PARACHUTING NEW REGIONAL CONFIGURATIONS

La Ruta Mutis: A Cultural Tourism Project in Colombia

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Abstract

This paper intends to study the social construction of new regional configurations and the ideational antecedents of identity construction at play, in light of a Cultural Tourism project in Colombia: *La Ruta Mutis*. It strives to understand how seven municipalities—previously connected to the traditional imaginary of region demarcated by departments and the administrative and institutional arrangements that come with it (Cundinamarca and Tolima)—are suddenly spatially and historically redefined by the reconstruction of an episode of Colombia's past, the life of José Celestino Mutis (1732-1808)—a Spanish Botanist, doctor, and priest—who led the *Royal Botanical Expedition* (1783-1808; 1811-1816) in the Americas. Using social constructivism as a theoretical framework and Anssi Paasi's work on New Regional Geography and his conceptualizations of region and regional identity (2011; 2009), this paper attempts to demonstrate how tourism has become a fundamental site of the production of regions and alternative collective identities in Colombia.

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AUC	United-Self Defense Forces of Colombia
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration
DPN	Department of National Planning
ELN	National Liberation Army
EU	European Union
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
MC	Ministry of Culture
MCIT	Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism
NAFTA	North-America Free Trade Agreement
OEI	Organization of Ibero-American States
SECC	State Society for Cultural Commemorations of Spain
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Office
WEF	World Economic Forum

Chapter 1 Introduction

Colombia is passing through an intensive process of *touristification[1]* in the last decade. According to the Ministry of Commerce, Industry, and Tourism (hereafter, MCIT) an estimate of 2,8 million foreigners visit the country in 2010, two and half times the number of tourist that visit in 2002[2]. This is an unprecedented number for a country that had remained hostage of its own-armed conflict and of its bad image for many decades. Although, the internal conflict still persists,[3] the Colombian government has regained control over some territories and quite impressively, influenced people's perceptions on safety. This has been achieved mainly through the yet controversial "Defense and Democratic Security Policy"[4] of former president Álvaro Uribe Vélez (2002-2010) and through a powerful communication strategy, both of which have managed to re-encourage national tourism, attract foreign visitors, and convert the tourist industry into an important sector of the national economy. Under the umbrella slogan **"*Colombia: The only risk is wanting to stay,*"** launched by ProExport—a national agency created in 1992, which currently promotes exports, international tourism and foreign

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[1] I found two studies (Ojeda, 2011: 4; Bhandari 2008) that use *'touristification'* to refer to the rapid increment of tourism and the equally fast re-adjustment of the system to attend their needs and wants, which encapsulates what I want to say in the case of Colombia.

[2] Interview undertaken by Prlatam to current Minister Sergio Díaz-Granados before the opening of FITUR (International Tourism Trade Fair) 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wyprwGoiQeU [March 28, 2012]. MCIT-DPN, 2011: 18. Foreigners come mainly from Latin America, US, and the EU (Spain, Germany, and France).

[3] Despite of the efforts made by the government in the last decade, which have weakened guerilla groups and demobilized paramilitary members, the conflict continues. Recent years have seen the rise the "emergent bands" (*Bandas Emergentes Criminales* or BACRIMS) also known as "neo-paramilitary groups". These are criminal bands formed by former paramilitary fighters involved in drug-trafficking and extortion.

[4] Álvaro Uribe's strong electoral victory in 2002 was based on his discourse on security—paramount in a context where the immediate antecedents were failed peace dialogues and an escalating violence across the country. The Democratic Security (Seguridad Democrática) policy package aimed at empowering military, restoring government control over order and security, and holding all armed groups accountable for their actions (Mason, 2003:392). The policy has been heavily criticized for 1) over-militarizing the country and not focusing on other aspects of the political economy of conflict; 2) for being a short term solution; 3) for involving civilians; 4) for the murder of innocent civilians by the military who argued that they were guerilla members.

investment—the government continues to promote tourism on the basis of being an element of competitiveness and a "motor of development."[5]

In the midst of this situation, in 2007, MCIT and the Ministry of Culture (hereafter, MC) joined forces to develop the Cultural Tourism Policy, titled *"Identity and Competitive Development of Colombian Heritage for the World" (MCIT-MC 2007).* Defining cultural tourism as, "any touristic travel with the intention to know, comprehend, and enjoy all distinctive religious, material, intellectual, and affective features and elements that characterized a society"(Ibid.), this policy sought to explore the potential of tourism in the articulation of processes of identification, appreciation, competitiveness, and sustainability of the cultural patrimony of the country. At the same time, it recognized the socio-economic utility of culture in propelling entrepreneurial projects, generating employment, and encouraging processes of collective identification and social cohesion. The policy was the first attempt to reconcile the practices of both ministries, and encourage productive synergies to guide and strengthen the industry of tourism, but also the conservation of the cultural, both material and immaterial, patrimony.

In 2008, under the rubric of this policy and using the celebration of the *Bicentennial of Independences* from the Spanish colony as strategic political juncture, the first cultural tourism routes were created. These are thematic routes or journeys that integrate various towns around a particular historical event. They are platforms for cooperation and dialogue between communities, and contribute to economic development. Four *Rutas del Bicentenario de las Independencias 1810-2010* ("Bicentennial of Independences Routes") were launched in Colombia, aiming at reviving the stories of revolution and emancipation that led to Colombia's independence. These routes were:

1. **La Ruta Mutis**: recreates the journey followed by Jose Celestino Mutis (1732-1808)—a Spanish Botanist, doctor, and priest—while leading the *Royal Botanical*

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[5] See the Colombian Cultural National Plan 2001-2010; National Development Plan 2002-2006, 2006-2010, and 2010-2014.

Expedition (1783-1808; 1811-1816) from 1783 until 1808 [6]. The expedition explored around 8,000 km² in a range of climates, using the Magdalena River for access to the interior. It is argued that Mutis influenced and educated much of the Granadina youth, many of which played important roles for independence (José Félix Restrepo, Francisco Antonio Zea, Jorge Tadeo Lozano, and Francisco José de Caldas).

2. **La Ruta de los Comuneros:** celebrates the '*Comunero* Revolution', a twenty-two thousand people mobilization in March 1781 against the impositions of the Spanish Crown, which opened the way towards seeking independence.

3. **La Ruta Libertadora**: re-vives the route followed by Colombia's freedom fighters, Simón Bolivar and Francisco de Paula Santander, which led to independence of the New Granada from the Spanish monarchy, the 7th of August 1819.

4. **La Ruta de la Gran Convención:** recounts the Constitutional Convention of 1828 that took place in Ocaña and aimed at reforming the 1821 Constitution. The idea was to re orient the so-called 'Gran Colombia' (which consisted of Ecuador, Nueva Granada, and Venezuela) towards new political and administrative goals. The outcome was the dissolution of 'La Gran Colombia'.

Four years after their implementation—which involved the participation of MCIT, MC, municipal and departmental authorities, local actors, and international cooperation; and which consisted on a series of diagnostic studies, historical reconstruction, socialization activities, and vast media campaigns—and two years after the celebration of the *Bicentennial of Independences,* only one route remains active. This is *La Ruta Mutis*. The puzzle of this paper is not why *La Ruta Mutis* continues what the other did not, but rather how this one in particular was conceived and put together. *La Ruta Mutis* is located in the center of the country in the southern department of Cundinamarca and the north of Tolima. Seven towns are part of this initiative: La Mesa and Guaduas (from Cundinamarca), and Honda, Mariquita, Ambalema, Falan, and Valle de San Juan (from Tolima). Bogotá and Ibague, both capital cities of the departments are also part of the route[7].

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[6] Mutis passes away the 11 of September of 1808. Mutis' nephew, Sinforoso, leads the *Expedition then,* in 1811 until 1816.
[7] Refer to Map 1 and Map 2 below.

Map 1.

Geographical location of Colombia

Source: Maps of the World (www.mapsoftheworld.com)

Map 2.

Geographical location of *La Ruta Mutis*

Sources: Ministry of Culture, 2010
(http://turismocultural.mincultura.gov.co/?idcategoria=40259)

1.1 Research Focus

This study intends to examine the process of social construction of this new regional project and to analyze the ideational antecedents of identity construction at play. It aims to explore how the roles of the Ministries, private consultants, international sponsors, and local individuals and collective actors—and considering the relationships of power among them—have shaped the project so far. It strives to understand how seven municipalities, previously connected

to the traditional imaginary of region demarcated by departments and the administrative and institutional arrangements that come with it (Cundinamarca and Tolima), are suddenly spatially and historically redefined by the reconstruction of an episode of Colombia's past, in this case the life of Mutis and his *Royal Botanical Expedition*.

Using social constructivism as a theoretical framework and Anssi Paasi's work on New Regional Geography and his conceptualizations of region and regional identity (2011; 2009), this paper attempts to demonstrate, in the light of *La Ruta Mutis* as case study, how tourism has become a fundamental site of the production of regions and alternative collective identities in Colombia. This paper will show how the converge of different elements such as the general perceived notion of safety, the construction of a more positive country's image, the increasing economic performance, and the rise of tourism in Colombia is creating a space that allows for the scrutiny of shared histories—ones that go beyond the recent history of violence—and for the exploration of alternative narratives of *Colombianess*.

Studies on tourism and its effects on societies have become more multi-disciplinary in the last years. Tourism is not longer a subject of concern for economists and managers, but also of sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers who have added new areas of inquiry and reflection of this social phenomenon. Existing literature on tourism deals with the good and detrimental sides of tourism. International organizations such as the World Economic Forum and the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2009) tend to suggest more positive narratives on tourism as "largest employer in most countries and also a fast-lane vehicle into the workforce for young people and women" (weforum.org). UNESCO highlights tourism as a positive force in the conservation of nature and culture, which, by capturing resources of cultural heritage, use them for their very conservation (UNESCO, 1999).

More critical authors, however, have analyzed issues such the marketization of nature onto profitable enclaves for the amusement of eco-tourists (Duffy and Moore, 2010; Brockington

and Schoelfield, 2010), the commodification of culture as a result of tourism (Mbaiwa, 2011), the entanglement of tourism with global politics of land grabbing and accumulation by dispossession (Ojeda, 2011: 31), and folklorization of ethnicity and culture as an effect of tourism. This study does not stand on any of these corners of the debate, which does not mean that is uncritical or politically neutral. Rather, this study adds to the discussion of sociologists and geographers on the production of regions and the construction of regional identities by tourism, and to public policy by showing how particular policy frameworks and programmatic ideas can shape territorial projects in particular ways.

1.2 Methodology

This paper draws on qualitative data and ethnographic observations gathered by the author during a month and half-long fieldwork carried out between 2009 and 2010, while working as AVIATUR organization[8] consultant for the Ministry of Culture. I assisted AVIATUR in the investigation of the touristic potential of *La Ruta Mutis* and wrote a publication about the main cultural manifestations of the municipalities involved. During my fieldwork, I visited all seven municipalities and the two capital cities, where I met with Secretaries of Culture, local entrepreneurs, local historians, and youth artistic groups. I also attended meetings with the MCIT, the Vice-Ministry of Tourism, the MC, municipal authorities, and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI). For this paper, I rely on field notes, meetings minutes, and institutional reports I gathered during the fieldwork.

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[8] Created in 1957, this is a private national travel company, a leading/'expert' figure of tourism in the country. Today, it has the concession of major natural parks (out of 56 in total, which cover 10% of the national territory) of the country such as: Amacayacu, Tayrona, Gorgona Island, Barú, and Los Nevados park)—where it provides eco-tourism services. The concessions were decided by the government of Alvaro Uríbe Vélez (2002-2010) as a response to the lack of institutional and financial capacity of the government (through the National Parks Direction). AVIATUR organization has around 20 specialized companies within it. One of then being AVIAEXPORT, the one I was contracted by to do a consultancy work for Ministry of Culture. AVIAEXPORT supports national companies that want to export products; it attends international fairs of all types, like FITUR. When I was working with them, part of the team went to *Expo Shanghai* to be in charge of the Colombian store of art crafts at the fair.

These observations are, however, complemented and updated through a number of Skype, phone interviews, and e-mail personal communications to former functionaries of the MC and particularly from the Office of Cultural Tourism (which currently does not exist), and some community members[9]. Most of my analysis refers to the initial stages of *La Ruta Mutis* (2008) and the period when AVIATUR stepped in (2009). It is important to state that since the case study is only at a young phase (2008-2012), findings and conclusions made do not attempt to make predictions about how the project will turn out and the welfare impacts of the project in its later stages, nor is the objective of the research to evaluate the project *per se*[10].

This study also draws on secondary data obtained from various sources, mainly through government policies, statistical data, and reports. It also includes documents from international organizations engaged with the issues of tourism and culture. Other documents include newspapers, legal documents, and articles from ministerial websites. I use maps, tables, charts, and photographs to help the reader comprehend the project a bit better.

1.3   Organization of the Paper

The main body of this paper will take on four parts. In **Chapter II**, I present my theoretical framework, which is based on social constructivism and 'New Regionalism' debate (particularly, *à la* Paasi). In **Chapter III**, I provide a context and overview of Colombia's policy framework on tourism. I analyze when, why, and how tourism became an important engine for economic development and looks at the discourses of legitimization and communication strategies that have propelled its existence. I also explain the emergence of the Cultural Tourism Policy. Guided by Passi's framework of institutionalization of region, in **Chapter IV**, I analyze

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[9] In References one can see the list of people interviewed while the researcher was in Budapest, Hungary.

[10] **As author, I am aware of her position within the construction of this cultural region and the role it played in a larger chain of social relations. Many of my observations are informed this role as consultant for the private sector, trying to build from what was done by the Ministry. I acknowledge that even this paper is an artifact that adds to the ideational elements of the construction of region.

the territorial and symbolic shaping of *La Ruta Mutis*. Following that, in **Chapter V**, I scrutinize the institutional shaping and establishment of *La Ruta Mutis*. **Chapter VI**, I will present the conclusions of this research.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

This paper draws heavily on a Social Constructivist approach (hereafter, constructivism) to guide the study of the processes of region- and identity-building. A constructivist theoretical framework would deepen our understanding of the actors, ideas, and political structures that contribute to the emergence and evolution of new regional configurations and new politics of identity in Colombia, with a particular emphasis on *La Ruta Mutis* as case study. This study is located within the broad debate on "New Regionalism"—which since 1980s attempts to explain the new geo-economic and geo-political configurations brought by the neo-liberalization of the global economy and the rise of interdependence. It specifically profits from constructivist Anssi Paasi's conceptualizations of region and identity. As it will become evident in this chapter, this approach would enable us to break through a static image of *La Ruta Mutis* as a given geographical space, and move towards building a more dynamic view of the formation processes of this cultural tourism project.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first explains the main features of constructivism. The second begins by explaining the scholarly debate around 'New Regionalism', within which Anssi Paasi's work is located. Then, I turned to exploring Paasi's ideas: on region as a social construction, the theory of institutionalization of region, and on identity.

2.1 Social Constructivism as a Theoretical Framework: After the ideational antecedents of regionalism and identity

Constructivism arose in the 1980s as a bridge between extreme forms of positivism (economic determinism) and extreme forms of relativism (cultural determinism) that dominated the understanding of the social world. According to this social theory, nothing is ontologically

given or fixed; on the contrary, everything is constructed and reconstructed via our own inter-subjective and intra-subjective types of meanings and understanding, and via socialization with each other at a particular time and space. Constructivism offers a non-essentialized view of reality, and is prepare to grasp "a world of human consciousness: of thoughts and beliefs, of ideas, and concepts, of languages and discourses, of signs, signals and understandings among human beings…" (Jackson, 2007: 162), all which shape particular contexts.

To achieve such purchase of the social world constructivists depart from taking structure and agency as mutually constituted: agents create structures and structures affect and shape agents' life. This is different from more *rationalist* and *behaviouralists* theories. Second, although, ontologically, there is recognition of the importance of both, the material basis and ideational basis of reality, for constructivists, in general, ideas are preeminent in explaining political, economic, and social outcomes[11]. Ideas are defined as "mental constructs held by individuals, sets of distinctive beliefs, principles and attitudes that provide broad orientations for behavior and policy" (Tannenwald, 2005: 15). They matter not only because "they mop up some unexplained variance in a particular outcome of interest…but because they are simultaneously the media through which agents understand the world and the material that constitutes it" (Blyth, 2011: 84). Inter-subjective ideas become analytical entities by themselves that can explain how particular contexts and trajectories are created and how they evolve over time[12].

In addition to the critical role played by inter-subjective meanings and ideas in polity formation, constructivists also draw attention to the role of language and discourse. Different

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[11]Although the common ground between constructivist is the focus on the role of ideas, their emphasis differ according to how they conceive and handle materiality. For more extreme forms of social constructivism, there is a direct relation of the ideational on the material, of language and discourse on material reality (which may or may not exist, as material reality or 'constructed' reality). However, there is no expected reaction of the material on the ideational as a result. One determines the other without expecting effects that may change the position of ideas. For others, ideational and material factors are mutually constitutive of reality. Ideas are bias and speak to particular specific interest and through the power of consent are telling it to others as if they were their own. Dominant groups present their ideas representing their specifically interest but assuming that their interests are the ones of society itself: ideas here help construct a reality coming from the interest, actually constituting with materiality at the same time

[12] For constructivist continuity depends on the sustainability of a particular crafting by dominant actors.

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from a post-modernist or Derridian[13] understanding of discourse, which puts emphasis on the contend and ways to convey ideas, for constructivists as Vivian Schmidt discourse is "the process of generating, deliberating and/or legitimizing ideas about political action (Schmidt, 2011: 47). In other words, "discourse is not only about what is said, but also about who said what to whom, when, where, why" (*ibid.* 56). With this understanding of discourse as an interactive process, we can say that it is through discursive practices that agents make sense of the world, construct, and attribute meaning to their activities.

Table 1.1. presents a five-dimensional constructivist analytical framework proposed by Claudia M. Fabbri (2005: 8-10) in her study about regionalism in South America. This comprehensive framework encapsulates a number of the ideational dimensions study by constructivists. This framework orients this study into what to look at when trying to understand the ideational antecedents of *La Ruta Mutis*.

Table 1.1.

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[13] The work of post-structuralist Jacques Derrida.

A Constructivist Analytical Framework (Claudia M. Fabbri 2005: 8-10)

Worldviews
- Overarching and prevailing ways of looking at reality
- Draw on shared knowledge and inter-subjective understandings and provide a set of assumptions and meanings
- Can be recognized as such because, following processes of internalization and institutionalization
- Collectively held and widely accepted to the point of being reified or 'taken for granted'
- Act as structures by constraining and enabling actors' goals

Programmatic ideas
- Programmatic ideas include statements about cause-effect relationships
- Provide resources for constructing organized strategies of action
- Highly technical language and end up in concrete policy discourse and action.
- Can be investigated by identifying what actors define as policy problems, how objectives are prioritized, and which links actors perceive between the policy instruments adopted and the desired policy outcomes.

Critical Junctures
- Contribute to discrediting certain ideas and enabling others to emerge and become politically significant
- Three key types: shocks, dissatisfaction or disappointment with the status quo, and congruence or 'fit' between ideas and circumstances

Diffusion mechanisms
- Processes of interaction are crucial to understanding
- Shape the currency of ideas and help understand how particular ideas are transmitted, selected, and become taken for granted.
- There are three main diffusion mechanisms: socialization, internalization, and learning.

Ideational entrepreneurs
- Ideas gain their prevalence because they are advocated by ideational entrepreneurs responsible for defining the terms of social construction.
- Attention to the actions, resources, and inclinations of particular political actors and how these factors affect the political life of ideas

Constructivists have been heavily criticized, however, for neglecting the importance of material forces in their analyses (see the critique of Sikkink 1991 by Jacobsen 1995). "In the process of emphasizing the social construction of identities and interests, constructivists have generally tended to ignore the important constitutive role of the global economy" (Varadarajan, 2004: 320). This study concurs with this critique and acknowledges that other ontological and theoretical approaches may be able to explore more deeply the material basis of certain events[14]. Having said so, however, this research will strive in treating the material basis as ground for ideas, policies and worldviews, as considered by "New Regionalism".

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[14] Examples of this are: the Morphogenetic approach of Margaret Archer (1995; 1998) for whom, although structure and agency must be regarded as being mutually constituted, structure precedes agency and changes in structure post-date actions of agents; and Neo-Gramscian perspectives such as the work of Robert Cox (1983; 1986) who explores the role of the material conditions of production but fully aware of the individual agencies and particular ideas.

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Through the use constructivism, this paper seeks to explore the tenets that have characterized that production of *La Ruta Mutis*. The framework will shed light to the wide rage of political actors and their relations of power and political ideas that were at play in the articulation of this cultural tourism project.

2.2 'New Regionalism' and 'New Politics of Identity' as Analytical Lenses

In recent years, critical geographers, heterodox political economists, historical sociologists, and urbanists have become attuned to the changing spatialities of the contemporary world (Brenner, 2009; Passi, 2000; Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000). With the geo-economic and geo-political transformations post-1970s, and the subsequent move from Cold War bipolarity towards multi-polarity, the erosion of the Wesphalian nation-state system, the deepening of interdependence and the neo-liberalization of the global economy (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2000: 457: Paasi, 2009), a boom of regionalisms and regionalist projects have occurred worldwide, the EU only being the most sounding example of this phenomenon. In the midst of this, regions started to be seen as fundamental building blocks or motors of human activity (with its multiple dimensions), becoming subjects of scholarly scrutiny. The re-emerging interest in regions became, hence, an expression of the changing functions and re-scaling processes of state governance that has occurred as part of globalization (Jessop, 2002; Brenner, et al. 2003)[15].

'New Regionalism' is a broad strand of research—a heterogeneous constellation of interrelated discussions from different academic specializations (Brenner, 2009: 124). It emerged in the late 1980s intending to develop new theoretical frameworks and methods to make sense of these geo political changes and regional (de-) integration. Different from the 'Old' or 'first' regionalism, which refers to the first post-World War II initiatives of integration, 'New

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[15] Unfortunately, due to spatial constraints, I cannot extend into the debates relating to regionalism and globalization. It is however, important to mention that there are different views on the nature of this relationship. One of these views by Hettne (2006: 548) states that "regionalization and globalization represent related but different aspects of the contemporary transformation of world order…and may have different impacts at different points in time." He contends that globalization can be seen as Polanyian 'second Great Transformation', and regionalism can be part of both, the first and second movement, "with neoliberal face in the first and more interventionist orientation in the second" (Ibid.)

Regionalism' is not confined merely to formal inter-state regional organizations and institutions, but is "a heterogeneous, comprehensive, multidimensional phenomenon, which involves state, market and society actors and covers economic, cultural, political, security and environmental aspects" (Öjendal et al. 2001a: 4).

"New Regionalism" scholars have looked at this phenomenon at various spatial scales, yet, most of the work has focused on macro-regions or supra-national both, intra- and inter-continental regions—the European Union, being the most prevalent case study. Other studies have scrutinized the rise and functioning of NAFTA and ASEA, while others, the global city regions or polycentric urban regions—currently proposed as motors of future regional dynamism (Paasi, 2011: 10). It is, however, mainly in the field of geography where regions are sub-national entities. Having set the stage within which debates on regions and identity rest upon, and given the sub-national scale of the case study of this paper, I now turn to the work of a constructivist geographer Anssi Paasi.

2.3   Region as a Social Construct and Regional Identity à la Paasi

Since the late 1980s, Paasi's main research has been on how regions 'become' and how social power is involved in region-building processes and territorial identities. He contends that regions are "social constructs that do not rise in a vacuum but that are made in broader social practice—hence contested results of power relations" (Paasi, 2009: 133). He argues that they are both, outcomes and manifestations of the perpetual and contested meaning making occurring in a wider network of social relations (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2011: 165). Regions, hence, should not be regarded as "isolated, bounded islands" but embedded in networks and processes extending well beyond the administrative borders of its confines (Paasi, 2010).

For Paasi, one of the main differences between 'old' regions and 'new' regions (the dichotomy explained above) is that 'new' regions are "typically constructed as *ad hoc* projects aimed at developing or increasing competitiveness of such units" (Paasi, 2009; Paasi and

Zimmerbauer, 2011: 169). He contends that they are often ahistorical[16], bureaucratic constructs, separate from daily life and the spatial identities of citizens. Whereas 'old' regions "have normally become institutionalized as part of the rising spatial and social divisions of labor, and often established parts of the regional system and social consciousness i.e. Swiss Cantons, Dutch provinces" (*Ibid.*). In their research, Deas and Lord have identified, what they called, 'unusual or non standard regions'. For them, this phenomenon may suggest that another 'new regionalism' can be discerned: one that moves from a their connection with functional metropolitan areas or culturally and administratively distinct provincial regions, towards non-standard areas that relate to ideological perceptions of the changing nature of economic space" (2006: 1865). In practice, both types of regions overlap.

In order to conceptualize the dimensions of region-building processes, Paasi developed what he calls the *theory of institutionalization of regions.* He takes regions as historical (ly contingent) processes and suggests openness in that constitutive forces of regions may originate endogenously or exogenously (Paasi 2009: 133). Four mutually reinforcing and simultaneous stages are abstracted for analytical purposes from this process. These stages are summarized in the table below. (**Table 1.2**, put together in such way by this author).

As Paasi argues, "regions are not merely passive backgrounds for social action (not just context), but rather the are both constituted by and constitutive of the institutionalization of this very action that fuses space, power relations, ideological struggle over meanings and identity discourses and materiality" (Paasi and Zimmerbauer, 2011: 165). The present study will try to explore how government officials engage in the process of constructing collective imaginaries simultaneously with the construction of regions, by using history-based rhetoric.

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[16] This 'ahistorical' should not be conflated with the 'ahistorical' used in the first paragraph of this sub-section. What Paasi seems to mean in this second use is that 'new' regions are deliberately produced, often without historical genes in its identity, but rather contemporary ideas to propel identity and cohesion. This is not totally the case of *La Rutas Mutis*, but we will see later on as the paper develops.
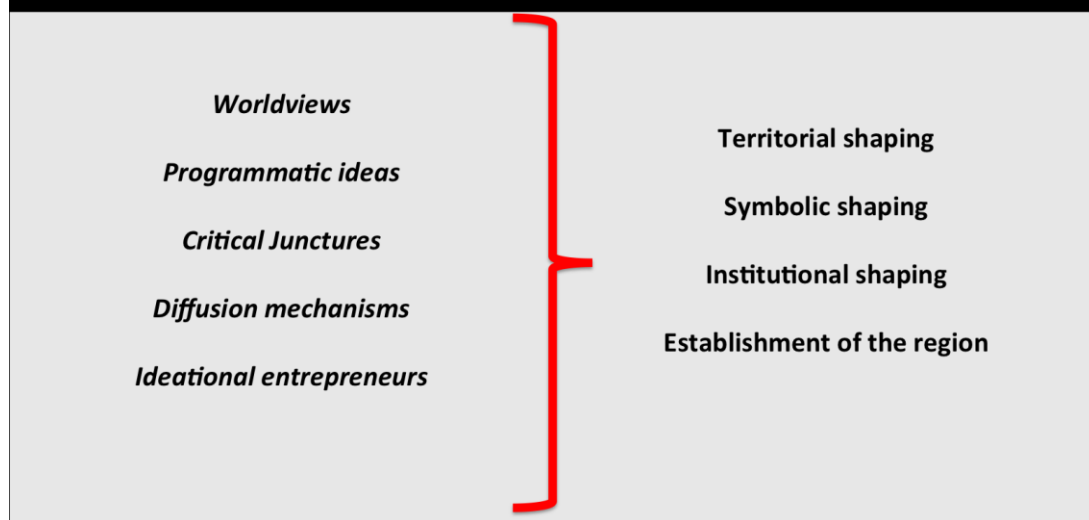
Table 1.2.

Stage	Definition
Territorial Shaping	• Emerges with history or ad hoc • Refers to the emerge of boundaries which vary from 'soft' to 'hard' • Used to distinguished the unit in question • Distinction: political, economic, cultural and administrative practices
Symbolic Shaping	• Process of naming and creation of other symbols • Regional symbols and meanings often bring together the past, present and future of a region, and they have a key role in making a meaning for social and economic life • To produce and reproduce social integration and socio-spatial distinction • render possible the representation, signification and legitimation of the regional 'reality'.
Institutional Shaping	• Development of formal and informal institutions • Informal i.e. regional ways to do things • Formal i.e. political organizations • Institutional thickness and the interaction and networking both inside and externally
Establishment of the Region	• At the supra-state level: sovereignty of the unit is recognized • Sub-national: gaining an administrative status • Ready to be used in struggles over power, resources, reproduced in discourses

For the purposes of this study, I find useful to fuse Fabbri's categories of analysis with Paasi's Theory of Institutionalization of Region. Hence, by focusing on what are the worldviews, programmatic ideas, diffusion channels and ideational entrepreneurs—all which are located in a particular time and space and influenced by certain historical junctures, I would be then able to explain how *La Ruta Mutis* has been shaped in those four mutually constitutive dimensions (Table 1.3.)

Table 1.3.

An Aggregated Constructivist Analytical Approach to Region-Building (by the author)

Worldviews

Programmatic ideas

Critical Junctures

Diffusion mechanisms

Ideational entrepreneurs

Territorial shaping

Symbolic shaping

Institutional shaping

Establishment of the region

Chapter 3 Background and Policy Framework of La Ruta Mutis

This chapter provides an overview of the tourism policy and discursive context within which our case study emerged and stands today. It proceeds from the understanding that investigating the emergence of a 'new' regional project cannot be done in a vacuum: it must take into account the contextual backdrop in which it is embedded and the politics and processes that are implicated when policy directions are set and implemented. Rather than just enlisting the existing tourism policies, this chapter goes one step deeper and explores the socio-political and historical underpinnings that may account for tourism becoming the third highest source of foreign exchange earnings in the country today, after oil and coal[17] (DPN, 2010). It analyses when, why, and how tourism became an important engine for economic development and looks at the discourses of legitimization and communication strategies that have been used by the Colombian state since the mid-1990s to promote it. This chapter argues that tourism is a centrepiece of the Neoliberal project introduced in the country by the early 1990s, promoted through a state-led double strategy of securitization and country re-branding campaign as one of the most important national (but also nationalizing) projects.

3.1 Promoting Tourism in the Midst of Conflict: When, Why, and How come?

There is no doubt that Colombia has potential for tourism. Its biodiversity—ranked second largest in the world, with nearly 3,000 different species of birds, mammals and amphibians—, a very high proportion of protected areas (30 per cent of the total land), well reputed beaches in the Caribbean sea, rapidly modernizing and cosmopolitan urban centres, and

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[17] According to MCIT-DPN 2011, tourism is the third most important sector after oil and coal in raising foreign exchange earnings. The increase of travellers from 2002 to 2009 generated an increase from US$ 1,2 Billion (2002) to US$2,6 Billion in 2009—an increment of 115% (Ibid. 19).

its cultural richness are all clear strengths to build upon in developing the tourism industry (WEF, 2010: 25-26)[18]. However, Colombia displays a number of deficiencies,[19] the most important being the issue of insecurity.

As it is well known, Colombia has been immersed in armed conflict since the 1940s; a situation that has deep roots in agrarian tensions and bipartisan political violence, partly instigated by the historical unequal distribution and high concentration of land. Although, the violence generated by the confrontations between left-wing guerillas—the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN)—the paramilitary forces, and drug mafias has diminished quite impressively in the last decade, the conflict still remains. Since when, why and how, then, a country still in war decides to bet on tourism as an engine for development and achieves re-positioning itself in the global tourism map (UNWTO, 2009)[20]?

Before the 1990s, tourism was considered a low-growth service industry in Colombia, this was partly due to the internal violence. It was the early 1990s, however, that first set the ground for considering tourism as a plausible economic sector, imbued in emerging narratives around ideas of competitiveness brought by the installment of a Neoliberal project. In 1990 the Colombian government, under the presidency of César Gavíria (1990-1994), initiated a transition towards an economic liberalization known as *Apertura Económica* (economic opening). "A convinced Neoliberal" (Gutiérrez and Schönwälder, 2010), Gavíria managed to foster a constitutional process that resulted in the creation of the 1991 Political Constitution, which included both, deeply Neoliberal clauses and an ample proposal of democratization (*ibid.* 217).

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[18] In 2008, Colombia ranked 23rd and 33rd in the world, respectively, for the number of World Heritage natural and cultural sites (WEF, 2010: 27).

[19] Other deficiencies are poor hygiene conditions, limited availability of healthcare services, underdeveloped infrastructure—especially true for ground transport and tourism-specific infrastructure—and low levels of education and training in general and particularly for tourism operators (WEF, 2010: 27).

[20] Colombia is the first South American country to join the UNWTO/WTTC Global Leaders for Tourism Campaign, which seeks political support at the highest level for the tourism sector.

The implementation of the first component of the agenda included canonical measures[21] such as deregulation, privatization[22], and a move from a tax system based on proportionality towards a "flattening out"; a stimuli to foreign investment, flexibilization of labor, and the freezing of all attempts of land re-distribution (*Ibid.*).

The idea of competitiveness played a crucial role in the reconceptualization of the tourism project in the country. President Gavíria's National Development Plan titled "The Pacific Revolution" clearly epitomized this worldview:

> According to the modern theory of development, the purpose of the State is not to substitute the market and competition, but to promote them, because the **most competitive** economies have been the most efficient, and because the **most efficient** have generated the **most growth and equality**. There are evident benefits from the promotion of competition among enterprises and sectors. This compels one to assign resources efficiently, so then, can be manifested in a **more competitive production** and more **competent producers** (PDN 1990-1994: 5. Emphasis given by the author).

Between 1992 and 1993, in an attempt to know how to attract higher levels of foreign investment and to position its exports more profitably in the market, the Colombian government contracted the *Monitor Company* to carry out a study that could suggest a strategy to move forward in these respects. *Monitor* had Michael Porter—Harvard leading authority on competitive strategy and economic development of nations—on board (MCIT, 2009). The study, which included interviews with 250 government officials and entrepreneurs, presented a document written by Porter himself that identified tourism as a sector of great potential for the creation of the competitive advantage of Colombia. This document provided the guidelines for drafting the first General Tourism Law, Law 300 of 1996. Following Porter's ideas, the Colombian state began actively promoting tourism in collaboration with the private sector through the establishment of

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[21] Gutiérrez and Schönwälder (2010) argue there were some exceptional specificities and surprising outcomes during first years of the implementation of the Neoliberal project: "Between 1990 and 1996, social investment by the central government grew from 3.9 to 6.9 per cent of GNP; resources for health and education grew from 2.5 to 3.4 per cent and from 0.7 to 1.2 per cent of GNP, respectively. Investment in justice and security also grew (1.9 to 2.4 per cent, and 0.6 to 1.1 per cent, respectively" (2010: 217)

[22] Privatization of manufacturing companies; natural gas and gasoline distribution; electricity regulation; Maritime Ports; and was then followed by the Health system, Public services (partially), banking, and the Colombian Petroleum Company–ECOPETROL (partially).
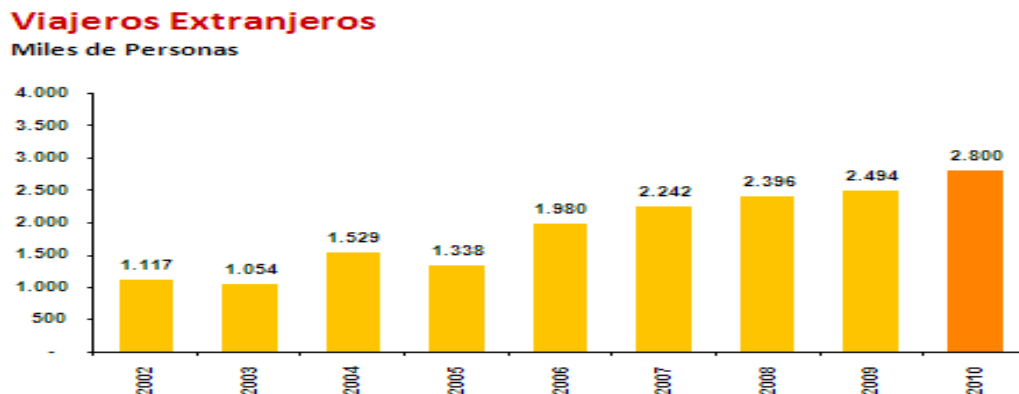
a series of measures, which included: visa exemptions for some countries[23], infrastructure development, and deregulation measures. The mid-1990s, hence, provided the ideological, legal and strategic initial framework to propel tourism under the promise that it would make Colombia more competitive in the global market.

During President Andrés Pastrana (1998-2002) tourism declined to the lowest figures and its promotion was not a programmatic priority. In the Sectorial Tourism Policy (MCIT, 2000), two years delayed, tourism was promoted as "a fundamental tool for surpassing conflict and for national re-construction" (*Ibid.* 9). For Pastrana's team tourism was viewed as an alternative economic activity for the substitution of illicit crops, through the promotion of eco-tourism projects, for example. The policy drew a connection between tourism, peace-building and the Plan Colombia—a US$1.6 billion military/counter-narcotics aid package agreed by Pastrana and Bill Clinton in the year 2000 (*ibid.*). The author could not find much data regarding the actual implementation and outcomes of this policy, certainly an interesting issue for future research. It is worth noting, however, that during these years all the attention was on the peace negotiations between Pastrana's government and the FARC. After almost three and half years of conversations, and a few months before presidential elections, negotiations were ended. It has been argued that rather than working towards peace during the negotiations, guerrillas and paramilitaries strengthened in number and military capacity (Rojas, 2009: 227).

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[23] Colombia achieved a fairly liberal visa regime. By 2008, citizens from 87 out of the 192 United Nations members (45%) were exempt from obtaining a visitor visa or could obtain one upon arrival. This is coupled with an absence of passport requirement for citizens of Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia and Peru (WEF, 2010: 11).

Figure 1.1

International Tourist arrivals 2002-2010, Colombia

Viajeros Extranjeros
Miles de Personas

Año	Miles de Personas
2002	1.117
2003	1.054
2004	1.529
2005	1.338
2006	1.980
2007	2.242
2008	2.396
2009	2.494
2010	2.800

Source: MCIT-DPN, 2011: 18

Figure 1.2

International tourism receipts (US$ millions), 2002-2009

Año	US$ millions
2002	1.237
2003	1.192
2004	1.366
2005	1.570
2006	2.009
2007	2.263
2008	2.499
2009	2.669
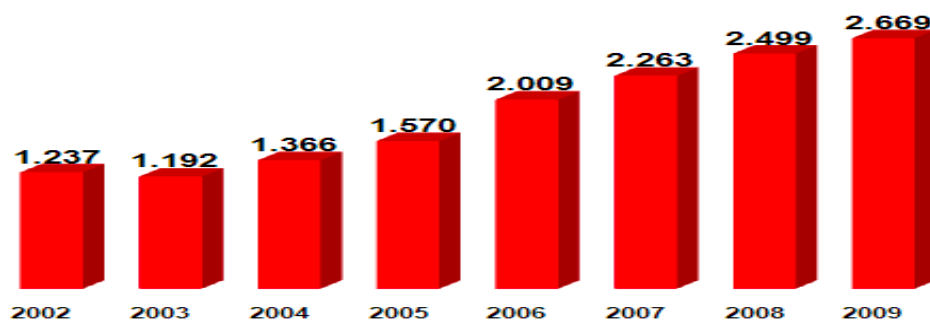
Source: MCIT-DPN, 2011: 19

After Pastrana's failed attempt to bring conflict to an end throughout a peaceful venue, which led to more violence and economic downturn,[24] over 50 per cent of Colombians elected Álvaro Uribe Vélez as president—who had promised law and order, and military crackdown of the guerrillas. Uribe's core objectives during the eight years of power (2002-2010)—as he was re-elected in 2006—were security and economic development (DPN, 2003: 19). In order to achieve

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[24] Between 1998 and 1999 the economy contracted by 9 per cent and the country's debt jumped from 34 per cent of GDP to 41.3 per cent, while unemployment rose to 18 per cent (Rojas, 2009: 228). It is important to put this situation into the financial crisis context as well.

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the former, Uribe launched the "Defence and Democratic Security Policy"—which aimed at empowering military, restoring government control over order and security, and holding all armed groups accountable for their actions (Mason, 2003: 392). For the latter, one of the main strategies was to challenge the stereotypical images of Colombia (related to violence, drugs, corruption, and backwardness) with more positive images of it. These two strategies in combination proved useful for the promotion of tourism. Tourism was also institutionally upgraded during Uribe's era, passing from having a directorate at the Ministry of Economic Development, to getting a Vice-Minister in the newly merged Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism (MCIT)[25].

For our purposes, I want to highlight three initiatives that emerged during Uribe's time in office and that have incentivized tourism domestically and from overseas[26], as well as helped re-inventing the image of Colombia. They were important programmatic components of both Tourism Sectorial Plans: 1) "Tourism for a New Country 2003-2006" (MCIT, 2003) and 2) "Colombia: World Class Touristic Destination 2008-2010" (MCIT-DPN, 2008)[27].

- ***Caravanas: Vive Colombia*** *(*"Caravans: 'Live Colombia'")*: launched in October 2002, this was a security strategy around the idea of making *rutas seguras* (safe routes[28]) for domestic travelling during holidays and high season, by reclaiming back areas that were under the control of insurgent and narco-trafficking groups. It included the organization of "caravans" to point or events of touristic interest. This campaign was very successful in restoring the free movements of Colombians and tourist alike, notably through the creation of 2,234 *rutas seguras* (WEF, 2010: 13). Besides allowing free mobility, this initiative also opened the space for social exchange and appreciation of cultural diversity within the territory—an experience that was limited before by fear of kidnapping or violent attacks.

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[25] The result of the coming together of the Ministry of Economic Development with the Ministry of International Commerce.

[26] Mainly targeting tourist from Latin America, the US and the EU, which are the main commercial partners for Colombia. The following are the countries that have responded best to the promotion: México, US, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Perú, Ecuador, Venezuela, UK, Germany, Spain, Italy and Poland (UNWTO, 2009: 18). The main tourist destinations are: Bogotá, Medellín, and Cartagena (urban tourism).

[27] 1) *Turismo para un Nuevo País 2003-2006*; 2) *Colombia: Destino Turístico de Clase Mundial 2008-2010*

[28] Mostly, those that connect main urban centres with seaside attractions.

- ***Colombia es Pasión*** ("Colombia is Passion"): launched in 2004, this second initiative was a nation-branding strategy led by Lina Moreno de Uribe (the first lady) and the president of ProExport of the time, co-financed by the private sector (70 per cent) and the government of Colombia (Sepúlveda, 2008). The objective was to create a country-image, one that could capture more positive features of Colombia to be shared abroad, aiming at strengthening the country's reputation to attract more tourism, foreign investment, and business opportunities. The final logo represents the warm heart of Colombians with the rising steam of a Colombian cup of coffee[29]. The branding strategy had two dimensions: one of which is directed towards nationals—persuading them to comprise with the image of the country and stand by it (*Muestra tú Pasión*/"Show your Passion"), while the second is towards non-nationals. As any brand, *Colombia es Pasión* travels to international meetings, fairs and conferences; with national sports, entrepreneurs and government teams. *Colombia es Pasión* was managed by Alexandra Torres Asch, the same person who in 2007 would proposed the creation of *La Ruta Mutis* to the incoming Minister of Culture, Paula Moreno (2007-2010).

- ***Colombia: El Riesgo es que te Quieras Quedar*** ("Colombia: the Only Risk is Wanting to Stay"). This third advertising and marketing campaign is part of the country brand *Colombia es Pasión*, but particularly designed for tourism promotion. It emerged in 2007 as an attempt to turn a negative image of insecurity and risk associated to the country, into a positive one; turn risk into an opportunity. The campaign launched a web portal in five languages (www.colombia.travel)[30].

The 2006 report to the Colombian congress presented positive results in both security and the economy, giving substance and legitimacy to the campaigns. Since 2002 the homicide rate had declined by 43.2 per cent and the number of kidnapped had decreased from 2,900 to 687. By the same year, foreign investment grew by 194 per cent and the GDP grew by 6.8 per cent (the

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[29] In 2006, it won the prize to the best logo and design by *The American Design Awards* (UNWTO, 2009: 16).
[30] In 2009, the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the UNWTO and the European Travel Commission-ETC published two studies celebrating Colombia's internal and external efforts in shaping the industry of tourism and successfully re-creating the image of the country. The 2010 white paper by the World Economic Forum also highlights the efforts of the Colombia government to challenge stereotypes and stigma.
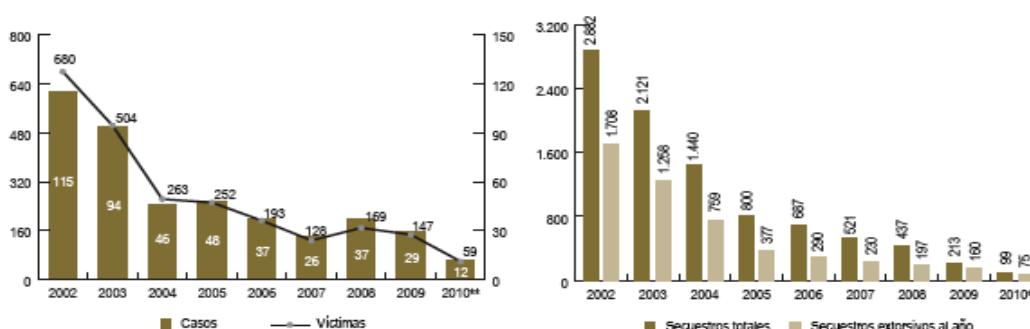
highest since 1978)[31]. By the end of Uribe's presidency, official statistics showed how homicide and kidnapping cases continued decreasing (see Figure 1.3 below), while GDP grew by 4.0 per cent between 2006 and 2010.

Figure 1.3

Collective Homicide and Kidnapping 2002-2010, Colombia

Gráfico 1.1

Homicidio colectivo y Evolución secuestros

Homicidio colectivo: asesinato de cuatro o más civiles, efectuado por un mismo actor o grupo en un mismo lapso.
**Datos enero - mayo de 2010.*
Fuente: CICRI-DIJIN- Policía Nacional - Fondelibertad - Sistema de Seguimiento a Metas de Gobierno.

Source: National Police, *Fondelibertad* and Monitoring System of Government Goals

Current president of Colombia, Juan Manuel Santos (2010-2014), shares this vision and supports tourism as "factor for prosperity". Departing from what is already in place, Santos' general objective is to improve the competitiveness of the tourism services and destinations, as to convert tourism into a sustainable development strategy able to generate employment and prosperity for the regions (MCIT-DPN, 2011: 23).

As it was shown, tourism has been transformed from being an unnoticeable low-growth service industry before the 1990s, to becoming a fundamental national economic project and strategic ally in the country's search for a strong competitive position within the global market—

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[31] Parallel to this official optimistic narrative that undoubtedly managed to influenced Colombians and foreigners general perception about the country, rest stories of dirty war by the paramilitaries and their links with security forces; irregular stories of forced displacement of peasant communities, and the murder of innocent civilians by the military who argued that they were guerrilla members.

following the neoliberal tenets that arose in early 1990s. This has been done through a state-led double strategy of securitization and country re-branding campaign, for which tourism has been, at the same time, an instrumental factor[32]. On the way to position tourism globally, but also, to regain foreign investors interest and trust in the country, this strategy has become almost a new type of nationalism. It is yet not clear whether this nationalism is a positive one—in that it allows Colombians to experience other dimensions of their country and their identity, besides what now is considered "the culture of violence"—or whether is a negative one—in that it may conceal important unresolved tensions of the country and be more of a brain washing than an identity construction tool. Although, this is certainly an interesting question, in this paper, I will just focus on how Cultural Tourism—as shown by *La Ruta Mutis*—may actually be able to provide historical and cultural content to a region and to a nation that has been trapped in an identity defined by conflict.

3.2   Cultural Tourism in Colombia

Although, it is common to find references to culture in legal and policy documents in Colombia, the Cultural Tourism is relatively new. Cultural Tourism Policy was only drafted in 2007—being one of the latest of its kind in Latin America.[33] According to the 1991 Colombian Constitution, "culture, in its diverse manifestations, is the basis for nationality." This statement already highlights the significance of culture in Colombia's nation-building project. The first General Law on Culture, Law 397 of 1997, defines cultural patrimony as,

> the set of cultural goods and values which are expressions of the Colombian nationality, such as tradition, customs, habits, material and immaterial goods, movable and immovable property, all which have a particular historical, artistic, aesthetic, plastic, architectonic, urban, archaeological, scientific, ecological…interest, cultural manifestations, products, and representations of popular culture (MC, 2007: 400).

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[32] Despite of the priority given to the sector in the last decade, there is not notable increase of government expenditure on it, which remains at the 2.04 per cent of the total budget in 2008. Countries like Egypt spend 6.66 percent, Costa Rica 6.15 and only South Africa is below Colombia with less than 0.54 percent of the total budget (WEF, 2010: 15).
[33] Perú, México, Chile.

Departing from that definition, the National Cultural Plan 2001-2010 "*Hacia una ciudadanía democrática cultural*[34]"states that for the sustainability of cultural patrimony is necessary to develop strategic alliances with the tourism sector, and move towards constructing a typology of Cultural Tourism.

Having these policies as fundamental background, and following the General Tourism Law of 1996, which acknowledges the importance of cultural values for tourism, MCIT and MC formulated the first Cultural Tourism Policy of Colombia in 2007[35]. The policy had a number of goals in mind. The first was to strive for making cultural patrimony conservation practices and tourism development complementary and not antagonistic (2007: 401). Second, to utilize all the cultural endowments of the country in an effort to differentiate in an increasingly globalized tourism industry. Third, to use it as social transformation tool, which by highlighting shared features and values could enhance regional development. It is on the basis of this policy that *Las Rutas del Bicentenario*, of which *La Ruta Mutis* is part of, emerged.

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[34] In English, "Towards a Cultural Democratic Citizenry"
[35] The policy was introduced during the XVII General Assembly of the United Nations World Tourism Office (UNWTO) that took place in Cartagena, Colombia.

Chapter 4   Territorial and Symbolic Shaping of La Ruta Mutis

Having explained the policy terrain in which *La Ruta Mutis* emerges, highlighting the guiding principles of tourism as a national and 'nationalizing' project, I now move to the actual case. In the following two chapters, I will explain the process through which seven municipalities come to constitute a regional project, founded on an exercise of history-based planning rhetoric and socialization into Mutis's life and his *Royal Botanical Expedition*. I look at the ideational entrepreneurs, the socialization processes (looking at who is, and why one is socialized), the critical junctures, and the discourses that together, gave life and shape to this new regional project. I use Paasi' stages of Institutionalization of Regions (2009) to organize my analysis. Although, I do agree that these four stages are simultaneous and mutually reinforcing all along the formation process—and not pretending to extract complexity out of these messy interactions—for organizational purposes, I would aggregate them into two moments: 1) Territorial and Symbolic shaping and 2) Institutionalization and Establishment of the region.

4.1   The Politics of Parachuting New Regional Configurations

La Ruta Mutis arises in a convenient historical moment for Colombia. On the one hand, Uribe had won the re-election in 2006, which corroborated popular approval to his national project and policy orientation; violence had diminished and since 2005, the government had begun to implement post-conflict type of programs such as DDR[36] and truth telling initiatives, which despite of criticism[37], influenced people's perceptions of their own country and future; by

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[36] Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration of paramilitary members.
[37] Regarding peace efforts, critics argue that the spaces abandoned by the guerrillas are being coopted by paramilitaries that have extended their influence across the country, even permeating the political system (Ducan, 2005). In relation to post-conflict initiatives, critics contend that they are being softer with perpetrators rather than with victims.

2006, tourism was already 77 per cent higher than when Uribe first took office in 2002 (MCIT-DPN, 2011: 18), and *Colombia es Pasión* was already giving goose bumps to many. In addition, Uribe had appointed the youngest minister in history, Afro-Colombia descendant Paula Moreno, as Ministry of Culture, who had to—among many responsibilities—prepare the celebration of the *Bicentennial of Independence 1810-2010*—a celebration that was to coincide with Uribe's last month in office.

The idea of *Rutas del Bicentenario* and *La Ruta Mutis* in particular, came from Alexandra Torres Asch in 2007—manager of *Colombia es Pasión* and currently executive director of Bogotá's Convention Bureau[38]. For her, the idea was not only compatible with the Cultural Tourism Policy just drafted and the 2010 celebration, but also thought as to support Bogotá's tourism package. For her it was important to have neighboring municipalities adding concept and culture to the tourism offer of the capital (Personal interview). The idea was socialized to the Minister Moreno, who delegated it to the new Cultural Tourism Office[39] of her ministry, headed by Jaime Andrés Ramirez. Ramirez gave a different emphasis to the idea. In his words,

> the life of Mutis and his Royal *Botanical Expedition* seemed like a powerful concept to integrate communities that were protagonists of historical events that marked the birth of our nation (MC, 2010).

But, besides the proximity of the *Royal Botanical Expedition's* territory to Bogotá (as highlighted by Torres), what else made Mutis a powerful concept around which to integrate communities?

Mutis and his personal story happened to embody many important features for the development of a project. Being considered one of the instigators of independence, he was a

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[38] As manager of *Colombia es Pasión*, Torres was in charge of creating the brand, as well as its design and its financing. Bogotá's Convention Bureau is an expert agency in organizing corporate events. The aim is to promote the capital city as one of the most important in Latin America to carry out international corporate events.

[39] The office was not just in charge of *Las Rutas del Bicentenario*, but other projects of Cultural Tourism in the country. The office worked in coordination with the Vice-Ministry of Tourism from the MCIT, so, every time I refer to the 'Office', I am actually talking about this alliance (unless, I specify the opposite).

positive historical figure to be proud of and be enhanced in the collective memory of Colombians; besides, his life history connected well with the *Bicentennial of Independences* thematic program of the context. Second, his facet as botanist who catalogued around 20,000 plants and 7,000 animals in the region, gave room for exploring issues of conservation, scientific exploration, and eco-tourism within the regional project; his religious identity for connecting him to religious tourism and patron saints festivities. All in all, Mutis and the *Royal Botanical Expedition* constitute an integral and multifaceted concept to create region.

La Ruta Mutis was the first route to be developed out of the four. The reason: the bicentennial of Mutis' death to be commemorated the 11 of September 2008—which seemed like the best opportunity to launched it. To prepare for that, the regional boundaries needed to be decided: *Which municipalities are going to be part of La Ruta Mutis?* Although, one might think that the journey of Mutis was to give the answer, the process was not that straightforward. It involved a lot of historical interpretation and re-interpretation, and close doors discussions between the MC and MCIT about what constitute a cultural attraction and a touristic attraction. This initial event brought to light the difficulties of operationalizing the all-encompassing policy on Cultural Tourism, and revealed the fundamental differences in the way each ministry conceives tourism. After many (still today) unresolved tensions, four municipalities were selected to represent *La Ruta Mutis* (at least at that point): Mariquita, Honda, Ambalema (Tolima), and Guaduas (Cundinamarca).

It is not clear what was the selection criterion used by MC and MCIT besides finding some degree of connection with Mutis. Perhaps, the concept of *Expedition* itself allowed for flexibility at the moment to decide. The truth is that some municipalities had stronger connection with this historical event—the case of Mariquita, which was home for Mutis for thirty years—than others. Honda entered the project because it was the port through which Mutis sent out his findings; Guaduas because of having parts of a royal road walked by the *Expedition* when going

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from Mariquita to Santafé (the capital); and Ambalema because Mutis passed by it before finally settling in Mariquita. It is clear that the definition of the boundaries of this regional project went beyond rigorous historical arguments, to include other infrastructural and cultural considerations, such the beauty and richness of these municipalities' historical centers and surroundings, which played a major role when deciding nomination and entrance into the project[40].

After this initial territorial demarcation, the Cultural Tourism Office began to socialize the idea with various actors at different scales, looking not only for legitimacy, but also for funding. At the international level, the Office developed strategic partnerships with Spain. The *Ajuntamiento de Cadiz*, (birthplace of Mutis), through its major of the time Teófila Martinez, agreed to cooperate with the project by donating 326 thousand Euros[41] (personal communication); the State Society for Cultural Commemorations of Spain (SECC) did so as well, contributing with 275 thousand Euros delivered through the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI)[42] (personal communication). At the departmental and municipal levels, the first interlocutors of this idea were the governors of Cundinamarca and Tolima, municipal authorities of the four towns, and their respective secretaries of culture—all of which agreed to start mapping the strategic local actors and to reach out to local historians to start rescuing the history of Mutis in their communities but also, the history of their town more generally.

According to Ramirez, between January to September 2008,

more than 5 visits to each of the four municipalities were undertaken by the Office, more than 1,000 people were socialized into the project, 80 *Vigías del Patrimonio* (Heritage Tour Guides) received formation, and inventories of both material and immaterial heritage were done in each municipality (personal communication).

When asked who were the "1,000 people", Ramirez explains that they were community members involved in the cultural industry of their towns such as theater, dance, music, and

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[40] Ambalema's historical center was declared National Monument in 1980, Honda's is Historical Heritage of the Nation, and Guaduas does not have a national recognition but it is, with Honda, the best-preserved historical center of the route.
[41] Resources were designated for the restoration of historical heritage of the route.
[42] Resources were designated for road signals and for the education of Heritage Tour Guides (*Vigías del Patrimonio*)

history associations; also hotel and hostel owners, restaurants managers, tour guides and tour operators participated. Convocations to these meetings were responsibility of the secretaries of culture mainly through word of mouth and participation varied between the municipalities. In all four, however, youth were particularly interested. For them, *La Ruta Mutis* was an interesting platform to link to other places and collectivities that share their activities, and a possibility to develop a new market in which to sell their projects outside the limits of their own towns. I will explore this further later in the paper.

The anniversary of the death of Mutis the 11 of September 2008 played a crucial role in the grounding and materialization of the idea. It did so in different ways. First of all, the event—televised in a national channel—strived to re-position and re-value the figure of Mutis into Colombian's shared history and collective memory—opening an unknown or forgotten door of Colombians past that go far beyond the recent history of war. Second, it served as stage for the officialisation of partnerships and commitments to the project. It introduced the major players behind the project, including the major of Cadiz and the delegates from SECC, who publically showed their interest in the development of the route. Third, it was a key moment for regional branding boosting, which added to the process of consolidation. Lastly, it was a public confirmation of an imaginary that had been crafted for already a few months.

The presence of President Uribe and Minister Moreno during the commemoration was particularly symbolic. Although, it is true that Uribe made community meetings with high government officials (including himself) a common practice, not every small region gets to launch a project with him and ministers on board. Hence, their participation gave evidence of strong commitment by the government, but also, appeared to forecast positive results of the project—which was quite a persuasive gesture for the process as a whole. For the government, the event was also an opportunity to send a broader message on the importance of culture in social and

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economic processes, but also as key element in the re-construction of national identity. In the words of the Minister,

> In its now time for Colombians of the XXI century to know and protect the biodiversity of their territory, the same place Mutis explored. We want *La Ruta Mutis* to become an opportunity for people to have direct contact with their culture and history of Colombia (MC 2008).

*

In this chapter, I have explored some of the ideas and interests that informed actors and their roles they have played in the territorial and symbolic shaping of *La Ruta Mutis*. What began as an idea that sought to add to the competitiveness and attractiveness of Bogotá, it evolved into a much more complex project of regional re configuration and alternatives histories and identities of *Colombianess* based on Mutis as meeting point. In this particular historical instant of the project, it is evident that many of the decisions had been deliberated in a top-down approach without much conversation with the communities—despite of socialization events that seemed one-directional rather than in the form of a dialogue. The international cooperation has also played an important role in the shaping process by adding emphasis, through their donations, on particular aspects of *La Ruta Mutis*.

Chapter 5 Institutional Shaping and Establishment of La Ruta Mutis

A few months after the inaugural event, the Cultural Tourism Office—recognized as the highest authority of *La Ruta Mutis*—receives two notifications: the first one says that compare to 2007, tourism had increased by 60 per cent in the municipalities of *La Ruta*. However, a month later, the second notification is, in fact, a series of complaints coming from tourists, regarding the poor infrastructural and tourist services and lack of cultural content in the route. It became clear that what was at place at that the moment was an appealing historical tale, a sounding regional brand, four municipalities highly accessible to people from Bogotá and Ibagué seeking for new destinations, a series of inventories of cultural elements of each of the municipalities, and the financial resources and strategic allies to work with. Yet, there was neither a sense of route nor a sense of individuality within the route. Each of the municipalities was trying to decide how to profit from the idea, finding ways to communicate with their counterparts, while having to take care of so many more pressing issues at the same time. All in all, it became like a new responsibility—that had generated a lot of expectations among community members—that municipalities had not ask for.

Although many of the important elements appeared to be present for the project to work, there were neither formal nor informal institutions that could produce and reproduce the initiative. The only senses of formal institution were: a quite paternalistic relationship with the Cultural Tourism Office and the Vice-Ministry of Tourism, an incipient connection between secretaries of culture, and sporadic/highly bureaucratic meetings between majors and governors. To overcome this disconnection and lack of institutionalism, the Office decided to carry out a diagnostic study on the individual potential of the municipalities, which could hopefully then

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inform the conceptual definition that the route should follow and the role that each member could play in it.

At this moment, however, *La Ruta Mutis* was no longer a route of 4 members, but had become of 7. Local historians from Falan, Valle de San Juan (Tolima), and La Mesa (Cundinamarca)[43] had managed to historically demonstrate their connection with Mutis and the *Royal Botanical Expedition* and hence, appeal for their right to become part of the project. Ramirez argues that the acceptance of the new members was a collective decision of the initial four—their authorities and secretaries of culture—as well as of Cundinamarca's and Tolima's governors (personal communication)[44]. In March 2009, *La Ruta Mutis* is launched again, this time without high national officials as part of the event.

The Office decided to hire private consultants to carry out the study—which included various components and various research teams. One study was on the gastronomy of *La Ruta,* the other on the cultural manifestations, one on handcrafts, and the last one, an all-encompassing diagnostic investigation that could suggest a potential concept of *La Ruta Mutis*. AVIAEXPORT, one of the enterprises of AVIATUR organization—as mentioned in the introduction of this work, leading tourism agency in Colombia and perceived expert in the area—was invited to participate for the fourth task. For Ricardo Ramirez—General Director of AVIAEXPORT, and who at the time was preparing for the management of *La Tienda Colombiana* (Colombian Store) at *Expo-Shanghai 2010*—*La Ruta Mutis* was a meaningful challenge to think creatively on how to reinvigorate the cultural wealth of every one of these municipalities, but ultimately of the nation (personal communication). Many of his insights on how to shape *La Ruta* were informed by his

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[43] For Valle de San Juan (6, 240 inhabitants) *La Ruta Mutis* was an opportunity to reactivate its economy and its social and cultural live, disrupted by paramilitary violence a few years ago. For Falan (9, 250 inhabitants), *it* was a chance to diversify their economy based on agriculture and a platform to create employment opportunities for youth. For La Mesa (28, 710), it was an opportunity to give concept to the agro-tourism typology that was already developing in the town.

[44] This event revealed that defining regional boundaries is in fact a highly contested process. It also demonstrated the organizational capacity of *La Ruta Mutis* of 4 at that point to collectively respond to the petitioners.

extensive experience in international tourism fairs and the recent visits he had done to some *pôles de compétitivité* in France.

I joined AVIAEXPORT and Ricardo Ramirez's team for this endeavor. Although, my ideas were also informed by international experiences, which unavoidably, I used as references when trying to assist the crafting of the route, they were also informed by a degree of skepticism about the effects on tourism on small communities. My thinking was more aligned to the type of analysis by Duffy and Moore, (2010) and Brockington and Schoelfield (2010), which I saw explaining some of the phenomena I had witnessed during my previous fieldwork on rural communities in Latin America and South East Asia. However, the cultural and historical components of *La Ruta* were what persuaded me into coming on board.

Doing collaborative research with the other consultants, we all realized that the cultural theme of the route could not and should not be given solely by the remembrance of Mutis and his *Botanical Expedition*, but more importantly by the cultural life, idiosyncrasies, habits, ways of doing things— characteristic of each town. That implied broadening the concept of culture to embrace equally contemporary collective ways of being and living immaterial heritage. For AVIAEXPORT, then, Mutis should be taken as common denominator and meeting point of all seven members, but not as mask of their more cultural particularities. Communities themselves, and various actors we met, were the ones who provided this lesson.

During the fieldwork, we encountered an impressive cultural dynamism that had remained dormant for years, mainly due to the lack of interest from the municipal authorities, limited financial resources, and in some cases, due to violence. This is the case of Valle de San Juan, where, the researchers in charge of cultural manifestations, came across a community dance tradition, rooted in the festivities of villages and which involved almost all family members, that had been weakened by the paramilitary violence and forced displacement of recent years[45]. We also found newer projects such as the Theater Festival and Scenic Arts of La Mesa created by a

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[45] The dances, which is actually a joint-performance of five different acts: Rolos, Pijaos, Cucambas, Negritos and Matachines— are now being studied by UNESCO.

group of young Mesunos, and very active local academies of history mostly involved in the re-collection of oral histories from the elder members of their communities.

Beyond the four publications that resulted from these research studies, what was important was that communities[46] began to reflect on their cultural assets and local knowledges that could enhance their own municipal touristic offer, but also of *La Ruta Mutis*. The process opened new venues for self-reflexivity and self-recognition, and a space for noticing and linking with counterparts across municipalities. Cultural agendas got socialized among municipalities, hoping they could use each other festivities and events as potential new stages of performance; local history academies decided to join forces to start writing a more integrated script about the presence of Mutis in their towns, and Heritage tourist guides exchanged stories and experiences from their own municipalities. One could argue that institutionalism was brought down from that previous paternalistic relationship to MC-MCIT to a more independent and self-driven grassroots connection. This does not mean that the first was not longer necessary, but rather, not longer a pre-condition for interaction between them[47].

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In this chapter, I have narrated the problems that arose with the lack of institutionalism of *La Ruta Mutis*. This situation re-confirmed how unsustainable projects are when they do not focus on developing social ties, mutual recognition and active communication between actors at the grassroots level. It revealed how it started as a highly bureaucratic construct with no solid foundations and legitimacy. I also explored the presence of new private consultants and how they shaped the concept and also the interactions between members of *La Ruta Mutis*. I am not suggesting that AVIAEXPORT and the other three consultants changed the terms of the

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[46] With this I mean the different social groups that participated in all-four research studies: gastronomy, handcrafts, cultural manifestations, and conceptual framing.

[47] In 2010, before Uribe's last month in office, and hence, Minister Moreno's, the Cultural Tourism Office opened an application for manager of *La Ruta Mutis*. Office had two reasons for doing this: 1) it was consented from the beginning that communities themselves had to embrace the project and that MC-MCIT will withdraw at some point in the process; 2) to give continuity to the project, it was necessary to delegate it a non-governmental actor. A private actor from Tolima—*Circulo de Competitividad Turística del Tolima*—was selected to undertake this responsibility. This is definitely an important part of the production process of the region, however, for lack of data and space, it is not included in this study. This is certainly an aspect to be explore in future research about the establishment of the regional project.

conversations, what I am highlighting, however, is that they were the bridge or intermediaries between MC-MCIT and the communities, which generated the more active involvement of communities in the legitimization of the project.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

In this study, I have aimed to discuss the process of social construction of *La Ruta Mutis*—the first cultural tourism route launched in Colombia, which integrates seven municipalities under the theme of the life history of José Celestino Mutis (1732-1808) and of his *Royal Botanical Expedition* (1783-1808; 1811-1816). In doing that, I looked at the ideational antecedents of the project, paying close attention to the responsible actors for defining the terms of social construction (known as 'ideational entrepreneurs'), their ideas and interests, positions and roles when shaping *La Ruta Mutis'* territorial and symbolic boundaries and establishing its meaning. Understanding that regions are not 'islands' disconnected from other constellations of power and broader policy frameworks, I placed *La Ruta Mutis* into a larger historical context of tourism and tourism promotion in Colombia. I scrutinized when, why, and how tourism has become an important economic sector and also, a national and nationalizing project for a country still involved in armed conflict.

This research has shown how tourism has been transformed from being an unnoticeable low-growth service industry before the 1990s, to becoming a strategic ally in the country's search for a strong competitive position within the global market: Colombia's third highest source of foreign exchange earnings after oil and coal today. It has been argued that narratives and policies on strengthening competitiveness—which emerged with the country's economic liberalization in 1991—coupled with a state led double strategy of securitization and country re-branding campaign, have played a crucial role in the reconceptualization and re-positioning of tourism in the country.

At first glance, *La Ruta Mutis* is then a by-product of these transformations. It is outcome of the last decade's official programmatic ideas of re-branding the nation and finding ways to differentiate itself in an increasingly globalized tourism industry—an *ad hoc* construction for

enhancing Bogotá's tourism package and adding to the celebration of the *Bicentennial of Independences 1810-2010.* Although, this is partly true, and may even hold explanatory power for its very origins, *La Ruta Mutis* has evolved to become a new regional project, which is defining its own identity and place within the country, re-imagining itself, its territoriality and culture, around the story of Mutis. By concentrating on the formation process of *La Ruta Mutis,* on its territorial, symbolic and institutional shaping and the actors involved, this study has highlighted how tourism has become a fundamental site of the production of regions and alternative collective identities in Colombia.

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Chapter 8 Appendices

Appendix A: Characterization of the municipalities involved in *La Ruta Mutis*

Municipality	Department	Population (DANE 2005)	Distance from capital of the Department	Mutis and the Royal Botanical Expedition
Guaduas	Cundinamarca	34, 361	105 km from Bogotá	-Mutis had an experimentation centers here -Mutis transits through the Caminos reales ("Royal roads")
La Mesa	Cundinamarca	28, 710	54 km from Bogotá	-The starting point of the Royal Botanical Expedition. Mutis arrives to La Mesa 1st May 1783
Ambalema	Tolima	7, 338	74 km from Ibagué	-Mutis passes by during his Expedition.
Valle de San Juan	Tolima	6, 240	48 km from Ibagué	While working in the mines of Valle de San Juan, Mutis gets the approval to commence the Expedition.
Mariquita	Tolima	33, 118	116 km from Ibagué	-Official place of the Expedition due to its strategic geographical location
Honda	Tolima	26, 249	92 km from Ibagué	-Mutis used the port to send his advancements and weekly, sent his herbarium to the laboratory located here.
Falan	Tolima	9, 250	115 km from Ibagué	Mutis practices mining techniques.

Appendix B: A chronological list of the most important legal and policy tools on tourism and cultural in Colombia.

Colombian Tourism and Cultural Policy Framework
• Colombian Constitution of 1991, Art. 2
• Law 300 of 1996 (General Tourism Law)
• General Cultural Law, Law 397 of 1997
• Tourism Sectorial Policy 2000: *Por una sociedad que construye Paz*
• Cultural National Plan 2001-2010: *Hacia una ciudadaná democrática cultural*
• *Caravanas Vive Colombia* of 2002
• *Plan Sectorial de Turismo 2003-2006: "Turismo para un Nuevo País".*
• *Colombia es Pasión (2005)*
• Reform to the General Tourism Law, Law 1101 of 2006
• Cultural Tourism Policy of 2007
• *Colombia: El riesgo es que te quieras quedar (2007)*
• Tourism Sectorial Policy 2008-2010: *"Colombia Destino Turístico de Clase Mundial"*
• Tourism Sectorial Policy 2011-2014: *"Turismo: factor de Prosperidad para Colombia".*
• **National and Departmental Development Plans also include programmatic references to tourism and culture
• *Colombia Vision 2019*

Appendix C: Photos

Figure C. 1

José Celestino Mutis

Figure C. 2

Original Map *Royal Botanical Expedition*

Figure C. 3

Brochures of all four Bicentennial Routes

Figure C. 4

Nation-branding: "*Colombia es Pasión*"

Figure C. 5

Nation-branding: "Colombia: The Risk is Wanting to Stay"
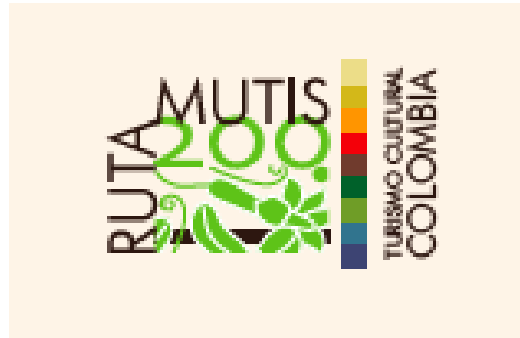
Figure C. 6

Regional-branding: *La Ruta Mutis*

Figure C. 7

Places and people from *La Ruta Mutis*