneration for the job waste pickers do and contribute to the improvements in their livelihoods and working conditions (Asociación Cooperativa de Recicladores de Bogotá, n.d.)
Association of Carreteros	Association of recyclers' who own a horse-drawn vehicle (Zambrano, G, interview, July 26, 2013).
CIVISOL	Its main objective is to bring about systemic change by propending for a change in people's mentality, society and institutional norms. Regarding waste pickers, it has supported several reforms and other actions at the judicial level (CIVISOL, n.d.). They have criticized strongly the actions the changes that took place in 2012 (Ruiz-Restrepo, A., interview, July 19, 2013).
CEMPRE Colombia (Corporate Commitment to Recycling)	The NGO brings together 14 large companies with the purpose promoting the ISWM. To achieve this they facilitate the dialog and cooperation between those involved in the recycling chain and promote environmental education and social awareness (CEMPRE, n.d.)
ENDA - Colombia	ENDA supports the "construction" of cities that are socially and environmentally sustainable, democratic, non-violent, plural and equitable in economic, cultural and gender terms. Through their Waste Management and Recyclers' Population Program they have sought to strengthen the organization process of waste pickers and support their political incidence (ENDA Colombia, n.d.).
UAESP	Public entity in charge of ensuring the provision of sanitation, illumination and funeral services in Bogotá. Among its functions is the development of policies, plans, programs and projects to improve and foster waste collection, recycling and waste disposal (Unidad Administrativa Especial de Servicios Públicos - UAESP, n.d.)

### **ANNEX 3: Declaration of Informed consent and confidentiality**

Title/Name of interviewee

My name is Camila Castañeda and I am a student from the MSc. of Environmental Governance from the University of Freiburg (Germany). I appreciate the opportunity of having this interview with you. The objective of my thesis is to analyze the waste management and recycling policies in Bogotá, as well as the discussion that has taken place in the last years on the inclusion of the recyclers, through an interpretative analysis of public policy.

For this reason, I have prepared some questions in order to know your perception about the subject, this will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. The interview will be taped with the purpose of having a record that facilitates the subsequent analysis. Both, recording and transcription, will be used exclusively for the elaboration of this project and will be confidential. Likewise, I assure you that there won't be any quotes of the interview with your name, unless you agree to it. If such is the case, I shall send the quotes through an electronic address to verify your consent. Either way, you will remain anonymous if that is your wish. Please do not hesitate to ask questions about the project at any time.

Thank you again for your collaboration,

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Do you wish to remain anonymous? Yes  No

Bogotá, Date

Interviewee's signature

## **ANNEX 4: Interview guideline**

1. What are/were the main problems regarding waste management and recycling policies in Bogotá?
  - a. What are its main causes?
  - b. Who is responsible?
  - c. In which forums and how have these problems been debated?
  
2. Thinking back to when the debate first came up, has your perception of what the problems are changed?
  - a. If so, how and why?
  - b. Have other actors changed their perception of the problem?
  
3. What key events have initiated and/or fostered the waste management and recycling policy in Bogotá?
  
4. How and when did waste picker inclusion become part of public policies?
  
5. Who are the main actors (persons and/or institutions) involved in the waste management/recycling policy?
  - a. What stand do they take regarding waste management and recycling?
  - b. What arguments do they use to support their position and when do they utter them?
  
6. What is your opinion regarding the Basura Cero Programme and the waste collection scheme adopted by the District Administration last year?
  - a. With what do you agree? With what do you disagree?
  - b. How are the problems addressed (or not) with this approach?
  - c. Do you think this is an inclusive model? Why or why not?
  - d. What are the challenges for achieving the institutionalization of this program?
  
7. What other alternatives could be implemented to achieve an inclusive waste management and recycling model in Bogotá?
  - a. What are the challenges for implementing them?