

# Culture as an Obstacle for Entrepreneurship

Gloria Leonor Ortiz Morales (✉ [gloria.ortiz@unibague.edu.co](mailto:gloria.ortiz@unibague.edu.co))

Universidad de Ibagué <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0009-839X>

Juan Carlos Ramos Aguilar

Universidad de Ibagué

Katherin Yineth Lozada Morales

Universidad de Ibagué

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## Research

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# Abstract

This research was aimed to identify the main reasons why entrepreneurs in the city of Ibagué, who structure business ideas and participate in contests and/or calls, do not continue the entrepreneurial process until the creation of their companies. After applying the beforehand validated instrument to more than 100 students from the Universidad de Ibagué and expert advisers from the department of Tolima, made up of universities, entrepreneurs, and public-private institutions, with interests in entrepreneurship; it was possible to recognize that the main reason, why entrepreneurs generate ideas, but not companies, is the cultural factor. The foregoing is based on the fact that Tolima has been a quintessential agricultural department and this situation has contributed greatly to the fact that the entrepreneurial spirit has not been developed in people.

Within the research results it was detected that in contrast with other cities of Colombia, like Manizales and Medellín, Ibagué has not been able to consolidate a solid entrepreneurial ecosystem due to the lack of coordination among private, public and academic sectors, and on the other side, the majority of people from Ibagué do not have family support for the development of their initiatives, being fundamental components for the creation of enterprises.

Among the recommendations proposed in the study is the construction of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, because it will allow the participation of the Triple Helix by providing opportunities to all entrepreneurs in the region; in addition, it is considered important that educational institutions, both schools and universities, promote the development of entrepreneurial skills and competencies in individuals involving their families.

## Introduction

Tolima is a department of Colombia located in the central area of the country that has traditionally had an agricultural nature for the wealth of its lands (Rivera - González & Rubiano - Aranzales, 2016). Currently and despite its geographical location, in the analysis of the country's competitiveness index, Tolima is located in the 15th place; with the item corresponding to innovation and business dynamics, located in the 20th place, being more worrying (Consejo Privado de Competitividad, 2019). The above reflects that the entrepreneurial intention in the department is not high or, meaning the same, the entrepreneurial spirit of the region is low.

The contribution of entrepreneurship to economic and social development is an issue that has been widely discussed (Greene & Saridakis, 2008; Murugesan, 2010; Loveridge et al., 2012), and in some countries it has been affirmed that the entrepreneurial spirit depends on the national culture (Boissin et al., 2009). However, it is a fact that within a country there is a diversity of cultures that can promote to a greater or lesser extent the development of this spirit (Carbonara et al., 2018).

Despite the relationship between culture and entrepreneurship has also been studied (Friedland & Mohr, 2004; Weber & Dacin, 2011), the way in which culture shapes innovation and entrepreneurship has been

discussed slowly and sparsely (Lounsbury et al., 2019), however, we can assure that the environment plays an important role in the process of incorporating future learning and behavior (Bretones & Radrigán, 2018).

Factors such as education or family relationships directly affect the entrepreneurship motivations and intentions (Bretones et al., 2009; Randerson et al., 2015), whereby, the present work tries to identify the variables recognized as difficulties for the entrepreneurial exercise and verify the hypothesis: "a cultural environment adverse to entrepreneurship is the greatest drawback to the development of entrepreneurs in the case of Tolima."

Entrepreneurs have to overcome different obstacles to carry out their business projects including cultural factors (Ramadani et al., 2017). Cultural factors are understood to be the support of the household and close people, institutional support (public or private), the consumption habits of the internal market and the tradition of starting business. In other words, it is the set of norms, values and codes of conduct which promote social acceptance and approval of entrepreneurial activities, and that persist over time; the culture of the region directly affects the development of new ventures and the economic development thereof (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2017). However, up until now, the impact of this culture on entrepreneurs that against all odds decide to create a company has not been studied yet.

In the department of Tolima, these cultural factors are mostly adverse, although in 2006 the Entrepreneurship Law 1014 was issued, which seeks to promote the culture of entrepreneurship through educational institutions, public policies and entrepreneurship networks (Congreso de la Republica de Colombia, 2006); but this law does not contain sanctions, therefore, its application has ended up becoming something optional.

Considering that the entrepreneurship ecosystem refers to the coordination of institutional actors and natural persons articulated for the development of entrepreneurial projects, under the framework of public-private alliances (Fuerlinger et al., 2015). In Colombia, cities such as Manizales and Medellin have developed ecosystems that combine the wills of institutional actors from the "Triple Helix", composed by public, private and academic sectors, but this reality has not been replicated at the national level (Camayo et al., 2017). The department of Tolima does not currently have an entrepreneurship ecosystem; the obstacles for the articulation of institutions and the difficulties to link entrepreneurs in the environment, have resulted in an absence of regional strategies for the promotion of differential entrepreneurship.

## Methods

For the development of the study, the methodological process called Mixed Methods Research (MMR) was applied (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018; I et al., 2019; Gates et al., 2014), defining the following stages:

Process of research methodology

**Stage 1 Diagnosis of the problem context.** At this stage, a diagnosis was made of the current problem situation, in which this information was integrated:

1. **Theoretical:** From experiences and models proposed by authors, who characterized the variables that were considered significant to be included in the model.
2. **Qualitative:** A qualitative study was designed by means of interviews with entrepreneurship coordinators from different institutions, who have accompanied entrepreneurs of the region, and qualitative information was retrieved regarding how they have experienced this process, and the reasons detected for which entrepreneurs dropped out their entrepreneurial process.
3. **Quantitative:** The analysis of the quantitative information was carried out, from databases available at the university and other organizations in Ibagué about the performance of the students who have experienced this process (Hernandez-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018).

Through *data triangulation methodology* (Okuda Benavides & Gómez-Restrepo, 2005), the integration process is carried out, obtaining an in-depth diagnosis of the current situation of the entrepreneurs, their experience and the causes of desertion from the process.

**Stage 2 Characterization and prioritization.** To carry out this activity, the in-depth diagnosis of Stage 1 was used to characterize the variables and critical factors that must be included within the model. This characterization bears in mind socio-demographic and attitudinal aspects.

**Stage 3 Instrument design.** From the variables and critical factors characterized and prioritized in stage 2, an instrument was designed, that covered all these variables. It was established how the measurement and scale system of this instrument will be, which is more convenient to know and characterize the causes of desertion from the entrepreneurship process. This instrument was designed with the support of a focus group that had the collaboration of expert participants on the subject.

**Stage 4 Validations.** At this stage, the instrument was applied to a sample of students who have gone through the entrepreneurship process and have dropped out.

**Stage 5 Integration of results.** In this phase, the statistical analysis of the results of the application of the instrument was made. This analysis has two components: (1) Descriptive analysis, in which the variables of the model were generally characterized; (2) Structured analysis, relationships were sought between the variables of the model, hypotheses were tested, and the main causes were established.

## **Characterization of the groups**

For the research, the result of the instruments applied to students as well as representatives of entrepreneurship in regional institutions, was taken into account.

The first group characterized in this study corresponds to more than 100 entrepreneurs who have participated in entrepreneurship competitions and calls, regardless of having carried out the business project or not. Most of them are students from Universidad de Ibagué.

The second group that participated in the research is that of expert advisors in entrepreneurship and who belong to universities and others public-private institutions with interests in entrepreneurship.

Both groups are geographically located in the city of Ibagué, capital of the department of Tolima. For the first group, the instrument used was the previously validated survey; while for the second, a semi-structured interview was conducted.

## Results

Within the research results, it can be evinced that on average, people from Ibagué that fall back on family support for the development of business initiatives amount to barely 33.7%; while the vast majority do not know what would be the position of their family towards entrepreneurship. This factor is quite clear, since the family plays a fundamental role in the development of entrepreneurs (Nordqvist & Melin, 2010; Basco et al., 2019; Porfírio et al., 2020; Bauweraerts & Colot, 2017), which also implies that it is a major factor, so that entrepreneurs give up on different business projects.

To the statement: People from Ibagué that fall back on family support to develop entrepreneurship, the answers were:

Result of the question No. 2 regarding the regional environment

It is also worrying that only 27.2% see the fact of being able to develop markets in the city in a feasible way. Even though methodology measures perception, not the veracity of the statement, it denotes an adverse feeling in the business development of the city. Such sentiments affect the diversification of the economy in the city of Ibagué and the department of Tolima, focusing on traditional sectors such as commerce and agriculture in their elementary stages (Delgado & Ulloa, 2015).

The other great lack of knowledge lies in the access to sources of financing, in which only 22.8% reckons the possible access, and 26.1% states that it is impossible. According to the experts consulted, there are financing sources in the city, but the apathy of people from Ibagué, and difficulties with media channels, lead to a Herculean task to disclose the benefits of said funds.

However, it is true that entrepreneurs in the region are reluctant to finance ventures, either due to ignorance or, failing that, the compensation received for their possible investment does not meet expectations. Although startups can be a risky investment (Nanda & Rhodes-Kropf, 2013) in many cases the initial amount is not so significant and the medium-term prospects can be very promising (Xu et al., 2020). But currently there are no joint inter-institutional platforms that promote this type of investment with local money for the development of regional entrepreneurship, which makes it even more difficult to strengthen new ventures (Colombelli, 2010; Stevenson et al., 2019).

**Figure 3** Cross-section of the regional environment

In addition, only 23.9% of respondents are satisfied with the consultancy provided for the development of business projects, which denotes three issues, either there is no support or, failing that, entrepreneurs themselves voluntarily or involuntarily ignore the help that the accompaniment of institutions can provide. That said, entrepreneurs within their own exercise should seek such support on their own initiative; despite this, cultural environment runs counter and forms individuals who limit themselves in their entrepreneurial exercise.

The third possibility is that consultancies provided by institutions do not correspond to the demands of entrepreneurs, or are not in accordance with the current demands that the enterprises face (Enechojo Grace & Happiness Ihuoma, 2013; Abdul Kadir et al., 2012). It would have to be analyzed whether the people in charge of providing consultancies in institutions from the department of Tolima are suitable for such role.

The cultural environment adverse to entrepreneurship adds a major obstacle to those already inherent in entrepreneurial activities, from the scarce coordination among institutions to the incomplete development of entrepreneurs. The absence of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, deepens and accentuates the difficulties that new business projects must face, studies show that a well-structured and identified ecosystem greatly benefits the development of startups (Tripathi et al., 2019).

## **Discussion**

Pursuant to what has been observed in this study, it is necessary to center efforts on changing the cultural perception of entrepreneurship in the department of Tolima. For this, strategies must be focused on clear audiences that allow the paradigm shift in the long term. Such strategies need to be implemented from public and private spheres. In this document, recommendations will be given from the private sphere, more specifically from the educational sector.

Awareness-raising in primary stages of development (school), would contribute to the personal growth of entrepreneurs or, failing that, sensitize perspectives towards entrepreneurial practices. Thus, entrepreneurship cannot be solely a responsibility of higher education or, even worse, as a last resort, better known as survival or necessity entrepreneurship. Introducing individuals to entrepreneurship at an early age will increase entrepreneurial aim and facilitate the development of new long-term entrepreneurial projects. It is also important to link those strategies to household since family support is vital in the early stages of entrepreneurship.

From the university, it is necessary to make entrepreneurship a transversal competence which joins all undergraduate programs, including the faculties that are not traditionally part of the practice, such as those of humanities and law. Interdisciplinary teams are proven to have a better chance of successfully building business projects, and are more likely to receive funding from investors. For this, it is advisable to include a line of transversal entrepreneurship to the curricula of all undergraduate programs, which seeks to strengthen not only entrepreneurial projects, but also to develop entrepreneurial skills.

The role of the university cannot be viewed as an isolated effort; it must be in rapport with private companies and supported by public policies. Even from training, entrepreneurship must be considered from the joint effort of the actors with whom an entrepreneur interacts.

The construction of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is undoubtedly the greatest challenge that the public-private institutions of the region must face. It is important that said ecosystem move in the triple helix: University–Company–State. If any of the parties is not involved with the ecosystem, it can lead, as it has been happening, to sterile efforts that end soon, with duplicate actions and minimal results that do not transform the region.

It is from the ecosystem that entrepreneurs must develop the project from its initial phases of ideation until the acceleration stages. It is necessary to identify what are the difficulties and challenges present in the region for the construction of a healthy entrepreneurial ecosystem, and work from there to formulate tactics that allow, once and for all, to structure the actions and intentions of the institutions and entrepreneurs in a joint effort that allows visualizing tangible long-term results.

## Conclusions

It can be determined, from the results observed in the research, that the main obstacle to generate entrepreneurial projects in the department of Tolima is culture. The absence of the entrepreneurial culture in people from Tolima hampers and diminishes the creation of new business initiatives.

The entrepreneur finds additional difficulties to those inherent in the business exercise in the context of Tolima, from the personal (family) spheres, to the poor articulation of public-private institutions; lack of articulation results in the absence of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that empowers the entrepreneur and their respective projects.

The absence of family support denotes the traditionalist thinking of the region, in which finding employment is rather important, and at best entrepreneurship is seen as the last option for subsistence. The lack of entrepreneurial spirit has meant for the department absence of industry, dependence on trade, limited job opportunities, concentrated wealth, unemployment, among other negative effects for the local economy.

It was also found in the research that institutions have serious problems when communicating their efforts to promote entrepreneurship. A significant part of the respondents recognize that institutions offer wide support to entrepreneurs, but they are not aware of all the activities and events organized to promote entrepreneurship. The reason, as it can be inferred from interviews with experts, might meet two main grounds: either because media channels are inefficient, or the most worrying one, entrepreneurs do not monitor the possible support they can access, especially considering that most entrepreneurs stated that there is no financial support in the region for enterprise formation.

Although the sources of financing in the region are not abundant, at present there is no incubator of its own in the department of Tolima; public institutions are making an effort to allocate resources to boost the business sector, especially that related to agro-industries. The problem, to a large extent, is that entrepreneurs are unaware of these government programs, and several of the entrepreneurs who get involved, do so with poorly formulated projects that do not meet the requested standards. The above is due to the scant interaction that entrepreneurs have with institutions.

The absence of the entrepreneurial ecosystem is also a symptom of the culture in the department of Tolima. Different institutions have not been able to establish work plans that share objectives and resources. According to what was analyzed in the interviews, the experts' perception is that the individual ego on several occasions has surpassed institutional interest, political conflicts have also played an important role, not to mention that it has not been possible to structure an angel investment network with the businessmen of the region.

In conclusion, the culture of the department of Tolima has not allowed the development of an entrepreneurial culture so far. This does not mean that there are no entrepreneurs in the region, but their projects must face a greater adverse atmosphere than their peers in Medellín or Manizales. Our hypothesis which posed culture like the biggest obstacle for entrepreneurs was confirmed.

## **Abbreviations**

### **MMR**

Mixed Methods Research

## **Declarations**

### **Availability of data and materials**

The datasets generated during the study are available in the virtual and physical archive of the Entrepreneurship Unit of the Universidad de Ibagué. These research data can be accessed with the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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## **Author information**

### **Affiliations**

**Entrepreneurship Unit, Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences, Universidad de Ibagué, Ibagué, Colombia**

Gloria Leonor Ortiz Morales & Katherin Yineth Lozada Morales

**International Affairs Office, Universidad de Ibagué, Ibagué, Colombia**

Juan Carlos Ramos Aguilar

### **Contributions**

GO, JR, and KL were involved in the design of the study and the instruments applied to the participants, also they carried out the data collection process and the interpretation of the results. GO coordinated the research and contacted the participants. JR and KL did the literature work. GO and JR were in charge of the documents analysis and the manuscript draft. KL was involved in making the adjustments to the first version of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

### **Authors' information**

**Gloria Leonor Ortiz Morales** is professor in the Faculty of Economic and Administrative Sciences and coordinator of the Entrepreneurship Unit at Universidad de Ibagué, Colombia. She is an Industrial Engineer from the Universidad de Ibagué, Specialist in Project Evaluation and Development at the Universidad del Rosario and Magister (Mtr) in Innovation for Business Development from the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey, Mexico.

**Juan Carlos Ramos Aguilar** is an analyst in the International Affairs Office at Universidad de Ibagué, Colombia. He is an International Business Administrator from the Universidad de Ibagué and Specialist in Project Evaluation and Development at the Universidad del Rosario.

**Katherin Yineth Lozada Morales** is an advisor in the Entrepreneurship Unit at Universidad de Ibagué, Colombia and she is an International Business Administrator from the Universidad de Ibagué.

### **Corresponding author**

Correspondence to **Gloria Leonor Ortiz Morales**

### **Ethics declarations**

## Ethics approval and consent to participate

All participants in this study declared that they participated voluntarily and authorized the processing of personal data.

## Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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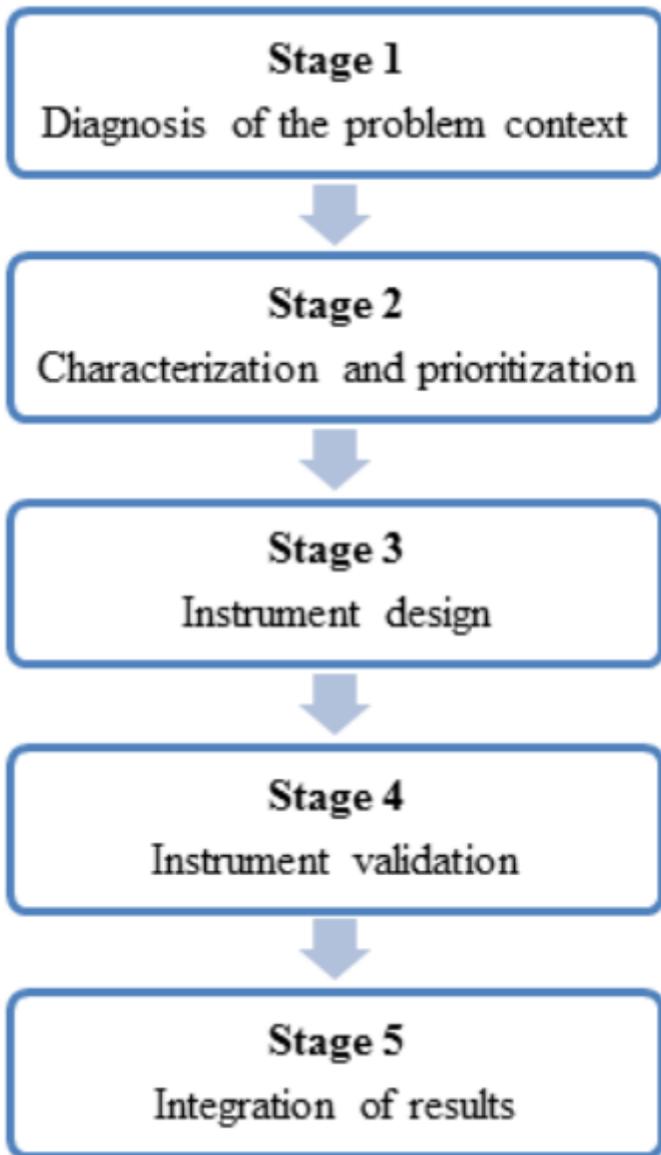
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## Figures



**Figure 1**

Process of research methodology

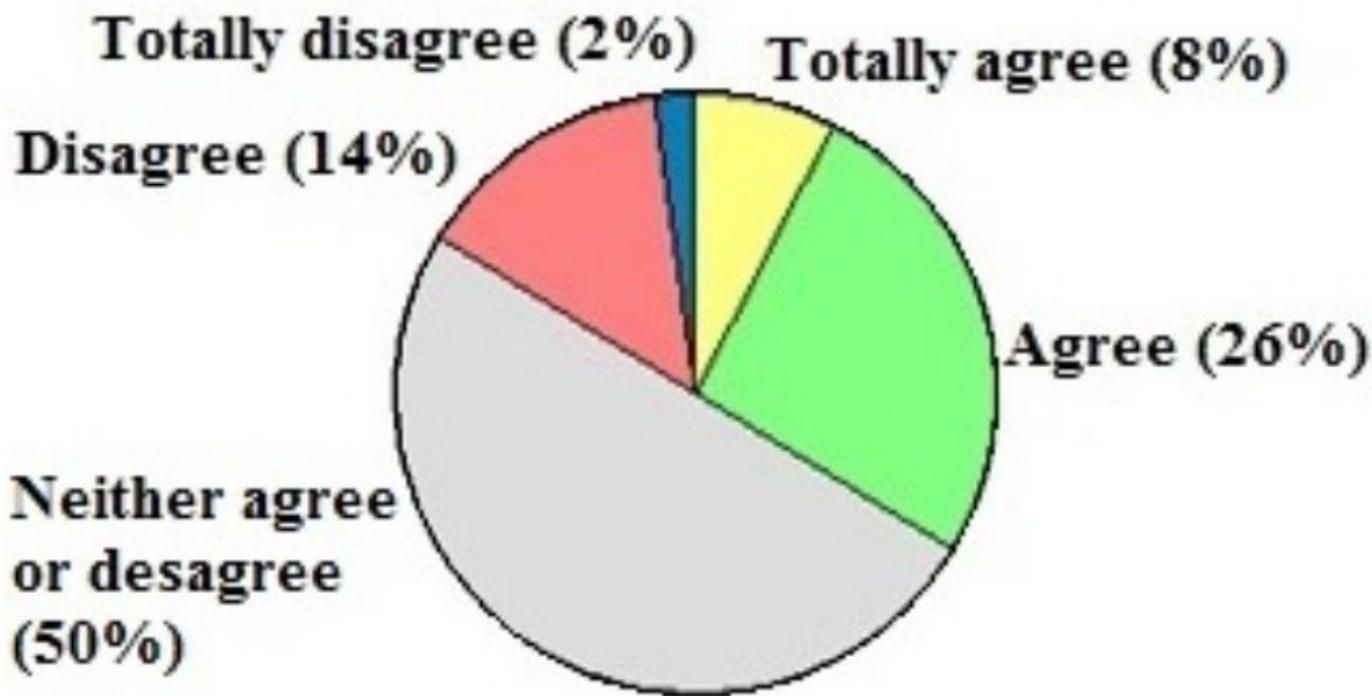


Figure 2

Result of the question No. 2 regarding the regional environment

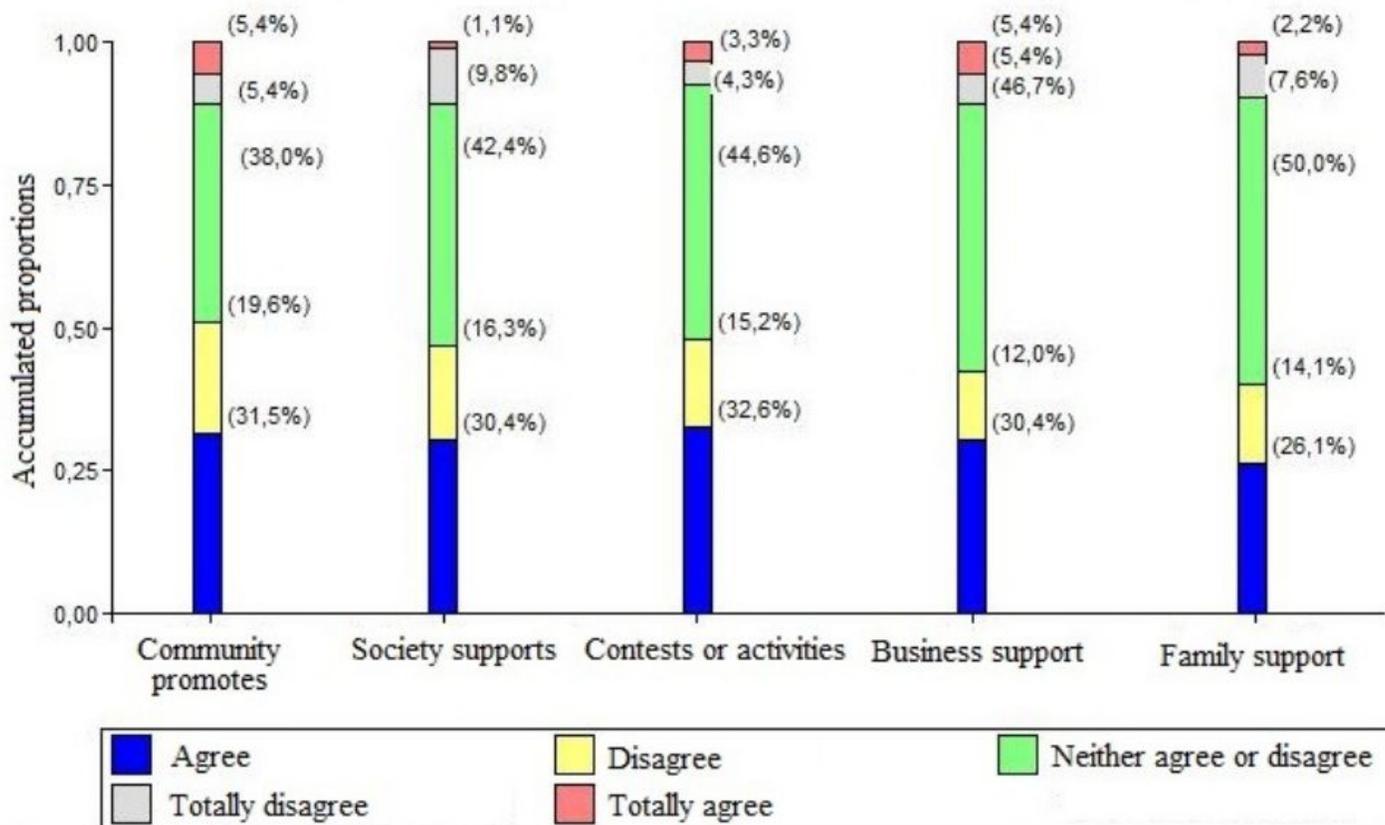


Figure 3

## Cross-section of the regional environment