

**Recreational experiences of peace signatories in Colombia,
based on life stories:
between militancy and civilian reincorporation**

**Experiencias recreativas de firmantes de paz en Colombia,
a partir de historias de vida:
entre la militancia y la reincorporación civil**

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Abstract

The objective of this work is to analyze the recreational experiences of peace signatories of the former Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army, in the transition from guerrilla militancy to civilian reincorporation in a framework of coexistence and harmonization in the former Territorial Space of Training and Reincorporation Mariana Paez of the municipality of Mesetas, in the Department of Meta. The research is qualitative, employing ethnography with the narrative biographical method, and the ATLAS.ti-8 software was used for analysis. The results confirm that peace signatories engaged in recreational, cultural and sports activities during their time of militancy, giving relevant meanings in terms of the notion of community in a guerrilla context, resilience and emotional resistance capacity. In transit to civilian life, these experiences allow them to feel like free citizens, encourage collective participation, generate expectations of training and generate a reconciliatory link with people from other communities. It is concluded that recreation brought together peace signatories in times of militancy, offering possibilities and instances of encounter and emotional relief, being a catalyst for the phenomenon of reconciliation with other communities, once the process of civilian reincorporation has begun.

Keywords: Recreational experience, peace signatories, armed conflict, life stories, reintegration.

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las experiencias recreativas de los firmantes de paz de las antiguas Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia-Ejército del Pueblo, en el tránsito de la militancia guerrillera a la reincorporación civil, en un marco de convivencia y armonización en el Antiguo Espacio Territorial de Capacitación y Reincorporación Mariana Páez del municipio de Mesetas, en el Departamento del Meta. La investigación es

cualitativa, emplea la etnografía con el método biográfico narrativo, y se usó el software ATLAS.ti-8 para análisis. Los resultados confirman la realización de actividades recreativas, culturales y deportivas por los firmantes de paz en tiempos de militancia, otorgando sentidos relevantes en cuanto a la noción de comunidad en contexto de guerrilla, resiliencia y capacidad de resistencia emocional. En tránsito a la vida civil, estas experiencias les permiten sentirse como ciudadanos libres, fomentan la participación colectiva, generan expectativas de formación y generan un nexo reconciliatorio con personas de otras comunidades. Se concluye afirmando que la recreación nucleó a los firmantes de paz en tiempos de militancia, ofreciendo posibilidades e instancias de encuentro y desahogo emocional, siendo catalizadora del fenómeno reconciliatorio con otras comunidades, una vez iniciado el proceso de reincorporación civil.

Palabras clave: Experiencia recreativa, firmantes de paz, conflicto armado, historias de vida, reintegración.

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1. Introduction

In Colombia there exists an armed conflict whose origin does not have a consensus among historians, political scientists and researchers (Gutiérrez, 2020; Moreno, 2015), however, it is estimated that its genesis would be found in the decade that began in 1940 (Ríos, 2017). This conflict has to date generated a confrontation

between the security forces of the Colombian State and various guerrilla groups, as well as paramilitary groups. In such a context, crimes against humanity and war crimes have been perpetrated, including massacres, so-called ‘false positives’, selective murders, ‘hits’, among other actions (International Federation of Human Rights, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2020; Rojas, 2020), counting between 1958 and 2020, more

than 265,000 confirmed fatalities, including just over 4,500 since the signing of the Final Agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace [(2016) hereinafter 'AP' (Peace Agreement)] (Carranza, 2020). These figures do not include forced disappearances, victims of displacement, territorial and socio-cultural uprooting, economic dispossession, loss of assets and property, kidnappings, sexual violence, intimidation, bribes for protection, among others (National Center for Historical Memory, 2018). It has been one of the longest conflicts in contemporary world history and with the most consequences in the region (Calderón, 2016).

The analysis of the armed conflict in Colombia is complex and multidimensional (Neira & Castillo, 2020). Although pacification in Colombia does not begin with the AP signed in 2016 between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia-People's Army (hereinafter, FARC-EP) [Rodríguez-Luna, 2021], this agreement contemplated the participation of this insurgent group. Of course, there are other active insurgent groups such as the National

Liberation Army (ELN), in addition to those who regrouped in the so-called Criminal Gangs (BACRIM) and paramilitary groups (Aguirre-Briñez *et al.*, 2018; Grasa, 2019; Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo y la Paz [INDEPAZ], 2021).

The AP was signed between the government of the then president Juan Manuel Santos Calderón and the FARC-EP, on November 24, 2016 (Arias, 2020), a measure by which a definitive ceasefire was agreed between the FARC-EP and the security forces of the State, and therefore, the laying down of weapons by the FARC-EP, under conditions that must allow, among other things, social reintegration, the guarantee of political rights, administration of justice, reparation and not repetition (Melo, 2016).

The agreement recovers the steps to follow for the civil reincorporation of the peace signatories, and it is in the poor compliance with the AP (Peralta & Sánchez, 2022) that this investigation was conceived. The United Nations Verification Mission (MVNU) in Colombia, for November 2021, already

counted the murder of 303 former FARC-EP combatants who laid down their weapons and welcomed the AP, however, the figure rose to 355, according to a report from the same MVNU for January 2023 (DW, 2023), in addition to situations such as the disappearance of ex-combatants and assassination attempts (United Nations, 2022). In 2023 alone, the number of former peace signatory combatants murdered amounts to 24, and, in 2024, 24 new murders of peace signatories have been added, including two from the Department of Meta, which is the context of this study (INDEPAZ, 2023, 2024). This civil reintegration process has been a challenge for Colombian society, and even more so for the former combatants who signed the peace, since a kind of suspicion towards them for their militancy (whether they have perpetrated crimes or not) remains in tension, which plays against these reintegration processes (Ávila, 2018; MVNU, 2019; Peralta & Sánchez, 2022). In fact, for them:

[...] reintegration into civilian life has not been easy. Some have left the jungle and settled in Bogotá, the country's capital, but

their adaptation has been complex due to the few activities to develop, due to their past, an economy in crisis and a society that does not fully accept them (France 24, 2021, 1/1).

Another obstacle that makes the AP points towards more complex opinion matrices that have been expressed through the media, and that point to the agreement as:

[...] an evil for the country, seeking to erase from memory the structural relations of injustice, exclusion, dispossession, extortion, the war crimes of the parties, the logic of extermination from the State and its governments; that is, seeking for all the media to make invisible the relations of domination that account for the phenomena of rebellion that historically cause conflicts. Likewise, lies were built around the agreement proposals, mobilizing emotions such as indignation and rage, which were widely disseminated and deeply penetrated the collective imagination, influencing the population's decision-making. Thus, we are witnessing a marked symbolic violence (Villa et al., 2022: 148).

In addition to what has been mentioned, non-compliance on part of the State is reported, and also manifested in the low banking coverage of the peace signatories, lack of support for productive projects and housing construction, among others (Cadena, 2018; Villa-Gómez et al., 2022). Other difficulties include:

Lack of knowledge about the Final Agreement, its implementation, and the measures contemplated for participation, both by civil society and the private sector and even within the State itself. This situation reduces the possibilities for broader and more effective participation, and local ownership of the peace process (Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, 2018: 230).

The AP does not decree impunity, as has been inadequately interpreted (Ambos & Aboueldahab, 2020). In fact, it creates the *Jurisdicción Especial para la Paz* (Special Jurisdiction for Peace), in the context of one of the agreed axes. Reference is made to the *Sistema Integral de Verdad, Justicia, Reparación y no Repetición* (Comprehensive

System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition), which ensures the satisfaction of the right to justice by the victims of the conflict (Olasolo & Canosa, 2018), adjusting to international justice standards in the framework of exceptional circumstances of transitional justice processes (Cisneros, 2018; Valderrama & Ortiz, 2017). In the context of the social reintegration process of the former FARC-EP, the figure of Territorial Training and Reincorporation Spaces (ETCR) emerges, previously known as Transitory Local Normalization Zones and Transitory Normalization Points, which are inhabited spaces self-managed by former guerrillas who signed the AP (Bolaño-Peña & Mejía-Escalante, 2020). These spaces serve for educational training, psychological care, communal and productive projects of peace signatories seeking a process of reintegration into civilian life. They are now known as Former Territorial Training and Reintegration Spaces (AETCR). However, given the particularity of the process, and the way in which these spaces are delivered for occupation, they have been considered ghettos (Peralta & Sánchez, 2022).

Understanding that the Colombian conflict and pacification are very complex, multidimensional and multifactorial processes, it is in the interest of researchers to place the analysis in the impact of recreation as a social phenomenon from guerrilla militancy to the process of transition and reintegration into civilian life. after demobilization, understanding recreation as an axis of peace (Buitrago & Aguilar). In observations made by the researchers, and, as with the group of peace signatories of the FARC-EP, it is noted that recreation, despite the fact that it is not a constant topic nor considered as first order nor in the public agenda nor in the framework of social science interests (Gomes, 2014; Quintero, 2021), could be relevant for the understanding of certain processes in the context described in this work. We refer to the recreational experiences of the peace signatories of the former FARC-EP, and their relationship with the coexistence and harmonization of the group in the face of daily activities. Recreation is thought of as a daily mobilizing experience with an important role, since it has been used both in times of guerrilla militancy and in the transition from that

militancy to civilian life after demobilization by the AP, depending on social reintegration. It possesses an added value associated to the subjectivity of the insurgent population, without ignoring the projects that start from recreation as a means of reintegration, nor nullifying the transcendence that was forged in the militancy of the rebels with respect to their predecessor practices.

In this sense, it is understood that recreation, in the wide diversity of recreational, cultural and artistic manifestations that it admits, behaves as a mechanism that restores, allows the emergence of feelings, of the emotional openness necessary for encounter, of dialogue, of participation, of the construction of citizenship, of the fabric of social relationships, of the capacity for resilience, of reconciliation and of forgiveness (Romero, 2015). In addition, it is noted that, within the framework of pacification processes, the right to recreation of these people must be recognized, as highlighted in the Political Constitution of Colombia (1991) in article 52, which is also endorsed in the same legal instrument in article 13, highlighting that «The State will

promote the conditions so that equality is real and effective and will adopt measures in favor of discriminated or marginalized groups». So much so, that there are AETCRs in which the ex-combatants themselves, in alliance with other organizations, have created artistic training schools to generate reconciliation processes (MVNU, 2019), which is consistent with what was commented by Hernández et al. (2020): «in those places where there is greater participation, there are more conditions for the involvement of ex-combatants in community affairs» (p. 4). It also highlights that the MVNU, accompanied by entities such as the Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization (hereinafter, ARN), has generated programs such as *Valorizarte*, *Soy valiente*, and events called *Verdad que podemos construir paz en comunidad*, basically incorporating cultural, artistic and recreational activities between peace signatories and community residents, creating opportunities for the development of relationships, the collapse of prejudices, reconciliation and satisfying their rights (Arroyave, s.f.; MVNU, 2021). Furthermore, the same ARN, in response letter No. OFI21-009906 (at the request of the researchers of this work),

maintains the following background information: a) With the Ministry of Sports through the *Programa Deportes Más* program, 3 people (including 2 peace signatories) were hired to develop recreational and sports activities for the population in the process of reintegration and their families, such as soccer, shuffleboard and volleyball championships; b) Sports activities have been developed through the Meta Sports and Recreation Institute (IDERMETA); c) ARN professionals, as part of their work plan, organize sports activities monthly.

When reviewing the literature, there is evidence of research regarding the signing of the AP, and in relation to the socialization process and the transition to civilian life, but there is not enough research on the linking of recreational experiences in these processes. Recreation has been an underestimated field in the study of social sciences, second order and of minor relevance compared to other social processes (Gomes, 2014; Quintero, 2021). However, given that the peace signers themselves have considered recreation as a core aspect of their experience in times of militancy and after the AP, some works were

found that demonstrate that intervention based on recreational experiences helps with the processes of civil reintegration, and that recreational experiences were relevant, playing a fundamental role at the time of guerrilla militancy. For example, Posso (2021) talks with former guerrilla women who associate the recreational experience with a category called 'learning and happiness in the midst of war'. One of them says: «(...) we had our entertainment there, and we spent our time studying and talking and listening to the news and that, talking, talks, they gave us all that there» (161).

In another case, Chávez & Gómez (2019) implemented a recreational intervention program at the Hogares Claret Foundation with young people disengaged from the guerrilla and in the process of reintegration. In 7 months of intervention, the young people expressed repressed post-war feelings, achieving changes in cultural practices and their codes of behavior. Another case corresponds to García & Ospina (2019), who used a recreational intervention program for youth empowerment and peace building. This project was linked

to the macro proposal for training leaders as peacebuilders, a community intervention project, favoring the empowerment of young people from Guamal-Meta, motivating them to contribute to the strengthening of the social fabric and the construction of peace. It is noted that young people do possess platforms, but there are no promoters to help with the good use of available time, or recreational programs. Lastly, Potes (2017) highlighted the «power of intervention that music has in the lives of guerrillas» (167), letting it be known that listening to and composing music were important incentives to recreate themselves in times of militancy.

«The guerrilla continues to be an individual, with his bios, his history, his biography, his added value to the fight, personal and characteristic. It can never be a unit that can be replaced by another on the geometric plane of the conflict» (Lawrence, 2004: 52). Thus, and given that the evidence points to recreation as a mechanism for coexistence, given the lack of research that connects recreation as a path to peace and reconciliation within the framework of the AP in Colombia, given the need to warn to the peace

signatories as subjects and in a particular way based on the recognition of their subjectivities [(it seems that, because they were insurgents, for a part of society, they do not have a life, a history, and their life circumstances are not valid, therefore they do not deserve peace) RFI, 2016], the purpose of this work was to analyze the impact of the recreational experiences of the peace signatories of the former FARC-EP, and its relationship with the coexistence and harmonization of the group against the daily activities at the AETCR Mariana Páez in the municipality of Mesetas, in the Department of Meta.

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2. Methodology

This work has a qualitative approach, with an ethnographic methodology and a

biographical-narrative type of research. The techniques used to collect information were observation, life history (from the semi-structured interview) and photographic recording. The instruments used were the field diary, photographic record, interview script and work sheets.

The population was represented by peace signatories from the FARC-EP subject to the AP, corresponding to the AETCR Mariana Páez, located in the municipality of Mesetas, in the Department of Meta, Colombia. Considering episodes that confirm the death of former guerrillas, there was no small risk when carrying out research, therefore, guaranteeing the strict confidentiality of personal data, the following criteria were used to select the sample: a) having belonged to the FARC-EP; b) having been a guerrilla fighter for two years or more; c) belong to the reintegration process carried out by the ARN at the time of the investigation; d) live in the AETCR in Mesetas or its surroundings; e) be of legal age; f) participate voluntarily; g) express availability to provide information within the framework of this research, signing an informed consent,

both to participate in the research and for the use of the photographs, as long as they were edited to maintain anonymity.

We worked with three *a priori* categories (AC), namely: AC1: recreational experiences; AC2: meaning of recreational experiences around coexistence; and, AC3: pacification processes.

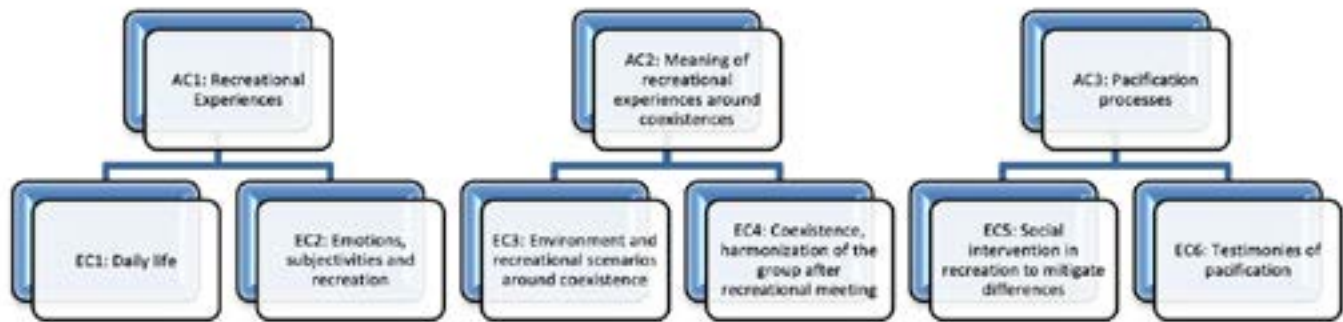
Table 1. Operational definition of a priori categories

A priori category (AC)	Codification	Operational definition
Recreational experiences	AC1	Recreational experiences of peace signers in guerrilla militancy and after becoming peace signers and in transition to daily life.
Meaning of recreational experiences around coexistence	AC2	Meaning that the peace signatories give to recreational experiences in relation to coexistence, among themselves and with Colombian society.
Pacification processes	AC3	Incidence of recreational experiences in the pacification process for peace signatories and in transition to daily life.

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

For the analysis of the interviews, a content analysis and a familiarization analysis of semantic occurrences were applied using the Atlas Ti-8 software, resulting in emerging categories (EC) or subcategories emerging from the three ACs, which are identified in Figure 1 in relation to the a priori categories from which they emerge:

Image 1. A priori categories and emergent categories or subcategories



Source: Own elaboration (2024).

2.1 Ethical considerations

The researchers have declared the originality of the research to the Universidad de Los Llanos under code N° FO-DOC-97/v2p3. In addition, in response to the request for support for academic research requested by the Colombian Agency for Reincorporation and Normalization, the request was made through official letter N° EXT21-004183, so that this research has been authorized under code N° OFI121-009906/IDM112000. Finally, this research was approved by the Ethics Committee of Universidad Adventista de Chile, under code 2023-112.

2.2 Context

The research was carried out at the AETCR Mariana Páez, located in the municipality of Mesetas (Department of Meta, Colombia), this area being agricultural in nature. Being inhabited by 200 families (at the date of the study), the AETCR Mariana Páez has areas adapted for volleyball practice and a micro field, it has tents with pool tables, shuffleboard courts, and a dance hall. It has a large room, which is known as the classroom for meetings, assemblies and integration events.

The homes are grouped by modules and each module has bathrooms and laundry rooms. It has a bakery as a result of collective work, a closed church, an ARN office, and a kindergarten for the children of the signatories. There is also a hotel, a restaurant and a library. It has a garage, a corral for goats and tanks for water supply. Currently, the inhabitants of the AETCR Mariana Páez have been displaced after six years of being located in the indicated territory, this having implications and risks to the lives of this group of nearly 200 families (Pineda, 2023).

3. Results

Firstly, the photographic record allows the peace signers to be warned while they were at the AETCR Mariana Páez, located in the municipality of Mesetas, in the Department of Meta, Colombia. The images show cultural and sports-recreational activities developed by the inhabitants of the AETCR, concretizing as activities that are core and constant in community life, showing that they are not isolated activities. This way of life has not been strange to them given that, in times of

guerrilla militancy, cultural, recreational and sporting practices already existed and were enjoyed.

It stands out that most of these activities come as a result of the organization of the inhabitants, some initiatives are carried out by non-governmental organizations, in addition to some actions generated by the Colombian State within the framework of pacification and reintegration (*Programa Deportes Más, Intermeta*). Although it is true some facilities stand out, the inhabitants of the area reported them as a result of their own actions, and not as a result of the signing of the AP, letting it be known that although they recognize that there is distrust on the part of Colombian society towards the signatories of peace (due to their guerrilla past), it is no less true that on their part there is also distrust towards the Colombian State since they state that it has not complied with the comprehensive commitments assumed after the signing of the agreement. The recreational and sports activities carried out involve a good number of the daily activities that are shared in the AETCR Mariana Páez community.

3.1 Interviews and Life Stories

Now, in the context of the life stories and the interviews, since these were categorized, their count constitutes a report of results. Considering the a priori categories, it is worth considering that another notable result reports the emergence of emerging categories or subcategories (See figures 1, 2).

Image 2. Category map



Source: Own elaboration (2024).

3.1.1 Recreational Experiences

This category implies two ECs, namely, a) daily life, and, b) emotions, subjectivities and recreation. The recreational experiences of the peace signers have been vital in the midst of the experience of guerrilla militancy, to the point that they have helped several peace signatories to overcome complex situations experienced in their homes and families, and also by inserting themselves into the dynamics of the guerrilla ranks. There are those who have had a genealogy determined by their participation in the Colombian guerrilla, or, there are those who joined the guerrilla ranks as teenagers, and had practically an entire life in that context. Thus, they warn in the recreation, a revulsion of the entire daily dynamics in said framework. It has not been the most important thing, but they do highlight it as a determining factor.

3.1.1.1 Daily Life (EC1)

The peace signatories confirm the carrying out of recreational activities in the daily life of their guerrilla militancy. For example, informant N° 1 is a lady, who maintains that:

There they played *micro*, they played volleyball, they did theater, they sang, they did dances, eh, they did, eh, poems, for example, for Mother's Day, they did activities, but no, the most, what was done the most was parties, parties, and no, what we did most, most, was the theaters, yes, they did theaters and sports, sports, well, it was almost not so routine, well for me, for me because, you know that I was from an available company and we didn't have much time for that.

Informant N° 2 is also a lady, and warns:

Recreation, well, all it means is there when we meet, we put out some theaters too, that for us is a recreation, it is to have fun with each other, we have or make new friends because there are several fronts that we meet, yes, then there we make friends, it is recreation for us, to share any meal with them.

And then they add: «Well, on the cultural hour what we do is like, songs, poetry, couplets; that is, in different places, yes, then there we do

the recreational hour too, dances or phonetic mimes like that, many little things».

3.1.1.2 Emotions, subjectivities and recreation (EC2)

The peace signers, in their times of guerrilla militancy, also notice emotionalities around recreational experiences, and these emotionalities also come to solidify the subjectivities under construction. In the case discussed below, we notice, for example, an aesthetic experience that without a doubt reports the subcategory in question:

[...] I also really liked fishing, I really liked fishing, I would leave the camp and obviously ask for permission, and I would go fishing. When there were no enemies nearby or anything like that, I went fishing, I fished there and caught fish and brought something back for the broth, a little something. One enjoys that, because, for example, passing by a beautiful waterfall and looking at it and saying, ah, how beautiful; there were possibilities to camp there, bathing there was a nice thing, but well, the truth is always I was, like, very, very aware of those things.

For example, I was talking to colleagues about how in a certain part there is a very beautiful or very nice waterfall, the water from a certain stream seemed very pretty or very cold to me, things like that (Informant N° 3).

3.1.2 Meaning of recreational experiences

Recreational experiences in times of guerrilla militancy provide relevant meanings for those who were part of their ranks. This category implies two ECs, these being: a) environment and recreation scenarios around coexistence, and, b) coexistence, harmonization of the group after recreational encounter.

3.1.2.1 Environment and recreation scenarios around coexistence (EC3)

The peace signatories point to the recognition of environments and scenarios that lead to coexistence within the framework of their guerrilla militancy, not only among themselves, but also to situations with people from other communities, peasants, etc.

[...] when a squad proposed, a party cell proposed something, that was something

like, that is, you had a lot of power, so to speak. A cell, for example, the third cell, eh, so-and-so proposes that singing be done in the afternoons, so it was done, such and such squad proposes that one be done, a recreational cultural hour, which was then done, they danced well, then well, more or less it was like that, the squads, or yes, the guerrillas had that way of coming out and proposing something (Informant N° 3).

Another informant points out:

We made time because to celebrate the 24th, because not the 31st. Sometimes we could due to situations, as everyone knows, because sometimes we had our enemies very close, so we couldn't have such a good Christmas with all the people, or, sometimes they would gather us together, so they would set a date for that day, a meeting is held, but just quick questions of just one day or two, at least, because it depends on the state of the area (Informant N° 2).

Another one adds:

Meeting with my classmates to talk, or I liked to embroider, dolls, I would get someone to draw them on the towel, the blanket, on a sweatshirt, and I would start embroidering, embroidering with thread, yes. That was either weaving straps or weaving, we called them ridges, to tie the awning, to tie anything, or the string for the rifle. The cord is a long thing that you make to pass a chiro through the barrel so that it does not get damaged, but I have already forgotten almost all of that, I knew how to weave that, I have already forgotten it, I think, I haven't done it since (Informant N° 1).

3.1.2.2 Coexistence, harmonization of the group after recreational meeting (EC4)

The peace signatories point to recreational and sports activities as a mechanism for coexistence and harmonization between them, but they also talk about cases in which these activities were carried out with civilians in various locations, in times of guerrilla militancy. This does not mean that it was a common action of all guerrilla fronts. But, although it is true, responses from peace signatories have already been presented in which they

tell about various recreational, cultural and sports activities that they carried out in, and between, various guerrilla fronts, it is notable that these activities were also carried out with civilians. An informant maintains:

When we went there to the Sumapaz moor with Zarco, we went out to the *totuma* to play *micro* against them, that is, with them and us, if they let us; normal, but we had to look at what was around first, but it wasn't forbidden or anything, talking to them, we dealt with them, normal, we shared with them, everything... I mean we can't there, they were civilians and we were in green, no nothing, we were all the same and everything we carried was for all of us, that is, sharing among all (Informant N° 3).

Another informant would say that their front did not allow exchanges with civilians for protection of the civilians themselves and also of themselves. This is what he highlights:

No, if the civilian got into that, they would kill him at once, they said he was a collaborator and a snitch and everything. No,

the normal thing was that you would pass by and the civilian would give you a glass of water, help you, he would give you a meal. Eh, there are times, one was there and someone was asked for a favor, oh he's going to bring me this little bit of dinner, we helped him, eh. There are times, eh, the meat, we killed the cow and shared it with them, we gave them a meal when we had it, it was a very nice relationship, for us the population was the most important thing, it was always the most important thing, it was the most sacred thing for us, unlike a few people who say that we, or rather, that's why you realize that the population wants the guerrilla, regardless of all the propaganda that the State throws around, because you believe that, um, if we had been, we would not have had the people, they would have killed us quickly. Ahem, the civilian would say to one, the army is coming and we *whoosh* (applauds), or when one was out there very badly, on the little mule they would take the consignment to one and all those little things, they were good to us, but since we didn't do that in a sporting event, or in my case I didn't, not

because how, to (sic) kill the civilian there from the army (Informant N° 7).

3.1.3 Pacification processes

- a) social intervention in recreation to mitigate differences, and
- b) testimonies of pacification.

3.1.3.1 Social intervention in recreation to mitigate differences (EC5)

According to the experience of the peace signatories, recreation served as a link between various guerrilla fronts, involving close dialogue with their companions, in good times and in bad times. It has even served to iron out differences between people, as witnessed by an activity at the AETCR Mariana Páez, in which two people participated jointly, a former guerrilla and a person from a nearby community, who had personal differences.

For me, recreation is, it involves socializing with other people, doing, I don't know, some kind of sport, a dynamic, maybe some game or something, so to speak, that leads to socializing. one with (sic) other people and to socialize, for me it would be like, like

that... Volleyball was played, they said, ah, that seemed good to me, *ta-ta-ta*, and that type of things and even more so when it was done in conjunction with other units, that was something very nice to do with other companies or fronts, that was always something very, very nice (Informant N° 3).

3.1.3.2 Testimonies of pacification (EC6)

The peace signatories warn about the conditions in which they arrived in the guerrilla ranks. Some at 12 years of age, others at 13, there are those at 16 years of age. Adverse conditions that influenced decisions that they might regret after being involved in the war for so long. When discussing and obtaining their answers, it is possible to notice between two of their answers, a contrast that points to the need for pacification and foresees the need to care for children and today's youth. In the first instance, an informant points out:

Well, my childhood was not very smooth. Eh, my dad was always a revolutionary, he was always a revolutionary communist. Ah, in the year 90, he left for the guerrilla and we were little ones with my mother,

then my mother left and we stayed with an aunt, a paternal aunt, with them we grew up and studied. I studied until the third year of high school and it was not easy, no, because in that time of the 90s, paramilitary violence began, the persecution began, and, well, it was our turn to stop studying, my four brothers had to stop study, we had to leave, because because I was the daughter of a guerrilla, they always, uh, had a persecution towards us, so, yes, it was a pretty hard childhood. No, I don't have very good memories of my childhood, I grew up without a dad and I grew up without a mom, until I was 16 when I went to the guerrilla (Informant N° 1).

The same person, a former guerrilla woman, later even points to recreation, sports and culture as social protection mechanisms in order to stop the spiral of boys and girls joining guerrilla ranks. This is how she highlights it:

We haven't had a teacher who comes and teaches them, someone who likes to sing, someone who likes to compose, eh, someone who likes to play volleyball. Well, all those

little things, it is very important so that history does not repeat itself, children are not out there idle doing anything, wandering around; there are people who do know how to use them (Informant N° 1).

After the dialogues held with the informants, a change is noted in the recreational activities developed in times of guerrilla militancy and after the AP (See Table N° 2).

Table 2. Activities in the midst of guerrilla militancy and post-guerrilla militancy

BEFORE	NOW
Micro	Micro
Volleyball (and other sports on improvised courts in the jungle) Culture hour: Reading Theatre Singing	Volleyball
Community work	Community work
Chess	Tabletop games
Cooking	Billiards
Fishing	Cockfighting
Swimming in rivers	Shuffleboard

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

As noted, several key elements have been lost in the lives of the peace signatories, perhaps due to what informant N° 1 comments:

The truth is, the thing with the handles, not anymore, I won't do it again. Eh, this thing about reintegration kind of makes people take on new things, or we take on new horizons, new rhythms, we get busy with other things, and here there is like more time, but there is also much more to do, see, so the truth is I didn't do it again.

And he adds: «we arrived here and everyone is working and trying to do their own thing, build their own little castle, so to speak, there are people who have taken out loans from the bank to buy a little land and that type of thing».

Among the most significant things, they say that they had the cultural hour as a meeting point, with singing, dancing, reading, training sessions and others, which can contribute today to pacification processes, but not to formulate it as an imposed mechanism, although they did keep purposeful similarities, just as what

they did in times of guerrilla militancy. On the other hand, the new meeting trends that have been embraced are: billiards, shuffleboard, cockfighting, etc. This last practice is not shared as appropriate by researchers; however, it should be highlighted as this is what is experienced in rural areas (especially there among the inhabitants who are peace signatories of the AETCR Mariana Páez), and whose value lies in the integration with others, with the paths, hamlets and towns, this can be the helm of new programs to venture into those new tastes that contribute to socialization.

Finally, and when asked about the support of the Colombian State after the AP, the response of Informant 1 even associates it with spaces for recreation:

It has been unsuccessful, because within, within the process, within the agreement of the process, there was something that said that they were going to install recreation fields for us, about I don't know what things, and that, that is true, like when you are going to conquer a girl (laughs) and the

conquest is quite difficult, I mean that was a crazy thing, that they said a number of things that, well if you are already here, you can notice it, that we have been here for four years and this It is the point at which we have not been able to organize the purchase of the land, we have not been able to get a housing project approved, yes, we have not been able to get sports sites adapted, none of those things.

Observation has made it possible to notice that the peace signatories have and share enthusiasm when seeing and receiving the organization and development of these activities, they express a desire to participate, and, in fact, they do so.

3.2 Field diaries

As a last report of results, it is noted that the field diaries were built up from the observation of different instances that occur in the daily lives of the peace signatories. It stands out that the peace signatories have been participants in many cultural, sports and recreational events. They are understood as necessary for the pacification and reintegration of the peace signatories, and this understanding is explicit on the part of the State in the documentation associated with the initiatives for the development of policies, but it is also explicit on the part of the peace signatories, who make these activities a relevant part of daily life in their communities.

Image 3. Field diary

DIARIO DE CAMPO		
Actividad	Investigador/Observador	Fecha
Actividad	Campeonato de Fútbol	Sábado 7 de Agosto 2021
Investigador/Observador	Sebastian Marín / José Ray	
Objetivo	Determinar cuáles espacios dan apertura a las experiencias recreativas.	
¿Qué se va a observar?	Se pretende observar las act. afines del deporte, la integración, el lenguaje corporal.	
Lugar-espacio	N.A.R. (Nueva área de reincorporación) Simón Trinidad (campo de fútbol)	
Personajes que intervienen	Comunidad firmante de Paz. / Comunidades aledañas.	
Descripción de actividades, relaciones y situaciones sociales cotidianas		Consideraciones Interpretativas/Analíticas con respecto al objetivo o pregunta de investigación
Llegamos al Simón Trinidad, esperamos a que empiece el evento (campeonato), en eso se acercan los representantes del Antioja F.C. Mariano Pérez reúne el equipo para dar algunas indicaciones, yo subí a dar nuestra presencia y apoyo al equipo. Sebastian no podía jugar pues su condición de futbolista no se le permite, yo sin embargo estaba dispuesto a dar lo mejor en el campo de juego (no es mucho, casi no juego bien) nos dan Uniformes rojos con el nombre de un Político y en el grabado Martín, con caracteres devaluados después del evento. P.11		En todo el campeonato se evidencia el respeto entre los firmantes, el apoyo de sus familias y amigos. Las fiestas que se salían gratis causaban risas. Algo que nos llamo la atención fue el tema de las faltas, en los otros equipos había esa negociación hacia los mismos, en el de nosotros (Mariano Pérez) por el contrario se asumían sin contradecir al árbitro. P.15
Observaciones		

Source: Own elaboration (2024).

The participating peace signers do not show bellicose attitudes, but rather respect the observations, fouls and other situations administered by the referees, judges and/or those who fulfill these functions within the framework of the sports activities carried out. There has even been the experience of a peace signer (former guerrilla) who did not have a friendly relationship with another person from the AETCR, and in the middle of sports activities, they were able to be together without any altercations. That is, recreational activity has allowed, in one way or another, to generate meeting spaces (See figure 4). In addition, it is also noted that activities such as meetings and assemblies are attended, as they are elements that are shared by them. The same thing that has happened in soccer and indoor soccer games has happened in other sports-recreational instances for them such as cockfights, dances, rounds, songs, among other community activities. It stands out that the behavior is nested and nucleated under the community of the AETCR Mariana Páez, that is, peace signatories, as if they were living together in the middle of the jungle.

Image 4. Participants in recreational activities



Source: Own elaboration (2024).

4. Discussion

This research shows that recreation had a space in the context of guerrilla militancy, and that, at the same time, it has had a favorable impact on the pacification process according to what the peace signatories in Colombia report. This reaffirms premises put forward by Sánchez-Cadavid & Arcila-Rodríguez (2023), for whom recreation can have a relevant impact on processes of social transformation.

The first element that this research highlights turns out to be the confirmation of a fundamental premise: recreation as a social phenomenon contributes to a culture of peace, as proposed by Gerardo & Rivero (2013). In fact, it has been one of the experiences that the peace signers rescue from the pacification process and that they value from their previous experience, and, so much so that, among all the practices that they revealed they had as guerrillas, recreational activities have been maintained by them in their transition to community life in peace, considering these as effective in this entire process of social reintegration and link with nearby

communities. And, that is the issue, how to transform a culture of violence that has persisted for decades, into a culture of peace for coexistence in Colombia. According to Gómez (2022), this is possible through education; and Reyes (2018) addresses it following the emergence of the *Movement for Peace and Life* in Venezuela regarding the political conflict that polarized two sectors and led to an escalation of violence in said country, but which found an incentive in that proposal of which, recreation ended up being a pillar of public policy for reunion and peace, and which also served to strengthen the *Constitutional Law against hatred, for peaceful coexistence and intolerance* (Gaceta Oficial 41:274).

Another aspect that stands out is the organization that, in times of guerrilla militancy, the now peace signatories had in relation to the planning of cultural and recreational activities, which can already be seen in Posso (2021), especially in activities carried out by the women, but do not refer to them exclusively. This is notable since it positions recreation as a relevant element in the lives of guerrillas in times of active militancy. This is also

endorsed by Goyeneche & Ramírez (2019), and when citing one of their informants, reading as follows:

In the courses that they gave us, there was always a cultural hour, no, and the cultural hour then we had to prepare in advance, so we met to say well, this squad will have the cultural hour point tomorrow, so we started to think well, we do a dance, we do a game, yes, and that was polished, it was polished, until at the end of the course we had four, five days to prepare that cultural hour, so they gave us ample space, then some very beautiful plays began to come out, people came out who knew about dance, so well, we are going to train those in dancing and teachers began to come out from ourselves who had more knowledge about that and they taught us (188).

And they add a little later:

So that space from Monday to Saturday always worked like that, on Sundays then there was recreational cultural time, well, Sunday has always been tried to be a day of

rest, that generally for us the day of rest is like a day of change of activity, essentially, and then in that recreational cultural hour, activities of a more artistic nature were already programmed, then it was in charge of the culture secretary, so they programmed, made a program for the cultural hour, which could include poetry, singing, dance if it was possible, or small theater scenes, sometimes games, things like that, or even sometimes a film was programmed, a film that people would see, do like the analysis of the film, then it was a space of constant training (Goyeneche & Ramírez, 2019: 220).

Now, of the recreational activities in times of active militancy, the now peace signatories have maintained many of them, replacing several because the living conditions are different. But what is relevant is that they continue to maintain recreation as a central aspect of their daily lives, which can be seen in the activities they were planning at the AETCR (even before their departure), now prepared with the intention of generating approaches to other communities in their eagerness to reintegrate into society.

The peace signatories give meaning to recreational activities that, in some way, allow them to warn people that despite the internal war they have waged for decades, they also dream, suffer, long for, have families and quite complex life records, and were affected by war, and that through this type of collective experiences they were creating spaces for sharing and coexistence. This has been confirmed in Posso (2021), as well as in Goyeneche & Ramírez (2019). Furthermore, it is noted that this type of activity has been transferred to daily life in that transition that they seek after the AP, since it not only has to do with the brotherhood forged in times of militancy, or the training and recreation spaces created, but recreation has also been understood by the peace signatories as a bridge that links relationships with the community, which is why they generate and project these activities with nearby communities. Christmas, birthdays, celebrations, dance, singing, reading, poetry, sports, fishing, cooking, knitting, contemplative activities, are just some of the recreational manifestations that the peace signatories have recounted, and that they maintain have generated meaning in their

orientation of what has been highlighted, and that advance in its translation in its relationship with nearby communities. In Vanegas et al. (2019), it is noted that recreation has even been a transversal element for spiritual healing, and this is very appropriate because it has to do with these processes that embody communities in the process of reconciliation and much-needed forgiveness. Regarding this relationship, Ospina (2019) also shows the connections between the reconciliation of victims and peace signatories based on an intervention designed with recreational-recreational activities, even despite the complexity of achieving these processes given the existing mistrust between the different interacting groups. And a step in that direction is to understand that the impact has been general:

In a post-conflict scenario, both victims and ex-combatants have been directly affected by the confrontation and express a high degree of emotional suffering, especially because they are forced to share everyday spaces. Thus, building peace and ending an armed conflict requires cultural and institutional modifications, in addition

to profound changes in the subjectivities involved... One dimension of these transformations would involve reconciliation processes (Villa-Gómez *et al.*, 2022: 615).

And they add: «This can materialize in face-to-face meetings, dialogues and conversations that allow agreements to be reached to facilitate coexistence» (*op.cit.*). And recreation, recreational activities and other cultural activities can serve as a rapprochement mechanism.

Regarding the way in which recreational activities have contributed to reincorporation, peace, reconciliation and the reconstruction of the social fabric in the context of the study, it should be said that, in their responses, the peace signatories let it be seen that recreational activities allowed the emergence of attitudes, feelings and emotions that moved them to get closer to other people, even when they differed from their own lifestyles, specifically civilians, or even fellow combatants from other FARC fronts, feelings and emotions that moved them to get closer to other people even when they differed from their own lifestyles,

specifically civilians, or even fellow combatants from other FARC fronts, from other guerrilla movements, from paramilitaries, and also from members of the armed forces. In other words, experiencing situations such as sharing, camaraderie, acceptance, forgiveness and the ability to ask for forgiveness, all of which have made coexistence, insertion and reincorporation into civilian life much more viable. Sharing spaces and recreational activities with civilians offers opportunities for relaxation and the lowering of tensions that may exist between different groups, and this has somehow favored the peace signatories in the framework of this process that implies, as has already been said, a whole exercise of rebuilding trust, of breaking down emotional barriers, of reconciliation, which is understood to be complex given the aftermath of the internal war in Colombia, but not impossible. And this research gives account and evidence of this whole process.

The peace signatories wish to train and advance in these processes, with a focal interest in recreation as they understand its relevance for meaningful reintegration. This is confirmed

in Document CONPES 3931, associated with the *National Policy for the social and economic reintegration of former members of the FARC-EP* (2018), which validates that 71% of male and 29% of female peace signatories, who were consulted, expressed interest in training in the areas of culture, recreation and sports. Furthermore, it highlights that the jobs and activities that guerrilla men liked to do most in times of militancy are, in order of importance, activities related to infrastructure, driving, agriculture, recreation, art, sports, communications, and health. In the case of women, the jobs and activities that they most enjoyed performing, in order of importance, are those related to health, communications, recreation, art and sports. In another order of ideas, two elements stand out that are affirmed as potential jump-starters of the pacification process. In this sense, recreation could not generate a change since it depends on other factors and political decisions. One of them is the logic of the ghetto in the figure of the AETCR (Peralta & Sánchez, 2022), which can be seen when visiting the place and sharing with the inhabitants of the area. This, without further ado, can endanger not only the lives of

its inhabitants, but also adds greater conflict situations in the AP, given that the ghetto is an instrument of confinement and control (Wacquant, 2007).

The other instigator of the AP can be recognized in the notion of suspicion with which the former guerrilla peace signatory is treated, and this brings with it the manifestation of obstacles and difficulties for reintegration (Posso, 2021). This occurs, firstly, on the part of the State itself and the institutions, and, secondly, but no less important, on the part of the population that has been victims of the internal war conflict. Therefore, the peace signatories have obstacles to advance in the reintegration process in the context of a PA that allowed the signing of guarantees by the two signatory sectors. However, there is a slowdown in the process, especially in relation to compliance by the State, which endangers the stability of the agreement and makes the living conditions and reintegration of the peace signatories from the guerrilla difficult (Villa- Gómez et al., 2022). In fact, when it was expected that, to date, according to Dabène (2022), 35% of the provisions

of the agreement would be implemented, it is known that only «28% of the provisions are fully implemented, 18% are at a level of intermediate progress, 35% minimum state and 19% not started» (sec. 1/1).

Conclusion

At the end of this research, and after listening to the stories of the peace signers, after visiting the AETCR Mariana Páez and living together from the research, after having assemblies with this community, it is noted that the recreation gave some meaning to the lives of the militants, and which served as a mechanism to promote resilience among the peace signatories in their times of guerrilla militancy. It is a phenomenon that knows no epistemic, geographical, or disciplinary boundaries, and this is noted by a former Colombian guerrilla militant, but also by a child or adolescent from anywhere in the world.

The recreation served as a shock to the loneliness and distance from the family in the midst of the war conflict experienced. It served for coexistence in the guerrilla, for individual and

collective training, for rest and enjoyment of nature at various times. Likewise, although it is true that the peace signatories, by signing the AP and laying down their weapons, also had to distance themselves from a way of life (along with everything that implies living in the middle of the jungle, with a permanent pilgrimage, in the middle of a war), it is no less true that recreation has been one of the elements that they have managed to transfer and that it has not been foreign to them in the adoption of a different way of life framed by pacification and social reintegration, even for interaction with communities in which forgiveness and reconciliation have been vital. Recreation thus has a divergent meaning for the peace signatories, but at the same time, integrative, restorative and projective (to the point that many wish to train in those areas), even when they cannot enjoy the conditions signed under the AP, being that they left their weapons as part of the commitment assumed collectively.

Although it is true that recreation is not an omnipotent phenomenon, it is an element that can help to catalyze social processes associated

with coexistence, sharing, reconciliation, in contexts that can be as complex (or even more so) as the armed conflict that has not ceased in Colombia and that has caused so much separation and pain in this country. Hence, understanding that contexts such as the one framed in the internal armed conflict in Colombia require integral, multifocal and multidisciplinary approaches, this work concludes by recommending the implementation of recreational processes in conflictive situations to favor social coexistence, reconciliation, peace culture and civil reincorporation.

6. Practical application

It is recommended that the study be extended to a larger number of informants, given that recreation has been a phenomenon present in the daily life of this population group. It is also suggested that the agreements made in the PA be taken up again, in relation to the provision of cultural, recreational and sports projects for peace signatories throughout Colombia, in addition to offering training alternatives in these areas.

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