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## Article

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# Culture as an obstacle for entrepreneurship

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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 validated instrument (survey) 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, a 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.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Culture, Enterprise creation, Entrepreneurial ecosystem, Academic institutions

## 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-Aranzaes, 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; Loveridge et al., 2012;

Murugesan, 2010), 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 (Cavallo et al., 2019; 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 & Radrián, 2018; Petrakis & Kostis, 2013).

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 a business. In other words, it is the set of norms, values, and codes of conduct that 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 decided 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 República 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 Medellín, have developed ecosystems that combine the wills of institutional actors from the "Triple Helix," composed of 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.

There are enough researches that address the different problems faced by entrepreneurs when carrying out different projects (Edelman et al., 2016; Farinha et al., 2020; Xie et al., 2019). Both personal and environmental spheres have been covered. The issues related to the factors that influence entrepreneurship, the impact of various factors on

the development of the entrepreneur, are studied (Alvarez-Sousa, 2019; Haque Choudhury & Mandal, 2021; Stam & van de Ven, 2021), but almost all studies try to identify the favorable situations that favor the emergence of entrepreneurs (Autio et al., 2013; Petrakis & Kostis, 2013; Stuetzer et al., 2014). The danger of a culture that stifles creative minds and the possibilities of innovation have not been sufficiently studied. This article does not discuss state policies, but rather covers individual configurations in the face of difficulties in generating new ventures.

The culture of a region as an obstacle has not been sufficiently covered. This paper presents the influence that society has on individual thinking and on the actions that limit entrepreneurship, from the point of view of the department of Tolima in Colombia. Although it is a region with all the potential and advantages to be one of the national drivers of the economy, it is a region dependent on commercial trade, with low levels of innovation and serious problems to generate high-impact entrepreneurship. This is why this paper aims to test the possibility of a culture that hinders entrepreneurial development.

### Culture and entrepreneurship

The importance of the entrepreneurial culture in a region has been previously studied (de Jong, 2015; Huber et al., 2014; Petrakis & Kostis, 2014). The importance of having a developed industry (Xie et al., 2019), political will (Farinha et al., 2020), family support (Haque Choudhury & Mandal, 2021; Lingas, 2013), and obviously a mix of individual characteristics that allow the incubation of ventures and entrepreneurs has been highlighted.

However, it is necessary to keep in mind that the industry, family, political will, and other elements studied are part of the regional culture in which entrepreneurs develop. All these elements have been studied separately to determine the impact they have had on the development of entrepreneurs. In other words, we can conclude that the coverage of these cultural factors that facilitate the emergence of entrepreneurial projects is extensive.

For example, Xu et al. (2020a), and Xu et al. (2020b)) claims that there is no doubt that in the entrepreneurial process, family relationships are important resources for entrepreneurs. But, as they also recognize, this asseveration is made from the studies made among the Chinese entrepreneurs, so it is necessary to expand these results to another culture.

Other issues as better access to reproductive healthcare increase women's propensity to become entrepreneurs, a factor that does not affect men, all of this due to the traditional gender gap (Zandberg, 2021). Again, cultural factors benefit the emergence of entrepreneurial activity.

Studies about transgenerational entrepreneurs also have been made. The concept of transgenerational entrepreneurship postulates that the success of family firms across generations relies on three main dimensions—firm entrepreneurial orientation, families, and cultural contexts—which affect their financial, market, and social performance (Basco et al., 2019). However, once again, the studies and results are focused on identifying the factors that facilitate entrepreneurship. There is no clear focus on identifying the barriers to entrepreneurship.

The field of education also plays an important role in analyzing the impact of the cultural environment on entrepreneurs. Results reveal that effectiveness of entrepreneurship education has a strong positive correlation with entrepreneurial creativity (Wang et al., 2021). These also showed small effect sizes for Entrepreneurship Education in increasing Entrepreneurship Intention and Self-efficacy (Martínez-Gregorio et al., 2021). Of course, we can infer that if there is no education in entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial activity will be low, but how much?

The region's culture has been highlighted as a factor to be taken into account (de Jong, 2015). It has been studied the differences that are present between different regions within the same territory (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2014; Stuetzer et al., 2014), comparisons between two different countries (Aparicio et al., 2021; Dionisio et al., 2021), even the impact of entrepreneurship in two different areas of the city.

The direct relationship between the entrepreneurial culture of a region and its economic development has also been studied (Fritsch & Wyrwich, 2014). Even aspects, such as religion, can favor the emergence of new business ideas (Miao et al., 2021), which ultimately contributes to energizing the entire economic system present in the region (Spulber, 2008). The importance of the academy in the entrepreneurial process becomes relevant when it comes to guiding and promoting entrepreneurship (Raposo & Paço, 2011; Sarıkaya & Coşkun, 2015; Solesvik et al., 2014) whether in the rural sector or in a specific city. The above highlights the central importance of business, academia, and government in the structuring of an entrepreneurial ecosystem that allows the generation of high-impact and innovative ventures, in addition to the ventures generated by the entrepreneur's own need to survive (Cantner et al., 2020; Fuentelsaz et al., 2020; Stam & van de Ven, 2021).

The public policies adopted by the regulator have been studied and identified as necessary to structure the entrepreneurial ecosystem (Cantner et al., 2020; Thornton et al., 2011; Tominc & Rebernik, 2007). It is necessary to promote public initiatives that encourage the generation of new ventures and therefore new jobs that enhance the economic development of society. Of course, political will shapes part of the entrepreneurial culture, but the impact it can have on the psyche of the general population has not been studied in depth.

However, the entrepreneurial culture of a region has always been approached as a possible positive aspect that facilitates and energizes the entrepreneurial activity found in the place (Capelleras et al., 2019; Tominc & Rebernik, 2007), but the negative impact of its absence in the region has not been studied in depth.

There is a gap in the study of the cultural burdens that hinder the advancement of entrepreneurship. While one or two factors can be addressed from different perspectives, What if culture as a whole compromises the development of new entrepreneurial initiatives? If the entrepreneur sees no help in such a sea of difficulties, will he continue with his initiatives despite everything, or will he eventually give up any hope of continuing to work on his projects? How far can resilience go when the whole environment is working against him?

This article will study how the culture of a region undermines and increases the barriers that already exist for entrepreneurial activities.

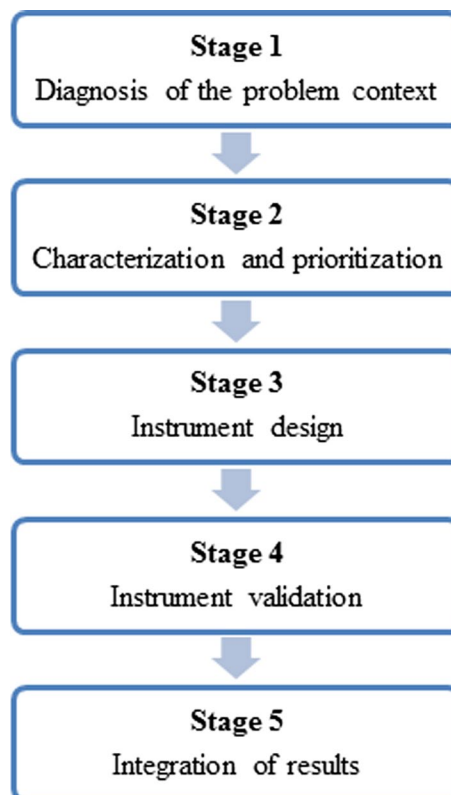
## Methods

For the development of the study, the methodological process called Mixed Methods Research (MMR) was applied (Gates et al., 2014; Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza, 2018; I et al., 2019), defining the following stages (Fig. 1):

*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:

- a) *Theoretical:* From experiences and models proposed by authors, who characterized the variables that were considered significant to be included in the model.
- b) *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 of their entrepreneurial process.
- c) *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



**Fig. 1** Process of research methodology

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, in which 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 other public–private institutions with interests in entrepreneurship.

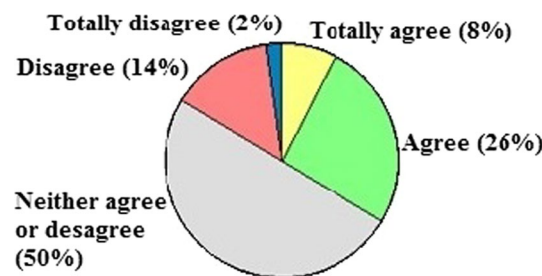
Both groups are geographically located in the city of Ibagué, capital of the department of Tolima. For the first group, the instrument used was the previously validated survey, while for the second, a semi-structured interview was conducted.

### Results

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

Regarding the family issues, people from Ibagué who fall back on family support to develop entrepreneurship, the answers were as follows (Fig. 2):





**Fig. 2** Result of 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, leads to a Herculean task to disclose the benefits of said funds.

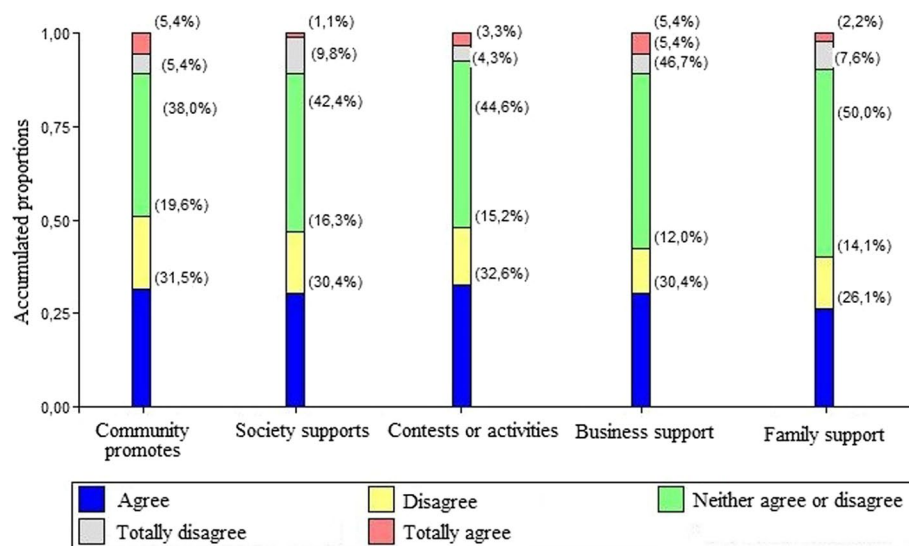
However, it is true that entrepreneurs in the region are reluctant to finance ventures, either due to ignorance or, failing that, the compensation received for their possible investment does not meet expectations. Although startups can be a risky investment (Nanda & Rhodes-Kropf, 2013), in many cases the initial amount is not so significant and the medium-term prospects can be very promising (Xu et al., 2020a; Xu et al., 2020b). 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). The results are summarized in Fig. 3.

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, the 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 (Abdul Kadir et al., 2012; Enechojo Grace & Happiness Ihuoma, 2013). 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 a 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





**Fig. 3** Cross-section of the regional environment

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).

While thought has been given to how a region influences the germination of entrepreneurs and innovative companies, the importance of involving business, education, and government in the formation of an entrepreneurial ecosystem, the perception, and absence of an entrepreneurial culture in a specific region has not been studied enough; this can undermine all the efforts of institutional actors to favor entrepreneurship. If the collective thinking about entrepreneurship is not changed, it becomes very difficult to form ventures that dynamize the economy of a specific territory.

The resistance of the collective to generate new ventures limits the initiatives only to the generation of ventures out of necessity, which has a minimal impact, which will probably not exceed the five-year valley, and most of them do not constitute an important source for the generation of employment. Even when important institutional efforts are made, the paradigms about the difficulty of entrepreneurship discourage potential entrepreneurs.

Since entrepreneurship has been identified as a primary need for all societies that base their economy on capitalism, studies have been developed seeking to identify and propose situations that allow for its development. The obstacles faced by the entrepreneur and entrepreneurship have also been identified from various perspectives. But the social psyche can configure a greater obstacle to those previously studied. Of course, this statement does not go against, perhaps, one of the most important characteristics of the entrepreneur, the resilience to overcome obstacles, but it would be interesting to analyze how many entrepreneurs find the solution of migrating to other regions that make easier the incubation of their entrepreneurial project.

## 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 toward entrepreneurial practices. Thus, entrepreneurship cannot be the sole 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 the household since family support is vital in the early stages of entrepreneurship.

From the university, it is necessary to make entrepreneurship a transversal competence that 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 in 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 moves in the triple helix: University–Company–State. If any of the parties are 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, and 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, and 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 as the biggest obstacle for entrepreneurs was confirmed.

From this starting point, it is necessary to study the impact that the regional culture has on the migration of entrepreneurs, the mortality rate of companies, and possible strategies to reverse these difficulties, if possible, in the short and medium term. Not

only is entrepreneurial education in the early stages of cognitive development essential but it is also necessary to address such education by focusing not only on the development of individual skills but also on the group that surrounds the entrepreneur.

### Limitations and future research

This study is limited to the cultural environment of the department of Tolima. Ideally, it would be possible to replicate these studies in areas with similar characteristics, both in Colombia and in the international context. Likewise, most of the data correspond to entrepreneurs located in the urban area of the department. It is relevant to study the phenomenon in rural areas; however, the pandemic, the geographical conditions, and the limited access to the use of technologies made it difficult to collect information at this early stage.

For future research, we consider it important to carry out a diagnosis to determine which of the different cultural factors has the greatest impact in limiting entrepreneurial activity. In this way, alternatives can be formulated to reduce this impact or, in the best of cases, to eliminate it.

The public sector should formulate long-term policies that allow for a paradigm shift in the region, but to do so, academia should provide a clear picture of the current situation and the possible alternatives that can be remedied.

### Abbreviation

MMR Mixed methods research

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### Author contributions

GO, JR, and KL were involved in the design of the study and the instruments applicable 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.

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

### 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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