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Metropolitan area of Neiva's bambuquera ¿Truth or myth?*

Área metropolitana bambuquera de Neiva ¿Verdad o mito?*

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Abstract

The Municipality of Neiva serves as the capital of the department of Huila. During the last decades, it has presented a socioeconomic dynamism that has allowed it to gain relevance at the national level. The reality of the municipality requires new ways of interpreting its territory, which is why several initiatives have been attempted to develop. However, several still need to be put into practice. Consequently, an investigation was conducted to determine the viability of building Neiva's bamboo metropolitan area. The study was based on a mixed research approach, concurrent strategy, and cross-triangulation through frequency and content analysis. The main findings indicate that the failure of past initiatives has occurred due to a lack of adequate exploration of relevance or because they were only established as political speeches during an electoral campaign. In addition, the requirements and possible municipalities that

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would be integrated into the city of Neiva were established, an approach was carried out to the different actors in the area to be integrated to evaluate representations that they have built on the problem, and it was diagnosed if their support is available. to comply with each of the requirements established in the regulatory framework. Recommendations are proposed that, in practice, would facilitate planning and better functioning of the metropolitan area.

Keywords: Development, Integration, Metropolitan area, Municipal council, Municipal government, Sustainability, Viability

Resumen

El Municipio de Neiva ejerce como capital del departamento del Huila y durante las últimas décadas ha presentado un dinamismo socioeconómico que le ha permitido ganar relevancia a nivel nacional. La realidad del municipio exige nuevas formas de interpretación de su territorio por lo que son varias las iniciativas que se ha intentado desarrollar, si bien varias no se han llevado a la práctica. En consecuencia, se condujo una investigación encaminada conocer la viabilidad de construir el área metropolitana bambuquera de Neiva. El estudio se sustentó en un enfoque mixto de investigación, basado en una estrategia concurrente y la triangulación cruzada, mediante el análisis de frecuencias y de contenido. Los principales hallazgos indican que el fracaso de iniciativas pasado ha ocurrido por falta de una adecuada exploración de la pertinencia o porque solo fueron establecidas como discursos políticos de campaña electoral. Además, se establecieron los requerimientos y los posibles municipios que se integrarían a la ciudad de Neiva, se realizó un abordaje a los diferentes actores de la zona a integrar para evaluar representaciones que han construido sobre la problemática y se diagnosticó si se cuenta con sus apoyos para cumplir cada uno de los requerimientos establecidos en el marco normativo. Se plantean recomendaciones que en la práctica facilitarían la planificación y mejor funcionamiento el área metropolitana.

Palabras Clave: Área Metropolitana, Alcaldía Municipal, Concejo Municipal, Desarrollo, Integración, Sostenibilidad, Viabilidad

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION. – RESOLUTION SCHEME. – I. Research problem. – II. Methodology. – III. Writing plan. – 1. Procedure for the creation of a metropolitan area in Colombia. – 2. Strength-oriented evaluation of the municipalities belonging to the Bambuque metropolitan area. – IV. Research results. 1. Participation of mayors and municipal councils in the creation of the Bambuque metropolitan area. – 2. Perceptions of the inhabitants of the projected metropolitan area. – 3. Integrative analysis. - CONCLUSIONS. – REFERENCES.

Introduction

The municipality of the Immaculate Conception of Neiva, one of the most representative of southern Colombia, is the capital of the department of Huila and is also known as the bamboo capital of America, a distinction given to it for the cultural and patrimonial richness of its folkloric festivities (Boulanger-Martel, 2021; Prada et al., 2023). Its foundation dates back to May 24, 1612, and its municipal extension reaches 1557 square kilometers.

The local economy is oriented towards ecotourism, gastronomy, industry, and commerce. Among the economic activities are agriculture and livestock, two sectors that contribute to the development of the department (Valenzuela-Molina et al., 2023). Neiva currently has an unofficial metropolitan area made up of 5 municipalities; this unofficial status restricts the city from benefiting from this manifestation of sustainable regional integration (Cramer, 2020; Gao et al., 2020; Vardopoulos et al., 2021).

According to the Colombian legal framework, the conception of a metropolitan area obeys the need to delimit an administrative entity formed by the association of several municipalities integrated in their operation under the regulation of one that acts as the core or leader of the relationship. It must be understood that, in this associative context, the links do not respond exclusively to geographical indicators in the strictest physical sense, but to territorial dynamics, environmental and demographic trends, productive and technological links, among other similar ones that are configured in the socio-economic space of the metropolis (Anguelovski et al., 2020; Gonzales-Centon et al., 2023; Klink & Ignatios, 2024; Lak et al., 2020; Langemeyer & Connolly, 2020; Mogrovejo-Andrade, 2022).

Since 2000, initiatives aimed at creating the scenario for structuring, formalizing, and developing the Bamboo metropolitan area have intensified. While it is true that these attempts have managed to awaken the interest of other public and private actors, there needs to be more efforts to materialize them and turn them into a reality. The initiatives proposed do not go beyond political discourse during election periods and the subsequent creation of working groups and debates that take place in the councils of each municipality and in the departmental meeting spaces where the advantages and procedures for officialization are socialized.

In the context of establishing an integrating act, discussions arise about the requirements and challenges that would be involved in achieving adequate management of the new metropolitan area. These discussions address issues such as sustainability, welfare, equity, and progress (Afanador-Cubillos, 2023; Rathnasiri et al., 2024; Roman-Acosta et al., 2023; Torkayesh et al., 2021; Weerabahu et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is convenient to understand that the integrated governance of an urban organization as complex as the metropolis would be subject to aspects of competition and benefits, the history of the territory and the impact of past and present conflicts, as well as the level of formal organization of the links established according to sociodemographic indicators (Calderón-Farfán et al., 2021; Löhr et al., 2022; Pérez Gamboa et al., 2023; Richter & Barrios-Sabogal, 2023; Torres-Barreto, 2023).

Even so, the construction of the metropolis as a joint space for alliances and the configuration of a prosperous and sustainable future represents an opportunity that, anchored in cooperation and joint efforts, can contribute to regional and local development (J. Li et al., 2020; Peng et al., 2020; Pour et al., 2020). Therefore, it is essential to recognize that the process of territorial monopolization arises from urban growth and the emergence of metropolitan dynamics in areas with high population indices and accelerated economic life (Cao et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Shaw et al., 2020; Streule et al., 2020).

As such, urban planning and territorial management systems need to be re-evaluated, as administrative division can hinder planning, cooperation, and governance at the regional level (Li et al., 2022; Tricarico et al., 2022); this is vital for the implementation of state public policies and territorial management to occur in conditions that enhance their effectiveness, as this is one of the main risks diagnosed in the literature (MacKinnon et al., 2022; Rekers & Stihl, 2021).

In this direction, among the main aspects to be examined is that the establishment of metropolitan areas requires eliminating the pre-established restrictions in the jurisdictions of the governments until they are recognized as local. For this purpose, it is essential to observe the forms of relationship between the core and the component territories, the relations of centralization and decentralization, as well as the territorial integration based on the assigned competencies.

In attention to the arguments outlined and defended above, the reason that motivated the research on this subject was subject to the postponement that has been given until now to the

decision to create the first metropolitan area in the Department of Huila and the Colombian south of the country. The general objective that was outlined in the research exercise was to know the viability of building the metropolitan area of Neiva, with Neiva as the central municipality and the integration of the municipalities of Aipe, Campoalegre, Palermo, Rivera, Tello, Villavieja, Yaguara.

To this end, a methodology was implemented based on the analysis of documentary sources, observation, surveys of key actors, and triangulation of sources. The study focused on the opinions of mayors, municipal councils, and residents of each of the municipalities mentioned. In addition, economic and demographic figures were analyzed to allow for a diagnosis of the realities experienced in each municipality.

Resolution scheme

1. Research problem

What are the key factors to consider in the construction of the Neiva Bamboo Metropolitan Area?

2. Methodology

Due to the complexity of the problem addressed, based on its multidimensionality and the various levels at which it is manifested, this study was carried out on the basis of the mixed research route. This approach to the construction of the bamboo metropolitan area of Neiva facilitated a better understanding of the quantitative data handled and a deeper inquiry without neglecting the holism of the historical, cultural, and patrimonial factors.

The selection of this route was based on the fact that it favors a broader perspective of the phenomenon in question, favors the elaboration of a solid theoretical framework, but is adjusted to the needs of the researchers, as well as a presentation of data based on integrated inferences (Miranda-Larroza & Sanabria-Zotelo, 2023). Therefore, a design with a concurrent strategy was followed, which facilitated the collection of quantitative and qualitative data in the same timeline so that analysis and triangulation of the results were carried out crosswise from the processing of both databases.

Two fundamental procedures were used to process the data: frequency analysis and content analysis. The latter was qualitative and hermeneutic based on codes and fundamental themes (Pérez-Gamboa et al., 2021). The integration was carried out systematically, aimed at the corroboration of ideas and the triangulation of the synthesized data, the theoretical positions of the authors and those found in the relevant literature, as well as the data available in the context corresponding to the territories under study.

Finally, the main findings of the study are presented in an integrated manner, aided by the thematic lines identified as the fundamental guides in the construction of the Bamboo metropolitan area of Neiva. This alternative was oriented to achieve an optimal result in the presentation of the constant comparison procedure that typifies this type of research design.

In observance of ethical principles, informed consent was requested from the persons involved in the research. In addition, the data were handled with the rigor established for this type of study, especially during the integration between the qualitative and quantitative designs, in order to maintain their nature and achieve an adequate synthesis in the presentation of the main findings of the research.

3. Writing plan

3.1. Procedure for the creation of a metropolitan area in Colombia

Among the many components of territorial organization, population development is one of the most important. It denotes its centrality and points to the city as an expression of the models of society and territorial planning that lie behind it. Therefore, urbanity embodies the main trends in urban concentration, as well as its causes and manifestations.

Both globally and in Latin America, the growing concentration of people in cities has resulted in high population density indices, as well as a systematic abandonment of rural areas. This accumulation of urban processes, not only of people, has resulted in the prioritization of the city over the other forms of organization of the urban system, which in turn conditions the integration process that forms one of the cores of metropolization.

In this sense, it is necessary to understand the metropolization of cities worldwide and its relationship with the coordinated responses from organizational and helix models to the problems generated by the increase in the indexes above (Calzada, 2020; Pérez-Gamboa et al., 2022; Roman & Fellnhofer, 2022; Thomas et al., 2021). Therefore, it is essential to examine the concept of the metropolis and what it implies in organizational, administrative, political, and sociodemographic matters. Furthermore, it is especially relevant to conceive its operationalization in terms of urban area formation and consolidation (Salazar et al., 2020; Roman & Fellnhofer, 2022).

According to the literature, the increase of the so-called intermediate cities in the conceptual framework of monopolization is due to the fact that the figure of the metropolis is not limited to the clear and delimited presence of a center city (Frantzeskaki & Bush, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose & Griffiths, 2021). Instead, the metropolis is conceived as an urban system where dynamic and functional relationships take shape that account for residential processes in suburban areas, abandonment of rural areas in the geographic area over which they directly exert their influence, and the high frequency of socio-demographic displacements through means of transportation or the conformation of floating populations.

If we analyze metropolitanization in Colombia, the last metropolitan area was that of Valledupar, which was created by popular consultation in 1998 and constituted in 2002 thanks to the popular consultation. At that time, the acceptance of the proposal registered an overwhelming majority. This democratic exercise was positive, giving origin to the object of the consultation; the following reflection emerges: Why, after 22 years, have no metropolitan initiatives been developed?

The current legal framework establishes with greater precision the procedures for creation and legalization, which provide flexibility in establishing intra- and interdepartmental alliances governed by a central or principal municipality. As established, the formation of these areas requires the participation of various actors, including the mayors of the municipalities involved and the departmental governors, and it also gives decision-making power to the citizens and their elected representatives.

From this alliance, a legal project of a constitutional nature must emerge that establishes the group of municipalities that will be integrated, indicates the municipality that will occupy the role of core center, and justifies the arguments and data on which the decision-making process is based, a process endorsed in international literature (Masuda et al., 2022). Said project will be filed civilly so that a period of less than ten business days can carry out the validation; if the

requirements are met, this same entity will proceed to convene and provide the necessary resources to submit the proposal to the evaluation and consideration of the citizenry.

Once the call has been decreed and registered on the site established for this purpose, a date will be established to carry out this democratic exercise. This period must include at least three months and at most five months. During this time, information about the process will be disseminated in the municipalities that will be the object of integration through the channels and means of communication that guarantee adequate reach. For the metropolitan area to be approved, each of the municipalities consulted must obtain a positive vote, and the percentage of participation must represent at least 25.0% of the total registered voters per municipality. Once this stage is concluded, the corresponding documentation must be presented within 30 calendar days, with a copy to the authorities in charge of studying the projects associated with decentralization and territorial organization. At this stage, the project will be evaluated based on its relevance, opportunities, potentialities, and other indicators that support the proposal.

This process is so important, as a territorial and political exercise, that it is important to highlight that the essential actors who hinder the process will be considered in serious misconduct. A period of one year is established from the creation of the metropolitan area to determine the resources that constitute its assets and income. Failure to comply with this process will also be considered serious misconduct, subject to sanction for those involved.

It is essential to bear in mind that the implementation of a metropolitan area can have indirect effects on the territories that comprise it, nuanced by the results of management (Sypion-Dutkowska et al., 2021). It follows that metropolization entails impacts that move in a wide range from positive to negative. At the same time, these can be observed specifically in the indicators of sustainable socioeconomic development and the quality of daily life of citizens. The issues that are most frequently highlighted in the literature are the aforementioned rural-urban migration, the formation of cultural and identity ties within the territory, access to quality services, socioeconomic well-being derived from new alliances, the connection of the country with the world, the role of cities as regional markets, as well as the occupation and use of land (Audikana & Kaufmann, 2022; Santos & Fernández-Fernández, 2023; Scarwell & Leducq, 2021).

Although there are challenges arising from the growth generated by regional integration, especially in terms of demographic growth, the analysis carried out made it possible to identify that there are also important advantages. Below is a summary of the systematization carried out and its triangulation:

- Stimulus to economic growth. Population growth drives consumption and encourages the creation of services, stimulates trade, constitutes an important source of jobs, and attracts investment companies, which contributes to the growth of the region's economy.
- Promotion of cultural diversity. The confluence of different origins promotes the configuration of a diverse and inclusive culture that is appreciated in the different ethnicities, subcultures, and linguistic constructions, making this an ideal scenario for the sociocultural development of the area.
- Improvement of infrastructure and services. The new demographics are the basis for the creation of new projects for the improvement of the infrastructure to support a rich sphere of interests of the population, which contributes to human well-being in the region.

- Greater job supply. Metropolitan areas offer a diverse occupational panorama, which can satisfy the growing demand for employment and facilitate the professional development of residents by feeding the various areas of the metropolitan economy with a qualified workforce, both in traditional and flourishing sectors.
- Stimulation of innovative and creative processes. This type of urban conglomerate attracts entrepreneurs and promotes the formation of different alliances resulting from the need to be satisfied with the new project of society. In relation to the above benefits, the convergence of interests and competition means that businesses must be more aware of their models and focus on innovation and creativity to respond to the growing demand.
- Increased tax collection. Regional economic growth and the development of urban infrastructure generate a significant increase in local tax revenues, especially in taxes such as industry and commerce and property tax.

3.2. Strength-oriented evaluation of the municipalities belonging to the Bambucue metropolitan area

Economic, social, and demographic aspects were taken into account to address this description. This approach was carried out with the aim of interpreting the similarities that revolve around the central city and thus being able to project the potential that would be achieved through the metropolisation process. The municipalities are:

- Municipality of Aipe. It occupies a total area of 801 square kilometers, which represents 3.80% of the total of the department. It is an important oil producer, with the exploitation of more than 120 wells that generate considerable income from royalties for the municipality. In addition to this activity, the municipality is dedicated to agricultural, industrial, and mining development as part of its production line. Its distance from Neiva is 32 kilometers.
- Municipality of Campoalegre. It is geographically located in the center of the Department of Huila, and its distance from the city of Neiva is 27 kilometers. The economy of the region is based on livestock farming, agricultural development, and fish farming. The most prominent crops are rice, sorghum, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, and bananas. In addition to these activities, they also stand out in the production of clay crafts. However, tourism is one of the new productive bets of the municipality and the department, which could represent an important productive pole in the face of the integration of the metropolitan area.
- Municipality of Palermo. It is located in the northwest of the department of Huila, and its distance from Neiva is 16.7 kilometers. Agriculture and commerce are fundamental pillars of its economy, with coffee and rice crops standing out. In addition, the oil and mining industries play an important role in local economic development while providing raw materials for both the agricultural sector and for industrial purposes.
- Municipality of Rivera. It is located in the northeast, and its distance from the capital Neiva is 20 kilometers. It has recently experienced a notable strengthening thanks to its abundant green and mountainous areas, which makes it a renowned tourist attraction for local, national, and international visitors. Among its attractions are hot springs, hiking trails, recreational farms, viewpoints, country houses, and a variety

of hotels that offer amenities for all tastes. In addition, the economy of the municipality of Rivera has flourished, which has led to the growth and development of numerous small businesses. In the agricultural sector, Rivera has crops of chalupe, grapes, coffee, cocoa, and cattle.

- Municipality of Tello. It is located in the northwest and is 22 kilometers from the capital of the department. Its economy is based on various crops and livestock activity. The quality of its grapes has allowed it to be classified as the vineyard municipality of Huila, given that its crops are considered the sweetest in the country.
- Municipality of Villavieja. It is located in the north of the department of Huila, and its distance from the department's capital is 37.8 kilometers. The local economy is based mainly on the agricultural and livestock sectors, the former being the most prominent. Additionally, ecotourism plays an important role as a form of contemplative, investigative, and scientific tourism, which values nature and the scenic, ethnological, and anthropological wealth of the places visited. It is worth noting that the Tatacoa desert is located in its territory.
- Municipality of Yaguará. It is located in the center of the department of Huila; the exact distance from the capital of the department is approximately 53 kilometers. The local economy is diversified in several sectors, including agriculture, with special emphasis on rice cultivation and livestock, and is recognized for breeding high-quality cattle. In the case of fish farming, this sector benefits from the presence of the Betania dam, which covers a considerable part of the territory. In addition, growth is seen in ecotourism, with activities such as aquatic tourism, the oil derivatives industry, as well as hydroelectric energy. All of this generates significant royalties for the municipality.

4. Research results

4.1. Participation of mayors and municipal councils in the creation of the Bambuque metropolitan area

The planned Neiva metropolitan area is to associate seven municipalities of the Huila department with its capital, Neiva. However, this initiative has been part of various speeches for more than twenty years. To date, the presentation of a constitutional project that acts as a foundation has yet to be achieved so that it can later be filed with the National Civil Registry. It is noteworthy that the last and the current public administration of the city of Neiva have been committed to the realization of this project; proof of this is the forums, seminars, and other spaces that have been promoted with experts on the subject for the socialization of the metropolitan fact.

One of the objectives outlined in the research consisted of establishing the opinions of the mayors and municipal councils of the municipalities that would form the metropolitan area precisely because they are, as a group, one of the main actors in the creation of the metropolitan area. After forming the database, it was managed directly by the mayors and the presidents of each municipal council. In the case of the mayors, a questionnaire was designed to inquire about their knowledge of the legal provisions, the benefits, and their possible support for the construction of the metropolitan area. An analysis was also made of the academic training obtained by the mayors to relate this to the level of knowledge on the subject of sustainable regional integration and to anticipate possible expert support.

Of the eight mayors, it was concluded that four have professional training, and the remaining four have postgraduate training at a specialization level (Table 1). The questions formulated to diagnose the level of knowledge that municipal leaders have regarding metropolitan areas were answered assertively by eighty-three (83.0%) percent; this allowed us to conclude that the mayors have the knowledge about the subject consulted and understand the dynamics that are built from the projected metropolitan area, which represents a cardinal potential and an important starting point for any project.

Table 1. Perception of current mayors towards the A.M.B.N.

Mayor's Office	Name of mayor	Education	Supported by
			A.M.B.N.
Neiva	Gorky Muñoz Calderón	Public Administrator	Yes X
Aipe	Octavio Conde Lasso	Specialist in Regional Development Management - Administrator	X
Campoalegre	Elizabeth Motta Álvarez	Specialist in Financial Administration - Administrator	X
Palermo	Natalia Caviedes Chinchilla	Lawyer	X
Rivera	John Jairo Yepes Perdomo	Public Accounting	X
Tello	José Manuel Córdoba Trujillo	Specialist in State Contracting - Lawyer	X
Villavieja	Álvaro Andrés Charry Perdomo	Business Administrator	X
Yaguará	Juan Carlos Rivas casallas	Specialist in Administrative Law - Lawyer	X

Source: own elaboration.

The municipal mayors who would be part of the metropolitan area by consensus have responded that, if the process of formation were to begin, they would opt to support it given that they understand the benefits that it would bring to their municipalities. The mayor of the city of Neiva has stated that within his government plan, dialogues with the other mayors should be established so that they can take the initiative and structure the constitution project.

In practice, it is important to have the support of the mayors for this exercise; the role that they can play in the scenario of the popular consultation is highlighted. The consulted literature also indicates that based on this political will, alliances could be strengthened with other actors and strategic sectors that are fundamental in the configuration of the new entity.

On the other hand, the methodology used to approach the municipal councils of the eight consulted municipalities consisted of coordinating with the presidents of each of the corporations about their possible support for the initiative to build a metropolitan fact. The context created by the COVID-19 pandemic is highlighted, where the different municipal councils met virtually to carry out their work plans. Each councilor was sent a questionnaire in which they were asked about their knowledge of metropolitan areas and their possible support for the construction of the Neiva metropolitan bamboo area (Table 2).

Table 2. Perception of current councillors towards the A.M.B.N.

Municipality under study	Number of Councillors	Supported by A.M.B.N.	
		Yes	No
Neiva	19	15	4
Aipe	11	8	3
Campoalegre	13	9	4
Palermo	13	10	3
Rivera	11	9	2
Tello	11	8	3
Vilavieja	9	7	2
Yaguará	9	7	2
Total	96	73	23

Source: own elaboration.

In total, there are ninety-six (96) councilors who make up the eight municipalities consulted. It was decided to address 100.00% of the population to diagnose knowledge and possible support. The questions regarding the level of knowledge were answered assertively by seventy-one percent (71.00%). Likewise, seventy-nine percent (79.00%) expressed their intention to support the construction of a metropolitan area in their municipalities. It is noted that the councilors are important actors when it comes to constituting the metropolitan area, which requires that a third of them manage to establish agreements.

This alliance can be significant in the construction of the initiative and facilitate the construction of the constitutional project. Additionally, it is important to highlight the role that can play at the time of the popular consultation as catalysts of the communication processes so that the project is adequately socialized and as key actors in the feedback and observation of the popular will.

4.2. Perceptions of the inhabitants of the projected metropolitan area

According to the figures reported by DANE, 509,133 inhabitants of the eight municipalities of the Huila department would form the Neiva metropolitan area. The issue of sustainable regional integration and association is becoming increasingly important in the Huila department, which manifests in the different sectors that drive the economy of the region, including agriculture, fish farming, and tourism. Following this line, the capital of the department must begin the construction of new forms of integration with its neighboring municipalities.

During the last public administrations of Neiva, the idea of building an economic block that has the city as its axis and involves the neighboring municipalities has been contemplated. In practice, these initiatives have been seen as strategies of electoral processes that, in the long run, remain only in protocol meetings and social formalities. Therefore, a true commitment is necessary on the part of the mayors and municipal councils of the territories chosen to build the metropolitan area. At the closing date of the fieldwork of this research study, the aim was to describe more concretely the reality regarding the possible scenario of the integrating event. Considering that one of the stages for its constitution is based on a democratic exercise called a popular consultation, the number of people who are eligible to vote in the municipalities involved was investigated. The result of this consultation showed that by 2020, 363,854 people were eligible to participate in democratic exercises.

Taking into account the thresholds established, where a quarter of this population per municipality must participate and vote affirmatively in the popular consultation, a minimum of 90,963 citizens would be stipulated who must go to the polls and vote positively for the creation of the metropolitan area. The values per municipality are described in the following table. The role that mayors and councilors of the municipalities can play when calling their leaders and encouraging their readers to participate in the popular consultation is highlighted.

Table 3. *Citizens' perception towards the A.M.B.N.*

Municipality under study	General population	Population eligible to vote	Votes for approval	Selected sample	Knows that it is a metropolitan area		Would vote yes to the creation of the metropolitan area	
					YES	NO	YES	NO
Neiva	357,392	262,893	65,723	96	59	37	43	16
Aipe	29,940	15,130	3,783	95	32	63	18	14
Campoalegre	35,037	24,833	6,208	96	29	67	16	13
Palermo	35,569	20,385	5,096	96	47	49	36	11

Rivera	19,751	16,681	4,170	95	18	77	15	3
Tello	14,627	10,771	2,692	95	23	72	16	7
Villavieja	7,302	6,500	1,626	95	27	68	19	8
Yaguará	9,515	6,661	1,665	95	24	71	18	6
Total	509,133	363,854	90,963	763	259	504	181	78

Source: own elaboration.

In order to determine the perceptions and levels of knowledge of the citizens regarding the scenario of establishing the metropolitan area, the population was taken as the inhabitants who are enabled to vote in each of the municipalities. The sample was selected using the statistical method, and a margin of error of 10.00% was assumed. The total of the questionnaires applied was 763.

One of the questions formulated in the questionnaire inquired about the knowledge of the concept of metropolitan area. The question was answered negatively by 504 people, which gave a percentage of 66.00% ignorance towards the term. The remaining segment, 259 people, stated that they knew what a metropolitan area is, which is equivalent to 34.00%. The following question was applied to the people who stated that they knew what a metropolitan area is: Would you vote positively for the creation of a metropolitan area? Of the 259 questionnaires applied, 181 said yes, a selection that represented 70.00% of the total respondents, and the remaining 30.00% responded that they would vote against the popular consultation.

4.3 Integrative analysis

The Neiva Bambuquera Metropolitan Area, named as such by the researchers of this article, is a theme promoted during the electoral exercises of the last 20 years. Despite this, once the elections are over, this initiative remains only in speeches. The current public administration states that it is interested in this idea becoming a reality; the eight mayors state that they know what a metropolitan area means and would support it. Specifically, the mayor of the city of Neiva, which would be the core municipality of the metropolitan area, states that he will coordinate with the other municipalities to begin the process of formation as soon as possible.

Likewise, the diagnosis of the acceptance of the constitutional project applied in the municipal councils showed that 79.00% of them stated that they would join the idea of making the metropolitan area official. The integration of these two actors is fundamental in the stages of dissemination of information and popular consultation. However, the results of the citizen survey expose a challenging scenario, given that 66.00% do not understand the meaning of metropolitan areas. Of those who handle the subject, 70.00% would support this initiative.

The fieldwork carried out allowed us to dimension the metropolitan area to a reality, which is based on the fulfillment of the requirements and the wills of the parties to promote the construction of the metropolitan area. The evaluation carried out of the data allowed to identify challenges the lack of knowledge of the population about the meaning of the metropolitan area and the high levels of absenteeism that have been manifested in the last electoral exercises, hence the fundamental nature of raising awareness regarding the process (Ricardo-Jiménez, 2022).

As a contingency plan, strong, solid, and forceful training is projected so that the information can be disseminated to the municipalities under investigation. The results of the data integration were especially aimed at the young population since a large percentage of them are those who do not participate in democratic exercises or entrepreneurship (Cantón-Balcázar, 2024; González-Ávila et al., 2023). This line, furthermore, is of great relevance in terms of the sustainability of the project since this age group and its transformational capacity are precisely

the core of the future; hence, the benefits and the role of responsible citizenship are fundamental (Norona-González et al., 2023). Finally, it was found that each of the municipalities consulted has potentialities that, if used appropriately in the metropolitan area, will be optimized for the benefit of its inhabitants. This expression of sustainable regional integration based on the current research exercise could cease to be a myth and materialize with the results and projected scenarios. The data suggest that the main departmental industries could experience exponential growth without giving up the sustainability already discussed (Liscano-Parra et al., 2023; Sanabria-Martínez, 2022).

This research will likely be a source for future inquiries, especially those focused on fiscal, financing, and monitoring aspects. Likewise, it is recommended to emphasize the communicative, educational, and cultural aspects that must support the implementation of the proposal while calling for these inquiries to be conducted with the participation of cooperative poles between government, university, industry, and society.

Conclusions

In the socio-demographic context, and associated with migratory, environmental, and socio-economic phenomena, the construction of metropolitan areas in an intentional manner and oriented towards sustainable development is seen as an important bet for the future. These forms of urban organization not only contribute to better government but also serve as platforms for adequate planning and management of local-territorial-regional development.

Within this system of ideas, the study carried out concluded that the Neiva Bambuquera Metropolitan Area constitutes a predictable and feasible scenario to implement. However, there are negative elements that act and have acted on the realization of the project. Therefore, in order to overcome these or other obstacles, it will be necessary to establish strategic alliances, facilitate the participation of the different socio-economic and political actors, and design a comprehensive proposal for the main sectors. From this point of view, the design of a sustainable metropolitan integration route would favor the convergence of agriculture, livestock, fish farming, the extractive industry, and local community development initiatives, especially through entrepreneurship and innovation processes. With this vision as the fundamental motive of the constitutional project, the Neiva Bambuquera Metropolitan Area could become the desired reality.

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