

## Design, social innovation and peace: experiences from the Amazon-Orinoquía border in Colombia (2018-2019)

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# PROJÉTICA

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**ABSTRACT:** As a contribution to the implementation of the Peace Agreements in Colombia, an accompaniment initiative has been developed from the discipline of industrial design for the promotion of productive and social projects, aimed at supporting the process of reinstatement of former combatants of the FARC EP guerrilla in the department of Guaviare. The objective is to support the construction of Peace from the design activity as a strategic element in social development through innovation dynamics and strengthening productive processes of grassroots economy, articulating the dynamics and interests of communities and government institutions in the local development. The methodology used was the Co-design process among teams of students, FARC EP ex-combatants and community members in order to formulate and develop productive projects and social development linked to the Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space Jaime Pardo Leal ("Espacio Territorial de Capacitación y Reincorporación Jaime Pardo Leal" in Spanish), in the village of Colinas, municipality of San José del Guaviare - Colombia. As a result the group have been working on five projects: agro ecology, production of capsicum jam, tourism, dairy and education and culture, all of them aimed at strengthening productive and social development initiatives. In this way this experience has allowed students to open up a dimension of how relevant the design in the social field can be, identifying problems and opportunities for contribution from design

to local development. All pointing at overcoming the causes of armed conflict and contributing to a stable and lasting peace through a process of dialogue with the knowledge of former combatants and communities.

**Keywords:** Social design. Social innovation. Peace. Agro ecology. Colombia.

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

The Territorial Training and Reincorporation Space Jaime Pardo Leal (hereinafter ETCR JPL) located in the village of Colinas in the municipality of San José del Guaviare was created within the framework of the peace agreements in Havana, Cuba, signed by the FARC guerrillas and the Colombian Government in 2016. The ETCR JPL is conceived as a comprehensive strategy for the reincorporation of approximately 380 ex-guerrillas into civilian life. In its almost 3 years of formation, it is a clear example of territorial organization that works to become a benchmark for peace in the rural sector of the municipality of San José del Guaviare.

The International Design Summit: Building Peace, held between January 20 and February 4 of 2018 in the ETCR JPL, allowed the development of several design projects whose objective was the promotion of the productive initiatives that arose in the exercise of co-creation with the community. Based on an evaluation of the viability of these projects, it was decided to give continuity to the accompaniment in the development of five of them from the Observatory of Design and Social Innovation of the National University of Colombia in Bogota.

The focus of this Observatory is framed in articulating the missionary activities of the University (Teaching, Research and Extension), through strategies of relationship with the community and institutional environment of the country so as to promote the development of the discipline and the design culture, with the purpose of contributing to the improvement of the quality of life, development with

equity and the protection of the environment. The design for social innovation is configured as an opportunity to contribute to the process of building a stable and lasting peace, starting from contributing to the confrontation of the causes of the armed conflict as well as to local development in a more balanced way, especially through strengthening productive processes that add value and build social fabric understanding that productive projects become life projects for these people who are transiting towards civility.

This perspective is located in the tradition of social design (MARGOLÍN, 2016; PAPANÉK, 2014), which promotes that design should be a field of contribution to social change with a reflexive look towards consumerism, social inequalities and the harmful environmental impacts that have largely accompanied the predominant design practice that have been subjected to criticism and re-orientation (ESCOBAR, 2015; MANZINI, 2015). Therefore, the focus of the Observatory can be raised in dialogue with the developments of the social innovation approach, which have had different emphasis in Europe (ECHEVERRÍA, 2008; ECHEVERRÍA EZPONDA; MERINO MALILLOS, 2011) than in Latin America (REY DE MARULANDA; TANCREDI, 2010) and own formulations from the field of design (MANZINI, 2015).

In this way, the Observatory of Design and Social Innovation seeks to enroll the group of students in a local reality, in interaction with community and government actors, aiming at making a contribution from co-design to the identification of problems and construction of alternatives from the territory in a solidary, sustainable, inclusive and alternative perspective to market-centered development models.

## **2 METHODOLOGY: THE DESIGN FOR SOWING PEACE**

It has been postulated that Design Thinking is a pertinent approach to Social Innovation because it allows a construction process from the point of view of

the community, strengthening its capacities (empowerment) through iteration. Therefore, it allows quick and efficient adjustments that contribute to reducing economic and social risk; makes it possible to identify the problems, and from them, the possible solutions. Also, it gives relevance to the innovation process by sustaining opportunities in community dynamics and because it enables the active participation of the different actors involved with the community (SOCIAL INNOVACIÓN CENTRE, [ca. 2014]).

From this perspective, the Observatory of Design and Social Innovation set out a series of objectives: firstly, to support the construction of peace from the design activity as a strategic element in social development through innovation dynamics and the strengthening of productive processes, this happens articulating the dynamics and interests of communities and government institutions in local development. Secondly, to know, apply and develop tools of social innovation that allow the creation of value and incorporation of knowledge in the productive process and in the social networks of production in community areas. Thirdly and lastly, to contribute to the strengthening of community processes, in order to harmonize welfare and economic development with a territorial approach.

The scope of the work carried out is based on co-constructing the projects through the contribution in a technical-productive dimension, but also in the process of management and strengthening the processes of collaborative organization as well as through enhancing visibility and communicative action. At the same time, consolidate constant support on the ground to strengthen associative structures in the community by strengthening local capacities.

The process has had different moments: An initial phase of appropriation of the projects in which the antecedents of the social design and the developments in the social innovation of the design are approached. In this phase, each team studied one of the formulated projects in order to approach social reality. The second phase was aimed at defining the strategic horizon of the design intervention, based

on a meeting with the actors of the Territorial Space and the definition of a work proposal. The third phase geared towards preparing a brief of the proposals to be designed, in a strategic, tactical and operational design framework using the SWOT matrix tool linked to the value chain. The fourth and final phase was focused on developing the outputs and preparing the final delivery.

Once in the ETCR JPL, each group of students developed the design proposal in a co-design process with the ex-combatants using tools such as interviews, participant observation and workshops with the community. Through a process of active listening and identification of value propositions, the participants intertwine in dialogue in order to respond to aspects such as the technical-productive ones, collaborative organization for production and visibility of the peace process through recognition of the reconciliation process and development of sustainable projects from an environmental and social point of view.

This process has been carried out since the second semester of 2018 in charge of three different groups of students. There has been a splice process in which the new groups can take back what was advanced by the previous ones. The population of the ETCR JPL that was linked to this process was made up of men and women who belonged to the FARC guerrillas, who have been forming new families that represented the birth of a significant number of boys and girls. These people have embraced the peace process as an opportunity to rebuild their life project, and at an initial stage of enthusiasm have been followed by moments of demotivation as a result of problems in the implementation of collective projects, for instance the lack of technical capacity and the limited commercialization scope. Their participation with the students along process has allowed to oxygenate and give a boost to these collective initiatives.

### 3 RESULTS

Below is a summary of each projects:

Tourism: Focused on the visibility and recognition of the cultural and material heritage of the community (conformed by former guerrillas, indigenous and peasants) in order to build a sustainable economy with productive initiatives within the populated centre and those articulated around them. We want to take advantage of the tourist potential of territory's location near the Amazon rainforest and the chance to show the experiences and knowledge of this group of people, such as their survival techniques and their unique knowledge about fauna and flora. This can certainly help to change the concept of war that this region experienced for the one of peace building.

Peace at hands: It is a project focused on the development of an educational and cultural management model in territorial spaces. For this, it is divided into 3 pillars: "Wise Hands" in which the new school, the library and the school of youth leaders are immersed; "Own Hands" that has all the experiences of the community inhabitants with the indigenous and guerrilla memory; and "Interlaced Hands" in which the community groups are found, like the youthful "Jungle inside" and the foundation "Roots of My Land" conformed by householders or artistic mothers who prepare dances. The objective of the model is to interrelate all the actors immersed in the education and culture of the community in all its fields, so as to generate processes of recognition and appropriation of knowledge, ecosystems, learnings and history.

Agro ecology: A process of vindication of the productive relationships built between nature and the inhabitants of the territory, based on clean production, sustainability and closing cycles. From these ideas arose four complementary projects: Fish farming, pork raising, agro ecological crops and concentrate production for animal feeding. These projects are established within a system of mutual benefit, embraced in an interest in self-supply and self-management. In this way, the community is integrated in an exercise of recognition highlighting the territory's own values, interest in food sovereignty and the ideals of the peasantry and ex-combatants.

Thanks to the above and the level of consolidation of the project, the collective seeks to disseminate this agro ecological experience in an exercise of collective work, knowledge dialogue and the objective of defending the relationship of mutual benefit between nature and human beings.

Lactiare: It is an alternative of business development that emerged in a family farm a few kilometres from the ETCR Jaime Pardo Leal. Maribel and her husband are the creators, they bet on innovation through the transformation of cheese (a basic product of the family basket) to a gourmet product. The couple were responsible for proposing five flavors using different products of the region: turmeric, cacao, coriander, coca leaf and chili pepper, all of them produced in their farm. Also, they themselves commercialize these products to tourists who arrive in the region. However, their proposal goes beyond selling cheeses, they want to provide a living experience of what it is to inhabit the rural space where peace is being built and strengthened. Thus, demonstrating that they are a community capable of providing a tangible benefit for the economic and social development of the country.

Sweetening Peace: A project born in 2018 with the visit of the Institute of Science and Food Technology (ICTA) of the National University to the ETCR Jaime Pardo Leal. This project emerges as a venture of Dayana Lizeth Barbosa Bustos following her desire to support her community, she decided to start producing jams that using the agricultural products of her territory. This project has been underway for two years, in which the capsicum transformation technique has been perfected to produce sweet sauces of this ingredient in an artisanal way. Although the project has faced the difficulties that its territory presents, like the lack of accessibility or obstacles to commercialization, it is a product that has remained faithful to the values that its leader considers fundamental: the value of the community and its well-being, the recognition of valuable role of women, 100% natural products and the desire to build peace. The students of the observatory have been working with her to strengthen issues related to the strategic formation of the company, the consolidation of a territory image, the technification of production processes and the search for new distribution channels. This has been carried out in order to apply to financing funds that give an economical boost the project and also become



a way to achieve long-term benefits within the community. It is recognized that these types of initiatives are the reflection of a context that demands other forms of incorporation and whose greatest wealth lies in generating a community welfare beyond only economic interests.

#### **4 CONCLUSIONS: MAIN TEACHINGS**

The process gone through in San José del Guaviare highlights the historical problems of abandonment of peripheral territories, with a limited presence of the State. This implies colonization models that have taken little care of the rich ecosystems present in these areas, as well as the presence of native peoples that have been most affected by the armed conflict. In addition to the structural problems of limited coverage in social and infrastructure services, which hinders an economic and social integration of these territories with a sustainability perspective.

This scenario in which the armed conflict has developed itself is a space of opportunities for the contribution of design to the sowing of peace. It allows a formative experience of the students facing that other reality of the country that is absent from the industrial design practice, integrating the configuration of objects and products along with the design management and participation in public policy development. All of these helps transforming the territory from co-construction processes.

Here remains full valid the design approach to transition proposed by Escobar (2015), where the look at political ecology, decolonial theories and the feminist

perspective contributes to a reconfiguration of the role of design in society from an autonomic perspective.

The practice of design for social innovation allows the construction of collaborative organizations and social fabric construction processes, in which all people design, in a process of confluence of diffuse design and expert design, in the way in which Manzini (2015) proposes. Therefore, the path proposed by Papanek (2014), to rethink the relevance of design in the social field also gains full force, aimed at integrating tools and approaches of participatory design, the design for the development of goods and services from a perspective of value chains, the design of collaborative organizations and relationships, contributes to the transition towards environmentally and socially sustainable societies.

Despite the uncertainties regarding the peace process and the quest for overcoming internal and external difficulties to these processes, the bet from the National University of Colombia in general and the one from the School of Industrial Design is to continue contributing to the implementation of the peace agreements towards a stable and durable peace. Taking into account that a transformative experience allows the role of ex-combatants to be translated into actors in the construction of society from a social justice project. From each of the projects that the observatory supports, the strengthening of capacities is sought to allow that transit of skills that were held in an environment of armed confrontation and that now come to be useful within a framework of building peace and community.

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