

WAVING THE GREEN FLAG FOR PEACE. PUBLIC SPACES AS PEACEBUILDING PLACES IN COLOMBIAN CITIES

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Abstract

“Space” traditionally relates to physical location, and “place” to a sociocultural perception of space, while “territory” usually refers to the governance context of space, with policy implications. However, these terms have increasingly become intertwined when it comes to the relationships between socio-cultural values, social cohesion and governance. Public spaces, especially urban green spaces, are outstanding contributors to social cohesion in any society. Nonetheless, their potential in post-conflict societies has been largely overlooked

so far. Through a literature review and through the observation of the use of green spaces in different societies in their post-conflict periods, this article aims to assess the potential for these components of the urban territory to foster peace and sustainability. This requires appropriate policies, with special relevance to the new socio-political context in Colombia following the implementation of the Peace agreements.

Key words: Colombia, post-conflict, public urban green spaces, social cohesion.

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ONDEANDO LA BANDERA VERDE PARA LA PAZ. LOS ESPACIOS PÚBLICOS COMO SITIOS DE CONSTRUCCIÓN DE PAZ EN CIUDADES COLOMBIANAS

Resumen

Tradicionalmente, el término “espacio” se relaciona con la localización física, “lugar” con una percepción sociocultural del espacio, mientras que “territorio” normalmente hace referencia al contexto espacial en el cual se ejerce la gobernanza, y tiene implicaciones para las políticas públicas. No obstante, los tres términos han venido entrelazándose para tener en cuenta la relación entre los valores socioculturales, la cohesión social y los procesos de gobernanza. Los espacios públicos, especialmente los espacios verdes urbanos, contribuyen de manera destacada a la cohesión social en cualquier sociedad. Sin embargo, su potencial en sociedades en posconflicto ha sido en gran medida pasado por alto. Mediante una revisión de la literatura y una observación del uso de los espacios verdes en varios casos de sociedades en posconflicto, este artículo busca revisar el potencial para que estas partes del territorio urbano fomenten la paz y la sostenibilidad, bajo políticas públicas adaptadas, con un énfasis espacial en el nuevo contexto sociopolítico colombiano, después de los acuerdos de paz firmados en noviembre de 2016.

Palabras clave: Colombia, posconflicto, espacios verdes públicos, cohesión social.

INTRODUCTION

While “space” traditionally relates to physical location, and “place” to a sociocultural

perception of space, “territory” usually refers to the governance context of space, “limited generally by formal (or legally constituted) boundaries” (Jenkins, 2005), with implications in terms of planning policies. The nation state has been the traditional framework for the definition and boundaries of a territory, although the term also refers to regional and local scales.

However, the three terms have increasingly become intertwined in order to connect sociocultural values and governance processes:

...an important characteristic of territory [...] is that it is constituted provided that there is a system of values shared by those occupying that portion of space. It is this system of values that determines cultural filters, and the way entities and flow must be organized to mark this portion of space in a particular way (Duarte, 2017).

Thus, not only does territory have space as its substratum, but it is also a social construction subject to sociocultural values and filters. More importantly, the author adds that “it needs to be clear that the portion of space called territory does not necessarily cover a contiguous geographical area”.

Montañez (2016) concludes from his study of the territorial issues in the Colombian post-conflict period that, before building peace within the territories, it is crucial to build territories that allow people to live with dignity, which is the best guarantee for sustainable peace. In line with this remark, it seems relevant and timely to be able to contribute to the reflection of the concrete implications of the territorial focus of public policies, to zoom in on the local scale, select a particular form of urban territory associated with community

building, and look into its potential to generate appropriation and social cohesion in the post-conflict context where the disruption of the social fabric often leads to violence.

This article proposes such a contribution, based on the hypothesis that public urban green spaces can play an important role in the development of social cohesion as a basis for public policies in post-conflict Colombia. The reason for such a hypothesis lies, first, in the results of numerous studies into the benefits of urban green spaces over the last three decades and, secondly, in a new focus on academic research of their potential in post-conflict contexts.

The benefits of urban green spaces highlighted in research include individual ones, such as increased wellbeing, improved cognitive functions (Fuller *et al.*, 2007), inspiration, and physical and mental health benefits (McMichael, 2000; Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2003; Tzoulas *et al.*, 2007), as well as collective advantages for the community. Among the latter, a wealth of literature documents the benefits of urban green spaces in relation to social cohesion (see Kazmierczak, 2010 for a literature review), their contribution to collective wellbeing in vulnerable areas (Coley *et al.*, 1997) or to the fight against violence (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001; Austin, Ashley and Grove, 2016).

However, research on the use of green spaces as venues for reconciliation, more specifically after an armed conflict, are few and far between; Tidball's and Krasny's studies have blazed a new trail in that respect. The purpose of this article is thus to tread new ground by suggesting that urban green spaces may con-

tribute to peace in Colombia as facilitators of social cohesion. First, we shall analyse the relevant literature on how such spaces can foster processes for place-making in changing circumstances, which can underlie public policies contributing to a lasting, sustainable peace. Secondly, some relevant international cases will be examined and, lastly, the Colombian context will be analysed so as to suggest further steps for public policies. The potential of green spaces will be analysed, both in terms of their social uses for leisure activities and of urban agriculture projects that contribute to economic sustainability, which is an indispensable component of a lasting peace as well as of social and environmental sustainability.

PLACEMAKING AND PUBLIC SPACES

The academic literature on the topic of place and the conditions of placemaking is extensive, as an increasing range of disciplines have engaged the topic of translating space into place (among these approaches, see Cresswell, 2004; Gieryn, 2000; Anderson, 2009; Butz and Eyles, 1997; Casey, 2001; Agnew, 2005).

Placemaking involves endowing space with value (Tuan, 1974), identification and a sense of belonging. The development of this process is linked with the daily use of these spaces or, in Cresswell's words (2009), "Experience is at the heart of what place means". Placemaking is also closely related to social life in spaces which conduces to an affective bond between people and places (Altman and Low, 1992). According to Schroeder (2012), "Such experiences serve as significant sources

of meaning and happiness in people's lives, and lead to strong emotional attachments to the places where they occur". In order to fulfil its social potential and generate place attachment, an urban space should be on a small scale (neighbourhoods), inhabited (as opposed to shopping centres or blocks of offices) and cherished by most of its inhabitants, and it should include the sharing of territory through the existence of gathering spaces, such as public parks, that permit human interactions (Friedmann, 2010).

Following a thorough revision of relevant literature, to suggest a conceptual framework linking urban green spaces and social cohesion, Kazmierczak (2010) concludes that the term "social cohesion" encompasses various levels: social integration of individuals in society (as cited in Commins, 1993); cohesion at community level, including shared values and social interactions (as cited in Forrest and Kearns, 2001); and social capital, i.e. the trust and reciprocity that develop thanks to social relations (ONS, 2001; Leyden, 2003). An impressive body of evidence enhances the main reasons why urban green spaces contribute to placemaking and social cohesion, following this triple definition. First, they are amenities freely accessible to all; secondly, they constitute social arenas that facilitate social interactions (Sullivan, 2004; Dunn *et al.*, 2006) and, lastly, they are places that alleviate stress and aggressiveness thanks to having contact with nature.

To be able to comprehend the relationships between identification with place and community participation in planning, Manzo and Perkins (2005) cross-pollinate two normally separate approaches to space: environ-

mental psychology and community studies. They conclude that "a cross-disciplinary analysis is essential to better understand the nature of people's relationships to place and to develop a more holistic view of how such relationships influence our experiences of place and the success of our communities". This seems particularly relevant in the case of post-conflict societies, where both attachment to place and community development have been eroded, often leading to desolation and lack of human connections: there, the reconstruction of both aspects can go hand in hand.

However, because the sharing of a common space by different groups does not automatically conduce to a sense of community, it is essential to understand the diverse meanings of a neighbourhood for its residents to create successful, and vibrant places (Loukaitou-Sideris, 1995). Manzo and Perkins (2005) thus suggest that, "given that conflicts among various community members can sometimes emerge in the planning process, exploring how place attachments influence people's motivations and behaviours in the community planning and development process is an important goal". They stress that "crime, relocation, and environmental disasters [...] also disrupt place attachments, disturb a sense of continuity" (Brown and Perkins, 1992), and cause feelings of loss and alienation (Hummon, 1992). Tapping into such feelings and reactions to disruption can, if properly recognized and understood, help mobilize citizen participation to rebuild a community" (Manzo and Perkins, 2005). As demonstrated by Peters *et al.* in a qualitative study of immigrants in Poland, the Netherlands, Germany and the

United States, visits to local public spaces (urban parks in this case) have the potential to help build social connections and develop a sense of place for immigrants in the cities where they arrived (2016, as cited in Pearl-mutter *et al.*, 2017). Once understood, these emotional ties to places, strengthened by social intercourse and community engagement, can promote social cohesion and community empowerment, which is particularly relevant in post-conflict contexts where internal migration has taken place. Indeed, there is more to sustainable peace than the demobilisation of ex-combatants (Rettberg, 2013). Crucial social, economic and political changes have to take place, which involves renewed trust and the capacity for a dialogue to be (re)established between former enemies, and between the population and decision-makers.

THE BENEFITS OF URBAN GREEN SPACES FOR SOCIAL COHESION IN POST-CONFLICT CONTEXTS

Obviously, countries in post-conflict situations are not the only ones to suffer from a lack of social cohesion or from the deterioration of public spaces: Pelling (2003) demonstrates such effects in the Rust Belt in the United States for instance, which has resulted from the slow erosion of the local economic base. But the specific circumstances of countries that have undergone an armed conflict demand more urgent and momentous action in order to counteract social disintegration and strengthen social links, based on shared values (Duarte, 2017), as a starting-

point for fruitful public policies and to avoid relapsing into conflicts. The uses and functions of green spaces in post-conflict contexts in Latin America have not been a focus of research, as evidenced in a revision of scientific literature of the past 20 years about the various forms of social participation that promote social cohesion in green spaces (Fors, Molin, Murphy, y van den Bosch, 2015): it returned 2,940 relevant articles which testify to a growing interest as well as a great diversity of research topics. But, it also reveals that most of these publications come from, and focus on, Western Europe, the United States and, more recently, Asia, while none of them deals with Latin America. The same can be said of the ground-breaking study of Tidball and Krasny on initiatives to “green the red zones” (2014).

Furthermore, reviewing international literature specifically in search of publications on public parks or urban forests as venues or instruments to promote peace reveals a void. The few cases which have been the object of academic perusal include the contribution of tree-planting programmes to peace-making in Belfast (Johnston, 1995; Shimada and Johnston, 2013; 2015), tree-planting projects in post-9/11 New York, in Hiroshima (Cheng and McBride in Tidball and Krasny, 2014), in Sarajevo (Johnston and Shimada, 2014) and in Afghanistan (Smallwood in Tidball and Krasny, 2014), as well as an ongoing project studying the transformation of urban spaces in Kathmandu, following the conflict there. Interestingly, these studies all revolve around the benefits of creating green spaces or urban forests after periods of armed conflict or around the use of tree planting to commemo-

rate human losses in conflicts (e.g. the avenues of trees planted in Australia after World War One illustrate such a case) or to celebrate an international reconciliation between former enemies (the “Parque de la Amistad” on the border between Panama and Costa Rica is a case in point, as is the park between Poland and Czechoslovakia, Gough, 2000). However, there are no studies on the use of green spaces to foster peace in post-conflict situations as such. Such a void is all the more important to fill as research increasingly confirms Jane Jacobs’ belief that although many city dwellers only “share a fragment of geography”, it needs to be governed adequately (cited in Schubert, 2014) for communities to function properly.

According to a UN report, Latin American cities display the deepest urban inequalities worldwide (ONU-Habitat, 2012), which generates rampant violence (Reyes, 2016). Thus, the context of this research is threefold: the evidence of the benefits of urban green spaces for placemaking and social cohesion; the lack of studies related to this topic in Latin America, and the regional inequity which presents specific challenges. Based on the theoretical framework and the lack of evidence so far, we looked elsewhere for strategies based on green spaces so as to suggest action in Colombian cities in the context of the post-conflict period.

POST-CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND THE USE OF PUBLIC SPACES: INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The responsibilities of facilitating placemaking and community cohesion through the

re-appropriation of public spaces in post-conflict societies rely to a great extent on adequate public policies in urban territories. However, the importance of public urban green spaces for peacebuilding in post-conflict societies is mostly overlooked, by researchers, by specialists of urban environmental management and, above all, by decision-makers, as vividly demonstrated through the priorities they set in the allocation of budgets.

The cases of El Salvador and South Africa serve as vivid demonstrations of this. In spite of the differences in the structural causes of the conflicts in these countries, both have been in a post-conflict situation over the last 20 years. Among the diverse strategies and policies proposed in both countries, urban green spaces have been, at best, underutilised in the peacebuilding process. However, a few isolated cases, mostly bottom-up initiatives, testify to the potential of these territories for the promotion of affective bonds and community building.

In the case of El Salvador, peace was reached in 1994, but the country was still considered one of the most violent ones in the Western hemisphere in 2015. There, public spaces and the restoration of social cohesion were not prioritised post-conflict. Unfortunately, in the same way that public spaces can serve as restorative environments likely to strengthen community cohesion, they can also turn, if uncared for, into no man’s lands or, worse, venues where violence can develop, in such cases where social, political or economic deterioration exist, which clearly undermines social cohesion and peace processes.

Not surprisingly then, in 2009, 90% of the Salvadorians interviewed felt unprotected in public spaces and 63% of them avoided places of recreation (Jiménez, 2010). Among the spaces perceived as generating most insecurity, associated with drug trafficking and theft, public squares and parks ranked third (Jiménez, 2010). With these data in mind, the same source warned:

...if children or young people do not have spaces for healthy leisure and recreation, if they do not find where to channel their energies under certain norms of harmonious coexistence and with the benefit of security bestowed by adults in the management of these spaces, it becomes more difficult to restrain the influence of groups with violent and delinquent purposes (Jiménez, 2010).

Faced with this challenging situation, the Five-year Development Plan, 2014-2019, admitted its shortcomings as far as public spaces, security and violence were concerned, and related them to a lack of holistic, inter-institutional vision. Indeed, in keeping with the international research mentioned above, reintegration strategies and good governance including active community participation are key characteristics in the successful experiences of peacebuilding in El Salvador (Consejo Nacional de Seguridad Ciudadana de El Salvador, 2014). As a consequence, important investments in infrastructure were undertaken in 56 localities, including for renovation of community places, improvement of green spaces and parks, building and renovation of sports complexes, and provision of adequate lighting

for football pitches and games for children (Jiménez, 2010).

Another initiative in El Salvador, undertaken by the civil society this time with the assistance of USAID, is called “Afternoons together” (“Tardes de Convivencia”) in the city of Sonsonate. It hinges on cultural projects around peaceful coexistence in public spaces. Where data are available, the rate of homicides shrank in these areas by 33% and that of thefts by 45%, as a result (Amuprev, s.f.).

Likewise, in South Africa, in a challenging social context marked by the heritage of apartheid since 1994, two top-down initiatives stand out as having green spaces as their backdrop to strengthen social cohesion and to tackle socio-spatial segregation (Orsini, 2016), although green spaces are not their main focus as such: the Community Work Programme (Masuku, 2015) and the urban regeneration of Helenvale (Safer spaces, 2016). In the first project, unemployed citizens perform paid part-time community service, which can consist in maintaining green spaces, while they look for a job. The second project aims at empowering the inhabitants of the Hevenvale township through various components: specifically in relation to green spaces, objective 1 (“Improving the safety of public spaces and community infrastructure”) focuses the efforts on the appropriation of parks and public spaces through the provision of infrastructure, the management of rubbish, as well as an emphasis on safety. In both cases, resuming maintenance and care may lead to renewed connections with, and within, public green spaces, and thus help to reactivate a community’s social capital and its

capacity to supervise and control its territory, which confirms Jane Jacob's opinion above.

The fact that public green spaces generate insecurity and distrust during conflicts, but can also be factors for social cohesion in post-conflicts, can also be appreciated in the case of Alexandra Park in Belfast (Northern Ireland). Located in one of the most conflictive areas during the three decades of the civil war (the so-called "Troubles"), it was the scene of violent encounters between the Catholic and the Protestant communities until a three-metre high "peaceline" was erected in its midst to avoid confrontation. According to Brand (2008), this division reflected a process of domination in a social space, based on fear, threat or the use of physical violence, wherein the local communities defended their space from the intrusion of strangers, rather than use it for placemaking and inclusion. In a very symbolical move, after the Peace Agreement was signed in 1998, a gate was opened in the peaceline in Alexandra Park during the day, as a way of dealing with the past and offering a path towards reconciliation, one of the greatest challenges that Northern Ireland faces as a society (Ramos, 2011).

Going one step further, in Berlin, after the fall of the Wall in 1989, the design of public parks across the former line of the Berlin Wall (Spreebogen and Mauerpark) has constituted a spatial strategy to visually reunite East and West Berlin and provide spaces of inclusion conducive to a vibrant social life, while conserving traces of the past. Through a territorial focus, wounds may heal and political and social reconciliation may start taking place.

On top of their social use, other uses of public green spaces are developing internationally, which can constitute instruments for sustainable peacebuilding (Weber *et al.*, 2014). Strong social networks at local level do not always suffice to reduce violence in societies going through post-conflict processes: "You cannot build a peaceful world on empty stomachs and human misery" (Borlaug, 2002). Indeed the first component of peace and social justice is adequate food, which may explain the numerous cases, and studies, on the role of urban and peri-urban agriculture (UPA) in public spaces in post-conflict societies (see for instance the study of de Soysa *et al.*, 1999, about conflicts after the Cold War and the role of UPA).

UPA is defined as

...a system of food production defined as agricultural practice undertaken within cities or in their surroundings, in soft areas (private gardens, allotments) or in hard zones (terraces, balconies), using local potential such as workforce, available ground, rainwater, solid waste, articulating technical knowledge and traditional know-how, in order to promote environmental sustainability and generate clean food products for self-consumption and commercialisation, strengthening the social fabric (Garzón, 2011).

The first argument in favour of UPA in post-conflict societies is to ensure food security and to fight against poverty. Among its outstanding contributions in Honduras, where many have been forcibly evicted since the 1960s (Pantoja, 2013), it benefits the most vulnerable people, promotes gender equity,

enriches the family diet and generates additional income, which improves the quality of life and health of those concerned. Likewise, in Sierra Leone, after the civil war during the 1990s, many rural populations were evicted and took refuge in the capital city, Freetown. As a consequence of the disruption of the food production system, UPA played a fundamental part in guaranteeing food security, the protection of the urban food chain and the promotion of sustainable urban development in the post-conflict phase (Lynch *et al.*, 2013). The same goes for the Republic of Congo during the post-conflict period, where according to a study which highlights the fact that in some cities, among which the capital, up to 80% of the population are engulfed in extreme poverty. For these populations, UPA has been a tool to fight against hunger, generate income, rehabilitate abandoned land, reinforce social ties and allow the creation of cooperatives (Balagizi y Dubbeling, 2007).

On top of savings in food and an improvement in the diet, FAO (2011) has identified the following benefits of UPA which favour placemaking and community building and therefore seem of great relevance in post-conflict societies: a strengthening of organisational processes within communities; help for social construction; affective and social healing of communities; improvement of people's quality of life; stimulation to citizenship through the environmental regeneration of collective spaces. The reason for these benefits, also noted in European countries (Bell *et al.*, 2016), lies in the fact that cultivating urban soil can contribute to investing meaning into space through constant interaction, as amply demonstrated

in empirical research in peacetime contexts, but also after conflicts.

For instance, the participants in the FAO project in Honduras highlighted, not only the improvement of their self-esteem and the reduction in stress, but also that, through turning abstract space into lived territory, relationships within neighbourhoods improved, brotherly relationships developed and violence decreased (Pantoja, 2013). Similarly, in Rosario (Argentina) community building was demonstrated through a capacity for self-organisation, the successful inclusion in UPA of recyclers in one neighbourhood, where 40% of the population lived off collecting recyclable materials. The study demonstrated that self-esteem increased in parallel with professional training and income generation (Spiaggi, 2005).

These outcomes are due to various factors, linked to placemaking and community empowerment. First, the regular presence in a public space with a common objective facilitates the creation of long-lasting social relationships. Secondly, UPA requires collective organisation and decision-making, not only to care for the crops, but also at times to defend the very existence of the gardens in the face of local administration hostility, as exemplified by the New York Community Gardens since the 1970s (Nail and Raulin, 2000). The very nature of agriculture demands that the gardeners take responsibility and come to terms with their disagreements, in order to make decisions about crucial strategies concerning choice of crops, maintenance, crop-sharing and marketing strategies in case of commercialisation (Fors *et al.*, 2015). This process can reinforce the social capital of vulnerable communities,

as demonstrated in a study of 20 community gardens in New York which shows greater benefits of UPA in less affluent communities: on top of benefits related to fresh produce, working out of doors and improvement in health, allotments in poor areas are four times as likely to lead to social benefits as in wealthier communities (Armstrong, 2000). Among those, “the family interaction through the kitchen garden offers a possibility to strengthen family ties, to remember and practice the wealth of knowledge from rural areas, an important element in children’s education and memory”, as well as to solve conflicts within the communities (Cantor, 2010).

The last reason why UPA may represent a valuable tool to promote and maintain peace is that it implies a direct relationship with the territory, in a context where the breakup of the social fabric often goes hand in hand with the loss of spatial bearings and economic income for the rural populations evicted. As mentioned above, one of the tragedies of forcible displacement is the loss of continuous relationships alongside a territory. UPA may provide an element of stabilisation and recuperation in order to heal the scars and renew “the material and symbolic resources that constitute strategies of survival” (Osorio, 2007), in different ways. First, UPA gives farmers the possibility to go on cultivating and consuming the food and products and medicinal herbs that make up their culinary and cultural heritage (Osorio, 2007), which also allows the conservation of native species. Thus, UPA combines activities that represent families’ strategies to adapt themselves to their surroundings: the knowledge brought by people coming from rural

areas is part and parcel of their human capital (Linares, 2007). Moreover, cultivating a piece of land, even though it may not be native land, permits the creation of new connections and to slowly develop emotional bonds.

In summary, international experiences throw light on the components of territory-based policies likely to foster social cohesion and peace: spatial (availability of quality, well-cared for public spaces, a design that permits inclusion), social (projects using these spaces as social fora), political (governance including the culture, memories and projects of different groups, including productive ones).

THE COLOMBIAN SPECIFICITIES

In line with international research and the few case studies available, it seems relevant to suggest an increased interest and adequate public policies for the green space component of the urban territory in Colombia after the peace agreement, signed in November 2016. As suggested by Rettberg (2013) after a thorough review of academic literature on the challenges of peacebuilding in the world, local ownership is crucial, which involves the appropriation of the local territory through citizen initiatives supported by public policies. This is amply justified by the fact that civil society “has become the most frequently cited non-armed allied in the efforts for peace construction, for their possible victimisation by some armed protagonist as well as because it is hoped that their agreement with and response to conflict resolution both legitimise and submit the adopted strategies to a healthy

examination of their social relevance and accountability” (Rettberg, 2013). In Colombia, two specific challenges resulting from the protracted conflict stand out, which public policies on public space should address.

One of the visible consequences of the fear and distrust towards public spaces as a result of the conflict and violence has been the increasing transformation of commercial centres into the main venues for collective activities and socialising (ONU Habitat, 2012): children’s games, sports classes, religious services, cultural events and celebrations can all be found in these enclosed, private spaces that emulate the offer of open public spaces while offering the appearance of security. The lack of attention, on the part of local governments, to the creation and maintenance of green spaces, their scarcity and generally poor quality in the peripheral or marginal suburbs, has a lot to do with this phenomenon. In Bogota for example, some neighbourhood associations organise themselves and pay for the services of a gardener to ensure the good maintenance of the local public “pocket parks”, in order to avoid them being perceived as abandoned and thus attracting antisocial behaviour.

One crucial component of the Colombian armed conflict, the second challenge for urban territorial policies in the post-conflict period, has been the forcible displacement of civilian rural populations, which has generated an internal mass migration to cities large and small: around 5.5 million people have swarmed to urban areas, with feelings of sadness and alienation at the loss of their territory and its social fabric (Sacipa, 2003). The extent of this tragedy can be appreciated when

comparing the proportion of the population that occupied agricultural or cattle-raising jobs in the countryside in 1964 and in 2012: at almost half of the total workforce (49.2%) in 1964, it had plummeted to 17.8% in 2012 (Montañez-Gómez, 2016). No less than 11% of the Colombian population has been displaced (Góngora, 2014), half of them in 27 urban centres (Salgar-Antolínez, 2016). The shockingly high percentage of poverty and extreme poverty in cities (Barriga and Leal, 2011) has direct repercussions on malnutrition levels, particularly in children, pregnant women and elderly adults. And of course, it is a well-known reality that poverty constitutes one of the most active ferments of violence.

In this context, initiatives towards community building developed long before the conflict ended, a clear demonstration of the capacity of the Colombian society for resilience in the face of prolonged violence. In Bogota, the “Peace to peace” (“*Paz a la paz*”) Project (IDRD, 2015) thus sought to reconstruct the social fabric for young vulnerable people (many of them victims of forcible displacement) through sports, a process in which recovering green spaces from drug users and delinquents was strategic. The “Memory and public space” (“*Memoria y espacio público*”) Project, for its part, aims at re-signifying emblematic spaces in the city (i.e. renaming streets and places with names linked to memories, mapping memory routes in the city or involving cultural and artistic actors to restore the dignity of the victims of the conflict (Centro de Memoria Histórica, 2014).

In Medellin, the second largest Colombian city, following the brutal murder of a

classical ballet dancer in a city park in 2008, her friends and relatives organised spontaneous events displaying artistic, theatrical and cultural activities in the park as a way to celebrate her life (Betancur, 2016). This is how the “Butterfly Wings” (“*Alas de Mariposa*”) Foundation was born in 2011, which institutionalised and replicated this strategy to reduce the indices of violence in the most vulnerable parts of the city, thus displacing delinquency from leisure spaces and investing them with new community aspirations.

The few projects mentioned above, on top of being closely related to green spaces, suggest a clear connection between social cohesion and the reestablishment of trust within communities, as a means to strengthen institutions and legitimise both the peace process and the State, and thus sustain the renovation of the social contract, in spite of the context of socio-political frailty that usually characterises peace processes.

In the Colombian context, as in that of many countries in similar situations, UPA can constitute a strategy of survival. Promoted by the Bogota municipality since 2004 as part of the “Bogota without Hunger” Programme, it has included since its origins community building among its objectives. Thus, in the Bogota District’s Development Plan 2004-2008, article 4 stated that “producers’ and consumers’ networks will be promoted, as well as the potential of urban agriculture as socio environmental alternative” (Rodríguez, 2017). This is why, on top of running free urban agriculture classes two days a month free of charge, the gardeners of the Botanic Gardens José Celestino Mutis go and help create allot-

ments in the local territories where communities request it. Another attempt to make UPA visible in the District’s territorial policies was undertaken, unsuccessfully, through Agreement 299 (2010) which promoted the creation of cultivation plots in public parks with citizen participation (Concejo de Bogotá, 2010). The Bogota Development Plan 2016-2020 aims at implementing the Sustainable Development Goals with pillars involving food security and environmentally sustainable systems; unfortunately, UPA is very low in the present administration’s priorities, not even being mentioned in the Development Plan.

As could be appreciated in a meeting of Bogota’s urban agriculturists at the end of 2016, the urban gardeners in the different (mostly economically deprived) neighbourhoods know how to organise themselves so as to disseminate knowledge and preserve the seeds of plant species endangered in rural areas. By making themselves responsible for their propagation and distribution in the urban territory, these stewards play a crucial part in preventing their disappearance. Our own observations confirm those of Linares (2007) and Méndez *et al.* (2005) in the South of Bogota, according to which UPA is not only part of a set of survival strategies in the city, but also allows peasant identity to survive and extend through a network based on shared knowledge and know-how.

Two cases demonstrate the relevance and power of UPA in the Colombian post-conflict era. The first one concerns the locality of Santa Rosa in Soacha (a large suburb of Bogota), in which over 8% of the victims of forced eviction who have come to Bogota have settled

(Salgar-Antolínez, 2016). There, victims of the conflict rub shoulders with ex-guerrilleros, ex-paramilitaries and other vulnerable populations, which may explain both the high level of poverty and the alarming rates of delinquency and violence. In such challenging circumstances, simply providing public green spaces and hoping for identification with the territory to happen would most likely be bound to fail. On the contrary, in line with other projects mentioned above, an urban agriculture project undertaken by an NGO has permitted the sowing of the seeds of social interaction (for 91% of the participants interviewed) and appropriation of the territory (for 66% of them) on top of improving nutrition (for 75% of them) (Gómez-Lee and Burg, publication pending). This corroborates Manzo and Perkins' analysis of how citizen participation can help rebuild communities.

The second case, even more directly relevant to the post-conflict issue, echoes Armstrong's study (2000) of the contribution of UPA to social capital in low-income groups. Agroarte in district 13 in Medellín, a self-termed "agrarian hip-hop" movement, combines graphic arts, UPA and rap music in a unique approach to generate identity, hope and social cohesion among populations victims of violence, so as to generate peace (Carbonell, 2017; Rendon, 2016).

EXPLORING AVENUES

In light of international research and experiences, as well as of existing Colombian local strategies, one can therefore suggest that

more attention should be paid to public green spaces within an array of strategies conducive to a durable social peace emerging from the territory. First, because they can counteract the current withdrawal into private spaces and help provide venues for civic encounters, without which it is difficult to see how peace can be achieved. And secondly, because, in spite of the indispensable organisation on the part of the communities themselves, some experiments show that the role of public powers is fundamental in order to generate continuity and sustainability in these initiatives. Among the avenues to be explored, let us briefly review possible actions and actors, in line with Kazmierczak (2010) and Manzo and Perkins (2005).

The first lesson is that the availability of quality public green spaces is a prerequisite. In Colombian cities, as in many others, the densification and privatisation of urban land (Lee and Webster, 2006) represent a threat in the sense that they restrict the capacity of the inhabitants to have contacts with ecosystems and their services, including social interactions. A growing trend in research analyses the consequences of that privatisation and urges the increase in public spaces to promote social health (Hodkinson, 2012; Campbell and Wiesen, 2011).

A corollary of this is the need for strong public policies to enforce the necessary measures to make up for the present deficit: in Bogotá alone, the task is daunting, with an average of 3.9 m² of green spaces per inhabitant presently, instead of the 10 to 15 m² advocated internationally. The new zoning plan being elaborated will have to point in

three directions: more parks of all sizes close to where people live, the facilitation of public spaces for UPA, in parks or elsewhere, and a particular emphasis on deprived areas, which often correspond to informal living areas where a lot of displaced people live and where accessible public green spaces are few and far between. Failing this availability, an equitable geographical repartition and the physical accessibility of green spaces, their repartition will continue to reflect the socioeconomic profile of the area, gated communities outside cities will continue to be a favourite choice for the well-off, while cities will continue to spell exclusion, and the potential of green spaces for peace and environmental justice will remain a missed opportunity.

On top of providing space, appropriate equipment is necessary for the social life of parks to be vibrant: the observation and analyses of successful parks as social fora show the importance of benches, lighting, trees providing shade, a sense of security (presence of wardens and gardeners) and protection from the noise and traffic, so that people can, and choose to, spend more time there and give a chance to social encounters and local democracy to be played out. In Colombian cities, this sometimes goes against the grain, and few seats are provided so as not to encourage homeless people to linger.

Conversely, political or cultural events focusing on peace (exhibitions, meetings, for example those of the Commission on truth presently being established) could be set up in parks: the calm and restoring qualities associated with green environments might conduce to an atmosphere likely to soothe the inevita-

ble distress of these encounters and heal the wounds.

The second lesson is that there is just so much public policies can do. As Gehl and Svarre put it, they can provide “tools and process”, not necessarily results (2013). International and Colombian experiences alike, despite their diversity, point to the need for interinstitutional bridges so that peace becomes an overarching objective central and common to all policies, not reserved for certain sectors. They also point to the importance of a wide governance, understood as “a model which is not based only on the hierarchy of the State, nor on the market” (Mayntz, 1998), but on ways of solving problems in networks, involving actors and strategies characterised by their diversity and a common goal: the public good. In this model, public participation is crucial; in Colombia, where individualism looms large, it has to be re-learned after decades of conflict.

Public space as a structuring backbone for the city, as is the objective in the new zoning plan of the capital (Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá, 2017), is a distant goal in most Colombian cities so far. Yet, achieving this is more important than it is normally thought to be: according to a study in thirty-four European countries, socioeconomic inequalities were reduced in neighbourhoods with good access to green space (Mitchell *et al.*, 2015). In other words, accessible green spaces can help decrease the effects of multiple deprivation and contribute to distributive justice.

In order to continue exploring the avenues opened here, we suggest hints for future research. Innovative ways to provide these unique spaces should be looked into, and

thinking outside the box in the dense, often anarchical and segregated cities of Colombia. Tools to promote authentic public participation as part of the governance process in the post-conflict age, including needs in terms of placemaking, should be developed. The frequentation of public green spaces should be monitored as a measure of their use and to best respond to the changing needs. The list is not exhaustive.

Over the last few decades, research has increasingly contributed to the knowledge of urban nature's contribution to public health and community cohesion. The treatment of public spaces constitutes a challenge, and parks and gardens cannot in themselves solve wars. But they constitute instruments at the crossroads of several key territory-based public policy challenges like climate change, sustainable cities and peace. If one agrees that the decrease in homicides is necessary, but by no means sufficient, to make peace, focusing territorial policies on public green spaces offers scope for facilitating reconciliation, wellbeing and resilience, and hence durable peace. A lot of bridges are still lacking between academia and practice to weigh in on public policies and convince Colombian decision-makers to dedicate a higher proportion of the local budgets to urban natural spaces and ecosystems, which are by no means residual. In so far as numerous local land use plans are presently being revised in Colombia, the time seems ripe to start doing it now.

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