Social norms and traffic behavior: Citizenship Culture as Public Policy in Bogotá, Colombia

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Social norms and traffic behavior: *Citizenship Culture* as public policy in Bogotá, Colombia

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Javier Guillot
Masters in Public Policy program
Hertie School of Governance (Berlin, Germany)
with the support of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

and member of the team of
Corpovisionarios, Bogotá, Colombia

[International Workshop]: Frontiers in Transportation – Social Interactions
Herrsching am Ammersee, August 3rd, 2013

I'm here today mostly to
share a story with you

…a story I believe may
spark your interests:
suggesting fruitful avenues for
research and action

…and that will surely leave
many open questions

The site and origin of the story:

Bogotá, Colombia

- **Elevation 2,625 m (plateau on the Andes)**
- **Population (2013):**
  7.7 million [Capital District]
  10.8 million [Metro]

Arguably one of the most dangerous cities in the world in the late 1980s / early 1990s.

…and indeed quite chaotic

1995: Antanas Mockus

Cultura Ciudadana in Bogotá
1995 - 2003

Stronger social regulation
of interactions between citizens, and between citizens and public officials

Basic set of shared rules
to take advantage of (and enjoy) the city's diversity

Talk structure

1. **The background: core elements of the *Citizenship Culture* approach**
   - Connection with social norms theory

2. **The case: Citizenship Culture and traffic behavior — the reduction of traffic fatalities**

3. **The upshot: Reflections, suggestions and open questions**

the background

Mockus's starting point:

(adapted: Mackie et al. 2012)

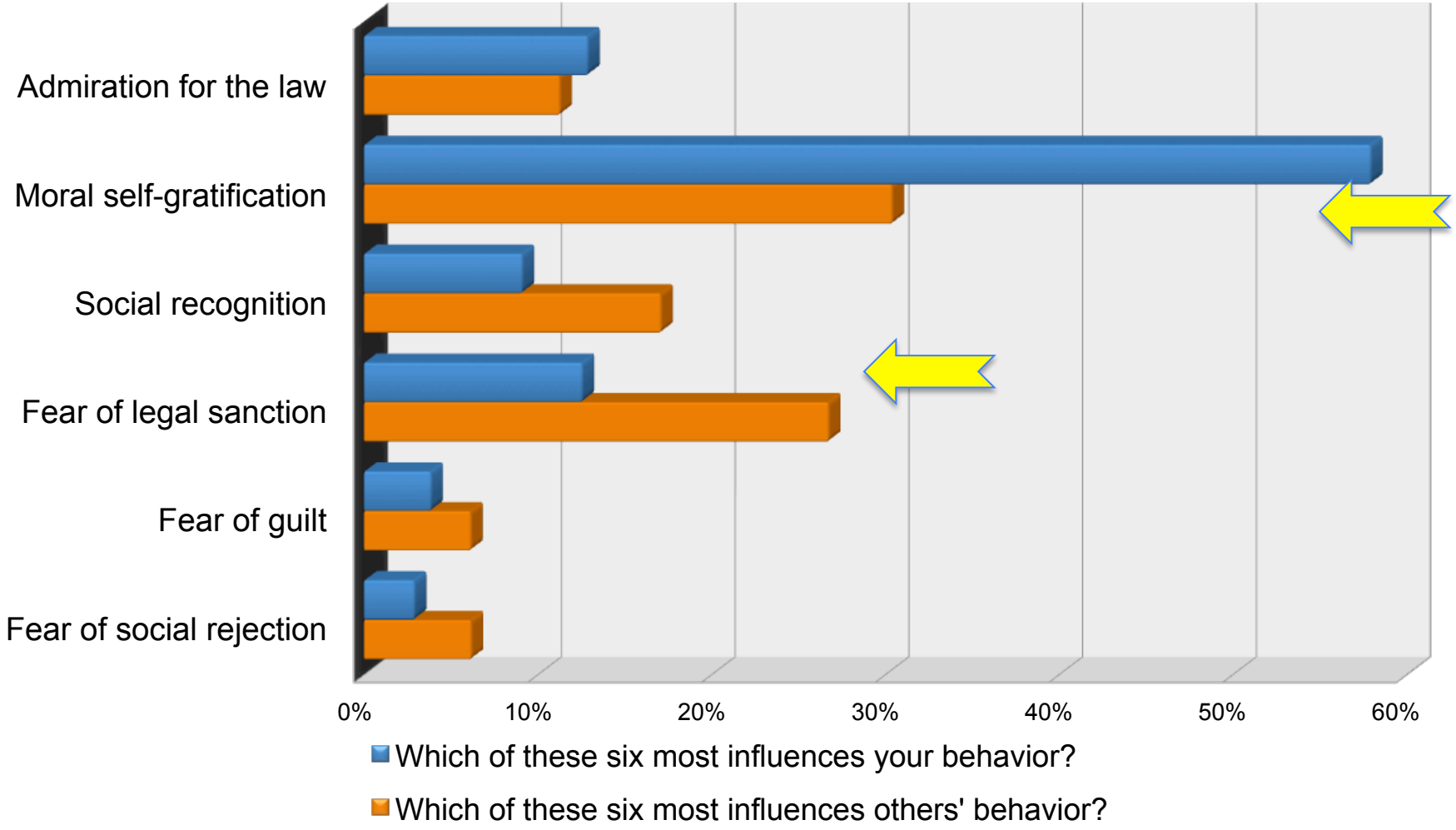
recognition of three different systems of norms that may <u>regulate</u> citizens' behavior

	Legal norms	**Moral norms**	**Social norms**
positive reasons	**Legitimacy of authority / respect for the law**	**Good conscience**	**Esteem / Acceptance / Approval**
negative reasons	**Authority's penalties**	**Bad conscience**	**Disesteem / Rejection / Disapproval**
[typical emotion in violator]	**[fear]**	**[guilt]**	**[shame]**

The *citizenship culture* challenge:
to harmonize these behavior-regulating systems

An assymetry in atribution of motives: self vs. others

Regulatory systems: Legal, Moral, Social
Average across surveys in 35 Colombian cities (2008 - 2011)



Source: **Corpovisionarios, Citizenship Culture Surveys. Error for each survey < 5%. Total N = 32 520.**

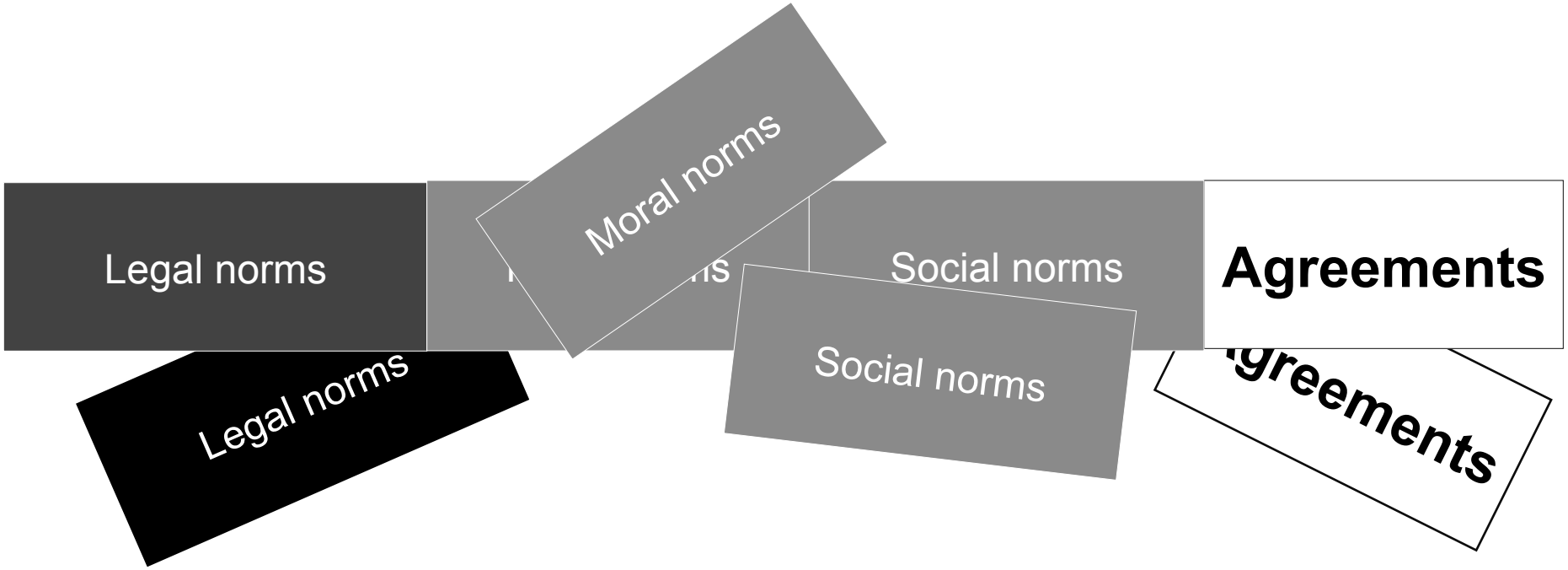
- This is consistent with solid social psychology: people tend to think of **themselves as intrinsically motivated** and of **others as extrinsically motivated.**

- *Plausible hypothesis*: in part explains why people frequently demand **harsh legal penalties** to confront what they deem socially harmful behaviors.

- **But in many cases, law enforcement *can* resort to pedagogy/social mobilization before force.**

- In particular when a (rather uncontroversially) collectively-harmful behavior is ***widespread.***

“Harmonization of norms” has been a central tenet of new institutional economists (since the 1990s)



But *how* can we translate this into public policy (if at all)?

[Box animation: Mockus 2010]

First: what is a social norm, after all?

- The term is used in the scientific/technical literature in an ***inmense variety of ways*** (both historically and at present)

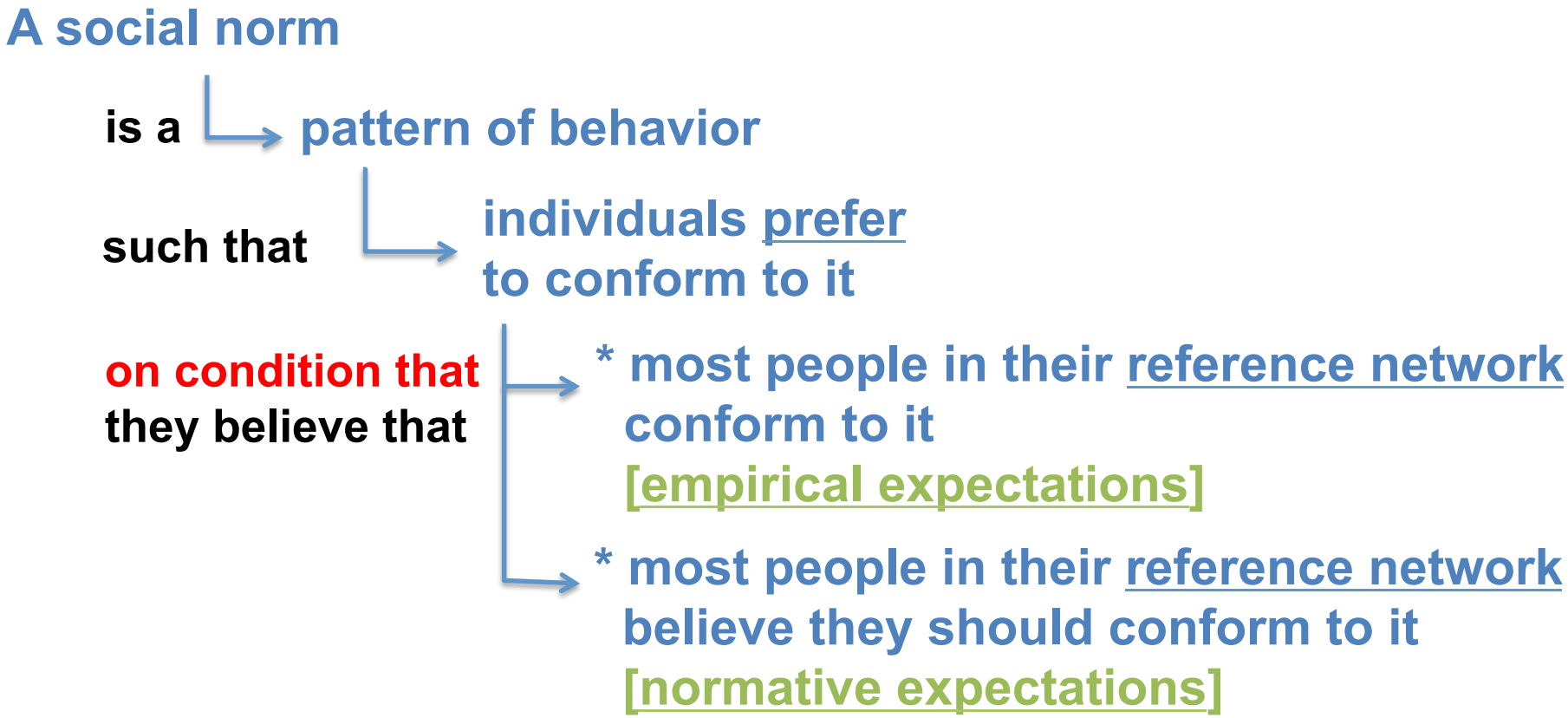
- There is urgent need for a **wider agreement** on a definition that can prove to be:
  - Theoretically fruitful
  - Useful in the interpretation of available data
  - Somehow translatable to non-specialists

A suggestion

Cristina Bicchieri
The Grammar of Society
CUP, 2006

Social norm:
a powerful definition

→ Bicchieri 2006, 2013



What do I believe others do?

What do I believe others think one should do?

Important point #1

Preferences vs. attitudes

Preferences may be *conditional*

If I have a *conditional* preference to do **x**,
it is <u>possible</u> that my *attitude* toward **x** is
not one of liking or endorsement.

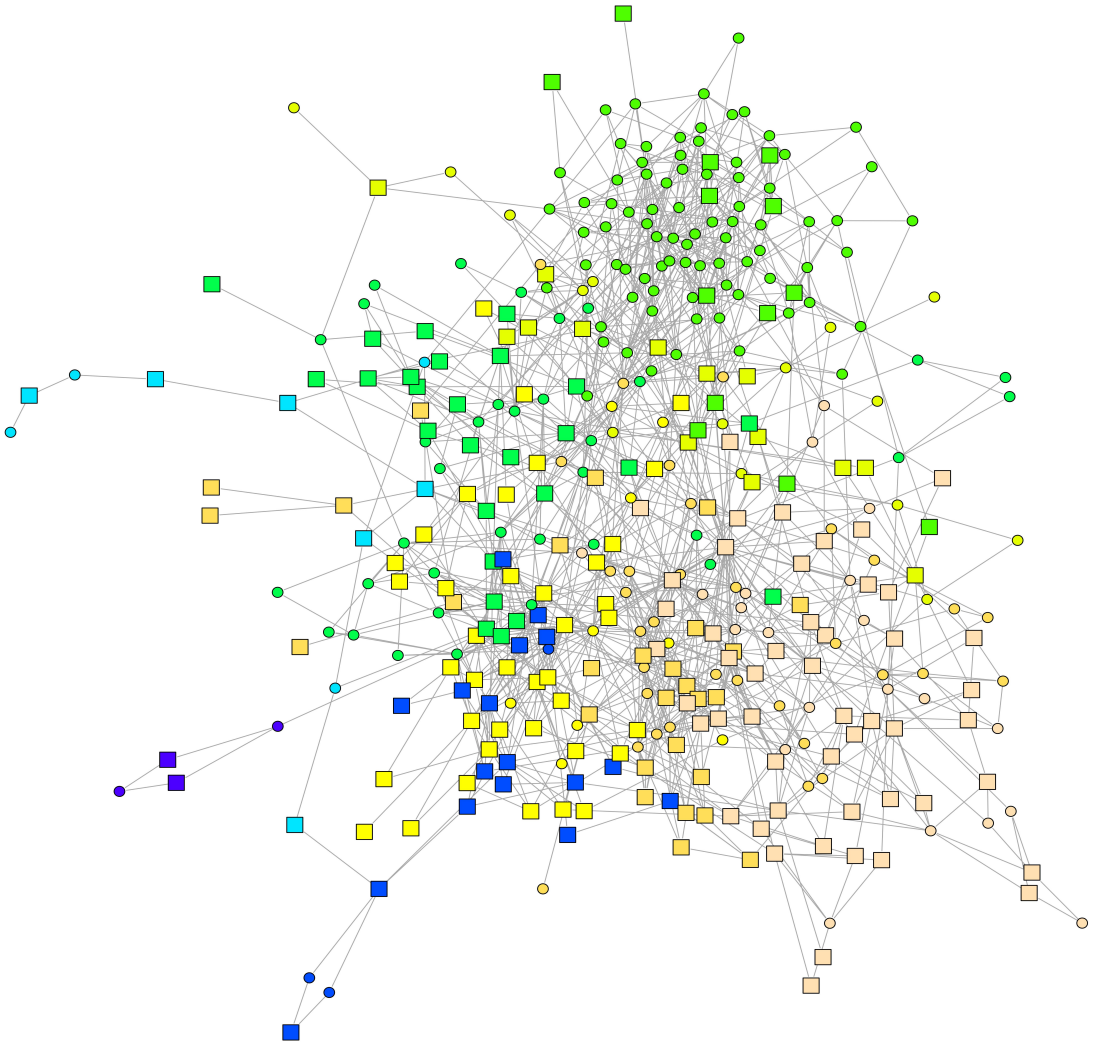
- I may prefer to conform to a social norm,
even if I don't like or endorse it.

Normative expectations are the “essential ingredient” of social norms

- These are beliefs about **other people’s** beliefs!
- *Empirical*: beliefs about what other people do.
- *Normative*: beliefs about what other people believe that one should do—what *others* approve/disapprove.

[Bicchieri 2006]

Reference network



Reference network for latrine usage in a village (Shakya 2012)

If my preference for doing **x** is *conditional*, then beliefs ***about others*** matter.

But **who are those others**?

Reference network: what should seem obvious

- The group of people that influences my choice:
  → What I *expect them to do* matters
  → What I *think they believe one ought to do* matters

- But this may **vary** quite radically for different social norms.

- And it may even **vary** if we are considering one same pattern of behavior, but different individuals in one large population.

- **Thus, what reference network sustains a particular social norm is an empirical question.**

The advantages of this definition

- It allows us to ***clearly distinguish social norms*** from other types of collective patterns of behavior.
- It is an **operational** definition, amenable to **formalization** (Bicchieri 2006).
- It is consistent with a wide body of **empirical evidence** (experimental, historical, ethnographical) and close to theoretical developments in various fields.
- And is it is straightforwardly “translatable”: UNICEF.

The core of Citizenship Culture

	Legal norms	Moral norms	Social norms
positive reasons	Legitimacy of authority / respect for the law	Good conscience	Esteem / Acceptance / Approval
negative reasons	Authority's penalties	Bad conscience	Disesteem / Rejection / Disapproval
[typical emotion in violator]	[fear]	[guilt]	[shame]

[Mockus, adapted by Mackie 2012]

Premises of the Citizenship Culture approach to policy / programming

- An integral public policy or social-change program should strengthen **not only formal** (legally enforced) systems of sanctions, but also individuals' capacities to **self-regulate** (via moral norms) and **especially to regulate each other** (via social norms).

- Additionally, it must focus on the **harmonization of these regulatory systems**:
  - to reduce or erradicate the moral or social approval of illegal / collectively harmful behavior.
  - to increase and consolidate the moral and social approval of legal / collectively beneficial behavior.

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The Big Question

A social norm

is a → **pattern of behavior**

such that → **individuals prefer to conform to it**

on condition that they believe that

* most people in their reference network conform to it [empirical expectations]

* most people in their reference network believe they should conform to it [normative expectations]

How do these expectations *change*? How are new ones *created*?

What key features explain the perceived success of *citizenship culture*?

- Simple diagnoses of target-problems with quantitative and qualitative tools; results had an influence on policy design.

- **Creative interventions:** make unfamiliar the familiar, or familiar the unfamiliar; break routines and habits; **resort to art**.

- Transform target-problems into objects of collective deliberation and reflection: **make it visible**!

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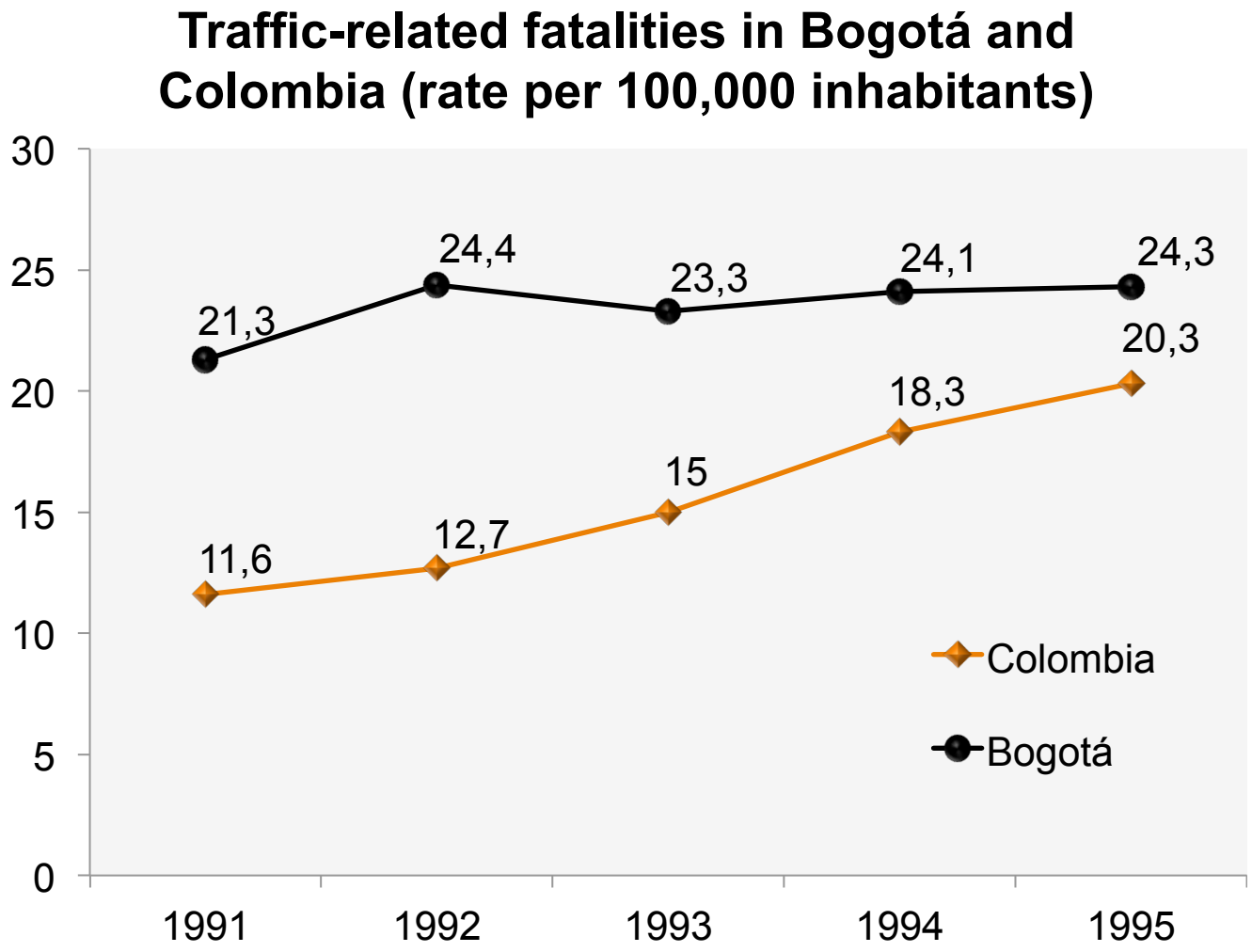
the case

A constitutional mandate: protect life



Sources: Forensis INMLCF
DANE Population Projections

[Corpovisionarios]

a series of innovative interventions

“Social regulation cards”

More than 350,000 were distributed

Very high visibility, citizens willing to try them out

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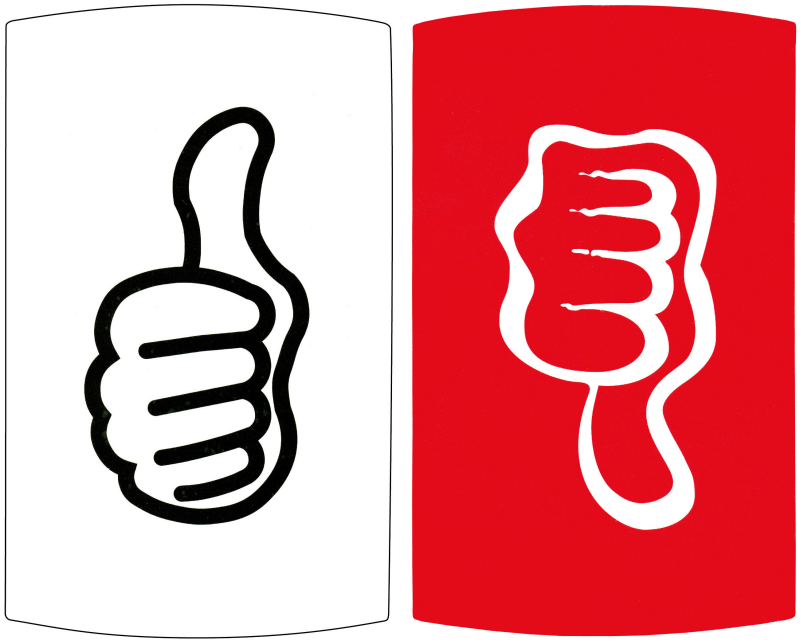
“Social regulation cards”



- **Hypothesis:** a simple means of direct, transparent interpersonal communication that fostered **new normative expectations** consistent with prosocial traffic behavior.

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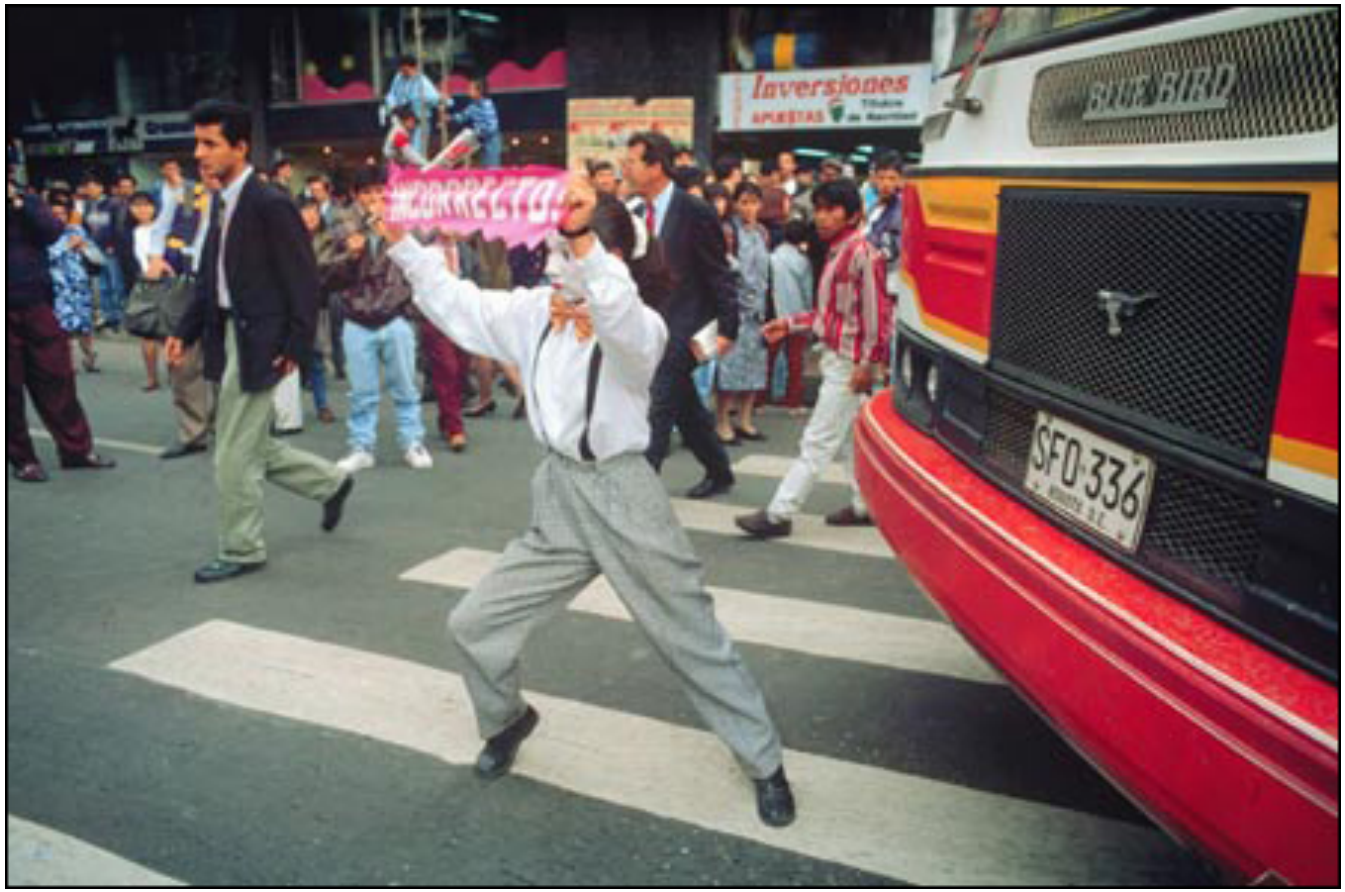
Mimes



Initially 40, then 400!

Dramatic success in terms of visibilization,
but replication *questionable*.

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Mimes

- **Hypothesis: Further strengthened normative expectations** and contributed to change in empirical expectations at crucial sites.
- Promoted public deliberation—it wasn't *just a show*.

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“Estrellas negras”: Black Stars

Marked the spot of a death
resulting from a traffic accident.
Later specified age and sex of deceased.

[Corpovisionarios]

“Estrellas negras”: Black Stars

- Re-appropriation of a **common cultural symbol**: simultaneously fostered moral and social regulation – provided opportunities for discussing and coordinating beliefs (visibilization)

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Ley Zanahoria: “carrot law”

Restricted alcohol expenditure:1:00 am. 2001: extended to 3:00 am.

- **Not only causally effective, but highly controversial** – led to **visible public discussion** (especially among relevant group of norm violators, but also among the public, widely conceived).

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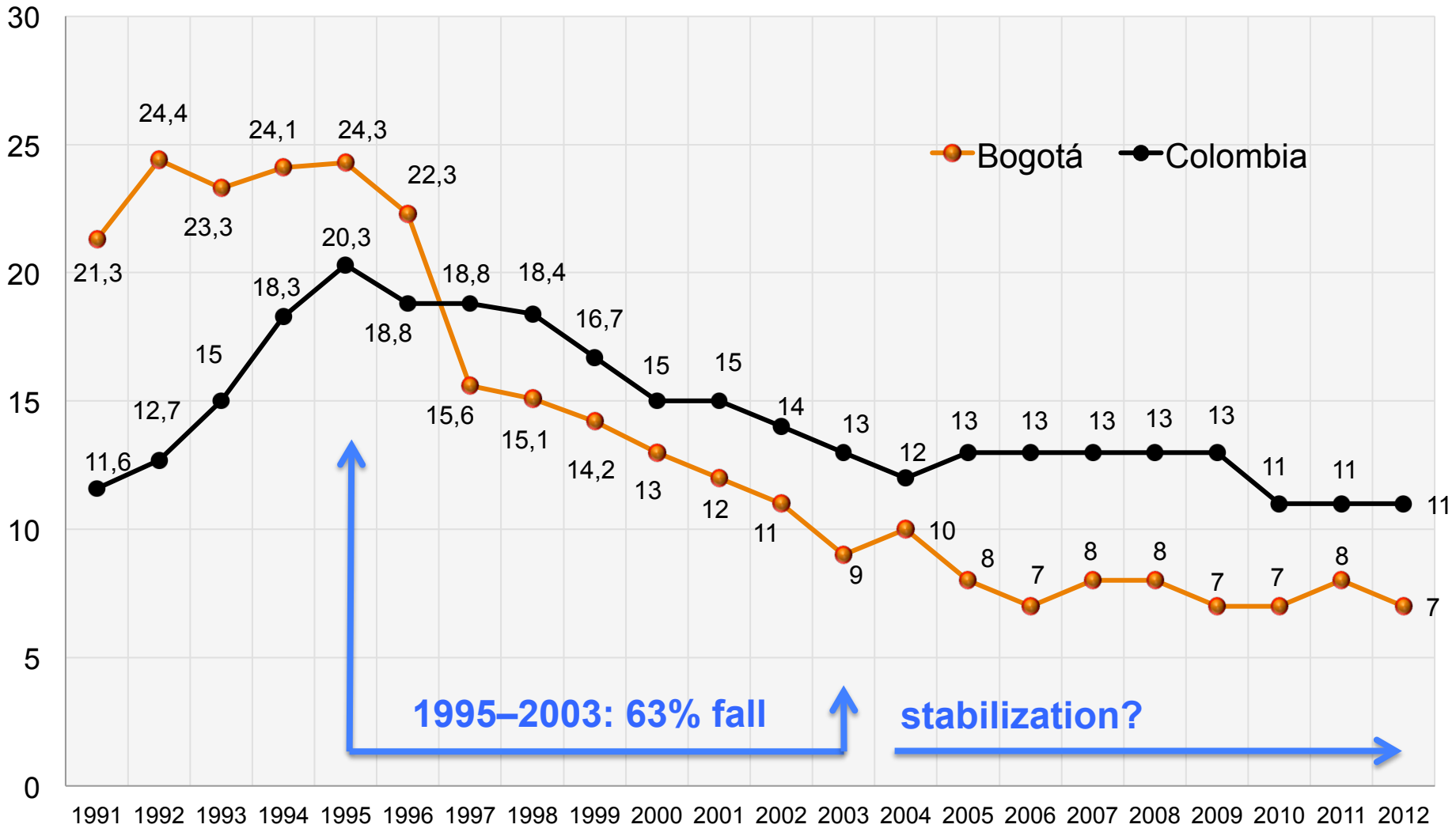
Traffic-related deaths in Bogotá and Colombia
1991 - 2012 (rate per 100 000 inhabitants)



Source: Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (INML)
DANE Population Projections

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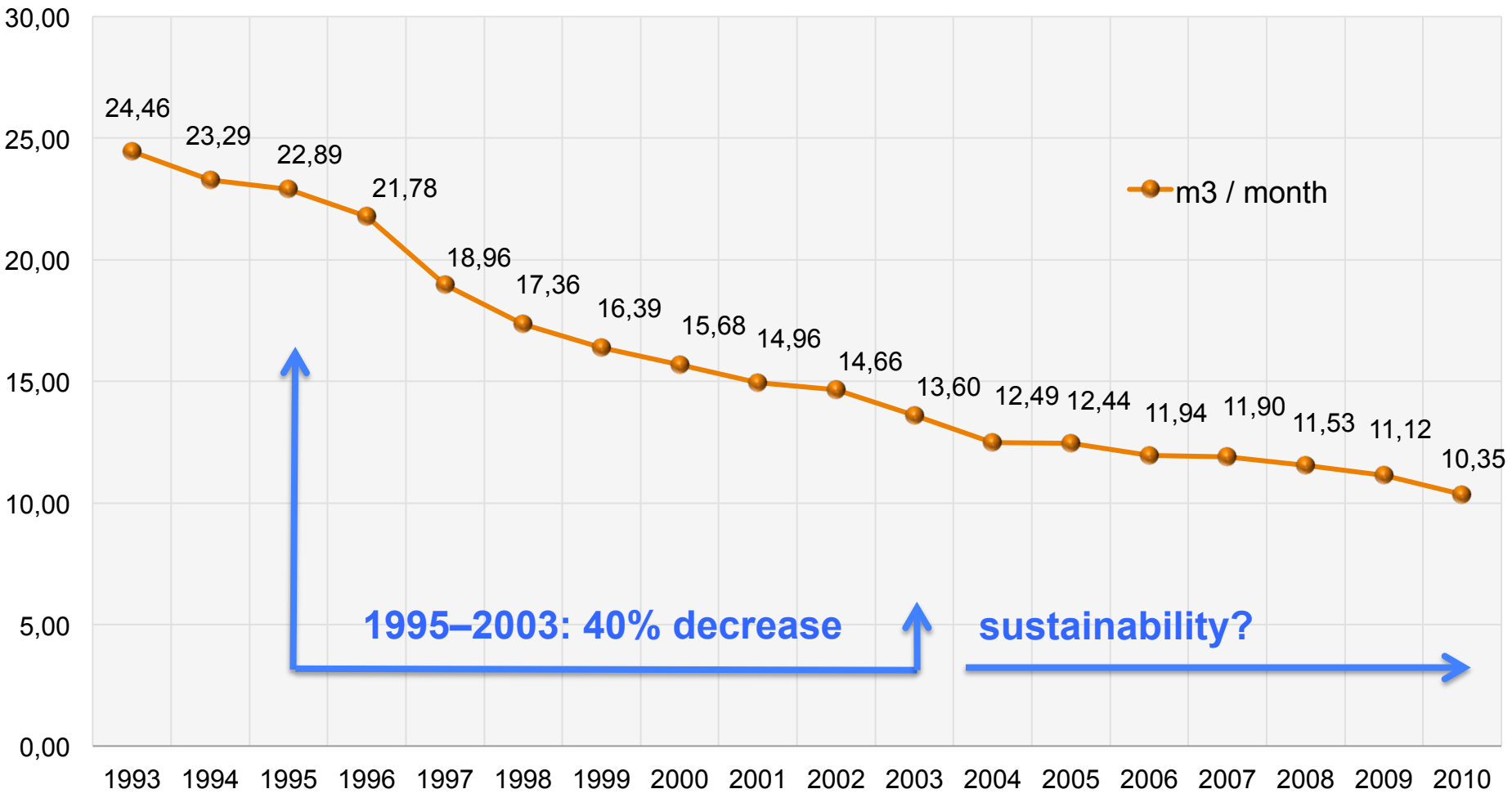
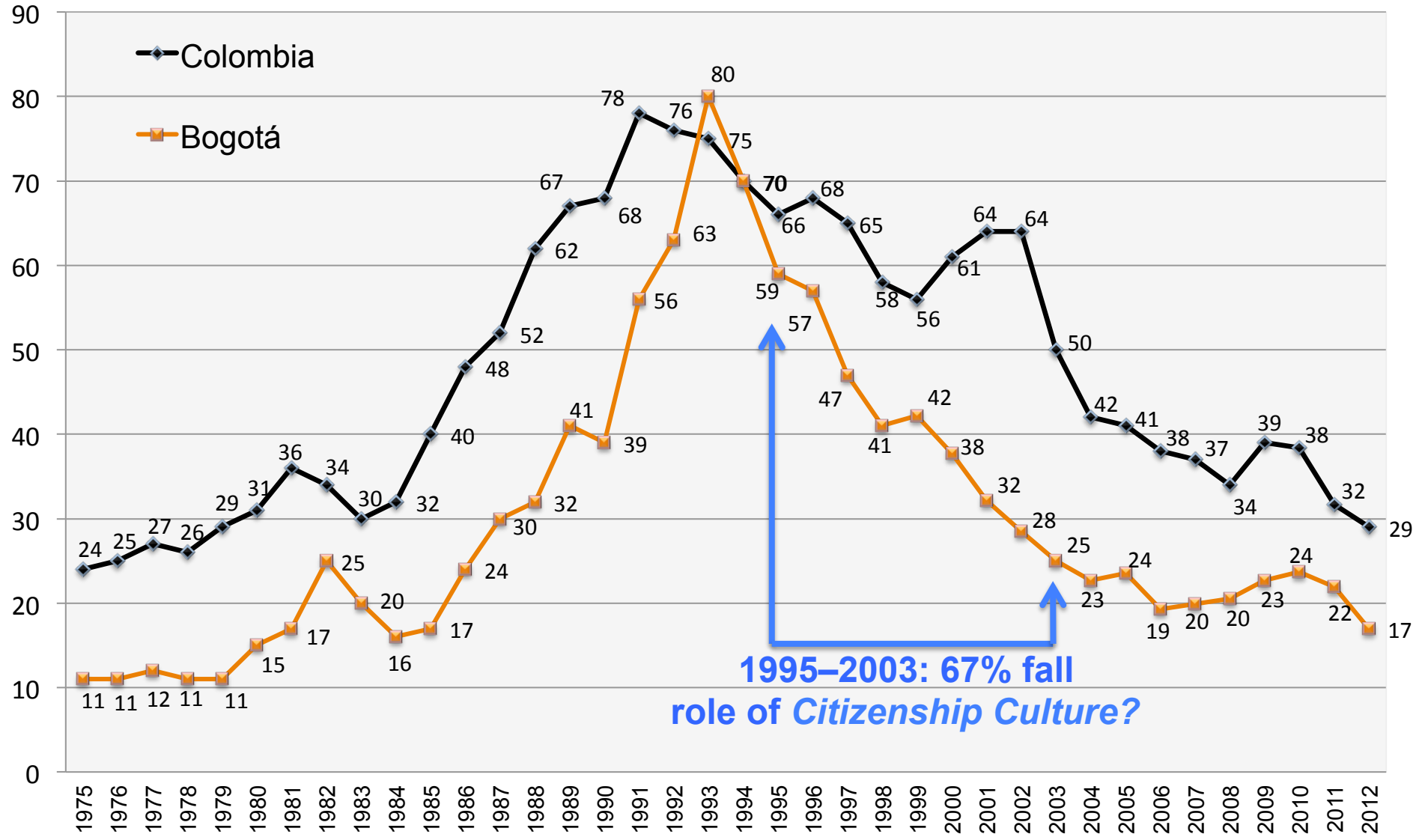
similar innovative interventions occured in other policy areas

Average water consumption per household
Bogotá, Colombia 1993 - 2010



Source: Empresa de Acueducto y Alcantarillado de Bogotá (last available data: July 2010) [Corpovisionarios]

Homicides in Bogotá and Colombia
1975-2011 (rate per 100 000 inhabitants)



Source: Instituto Nacional de Medicina Legal y Ciencias Forenses (INML), Policía Nacional
DANE Population Projections

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What didn't work that well?

- Institutions were not set up to keep **Cultura Ciudadana** as a part of integral urban policy in Bogotá in subsequent mayorships.

- But more importantly: the **emphasis on the bottom-up nature of the process** could have been much stronger.
- The people should **own** *cultura ciudadana*!

the upshot

A few points worth noting

- **Extremely high visibility**: crucial for enabling/ cathalizing change and coordination of empirical and normative expectations.

- Resorted to artistic elements **based on culturally recognized symbols**.

- Importance of **context-sensitivity**. Simple replication across different contexts probably ineffective.

- **Formal institutional strengthening** may not only be effective in and of itself: it may also work as a *signal* that indirectly strenghtens social capital (e.g. interpersonal trust).

Obstacles met in practice

- **Magical formulas** are sought after. The simple form of creative interventions tends to be copied, not the ideas behind them (example: mimes).
- But there seem to be **no magical formulas, no recipes** – rather, what we seem to be approaching is a **framework** for the design of potentially succesful strategies.
- Many strategies are implemented without identifying a concrete target: **small, disorganized "campaigns" have no impact**.

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Challenges and open questions

Things many of you are *experts* in!

- **Implementation of rigorous & powerful impact evaluation:** go beyond correlation to establish evidence for *causation*.

- Distinguish between effects of different strategy components (**How can this be feasible in practice? How to parse out causal effects in such cases?**)

Challenges and open questions

Things many of you are *experts* in!

- **What is the reference network?**

  - Important for policy design
  - The behavior and beliefs of *different* people may matter for *different* choices
  - It could well be that just *observing* strangers (directly or indirectly) who share the same public space is already a relevant social interaction.

- **The challenge of sustainability**

  How long? In what ways? How can we know?

CORPO VISIONARIOS

A non-profit independent organization that since 2007 provides consultancy services, performs research, and designs and implements strategies to facilitate positive social change.

- Following and advancing the *Citizenship Culture* approach.

- Strong reliance on social-norms perspective.

Something to take back?

Problem should be brought to **public awareness**

…where "**public**" means as **visible to all**:
an object of collective deliberation and reflection

The **key** is to implement strategies
that invite and guide people into
communicating more openly, transparently, and peacefully

by creatively disrupting routine shared social expectations

Thank you!

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for their generous invitation

Javier Guillot
Hertie School of Governance, Berlin
(& Corpovisionarios)

srguillot@gmail.com

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