



TENDENCIAS

Journal of the Faculty of Sciences
University of Nariño
ISSN-E 2539-0554
Vol. XXIV No. 2 - 2nd Semester 2023
July - December - Pages 112-142

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Green business

GREEN BUSINESS IN COLOMBIA: BETWEEN DISCOURSE AND PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

NEGOCIOS VERDES EN COLOMBIA: ENTRE EL DISCURSO Y LA GESTIÓN PÚBLICA

NEGÓCIO VERDE NA COLÔMBIA: ENTRE O DISCURSO E A GESTÃO PÚBLICA

Charli Javier López Muñoz; Carlos Andrés Benítez González; Raúl Andrés Tabarquino Muñoz

Specialist in Integrated Environmental Management, Universidad de los Andes. Candidate for a Master's Degree in Public Policy, Universidad del Valle. ORCID: 0000-0002-7866-2843. E-mail: charli.lopez@correounivalle.edu.co, Bogotá - Colombia.

Master in Public Policy, Universidad del Valle. Full Time Professor, Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios - UNIMINUTO. ORCID: 0000-0003-2368-6554. E-mail: carlos.benitez.go@uniminuto.edu.co, Pasto - Colombia.

Doctor in Administration, Universidad del Valle. Full Time Professor, Universidad del Valle. ORCID: 0000-0002-7866-1875. E-mail: raul.tabarquino@correounivalle.edu.co, Cali - Colombia.

Received: September 21, 2022

Approved: June 09, 2023

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22267/rtend.232402.230>



Abstract

The analysis of national public policies not only requires recognizing the influence of the discourses with which decisions are argued and justified, but also analyzing the local perspectives of the actors involved; therefore, the objective of this article is to know the opinions of the implementers and beneficiaries of three different regions of the country: Caribbean, Santander and Amazon, on the green business policy. For this purpose, professionals of the Environmental Authorities of the mentioned regions and verified green business entrepreneurs, located in their districts. Consequently, using a constructivist approach, attended face-to-face workshops (empirical observation), developed semi-structured interviews, and applied descriptive surveys; managing to identify disruptive constructions of the green business discourse in the territories. Finally, the main results that stand out are that there is a wear and tear among the actors that participate in the local public management of the policy, the exercise of verifying green businesses and executing the respective strategies and follow-up activities are costly and ineffective and are still present. challenges to consider green businesses as the new engine of municipal and

Keywords: sustainable development; public management; green business; public politics; sustainable territories

JEL: M14; O25; Q28; R58; Z18

Resumo

A análise das políticas públicas nacionais exige não só o reconhecimento da influência dos discursos com que as decisões são argumentadas e justificadas, mas também a análise das perspectivas locais dos actores envolvidos; portanto, o objectivo deste artigo é conhecer as opiniões dos implementadores e beneficiários de três regiões diferentes do país: as Caraíbas, Santander e a Amazônia, sobre a política empresarial verde. Para este fim, foram seleccionados profissionais das Autoridades Ambientais das regiões acima mencionadas e empresários verdes verificados localizados nas suas jurisdições, utilizando a técnica de amostragem de conveniência. Consequentemente, recorrendo a uma abordagem construtivista, foram assistidos workshops presenciais (observação empírica), foram realizadas entrevistas semi-estruturadas e aplicados inquéritos descritivos, identificando construções disruptivas do discurso empresarial verde nos

territórios. Finalmente, os principais resultados são que existe um desgaste entre os actores envolvidos na gestão pública local da política, o exercício de verificação das empresas verdes e a implementação das respectivas estratégias e actividades de acompanhamento são dispendiosos e ineficientes, e ainda existem desafios para considerar as empresas verdes como o novo motor das economias municipais e departamentais na Colômbia.

Palavras-chave: desenvolvimento sustentável; gestão pública; negócios verdes; políticas públicas; territórios sustentáveis

JEL: M14; O25; Q28; R58; Z18

Introducción

In Colombia, green businesses are considered by the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development (Ministry of Environment) (In Spanish Minambiente) as a tool for promoting social, economic, and environmental development by local governments. .According to updated data at the end of July 2022, it is reported that with the help of the Environmental Authorities, 4,162 green businesses have been verified, which are present in 750 municipalities in the 32 departments of the country, generating 48,052 direct jobs and annual sales of \$933,004 million pesos (Ministry of Environment, 2022). These figures are the result of the implementation of the National Green Business Plan (NGBP) (In Spanish PNNV) since 2014.

While the Caribbean, Santander, and Amazon regions account for three-quarters of the total verified green businesses, these territories differ among them in terms of values and beliefs on the subject of business and the use of natural resources, therefore, the initiative was born to conduct a field research to know the local perspectives of the actors in charge of the implementation of the PNNV and the particularities of the target population in the discourse of considering nature from a responsible business vision.

The problems identified for this public policy analysis focus on the disarticulation of local stakeholders for the consolidation of sustainable territories and the risk of commoditizing natural resources with "Top-Down" business guidelines.

Hence, this study seeks, through the use of a constructivist approach and the participation in face-to-face workshops (empirical observation), the development of semi-structured interviews and the application of descriptive surveys, to be an input for Minambiente to review the goals set and instruments built for the green business policy, for indicators that are consistent with the need to establish "sustainable territories" in the target regions to be studied.

Theoretical Reference

The main theoretical concepts underlying the study are presented below:

Public Policy

Various authors have contributed to the conceptualization of public policy. Some offer definitions with pragmatic tendencies (cause-effect), others provide utilitarian meanings (subject to an ultimate sense of reality), and other group with a normative and positivist approach (emphasizing procedure), and even some with a sociological approach (collective objectives). Nonetheless, this article takes as its theoretical reference the operational and instrumental definition proposed by Ordóñez (2013):

Public policy is the set of actions implemented within the framework of governmental plans and programs designed by analytical exercises of some degree of formality, where knowledge, together with political will and available resources, make the achievement of social objectives viable (p. 33).

On the other hand,

public policies are not only determined by the institutional framework, by the organizations that shelter them, the laws that support them and the values that justify them. They are also influenced by the discourses with which problems are defined, decisions are legitimized, results are presented and processes are understood. (Cejudo, 2010)

Finally, understanding public policies as a vehicle for innovation, facilitates the actors involved in reaching a persuasion of new challenges to design "adequate collaborative spaces conducive to the development of joint problem definition, mutual learning and joint participation of new and daring solutions" (Zurbriggen y Lago, 2014).

Public Management

On some occasions, public management has been mistakenly considered as a synonym of public administration; however, management is an action and effect of administering, therefore, it would be thought within the administration, understanding the latter as a broader term than management. Currently, it can be stated that there has been an evolution in the concepts, which allows pointing out that "while administration concentrates on the management of resources with a focus on the inside, management would seem to complement that with the effects and influence that the environment has" (Galinelli y Migliore, 2015).

In an uncertain and changing environment, goodness and success only acquire meaning after a policy has been put into practice. Rationality makes sense in relation to what has been, not to what will be (Giandomenico, 2010).

Based on the above principle, public management cannot be considered an exact science, and although public policy implementers must be prepared for adversities, they are subject to the ambiguity of the changing context.

However, "public policies must be guided by the requirement to achieve objectives and not by simple posturing or purely advertising motives, which sometimes go against the intended effects or squander public money" (Tirole, 2017). In addition, the management of "public policies also requires a change in the metrics used to evaluate these policies that favor long-term investments and innovation" (Mazzucato, 2018).

Constructivist Approach

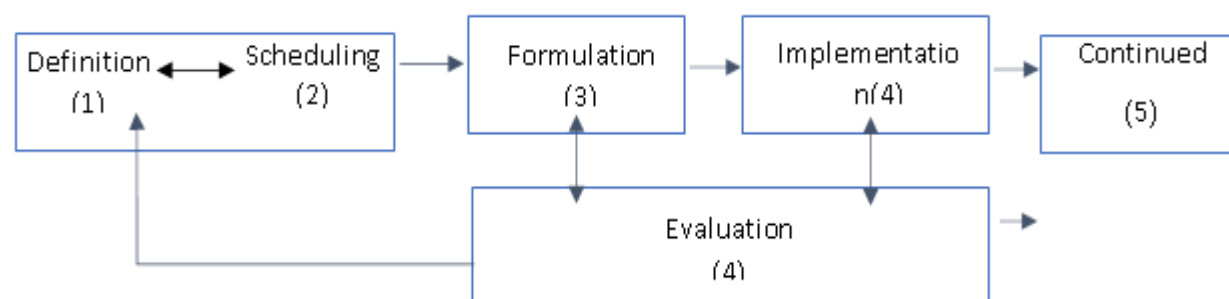
Public policy analytical currents are classified into three main groups: theoretical, integrationist and interpretative. The traditional approaches are the dominant current of public policy analysis; their authors consider their analyses to be objective and scientific in nature, and their conclusions are considered to be universally valid. On the other hand, integrationist approaches were born in reaction to behaviorist perspectives. Finally, there are the interpretivist approaches, an analytical trend that has managed to highlight the effect of discursive strategies and representative aspects such as beliefs, symbols and metaphors of communities. This emphasis on rhetoric, argumentation, and narrative, as fundamental axes of political activity in general, allows us to see that this analytical current focuses attention on the value of discourse and ideas, becoming a clearly constructivist current (Roth, 2010).

It is worth mentioning that this estimation of discourse occurs at different stages of the public policy cycle. Thus, it is convenient to highlight the assessment made by Aguilar (1993), mentioning that "the policy at the moment it is launched unleashes many opportunities and expectations, powers and interests at stake, workloads and responsibilities, operations and decisions".

In that sense, this research takes into account the theoretical postulation of the Schematic Model for the Analysis of Public Policies made by Guillermo (2004), where the feedback of the other stages is evidenced by the evaluation phase, thus maintaining the constant relationship of all the steps, as it occurs in real-world public policies (Velázquez, 2016).

Figure 1

Schematic Model for Public Policy Analysis



Source: Guillermo (2004, p. 124).

Finally, the article also takes into account the thesis proposed by Cejudo (2010) on discourse and its effects on implementation:

This discourse affects the implementation of policies in two ways. First, because the arguments and justifications that accompany the decision will be the main mechanism of communication to the actors in charge of implementing them (...), but it also has an impact because it goes against the individual and collective values and beliefs of the actors in charge of implementing the policies (...). These actors will then resort to their own disruptive constructions to turn the decision into practical implications. (p.16).

Therefore, the analysis with a constructivist approach explains this general conception of the public policy making process, contributing to understand the processes that compose them, from the valuation of the discourse as the beginning, justification and legitimacy of public action.

Green Business

The search for a new way to confront excessive consumerism at a global level has allowed public management to focus on building alternatives that allow maintaining growth rates with an awareness of planetary limits; however, the simple mention of the role of the market and incorporating the

issue of money can displace the intrinsic motivation and significantly alter the esteem for natural resources (Raworth, 2017). Well mentions the 19th century Scottish naturalist John Muir (as cited in Wulf, 2022), "nothing which has monetary value is safe, regardless how much it may be protected."

Furthermore, the world does not have enough resources to sustainably maintain the standard of living of the first world, much less if developing countries, such as Colombia, were to reach these levels (Diamond, 2020). Making it difficult to achieve that "the economy fits pertinently into the ecology, since the market undervalues future needs and does not take into account the external damages to global mercantile transactions" (Martínez, 2008).

Following this panorama, the importance of green businesses at a global level is evident "since they represent the alternative to continue generating global wealth, satisfying needs within the framework of supply and demand, from the great projection of sustainability" (López y Martínez, 2016).

In Colombia, Minambiente is responsible for "evaluating the scope and economic effects of environmental factors, their incorporation into the market value of goods and services and their impact on the development of the national economy" (Congress of Colombia, 1993). Within the framework of this function, the Office of Green and Sustainable Business (ONVS) was created in 2011 under Decree 3570; this ministerial unit works on two main fronts, first, in the development of studies and economic and financial instruments that provide behavioral changes of the actors that make use of natural resources and, second, to lead the competitiveness and promotion of green businesses in the national territory, providing policy guidelines to energize the supply of goods and services from the sustainable use of natural resources (Minambiente, 2019).

As part of this second front of action, in 2014 the ONVS published the National Green Business Plan (NGBP, in Spanish PNNV), a public policy document that defines green business as:

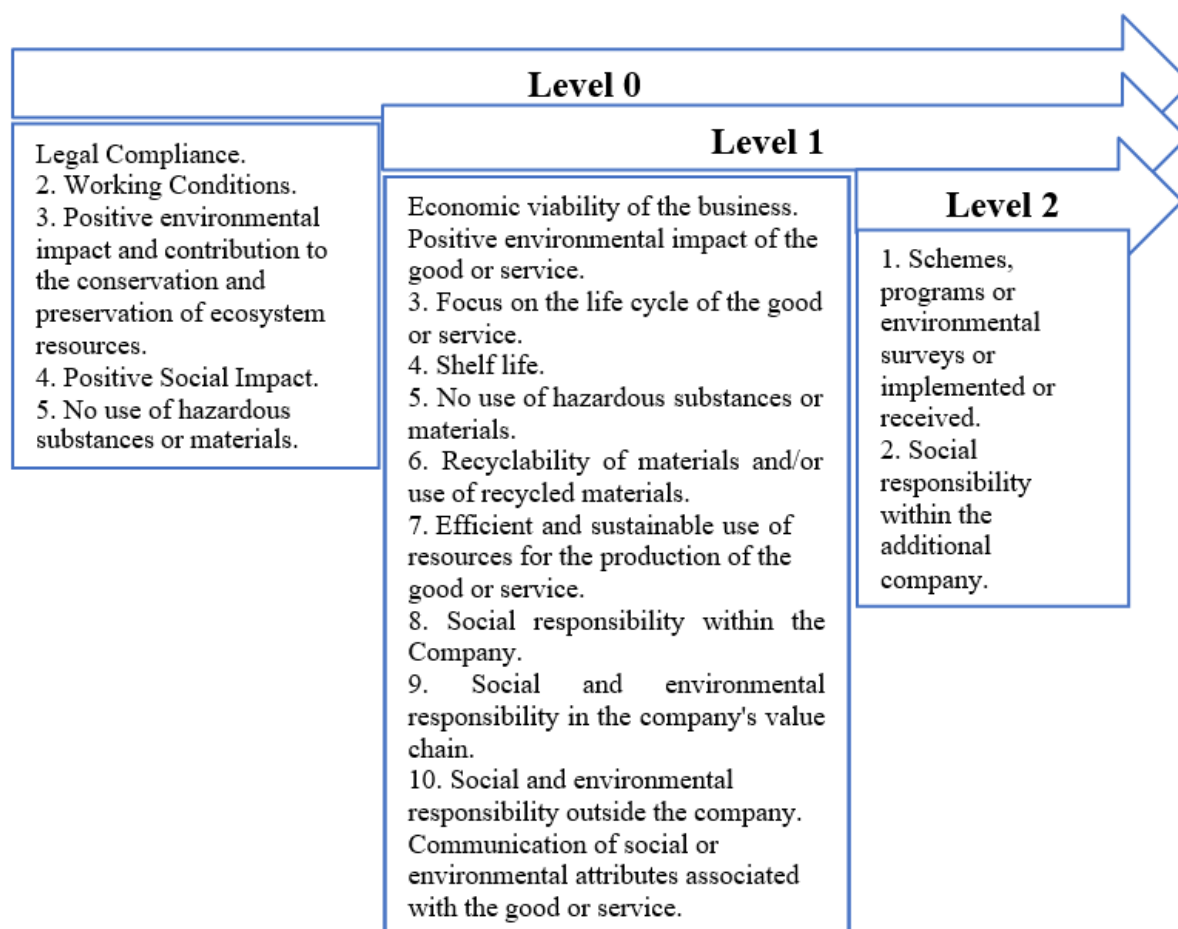
Economic activities in which goods and services are offered that generate positive environmental impacts and also incorporate good environmental, social and economic

practices, with a life cycle approach, contributing to the conservation of the environment as natural capital that supports the development of the territory. (Minambiente, 2014).

To achieve the goal of 12,630 verified green businesses by 2030, the ONVS developed a general methodology, called "Tool for the implementation of Regional Green Business Programs", which has a battery of indicators for the verification of green business criteria (Figure 2), which condenses the verifiers into three levels, Level zero includes the minimum "aspects" that any good or service must include to be considered a green business, level one includes the "qualifiers" that a good or service must meet to be considered a green business, and level two includes "schemes" of environmental certifications and recognitions, characterized by their high complexity for their acquisition. The set of indicators is composed at level zero by twelve dichotomous questions, in which the possible answers are: complies or does not comply, and at levels one and two, by fifty qualifying questions that are distributed with a score of 0, 0.5, 1 or does not apply.

Figure 2

Green Business Criteria



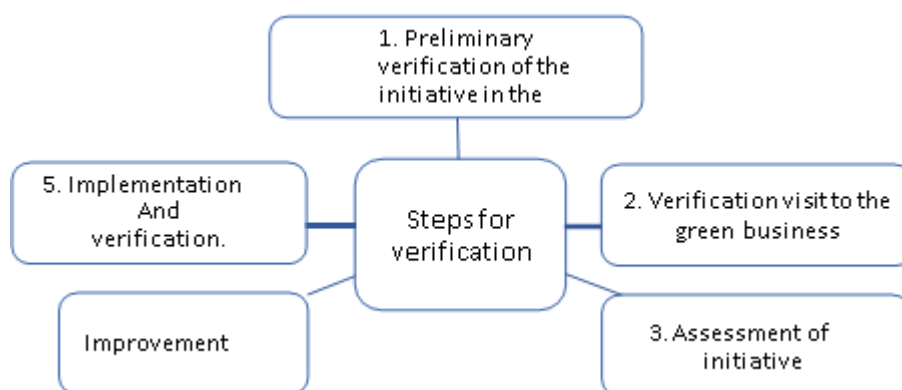
Source: Adapted from the Guide for Verification and Evaluation of Green Business Criteria (Minambiente, 2016).

Two main actors participate in the verification process, the verifier, a specialized official of the Environmental Authority, and the businessman or entrepreneur of the business, which can be a natural or legal person that provides goods or services that will potentially be classified as a green business (Minambiente, 2016). After executing the five verification steps of the green business criteria (Figure 3), the interpretation of the results is performed, relating the percentage of compliance with the criteria, with a description that indicates whether or not the initiative is considered as a green business and what it needs to continue improving. This interpretation of the

results is conditioned to the weighted rating of the twelve green business criteria, starting from a rating of "Initial" to a rating of "Ideal".

Figure 3

The Five Steps Green Business Verification



Source: Adapted from the Guide for Verification and Evaluation of Green Business Criteria (Minambiente, 2016).

Based on this national regulatory framework, it is a fact that Colombia is full of opportunities and potentialities in green business, where regions should become the new actors of the national economy "seeking their own sustainability and possibly a new development model, a local version of well-being and prosperity" (Sanchez, 2021). However, the comparative advantages with respect to the wealth of natural resources in Colombia have led to the following:

(...) the attempt to green the State has been hindered by the very nature of the issue. Many of the measures to solve environmental problems show results in the very long run, which is not attractive for politicians who want to deliver concrete achievements to their voters in the short term (Rodríguez, 2019, p. 172).

While the government must lead this transition to a green economy, this management must be actively accompanied by the private for its own interest, because:

(...) if companies could really save money, in addition to protecting the environment, they would have done so by now. In a market economy, companies do not need government help to cut costs. Competitive pressures would already ensure that those who did not reduce them would soon make losses and find themselves out of the market. (Thaler y Sunstein, 2009, p. 158).

However, the scope of environmental conduct within the logic of the market (green business) can materialize if two enabling reasons are taken into account:

In the first place, and as has been stated for some time, it is necessary to encourage more respectful behavior with the environment (...), secondly, because the progressive deterioration of the environment, with the consequences for the quality of life of citizens, is the appropriate scenario for (...), to activate emotional responses that lead to individual behaviors respectful of the environment and collective actions of environmental awareness. (Durán et al., 2007)

Sustainable Development

The national roadmap towards green growth requires the comprehensive implementation of public policies that start from the premise of "producing by conserving and conserving by producing" National Department for Planning (In Spanish, Departamento Nacional de Planeación [DNP], 2018, p. 4). However, behind these country initiatives, there is a construction of a discourse that has been implanted in the international agenda since the 1970s under the name of "Sustainable Development".

At the end of the 1980s, with the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), there was a common point between development theories and the conceptualization of sustainability. Thus, the Brundtland report defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Bermejo, 2014).

Since then, various points of view have been generated, starting with those who argue that it is a slogan of the United Nations to continue the unbridled consumption of capitalism (Demaria, 2021), through those who believe that technological advances justify continuing to focus on the growth of nations, to those who "argue that there are many poor people today who should not be asked to make sacrifices for the welfare of the hypothetical welfare of those who do not even exist yet" (Shafik, 2022, p. 146). The truth is that the discourse of sustainable development does not focus on what represents "the deterioration of the environment for the survival of the human species, but rather, on the depletion of the sources of natural resources indispensable to maintain the current dynamics of consumption" (López et al., 2016, p. 439).

These market logics within an intentionality of a green economy make global strategies develop between aspects of power and distribution, but at the same time, in functional dynamics that seek to avoid the debate on the capacity of ecosystems to support indefinite economic growth, boosted by the globally instated economy (Arias, 2017).

In early 2021, economist Partha Dasgupta published a report titled "The Economics of Biodiversity: A Dasgupta Review", where a framework for including nature in economic thinking is proposed following the development of three interconnected transitions; the first, ensuring that demand for nature does not exceed supply; the second, changing indicators of economic success; and the third, transforming institutions to enable change (Dasgupta, 2021).

In Colombia, the concept of "Sustainable Territories" has become relevant, defined as:

A social creation in which visions and strategies for the management and planning of the territory are identified, consolidated and agreed upon in a participatory manner, in order to achieve the well-being and security of its population over time (Guhl, 2022).

Precisely this vision of sustainability responds to the singularities of the different regions in the country and focuses on harmonizing local needs with the sources of their natural resources from their own worldview. The national public policy on green business is born with this intention, to

turn green business into the engine of the regional economy, through a local perspective, taking into account their particularities and territorial realities.

Methodology

This qualitative research is inspired by the instrument created by economists Banerjee y Duflo (2020) during their study on poverty, which they termed Randomized Controlled Trials (RCTs):

In an RCT, individuals or communities are randomly assigned to different treatments, that is, to different programs or to different versions of the same program (...) A single experiment does not yield the definitive answer to the question of whether a particular program works universally. However, we can conduct a series of experiments, changing the location of the intervention, and once the results are gathered, it allows us to verify the robustness of the conclusions reached. (p. 32)

Similarly, this study aims to approach the context of green businesses in the Caribbean, Santander, and Amazon regions of Colombia to understand, describe, and explain the implementation of green business public policy, the work of professionals, and the perceptions of verified green business entrepreneurs. Additionally, it seeks to identify their everyday knowledge and the narratives built around their interactions. Thus, this study refrains at first from having a clear concept of what is being studied and from formulating initial hypotheses to be tested (Hernández et al., 2014, p. 122). The aim is to uncover realities regarding the implementation of policy through empirical observation, achieved by participating in activities within the agenda to strengthen green businesses led by Environmental Authorities.

After gathering field notes from nine workshops focused on strengthening marketing for verified green businesses (Inírida, Riohacha, Valledupar, Santa Marta, Barranquilla, Cartagena, Sincelejo, Bucaramanga, and San Gil), a need arose to conduct semi-structured interviews to make the most of traveling to these various cities across the country (research cost-effectiveness). For this purpose, a convenience sampling method was used to select professionals from 11 Environmental Authorities responsible for the verification process and for supporting business enhancement activities, as well as a total of 18 green businesses within their jurisdictions that participated in the workshops. The

questionnaire design for the semi-structured interviews was based on Sinek's (2018) publication, *Start with Why*, which focuses on the relationship established between "why," "how," and "what." From a pragmatic business perspective, it begins with the most concrete aspects and ends with the abstract purpose of business functions to clarify their business purpose. Thus, the interviews were guided by three core questions, and additional questions were introduced during the interviews to obtain more precise concepts and information (Hernández et al., 2014).

Finally, descriptive surveys were administered by designing two online forms: one for green business entrepreneurs and another for professionals from Environmental Authorities, resulting in 58 and 11 responses from each group, respectively.

Results

Empirical Observation

The ONVS organized a series of national workshops to strengthen the digital marketing strategy of green businesses. The objective was to acquire inputs for constructing territorial marketing plans and to gather photographic material for designing a portfolio that includes products and services from green businesses verified in 2019-2020 by the Green Business Generation Program (Minambiente, 2019). A sampling was carried out for Convenience, with the principle of leveraging the development of these workshops during the first semester of 2022. In this way, the gathering of several green businesses located in different municipalities across the selected regions could be ensured, grouping them in specific events. In total, participation in nine workshops across the Caribbean, Santander, and Amazon regions was achieved (Table 1), leading to the findings presented following Table 1.

Tabla 1

Green Business Marketing Workshop Schedule

Region	City	Organizer	Date
Amazon	"Inírida, Guainía"	Corporation for the Sustainable Development of the North and East Amazon (CDA)	February 22 and 23 2022
Caribbean	"Riohacha, La Guajira"	Regional Autonomous Corporation of La Guajira (CORPOGUAJIRA)	June 06, 2022
	"Valledupar, Cesar"	Regional Autonomous Corporation of Cesar (CORPOCESAR)	June 07, 2022
	"Santa Marta, Magdalena"	Regional Autonomous Corporation of Magdalena (CORPAMAG)	June 09, 2022
	"Barranquilla, Atlántico"	Regional Autonomous Corporation of Atlántico (CRA)	June 10, 2022
	"Cartagena, Bolívar"	Environmental Public Establishment of Cartagena (EPA Cartagena)	June 13, 2022
Santander	"Sincelejo, Sucre"	Regional Autonomous Corporation of Sucre (CARSUCRE)	June 15, 2022
	"Bucaramanga, Santander"	Regional Autonomous Corporation for the Defense of the Bucaramanga Plateau (CDBM)	July 04, 2022
	"San Gil, Santander"	Regional Autonomous Corporation of Santander (CAS)	July 06, 2022

Source: Own elaboration.

- Low attendance at the workshops by the invited green businesses. On average, less than 50% of the invited businesses attended.
- Environmental Authorities did not participate in designing the marketing workshops. The workshops were solely directed and developed by specialized professional staff from Bogotá, contracted by Minambiente.
- It was common for workshop facilitators to explain technical concepts unfamiliar to green businesses through examples (there was evidence of an excessive use of Anglicisms).
- The workshops focused on digital marketing without prior analysis of the connectivity gaps existing in many rural areas of the participants.
- Most products brought by business owners for photography did not indicate on their packaging or containers that they were verified green businesses.

- One of the incentives for green businesses to attend the workshops was a transportation subsidy for round trips. However, it was observed that costs requested by business owners coming from various rural areas and villages were excessively high.
- Lack of familiarity was perceived in the communication between some green businesses and Environmental Authority professionals. In some cases, it was mentioned that a considerable amount of time had passed since their last interaction.
- The teams responsible for verification and support of green businesses are limited. Out of the 11 participating Environmental Authorities, only CARDIQUE, CORPAMAG, and CDMB had more than one professional dedicated to implementing green business public policy.

Semi-structured Interviews

The interviews served to gather opinions and narratives regarding eight years of implementing the green business policy—insights that were not fully captured during the aforementioned in-person workshops. The main results from the interviews conducted with the 29 participants who were available for this research are presented below. It is important to note that the information consolidated in this article maintains the anonymity of the interviewees (Table 2).

Tabla 2

Actors who agreed to the interview

Group	Objective	Actor	Code
Group 1	Know the strategies and actions of Environmental Authorities to strengthen green businesses	Professional CORPOGUAJIRA	(PCG)
		Professional CORPOCESAR	(PCC)
		Professional CORPAMAG	(PCM)
		Professional CRA	(PCA)
		Professional Environmental Public Establishment	(PEB)
		Barranquilla Verde -EPA Barranquilla-	
		Professional Autonomous Corporation of the Canal del Dique -CARDIQUE-	(PCD)
		Professional CARSUCRE	(PEC)
		Professional CDMB	(PCCS)
		Professional CAS	(PCB)

	Professional CDA	(PCCA)
Group 2	Green Business 1 CORPOGUAJIRA	NV1G
Know the stories behind the supply of goods and services of green businesses	Green Business 2 CORPOGUAJIRA	NV2G
	Green Business 1 CORPOCESAR	NV1C
	Green Business 2 CORPOCESAR	NV2C
	Green Business 1 CORPAMAG	NV1M
	Green Business 2 CORPAMAG	NV2M
	Green Business CRA	NVA
	Green Business EPA Barranquilla	NVEB
	Green Business CARDIQUE	NVC
	Green Business EPA Cartagena	NVEC
	Green Business 1 CARSUCRE	NV1R
	Green Business 2 CARSUCRE	NV2R
	Green Business 1 CDMB	NV1B
	Green Business 2 CDMB	NV2B
	Green Business 1 CAS	NV1S
	Green Business 2 CAS	NV2S
	Green Business 1 CDA	NV1A
	Green Business 2 CDA	NV2A

Source: Own elaboration.

Group 1: Professionals from Environmental Authorities

While it is true that Environmental Authorities have resources allocated in their annual budgets for supporting green businesses, these funds are insufficient to develop the strengthening activities that entrepreneurs need. For this reason, these activities are led by the national government—in this case, by the ONVS—which manages inter-institutional agreements to pool resources, involving international cooperation and academia in the process. Nonetheless, Environmental Authorities have identified potential actors in the territories who are interested in contributing to green business strengthening strategies in areas such as chain-focused approaches, technical assistance for local transformation, and responsible sourcing.

In this context, these actors identify the following challenges in implementing the green business policy in the studied regions:

- The availability of specialized personnel for supporting green businesses is limited. Additionally, the high turnover of professionals within Environmental Authorities leads to significant setbacks in strengthening processes.
- There is no collaboration among Environmental Authorities to pool efforts in supporting green businesses. Although regional nodes are part of the PNNV's strategy for consolidating green businesses at the national level, they have yet to be realized in the regions.
- It is challenging to follow up on green businesses' improvement plans after verification. The distances and logistical costs make it difficult to perform regular follow-ups.
- Contact has been lost with several entrepreneurs since the pandemic; however, to date, there is no updated information on the changes that verified green businesses have experienced since 2014 due to Covid-19.
- Inviting verified green business entrepreneurs to participate in various activities led by the ONVS and others has become increasingly difficult due to the fact that they do not perceive real benefits arising from their status as green businesses.

On the other hand, it was evident that the discourse around green businesses varies across the selected regions. For instance, in the Caribbean, professionals focus their message on...

to conquer the international market by leveraging their proximity to seaports. To achieve this, the strengthening focuses on meeting the necessary export standards, increasing productivity to meet the quantities demanded by foreign clients, and the digital transformation of their communication channels. On the other hand, in Santander, the message is directed at the local level, especially the citizens of Bucaramanga and the visitors attracted by the various tourism offers throughout the year. Professionals adapt the green business discourse to focus on the region's internal economic growth.

In the Amazon region, technical jargon is not helpful for supporting verified green businesses. As a result, professionals must adapt the green business discourse to the local entrepreneurs' terms,

aligning it with a version of the discourse that is primarily conservationist, where natural resources take precedence over business profitability.

Finally, when asked whether green businesses are the driving force behind local economies in the regions, Environmental Authority professionals agree that they are, but this does not mean that local economies are currently prosperous. One of the actors in this group argues:

Local entrepreneurs are green businesses out of necessity; they take whatever is available to them in order to survive and are aware of the need to preserve natural resources to keep their businesses running. What they need, more than obtaining a green business certification from the Environmental Authority, is support in areas where they lack knowledge to improve their value chains, and this goes beyond training. Only when targeted investments are made that strengthen the offering of products and services under competitive market conditions will it be said that green businesses are the driving force of robust local economies. (PCD, personal communication, June 13, 2022)

Another actor from this group, who began working at the Environmental Authority in late 2019 and has had to face the verification of green businesses during the pandemic, shares the following opinion:

Minambiente and the Environmental Authority must focus on understanding and mitigating the needs of green businesses. This is not a matter of numbers. Nothing is achieved if each year we meet the green business verification quota without having the capacity to support the business transformations needed for success. (PCS, personal communication, July 6, 2022)

Group 2: Green Business Entrepreneurs

The actors in this group easily explain what their businesses consist of and how they operate; however, when asked why they started their businesses, the responses were less eloquent. Entrepreneurs who develop green businesses face several challenges, which may be financial or non-financial, adverse situations that become obstacles to their goal of achieving more mature businesses and staying afloat (Díaz et al., 2022). The entrepreneurs' narratives about the products and/or services they offer are definitely stronger than the figures from their economic activities. One such actor, who has run their business since 1998 but only received green business certification from

the Environmental Authority two years ago, argues that the verified green businesses they know in the region do not live off the income from these businesses. This interviewee states:

Most entrepreneurs start their businesses to have extra income. Many of them work with the government and do not have the time to focus on their businesses. They only “wake up” when their work contracts end, at which point they attend the training sessions organized by the corporation. (NV1G, personal communication, June 6, 2022)

Another entrepreneur who sells energy bars made from bananas and switched to eco-friendly packaging in 2021 in order to participate in a national fair in Bogotá states:

Being a green business is not cheap. My products used to have plastic packaging, which accounted for 2% of the total value; now with eco-packaging, costs have risen by 33%, and customers are unwilling to pay more. (NV2C, personal communication, June 7, 2022)

Finally, the actors in this group agree that institutionalizing "nature as a commodity" poses a risk to the preservation of natural resources in their territories and, therefore, the sustainability of their businesses. One entrepreneur who sells handicrafts in Barichara, Santander, argued the following:

Barichara is known for being one of the most beautiful towns in the country. In recent years, the number of tourists visiting us has increased. Anyone would say that this is good for my business, but in reality, what people don't know is that we are running out of water in the municipality and the cost of living is skyrocketing. Yes, sales have increased, but now I need more money to live with my family. (NV1S, personal communication, July 6, 2022)

Descriptive Surveys

During the semi-structured interviews, interesting data regarding the understanding of the green business public policy by professionals from the Environmental Authorities and the entrepreneurs they assist for their strengthening were frequently noted. It was evident that, despite the PNNV having a strategy to create and promote regional nodes as engines of the policy's sustainability, most professionals were unaware of this strategy. It was also common for professionals not to have

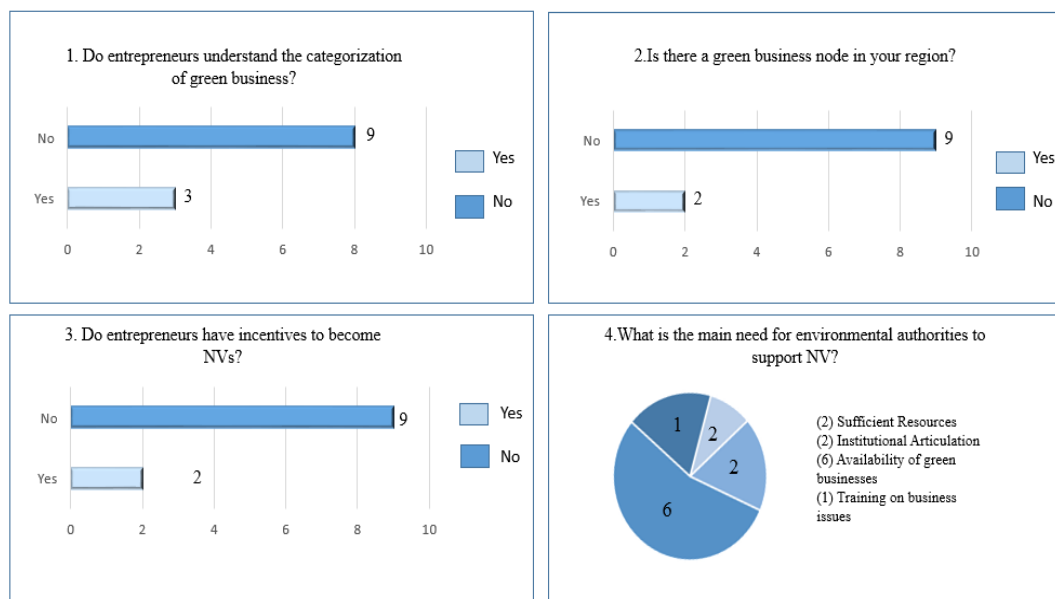
incentive tools that could attract the attention of entrepreneurs in the regions, which contributes to the difficulties green businesses face in becoming beneficiaries of the policy and participating in various calls.

Moreover, the interviewed entrepreneurs also expressed their lack of knowledge about the green business categorization implemented during the verification process, as well as being unaware of which stage of business development they were in or what they must fulfill to strengthen their businesses.

For this reason, there was a need to corroborate this information through two short perception surveys, which will contribute to the research (Figures 4 and 5), with the support of the participating Environmental Authorities for the dissemination of this tool through their communication channels to green business entrepreneurs.

Figure 4

Results of the Survey of Environmental Authorities Professionals

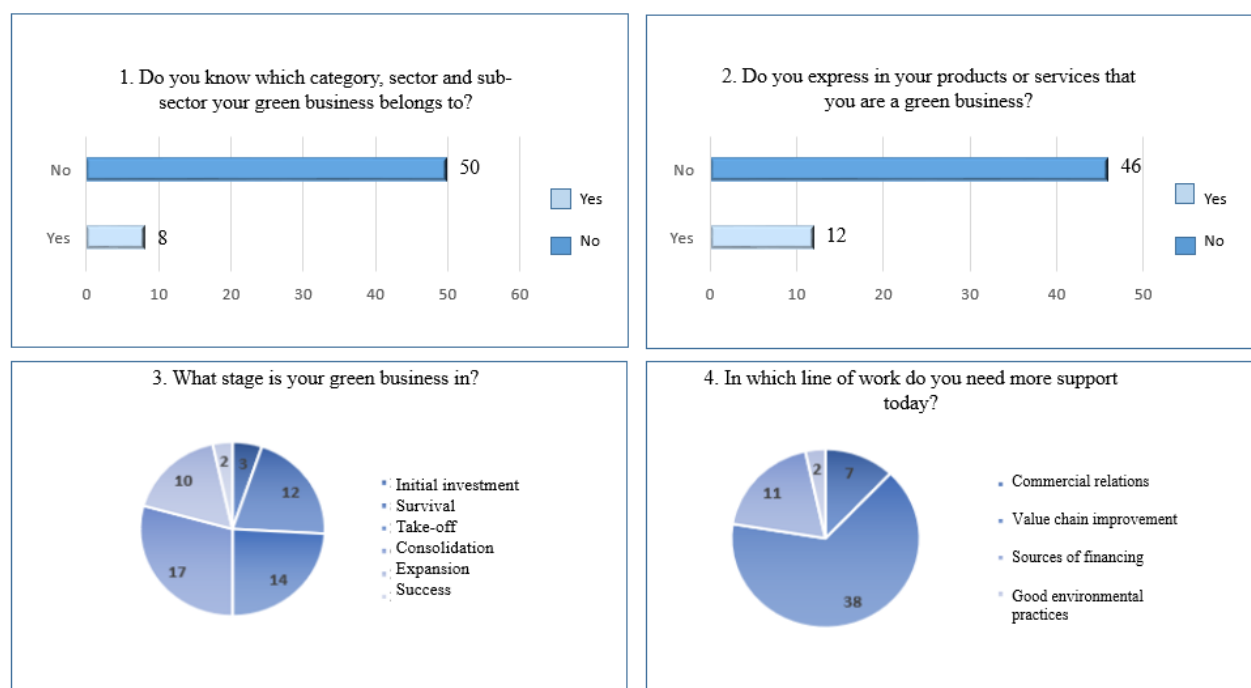


Source: Own elaboration.

1. Eight of the professionals who completed the survey responded that the entrepreneurs do not understand the categorization of green businesses.
2. Nine out of eleven professionals responded that there is no green business node in their regions.
3. Only two professionals responded that there are incentives for entrepreneurs to start the green business verification process.
4. The main need of the Environmental Authorities to support the strengthening of green businesses is the availability of entrepreneurs, followed by the consolidation of institutional coordination in the regions.

Figure 5

Results of the Green Business Entrepreneur Survey



Source: Own elaboration.

1. Fifty of the entrepreneurs who completed the survey reported that they did not know to which category, sector, or subsector their businesses belong.
2. Forty-six of the fifty-eight entrepreneurs surveyed reported that their products and/or services do not explicitly indicate that they are green businesses.

3. Only two entrepreneurs believe their green businesses are in the stage of business success. The majority of entrepreneurs consider themselves still in the phase of launch or consolidation.
4. The area where entrepreneurs expressed the greatest need for support was in improving the value chain, followed by the demand for funding sources for green businesses. Only two entrepreneurs responded that training on best environmental practices was an optimal form of support.

It is important to highlight again that the research refrained from formulating initial hypotheses to test from the outset. The aim was to discover, through the participation in activities within the framework of the Environmental Authorities' strengthening agenda for green businesses, the realities existing around the implementation of the policy through empirical observation and from a public policy analysis perspective. Therefore, all the results obtained were due to the availability of the actors participating in the research, either because they attended the activities where the researcher was present or due to the proximity of the professionals from the Environmental Authorities responsible for their support, which explains the convenience sampling technique used.

Conclusions

The discourse on green businesses promoted by Minambiente has led to the construction of different meanings in each of the regions studied, thus impacting the implementation of the policy. Firstly, because the Environmental Authorities have adjusted their ideology to ensure the effectiveness of their public management, and secondly, because the commercial content of the message has clashed with the values and beliefs of green business entrepreneurs. After eight years of implementing the green business policy, those responsible for local public management and the beneficiaries show signs of fatigue in the discourse. Environmental Authorities increasingly struggle to summon verified green businesses to participate in activities. The strengthening efforts of the Environmental Authorities and the entrepreneurs fail to identify the benefits they gain from being part of the policy.

The exercise that the Environmental Authorities carry out to verify green businesses and monitor their improvement plans is costly and inefficient. It is necessary to build a digital tool that allows mapping green businesses (so that other interested stakeholders can identify and join their goals), enables the green businesses themselves to provide feedback on the tool (progress of their improvement plans), and allows the Environmental Authorities and Minambiente to measure the impacts achieved in real time in order to make the necessary intervention adjustments at the right time.

While it is important to identify companies and ventures that achieve positive environmental impacts in their production and service delivery processes, efforts must focus on providing real support for these businesses' value chains. This way, their inclusion in a sustainable national business ecosystem will not cause additional costs in their product and/or service offerings, which would severely harm their market competitiveness.

It is suggested that the inputs obtained in the present research be complemented with the third stage of the "Qualitative Triangle" (Callejo, 2002) by conducting discussion groups, where the Environmental Authorities and green businesses, as well as the ONVS as the national policy leader, should participate. This would initially aim to contrast the findings and later initiate a process of adjustment in local public management and a shift in the discourse toward the consolidation of "Sustainable Territories" as the primary objective.

Ethical Considerations

This study did not require approval from an Ethics or Bioethics Committee, as it did not involve the use of living resources, agents, biological samples, or personal data that would pose a risk to life, the environment, or human rights.

Conflict of Interest

All authors made significant contributions to the document and declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the article.

Author Contribution Statement

Charli Javier López Muñoz: conceptualization, research, writing: review and editing, original draft writing. Carlos Andrés Benítez González: formal analysis, validation, and methodology. Raúl Andrés Tabarquino Muñoz: supervision and visualization.

Funding Source

Research funded with the authors' own resources.

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How to cite this article: López, C., Benítez, C. y Tabarquino, R. (2023). Green business in colombia: between discourse and public management. *Tendencias*, 24(2), 112-142. <https://doi.org/10.22267/rtend.232402.230>