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## **Peace *with* the environment**

Community perspectives from the Andean-Amazon foothills of Colombia

*Paz junto con el medioambiente: Perspectivas comunitarias desde el piedemonte Andino-  
Amazónico colombiano*

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*(Picture by a participant)*

## Abstract

Half a decade after the signing of the peace agreement between the Government of Colombia and the FARC-EP, the country continues to suffer from persisting violence and the need to address environmental destruction is more evident than ever. This research builds on a post-development critique of current peace efforts and responds to the call for including local perspectives in knowledge creation and development practice. By using photo-elicitation as data collection method, the study combines participatory and visual methods in order to explore alternative understandings of the relationship between the environment and peace, as well as resulting strategies by community-based organisations. The department of Caquetá serves as a particularly interesting case for exploring socio-environmental challenges due to its geographic location between the Andean foothills and the Amazon rainforest, and its historical importance for the conflict and peace processes. The resulting community-informed understanding highlights the importance integrating the environment into a vision of peace for local development strategies. Findings from this study therefore offer important theoretical and methodological insights for the growing field of environmental peacebuilding, and provide hope that constructing peace *together with* the environment can be possible.

**Key words:** *Buen vivir, Caquetá, Colombia, community perspectives, conflict, environment, environmental peacebuilding, participatory methods, peace, social ecology, visual methods*

**Word count: 14.990**

## Resumen

Media década después de la firma del acuerdo de paz entre el Gobierno de Colombia y las FARC-EP, el país sigue sufriendo una violencia persistente y la necesidad de abordar la destrucción del medioambiente es más evidente que nunca. La presente investigación se basa en una crítica del posdesarrollo a los esfuerzos actuales y responde a la llamada a incluir las perspectivas locales en la creación de conocimiento y las prácticas de desarrollo. Al utilizar la foto-elicitación como método de recogida de datos, el estudio combina métodos participativos y visuales con el fin de explorar entendimientos alternativos de la relación entre el medioambiente y la paz, así como las estrategias resultantes de las organizaciones comunitarias. El departamento del Caquetá presenta un caso particularmente interesante para explorar los desafíos socioambientales debido a su ubicación geográfica entre el piedemonte andino y la selva amazónica, y por su importancia histórica para el conflicto y los procesos de paz. El entendimiento comunitario resultante pone de manifiesto la importancia de integrar el medio ambiente en una visión de paz para las estrategias de desarrollo local. Los resultados de este estudio ofrecen importantes perspectivas teóricas y metodológicas para el creciente campo de la paz ambiental, y brindan la esperanza de que la construcción de la paz *junto con* el medioambiente sí es posible.

**Palabras clave:** *Buen vivir, Colombia, conflicto, El Caquetá, ecología social, medio ambiente, métodos participativos, métodos visuales, paz, paz ambiental, perspectivas comunitarias*

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## Table of contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <i>Abstract</i> .....   | i         |
| <i>Resumen</i> .....  | ii        |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> .....   | iii       |
| <i>Table of contents</i> .....  | iv        |
| <i>Abbreviations</i> .....  | vi        |
| <i>List of figures</i> .....  | vii       |
| <i>List of tables</i> .....   | vii       |
| <i>List of photographs</i> .....  | vii       |
| <b>1. Introduction</b> .....  | <b>1</b>  |
| 1.1 Research problem .....  | 1         |
| 1.2 Research aim, questions and purpose .....   | 2         |
| 1.3 Chapters .....  | 3         |
| <b>2. Conflict, the environment and a need for alternatives</b> .....                         | <b>4</b>  |
| 2.1 The Colombian conflict and the environment .....  | 4         |
| 2.2 Considering the environment within the peace agreement.....                               | 6         |
| 2.3 Problematisation of socio-environmental developments.....                                 | 7         |
| 2.4 The search for alternatives.....  | 10        |
| <b>3. Theoretical insights</b> .....  | <b>12</b> |
| 3.1 Understanding the role of the environment for peace .....                                 | 12        |
| 3.2 A post-development critique of development, peace and the environment in<br>Colombia..... | 16        |
| 3.3 Interpretive Framework.....   | 18        |
| 3.3.1 Underlying values of today's development discourse .....                                | 18        |
| 3.3.2 Globalisation and knowledge dependencies.....   | 19        |
| 3.3.3 Linking social and environmental systems .....  | 21        |
| <b>4. Methodological discussion</b> .....   | <b>25</b> |
| 4.1 Research design .....   | 25        |
| 4.2 Why a participatory approach? .....   | 26        |
| 4.3 Why visual data?.....   | 27        |
| 4.4 Photo-elicitation as data collection method.....  | 28        |
| 4.5 Analytical method .....   | 29        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| 4.6 Challenges and limitations of the methodology.....                         | 31         |
| <b>5. Case Background: El Caquetá.....</b>                                     | <b>34</b>  |
| <b>6. Presentation and analysis of the findings .....</b>                      | <b>37</b>  |
| 6.1 Defining ‘the environment’ and ‘peace’ .....                               | 37         |
| 6.2 The relationship between peace and the environment .....                   | 39         |
| 6.2.1 Violence and the environment .....                                       | 39         |
| 6.2.2 Getting to know the environment.....                                     | 45         |
| 6.2.3 Alternative livelihoods and food security.....                           | 47         |
| 6.3 Role of community-based efforts.....                                       | 50         |
| 6.3.1 Co-creation .....  | 52         |
| 6.3.2 Future generations.....  | 53         |
| 6.3.3 Challenges to community-based efforts.....                               | 55         |
| <b>7. Discussion .....</b>   | <b>58</b>  |
| <b>8. Concluding remarks .....</b>   | <b>62</b>  |
| <i>References .....</i>  | <i>64</i>  |
| <i>Annex 1 – Data collection process .....</i>                                 | <i>80</i>  |
| <i>Annex 2 – List of participants.....</i>                                     | <i>82</i>  |
| <i>Annex 3 – List of ‘experts’.....</i>  | <i>83</i>  |
| <i>Annex 4 – Information for participants &amp; research proposal.....</i>     | <i>84</i>  |
| <i>Annex 5 – Instructions for the participatory photography exercise .....</i> | <i>91</i>  |
| <i>Annex 6 – Consent form.....</i>   | <i>93</i>  |
| <i>Annex 7 – Interview guide.....</i>  | <i>95</i>  |
| <i>Annex 8 – Coding and Codebook .....</i>                                     | <i>97</i>  |
| <i>Annex 9 – Participant-generated photographs .....</i>                       | <i>101</i> |
| <i>Participant 1.....</i>  | <i>101</i> |
| <i>Participant 2.....</i>  | <i>105</i> |
| <i>Participant 3.....</i>  | <i>108</i> |
| <i>Participant 4.....</i>  | <i>110</i> |
| <i>Participant 5.....</i>  | <i>112</i> |
| <i>Participant 6.....</i>  | <i>118</i> |
| <i>Participant 7.....</i>  | <i>120</i> |

## Abbreviations

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| <b>BV</b>                  | Buen vivir   |
| <b>CBO</b>                 | Community-based organisation   |
| <b>CLAES</b>               | Latin American Centre for Social Ecology ( <i>Centro Latino Americano de Ecología Social</i> )   |
| <b>FARC-EP<br/>or FARC</b> | Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People’s Army ( <i>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo</i> )                                      |
| <b>GoC</b>                 | Government of Colombia   |
| <b>JAC</b>                 | Community Action Boards ( <i>Juntas de Acción Comunal</i> )  |
| <b>PDET</b>                | Development Programme with Terretorial-Based Focus ( <i>Programa de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial</i> )   |
| <b>PNIS</b>                | National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Crops Used for Illicit Purposes ( <i>Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos de Uso Ilícito</i> ) |
| <b>RRI</b>                 | National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Crops Used for Illicit Purposes ( <i>Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos de Uso Ilícito</i> ) |
| <b>RQ</b>                  | Research question  |
| <b>SE</b>                  | Social ecology   |
| <b>SQ</b>                  | Sub-question   |
| <b>ZRC</b>                 | Peasant Reserve Zones ( <i>Zonas de Reserva Campesina</i> )  |

## List of figures

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Combining <i>buen vivir</i> and social ecology.....                     | 23 |
| Figure 2: Connecting theoretical insights.....                                    | 24 |
| Figure 3: Data collection and analysis.....                                       | 31 |
| Figure 4: Creating peace together with the environment.....                       | 50 |
| Figure 5: Local development strategies and the community-based understanding..... | 57 |

## List of tables

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 1: Comparing theoretical insights.....        | 15 |
| Table 2: Contributions of different activities..... | 51 |

## List of photographs

|  |    |
|--|----|
| P4.4 Waterfalls.....                       | 39 |
| P5.5 Exploring the world of insects.....   | 41 |
| P2.4 Generating knowledge.....             | 42 |
| P5.6 <i>No title</i> .....                 | 45 |
| P2.5 Improving the quality of life.....    | 46 |
| P3.1 Constructing territory.....           | 47 |
| P6.3 An opportunity for peace.....         | 48 |
| P5.4 The colours of the harvest.....       | 49 |
| P1.6 Planting to recover.....              | 52 |
| P6.2 Reconstructing the social fabric..... | 53 |
| P5.2 Freedom.....                          | 54 |
| P3.4 Richness vs. neglect.....             | 56 |

For all photographs, see [Annex 2](#) and [Annex 9](#)



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research problem

The 2016 peace accords signed in Havana were supposed to herald a new era of peace for a conflict-ridden Colombia (RdC 2016). While hopes were high and the agreement was praised internationally for its comprehensiveness, today's reality makes clear that challenges persist, especially when it comes to the environment<sup>1</sup> (Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020; Rodríguez-Galán 2018; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018). Primarily in rural areas, continued deforestation and an increase in violence against environmental defenders are witness to challenges of the agreement's implementation (Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020; Krause 2019, 2020). Next to corruption and political neglect, critics assign the persistence of such setbacks for the peace process to a modern ideal that underlies current development efforts for peace, and which commercialises natural resources (Forero and Urrea 2016; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019; Roa Avendaño 2017). Within academia, the environment has already found its way into the study of peace, leading to the emergence of separate fields such as *environmental peacebuilding*<sup>2</sup> (Ide 2017; Ide et al. 2021; Johnson, Rodríguez, and Quijano Hoyos 2021). However, even within such pursuit to investigate the environment's role for peace, an instrumental view of this relationship aiming at economic growth appears to prevail (Woroniecki et al. 2020). Additional criticism of current attempts to combine peace and the environment is

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<sup>1</sup> Definitions of the environment can vary from context to context. In Latin America, and Colombia in particular, the environment is understood as "that what emerges from the relationship between human and non-human nature" (Rojas-Robles 2018:184). Understanding the environment as the result of dynamic interactions between humans and their surroundings helps to understand the relationship to conflict (or peace) and the environment (ibid.). As will be apparent from the analysis ([chapter 6.1](#)), the participants' definition of the environment is very similar.

<sup>2</sup> Environmental peacebuilding can be considered as a notion still under construction, which is actually more of a process than a fixed concept. While some authors focus mainly on environmental cooperation to facilitate peace (Ide 2019), this study will make use of a somewhat broader definition by Franco Gantiva (2020), who describes environmental peacebuilding for the context of Colombia as...

*...the stabilisation of the relationship between a human community and its immediate environmental surroundings, which goes through a process of identification and appropriation with/of the territory, the well-being of the population and the guarantee of their rights, without exceeding the carrying capacity of the ecosystem*

(198-99)

This definition includes thus a fairly balanced view of the relations between human and non-human environments and goes beyond mere cooperation by including notions of justice, well-being and conservation.

attributed to a limited recognition of local perspectives in the formation of efforts that address socio-environmental issues (ibid.; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019). This study addresses therefore the research problem of a lack of knowledge about how the environment relates to peace in general, and the specific need to rethink the environment's contribution to peace efforts from the perspective of those who are most affected.

## 1.2 Research aim, questions and purpose

The aim of the present research is therefore to highlight the importance of communities affected by the conflict – and civil society<sup>3</sup> in general – for rethinking how we understand the environment in relation to peace. The study shows that alternative understandings already exist and provides such example in the form of local perspectives from community-based organisations (CBOs) located in the department of el Caquetá. This region lies between the Andean foothills and the Amazon forest in the south of the country, and has experienced one of the highest degrees of violence and environmental destruction in the past (Carrillo González 2016; GFW 2021; Morales 2017). In addition, this research investigates how such alternative understanding informs community-based development strategies to address socio-environmental issues.

Accordingly, the research question (RQ) and sub-questions (SQ) for this study are:

**RQ:** *How do community-based understandings of socio-environmental interactions inform local development strategies in post-agreement Colombia?*

**SQ1:** *How is the relationship between peace and the environment understood from a community perspective?*

**SQ2:** *How does this understanding help development strategies at the community level?*

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of this study, civil society is to be understood as organised non-state actors that are distinct from political parties and businesses, and pursue non-profit objectives. More specifically, this research focuses on (rural) communities that are directly affected by the consequences of the current socio-environmental state in Colombia and collaborate towards fostering of peace.

To answer these questions, this research adopts a theoretical framework consisting of insights from *buen vivir* (BV) and social ecology (SE), and applies a participatory approach by using visual methods. In doing so, the study contributes not only to development and peace studies through exploring the connections between the environment and peace, but also to the growing field of environmental peacebuilding by responding to calls for recognising local perspectives within the discipline (Graser et al. 2020:4; Morales-Muñoz et al. 2021:183). Adding to this purpose, theoretical and methodological insights gained from this research offer important conclusions for future research and development efforts addressing socio-environmental challenges in (post-) conflict regions.

### 1.3 Chapters

The present research proceeds as follows: [Chapter 2](#) offers an introduction to and contextualisation of the research problem in the light of recent Colombian history. The following [chapter 3](#) presents the theoretical discussion from which this research will depart. This discussion includes an overview of the current academic debate around the relationship between peace and the environment, a post-development critique of current development efforts and a presentation of the interpretive framework, which constitutes the theoretical orientation of this study. Subsequently, [chapter 4](#) introduces methodological choices made, which combine a participatory approach with visual methodologies in order to explore community-based understandings. In [chapter 5](#), el Caquetá is presented as case of the present research. [Chapter 6](#) provides a detailed intertextual analysis of participant-generated photographs and responses. The following discussion in [chapter 7](#) positions these findings against the current academic debate, before the final [chapter 8](#) concludes with lessons learned.

## 2 Conflict, the environment and a need for alternatives

This chapter offers a brief contextual overview of the Colombian conflict and its implications for the environment. Further, it presents how the peace agreement integrates the environment in its planned agenda. Subsequently, it problematises the current socio-environmental situation in post-agreement Colombia and efforts to address challenges as rooted in market-centred ideals. In light of this background, this chapter concludes by arguing for the need to rethink the relationship between the environment and conflict by including a diversity of voices, especially those from civil society actors. Such need for alternative understandings presents the justification for this research.

### 2.1 The Colombian conflict and the environment

With a duration of more than half a century, the Colombian conflict is one of the longest internal armed conflicts in the world. What started as political disputes between Conservatives and Liberals in the late 1940s, soon developed into a nation-wide civil war, including a broad range of different actors. Territorial struggles and armed confrontations between the state and insurgent, including the Marxist guerrilla organisation 'Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army' (FARC-EP),<sup>4</sup> characterised the dynamic of the conflict. The involvement of various other actors such as drug cartels, paramilitary groups, as well as foreign involvement through the financial assistance of the United States to the Colombian government led to a spread of violence to all regions of Colombia.<sup>5</sup> This created a highly complex, obscure situation and an atmosphere of constant fear among the civil population in the entire country (Ángel and Fischer 2017; Carrillo González 2016; Graaff 2017; Pardo and Tokatlian 2010).<sup>6</sup> The

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<sup>4</sup> By its Spanish acronym: *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia – Ejército del Pueblo*

<sup>5</sup> One example that shows the extent of cruelty during the conflict are so-called *falsos positivos* (false positives). This term describes the assassination of innocent civilians, mostly urban youth, by government forces. The bodies were then labelled as guerrilla members to increase the army's 'body count,' incentivised by benefits for the responsible soldiers, such as paid vacation. This practice, has been heavily criticized by international Human Rights organizations (Graaff 2017; Rolston and Ospina 2017).

<sup>6</sup> While numbers alone cannot sufficiently describe the extent of the atrocities committed, considering the statistics provides an estimate of the impact the prolonged violence had on the Colombian population. At the time of signing the peace agreement in 2016, the conflict had resulted in the death of over 200,000 people, of which 81% were civilians. 27,023 kidnappings were reported between 1970 and 2010, and over 25,000 people were missing. Moreover, almost 15% of the country's population, or an estimated of

signing of a peace agreement between the Government of Colombia (GoC) and the FARC-EP guerrilla in 2016 signalled hope after decades of violence and was meant to introduce a transition towards reconciling the country (ET 2016a, 2016b; NYT 2016). Still, many challenges lie ahead for achieving peace in Colombia.

Next to the social impacts, decades of internal struggle and violence have also left traces in the environment, which can be considered yet another victim of the armed conflict (Franco Gantiva 2020:199). On the side of the insurgent groups, clearing forest areas for unregulated mining and the cultivation of illegal crops has heavily impacted the environment. At the same time, a widespread aerial application of pesticides to counter such illicit agricultural activities not only endangered the health of the local population, but caused significant damages to local biodiversity (Sierra et al. 2017; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018). Conversely, Sierra et al. (2017) observe that “military hideout zones and buffers among territories in conflict regions have promoted the conservation of natural areas” (41). These contrasting observations illustrate the complex interactions between conflict dynamics and the environment, which raises concerns over the potentially devastating consequences of peace for the Colombian environment (Álvarez 2001; Prem, Saavedra, and Vargas 2020; Reardon 2018; Zúñiga-Upegui et al. 2019).

The interplay between environmental factors and conflict is, however, not unique to Colombia, but rather presents an issue of global importance and immediate urgency, considering for example, the growing impact of climate change on conflict and poverty (Olsson et al. 2014; World Bank 2020). Observations from the Colombian conflict show that including an understanding of socio-environmental interactions within conflict transformation and peacebuilding efforts is essential for creating sustainable peace in Colombia and elsewhere in the world (Beckline et al. 2016; Clerici et al. 2019; Crawford and Church 2020; Ide 2017; Jama et al. 2020; Rodríguez-Galán 2018; Rojas-Robles 2018; Salazar et al. 2018). How such considerations have, to a certain extent, already found their way into plans for peace in Colombia will be discussed in the following section.

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5,700,000 people, have been internally displaced due to the conflict. Added to these numbers are the many victims of other conflict-related crimes, such as torture, anti-personnel mines, sexual violence and unlawful recruitment, as well as the psychological effects on the populations due to a prolonged exposure to violence and fear in their daily lives (CNMH 2016).

## 2.2 Considering the environment within the peace agreement

The Colombian Peace Agreement between the GoC and the FARC-EP is arguably one of the most comprehensive peace agreements in the world and was praised for its recognition of the environment and environmental justice (Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018).<sup>7</sup> Especially the first and the fourth chapters include environmental considerations to support the construction of peace.<sup>8</sup> For example, as part of the Comprehensive Rural Reform (RRI),<sup>9</sup> established under Chapter 1 of the agreement, both parties agree that future development programmes shall:

*... have a territorial-based, ethnic-based and gender-based perspective that will require the recognition and consideration of the economic, cultural and social needs, characteristics and peculiarities of Colombia's territories, of women throughout their life-cycle, of rural communities and groups in vulnerable circumstances and guaranteeing socio-environmental sustainability.*

(RdC 2016:11)

Additionally, Peasant Reserve Zones (ZRC)<sup>10</sup> are established as a collective form of organisation and land ownership with the aim of closing the agricultural frontier and protecting areas of special environmental interest. While conflict resolution mechanisms are introduced to address disputes over land tenure and use, the Development Plans with a Territorial-Based Focus (PDETs)<sup>11</sup> seek to address inequalities between rural and urban areas, and protect multi-ethnic and multicultural diversity through, for example, promoting community organisation and indigenous and Afro-Colombian production

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<sup>7</sup> Environmental justice is understood here as the active effort to challenging unequal power relations with regards to access and control over territories, nature and natural resources (cf. Mesa Cuadros 2019; Ortega-Guerrero 2018).

<sup>8</sup> The agreement contains six chapters regulating the transition process to sustainable peace: 1) integral rural development, 2) political participation, 3) end of the armed conflict, 4) solution to the problem of illicit drugs, 5) victims, and 6) implementation and verification mechanisms.

<sup>9</sup> By its Spanish acronym: *Reforma Rural Integral*

<sup>10</sup> By its Spanish acronym: *Zonas de Reserva Campesina*

<sup>11</sup> By its Spanish acronym: *Planes de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial*

methods.<sup>12</sup> What is more, as part of the RRI, set out under Chapter 4, the National Comprehensive Programme for the Substitution of Crops Used for Illicit Purposes (PNIS)<sup>13</sup> aims at creating participatory bottom-up strategies to overcome the conditions of poverty in rural communities and promote voluntary substitution of illicit crops. This programme includes a focus on sustainability and environmental regeneration by emphasising forest and soil recovery, the protection of vulnerable ecosystems, and environmentally friendly rural productive activities (ibid.; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018).

The peace agreement has consequently not only provided a glimmer of hope after decades of violence, but also shows a considerable recognition of the environment as well as the inclusion of the affected population. Thus far, these intentions have presented a promising outlook for addressing the observed interlinkages between the environment and conflict. The next section, however, reveals a less optimistic picture, when turning to recent developments in the past couple of years after the signing of the agreement.

### 2.3 Problematisation of socio-environmental developments

Half a decade after the signing of the peace agreement, hopeful optimism for a swift reconciliation of the country has vanished. The conflicts that underlie much of the violence have not disappeared and even new issues have arisen, which is why the current years are referred to as *post-agreement* and not *post-conflict* (Rojas-Robles 2018). Today, a fragmentation of old insurgent groups can be observed, and new armed organisations fill the void left by the FARC. Especially in rural areas, fears of an increase in environmental destruction after the permanent withdrawal of the guerrilla appear to have come true (Álvarez 2001; Morales 2017; Morales-Muñoz et al. 2021; Reardon 2018; Rodríguez-Galán 2018). The present section illustrates current socio-environmental developments in a post-agreement Colombia.

The effects of the guerrilla's withdrawal are most clearly visible in recent changes to the forest cover. The extent of deforestation in the country increased drastically after the

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<sup>12</sup> These programmes have a regional focus on those rural areas that are especially affected by violence. Criteria for prioritization are: poverty level, degree to which they have been affected by the conflict, weakness of administrative governance, presence of illicit cultivation (RdC 2016:22).

<sup>13</sup> By its Spanish acronym: *Programa Nacional Integral de Sustitución de Cultivos de Uso Ilícito*

peace negotiations with the FARC-EP and the imposed ceasefire, peaking at over 200,000 hectares in 2017 (IDEAM 2017a). Benefitting from the permanent withdrawal of the guerrilla in 2016, the increase in deforestation is primarily visible in areas formerly occupied by the guerrilla and with little state presence (Krause 2019, 2020; Prem et al. 2020; Volckhausen 2019). At the same time, government strategies with regard to the protection of forest areas show confusing, if not contradictory, trends. In the recent past, the GoC has shown a promising long-term commitment to prevent deforestation and promote climate mitigation. The former administration committed to the Paris Agreement and pledged to reduce deforestation to zero within the Amazon region by 2020 and a country-wide deforestation rate of zero by 2030 (IDEAM 2017b; Krause 2020; MINAMBIENTE 2017; Semana Sostenibilidad 2020). Actions by the current government, however, paint a different picture. As mentioned above, the deforestation rate is far from zero and the current administration has reneged on prior commitments, imposing the new aim of a deforestation rate of 220,000 hectares per year (Krause 2020; Pardo Ibarra 2019; Volckhausen 2019).

However, deforestation is not the root of the problem, but rather a symptom of other extractive activities. Drivers of the continuous forest cover loss are both legal and illegal types of land use, including pasturing, large agriculture plantations, (illegal) mining and illegal crop cultivation. Among these, land-intensive economic activities, notably pasturing for livestock, have the greatest impact (ibid.; Krause 2019, 2020).<sup>14</sup> Suarez et al. (2018) argue that the extraction of natural resources is also driven by a persisting dependency on the primary sector to finance peacebuilding programmes. Similarly, Forero and Urrea (2016) suggest that the government is taking advantage of the recent pacification of territories to attract national and foreign investors, offering access to areas which were previously inaccessible during the conflict.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, a rhetoric of justifying the exploitation and sale of primary resources in the name of peace, public

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<sup>14</sup> Pasturing (500,000 acres or  $\approx$  200,000ha of forest loss per year), mining (60,000ac/y  $\approx$  24,000ha/y) and illegal crop production (37,000ac/y  $\approx$  15,000ha/y) are main drivers for deforestation in Colombia. However, the construction of infrastructure, illegal logging and monoculture farming (considerably the expansion of the palm-oil industry) also contribute to high deforestation rates (Prem, Saavedra, and Vargas 2020:3).

<sup>15</sup> Some authors argue that corruption and state capture by private interest shape government decision-making and are the main drivers of a neoliberal agenda, which favours the hydrocarbon and mining sector within the country's development agenda (Pardo B. 2018; Sampayo Navarro 2018).



interest and the country's future development has led to the coining of the terms *pax neoliberal* (neoliberal peace) and *pax extractivista* (extractive peace) to describe current reconciliation efforts (ibid.; Roa Avendaño 2017).

What appears like a trade-off between social justice and environmental protection is far more complicated in reality. In fact, the post-agreement period presents an environment of increased social tensions. While forced displacement, violation of land rights and environmental pollution are direct consequences of extractive activities and deforestation, targeted assassinations of environmental and social leaders present the most visible form of violence (Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018). Globally, Colombia counts the highest numbers of murdered activists, with indigenous leaders and particularly women being targeted (ATALC 2019; Frontline Defenders 2020; Global Witness 2020; Sierra Praeli 2019; Wåhlin 2019). The ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic has only intensified this situation as imposed restrictions have reduced opportunities for social participation and armed groups are taking advantage of quarantine measures for their targeted attacks on social leaders.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, political leaders continue to openly stigmatise those defending environmental and land rights, accusing them of opposing development efforts or aligning with leftist ideas associated with the guerrilla. These developments have resulted in a country-wide situation of continued threats of violence and insecurity for the civil society. Especially rural areas are affected by these circumstances due to their historical dependency on exploitative economic activities as well as the strong presence of armed actors, making them the main site in the struggle for (environmental) justice (Frontline Defenders 2020; Global Witness 2020; Rodríguez 2020; cf. Bocarejo and Ojeda 2016).

In short, the long-awaited transformation of the conflict has largely failed to materialise. On the contrary, the absence of the FARC-EP and the lack of state presence in rural areas have led to new tensions among fragmented armed groups and an expansion of extractive activities, notably in relation to a growing agro-food industry as well as mining and

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<sup>16</sup> While the number of murdered activists has been rising continuously over the past years, 2020 was by far the deadliest year for social leaders, with 133 to 182 reported assassinations. Since the signing of the peace agreement in 2016 there have been a total of 4,281 rights violations against civil leaders and 753 have been killed (Defensoría del Pueblo 2021; de Reviero 2021).

energy-related development projects. This trend is supported by a market-centred rhetoric of peace and development, which tends to lead to new violence and environmental damage. The panorama that unfolds today in Colombia therefore shows a paradox between an apparent move away from the country's conflict-ridden past and increasing environmental destruction through the systematic exploitation of natural resources as well as new forms of violence. At the same time, such reality is a reminder of the importance of an integral approach to peacebuilding.

## 2.4 The search for alternatives

The current situation is far from the envisioned peace that the signatories of the peace agreement had wished for. Recognising the complexity of arguably the most comprehensive peace agreement in the world, its full implementation will most probably take longer than one decade (Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020). Yet, today's slow and partial implementation combined with the above described obstacles of the current situation, quite understandably meet discontent within the population and has given rise to criticism about current peacebuilding efforts (ibid.; Franco Gantiva 2020; Steele et al. 2020). This section explores such critiques and problematises the exclusion of alternative understandings about assumptions that underlie current efforts.

The reasons for today's situation are complex and criticism takes on different forms. On the one hand, the current administration's unwillingness and inability to implement the agreement in an integral manner leads to a loss of confidence in the peace process. This trend is especially visible in remote, rural areas with little state presence. Here, the majority of the population is dissatisfied with, and feels excluded from, the implementation process (Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020; Steele et al. 2020). At the same time, Molina Orjuela and Rojas (2019) suggest that state-run development and peacebuilding efforts primarily "focus on generating socioeconomic development from a traditional perspective of development" (169). Such single-sided approach to a complex reality fails to recognise context-specific circumstances, and risks neglecting environmental considerations altogether. The resulting obstacles today<sup>17</sup> show the

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<sup>17</sup> That is new incidents of violence, resource exploitation and environmental deterioration, as described above.

limitations of such profit-oriented reasoning and highlight the need to rethink peace and the role that the environment plays, more particularly. Such a rethinking of this relationship between peace and the environment needs to consider alternative understandings that are different from the predominant discourses, which justify the present practices (ibid.; cf. Woroniecki et al. 2020:10).

To find alternatives, one does not have to look far. Suggestions for different understandings exist already and emerge from various local initiatives, by communities who are directly affected by both increasing environmental degradation and the persistence of violence (Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019; Olaya Rodríguez 2016). Learning from community-based initiatives and efforts, is therefore essential for thinking about different futures and promoting a kind of development that considers local perspectives and ensures the sustainable coexistence with the environment while fostering a lasting peace.

To sum up, both conflict and the environment are very much connected in Colombia. This becomes evident when looking at the degree of environmental deterioration the conflict produced, above all in terms of deforestation. While the peace agreement quite comprehensively seeks to include environmental considerations, a continued rise in deforestation, an expansion of extractive activities and increasing violence against civil society bear witness to the persisting challenges to its implementation. What becomes evident is the need to rethink the relationship between peace and the environment by including alternative understandings based on community perspectives. Accordingly, the purpose of this study is exactly this: to highlight the role of knowledge by civil society actors for development efforts in post-agreement Colombia. More specifically, the present research encourages to recognise community-based understandings of the relationship between the environment and peace as real alternatives to the assumptions dominating the Colombian peace process today.

### 3 Theoretical insights

The previous chapter called for a rethinking of the relationship between the environment and peace as well as an inclusion of alternative, community-based understandings within development efforts towards peace. This chapter proposes an interpretive framework, that combines insights from *buen vivir* (BV) and social ecology (SE) and allows the present study to explore these alternatives. Before doing so, a literature review firstly outlines the current academic debate, illustrating a progressive integration of the environment as part of peace. These different theoretical insights provide a reference for positioning the findings from the analysis into the current academic debate later. Subsequently, a post-development critique suggests that a modernist reasoning underlies today's development in Colombia and emphasises the need for recognising the links between the social world and the environment. Such criticism also highlights the elements necessary for a theoretical framework – as presented in the last part of this chapter – making it possible to rethink how we understand peace and the environment in relation to each other.

#### 3.1 Understanding the role of the environment for peace

Peace can be understood in many different ways (Möller 2018), and so can its relationship to the environment. This first section illustrates a panorama of how these connections between the environment and peace (and conflict) can be explained, departing from three different theoretical approaches: traditional peace and conflict studies, political ecology and human ecology. While this presents by no means an exhaustive summary, this brief overview provides for a theoretical starting point, enabling a positioning of the present discussion within the broader academic debate.

Traditional peace and conflict studies emphasise the securitisation of the environment and seek to explain the casual factors that link the environment to peace. Such explanations are mostly based on positivist approaches and perceive the environment either as cause or as instrument for and within conflict (Amster 2018; LeBillon and Duffy 2018; Lee 2018). Accordingly, Lee (2018) differentiates four types of interaction between the environment and conflict: One the one hand, the environment can be subject to and reason for conflict when conflict occurs (A) over access to resources, or (B) over control

of said resources. On the other hand, the environment is instrumentalised during conflict when (C) its destruction becomes a strategy of warfare, or when (D) conditions of nature are used as strategic advantage (21-23).<sup>18</sup>

While such analysis focuses on studying the reasons and nature of conflict, recent trends within the field suggest to “study peace directly rather than through war” (Regan 2014:345). Such endeavour demands to recognise that peace is not merely the absence of war, neither is it “a goal to be pursued;” instead “[i]t is always in the making” (Said 2005:250). Therefore, shifting the focus from “negative peace” (the absence of conflict) to “positive peace” (an active effort to create peace) encourages to study the role of peaceful mechanisms for conflict resolution and cooperation (Diehl 2016; Galtung 1964). For the role of the environment for peace, this means, for example, studying environmental cooperation as active contributor to conflict transformation efforts (e.g., EIP 2020; Ide 2019; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018).

According to Diehl (2016), such inquiry of the underlying conditions that make it possible to create, support and maintain peace, should be multidisciplinary in nature: “Many of the ideas and formulations for understanding peace will need to come outside of political science” (8). Peace can therefore be understood as an active effort, which goes beyond social relations. Such realisation paves the way to study environmental cooperation for peace and efforts of environmental peacebuilding. Insights come, for example, from political ecology, which opposes the ontological positivism of traditional peace research and suggests social conflict to be a symptom of unequal power relations and lacking environmental justice (LeBillon and Duffy 2018). Key actors are therefore not only warring parties, but it is the oppressed and marginalised parts of society that show the link between the environment and conflict – or peace for that matter – in their quest for emancipation. Consequently, violence is not merely the physical force, but multidimensional in nature and can take the form of, for example, dispossession or

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<sup>18</sup> During the Colombian conflict, arguably all four types manifested themselves in one way or another. For example, (A) territorial disputes were central to the reasons of confrontations between insurgency groups and the government, as well as (B) control of natural resources, such as minerals. At the same time, (C) the large-scale, aerial application of glyphosate by the government was used strategically to destroy illegal crops as income source for the guerrilla, and (D) the latter resorted to remote forest areas and mountains as refuge (cf. Ángel and Fischer 2017; Ciro, Barbosa, and Ciro 2016; Pardo and Tokatlian 2010).

environmental degradation, which affects worst the most marginalised (ibid.).<sup>19</sup> Environmental injustice<sup>20</sup> is therefore central to conflict. Conversely, creating peace demands working towards a “social system that at all levels produces abundant life and justice, a system in which [...] basic human needs are met, including the right to life, to food and clean water” (Shifferd 2011:111). By including such notion of environmental justice into efforts for fostering peace, social and environmental justice cannot be thought apart anymore. Amster (2018) consequently concludes that “neither peace nor [environmental] sustainability will be possible without the other” (74).

Additional insights into this discussion come from human ecologists, such as Anne Goodman (2012), who proposes the environment to be a constituting element of peace by adopting a holistic understanding of what peace is. Peace is understood as “wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are part” (The Earth Charter International 2020:16.f, as cited in Goodman 2012). Ecological security is thus just as important for the creation of peace as the spiritual or psychological connection one has to the environment they live in (cf. ibid.; Barash 2000; Mische 2004). Within such an ontology of wholeness, both conflict and peace can work on three different relational contexts: relationships to oneself, to others and to nature (Brenes-Castro 2004). Accordingly, peace is “the outcome of harmonious relationships on all levels within the three relational contexts” (Goodman 2012:265). It is important to note here that such emphasis on the dependency between social and biophysical relations is similar to already existing *cosmovisions* (worldviews), such as the southern African concept of *ubuntu*, the Indian concept of *swaraj*, and *buen vivir* from South America, which will be explored in more detail below (ibid.; Chuji,

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<sup>19</sup> In Colombia, such type of violence has a long history, for example, in mining activities that especially affect indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, exposing them to health risks, water shortages and forced re-settlements (Gomez and Regaignon 2015; Gregow 2016). Today, however, these environmental injustices appear more obvious than ever. According to Ortega-Guerrero (2018), the recent signing of the peace agreement, shows a transition of the ‘armed-conflict phase’ to a situation, in which injustices primarily take place as environmental conflicts. As consequence, social inequalities manifest themselves in the form of both the unequal distribution of environmental goods and territories, as well as environmental burdens, such as pollution and damages to local ecosystems on which communities depend (ibid.; Rojas-Robles 2018).

<sup>20</sup> Environmental injustice is considered here as a lack of environmental justice (see footnote 7), and circumstances that contribute to this state. See footnote 19 for examples of environmental injustices in Colombia.

Rengifo, and Gudynas 2019; Kothari, Demaria, and Acosta 2014; Le Grange 2019; Shrivastava 2019).<sup>21</sup>

**Table 1:** *Comparing theoretical insights on the relationship between peace and the environment*

|   | <b><i>Role of the environment for conflict</i></b>  | <b><i>Understanding of peace and its relationship to the environment</i></b>   |
|---|---|--|
| <b>(Traditional) Peace and Conflict Studies</b> | Instrumental view of the environment: natural resources or territory can contribute, cause or strategically be used within conflict.  | Conversely, cooperation over natural resources can support peaceful relations.   |
| <b>Political Ecology</b>                        | Conflict as symptom of lacking (environmental) justice: Violence is multidimensional and shows itself through unequal power relations related to access and control over nature | Achieving environmental justice is central to peace and an involvement of marginalised groups claiming their (environmental) rights is essential for an active effort to create peace (peacebuilding)  |
| <b>Human Ecology</b>                            | Conflict as result from an unbalanced relationship between the three contexts of oneself, others and nature.  | Peace is a holistic concept and the environment is an integral part of it. Considering the environment within peacebuilding efforts is important for (ecological) security, spiritual/psychological wellbeing and harmonious social relations. |

Thus far, this literature review provided an overview of the theoretical debate around diverse understandings of the relationship between the environment and peace (see Table 1). Different levels of integration of the environment for conflict, the construction of peace and peace as a concept itself can be observed. While traditional peace and conflict studies adopt a positivist ontology and consider the environment as a casual factor for conflict, political ecology highlights the importance of recognising power relations and the role of environmental justice within peacebuilding efforts. As

<sup>21</sup> On a national level in Colombia, one example of this move towards understanding peace as wholeness is given by a landmark ruling of the Supreme Court in 2018, which granted the Amazon the same legal rights as a human being – including the right to survival and integrity. This decision aimed not only at securing good relations between humans and nature, but included ‘the other’ by granting future generations the right to enjoy a healthy environment (Corte Suprema de Justicia 2018; Dejusticia 2018; Krause 2020). On a local level, Morales Pachon (2019) observes that such integral view of social and environmental relations is already central to the motivation and work of many CBOs within the social and solidarity economy in Colombia.

interdisciplinary field, human ecology suggests to understand peace as wholeness. The environment forms an integral part of this concept. Having highlighted the importance of recognizing these diverse connections between the environment and peace and their importance for peacebuilding efforts, this chapter proceeds in the next section by offering a critique on how the latter are understood in post-agreement Colombia.

### 3.2 A post-development critique of development, peace and the environment in Colombia

As the preceding discussion shows, environmental considerations play an increasingly important role for how we think about peace and peacebuilding (Ide 2017, 2019; Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020; Lee 2018; Swain and Öjendal 2018; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018). Especially in Colombia, environmental justice has become a central issue for peace processes and concepts like environmental peacebuilding are promising approaches to address complex development problems at the intersection of peace and the environment (Mesa Cuadros 2019; Valenzuela and Caicedo 2018). As stated previously, however, while the Colombian peace agreement has been praised for its consideration of the environment, its implementation is still lacking behind. This section addresses the critique that suggests one explanation for why current peacebuilding efforts appear to bear only little fruit in Colombia.

The disappointing results of the agreement's implementation are mainly attributed to the government's failure to recognise the integral nature of the different aspects the agreement entails (Iniciativa Barómetro et al. 2020). Especially its efforts to address socio-environmental issues meet many challenges. In spite of a rhetoric of *post-conflict* and *post-agreement*, both violence and environmental degradation remain omnipresent in many Colombians' daily lives (Mesa Cuadros 2019). Besides a general lack of commitment by the current government to the implementation overall, critics observe that current efforts are based on a utilitarian and materialistic perception of the environment (ibid.). According to Woroniecki et al. (2020), even efforts of environmental peacebuilding frame the environment as "instrumental to economic growth" and fail to



include alternative understandings and forms of knowledge, especially by those mostly affected by conflict and environmental degradation (9).<sup>22</sup>

Such critique is nothing new, however. Already since the turn of the century, post-development thinkers, such as Arturo Escobar (2004), advocate for an understanding of development that moves beyond modernity and recognises the plurality of understandings and knowledge. To demonstrate the paradoxical developments of the modern model, Colombia serves as unfortunate example:

*[D]espite what could be seen as excellent conditions for a peaceful society and capitalist democracy (e.g., very rich natural endowments and a large and highly trained professional class), what has happened is the opposite; [...] the Colombian case makes patently clear the exhaustion of modern models[...].*

(ibid. 10)

Reasons for this contradictory situation are historical inequalities, which prevail today in the form of global capitalist forces (both legal and illegal) that fuel violence, forced displacements and the destruction of nature (ibid.). Development efforts, caught within the same modern rationale, therefore fail to address factors producing asymmetries and structures that sustain an unequal distribution of wealth and political decision making, rendering people living within affected areas as mere subjects of these efforts (Serje de la Ossa 2005:313).

The continuous rise in deforestation, persisting social conflict and increasing violence underline that Escobar's observations are even more important today in post-agreement Colombia (Krause 2019; Reardon 2018; Rodríguez-Galán 2018). He pinpoints the problem to the way we understand development and the underlying ideals current efforts are built on. To be able to address today's development problems – both in Colombia, but also elsewhere in the world – it is therefore inevitable that we learn how

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<sup>22</sup> Closely linked to this, many scholars demand that efforts to address the intersection of peace and environment should recognise and challenge historical injustices. This includes the country's colonial heritage and resulting power structures that shape relationships between societal actors and the environment (Parra-Romero 2016; Ramos Suárez 2020; Woroniecki et al. 2020).

to “imagine beyond modernity in some fashion” (Escobar 2004:4). Such a task demands recognising the epistemological importance of what Escobar calls “subaltern knowledges,” that is knowledge and practices by those oppressed by hegemonic globalization (ibid.). Elsewhere, he adds that a rethinking of nature’s and the environment’s relationship with society is central to such quest, therefore demanding also an ontological shift in how we perceive human and non-human realities (Escobar 2002, 2018).

Consequently, a theory underlying the analysis of peace, the environment and their relationship within development efforts should include the following two elements: First, it must recognize the shortcomings of modern perceptions of development and the concepts associated with them – including peace and environment – and open up the space for recognising alternative forms of knowledge. At the same time, exploring the relationship between peace and the environment needs a theoretical basis that creates a link between the social world and the environment. The challenge consists therefore in exploring the relationship between peace and the environment without falling back into modern explanations, but by listening to alternative understandings by those most affected by socio-environmental issues.

### 3.3 Interpretive Framework

For the very reasons outlined above, Molina-Orjuela and Rojas (2019) propose a combination of *buen vivir* (BV) and social ecology (SE) to explore development strategies for territorial environmental peace in Colombia. Inspired by this proposal, this section outlines an interpretive framework, justifies the methods applied and guides the research process.

#### 3.3.1 Underlying values of today’s development discourse

BV or *sumak kawsay* (in Quechua) has emerged as discourse countering mainstream understandings of development. It originates from indigenous movements opposing a neoliberalist development agenda in Latin America. The discourse combines post-colonial movements with anti-globalisation ideologies, hereby questioning modern perceptions of development and welcoming a diversity of alternative understandings. While some variation of BV has been part of many peoples’ cosmovisions in Latin America

for a long time, the concept has gained increased attention in the 21<sup>st</sup> century's debates on post-development and sustainability, not least due to the centrality of nature within BV's holistic understanding of well-being (Acosta 2010; Acosta and Gudynas 2011b; Kothari et al. 2014; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019; Vanhulst and Beling 2014).<sup>23</sup>

As can be derived from its name – often translated into 'good living' – BV seeks to offer an alternative perception of well-being to today's predominant understanding of development. The critique of today's approaches to development is centred around their underlying ideal of well-being, which motivates policies and interventions. Such an ideal is considered to be based on a failure to recognize the historical and market-based assumptions development strategies are motivated by. As a result, continued consumption and predatory progress in the quest for development do not lead to well-being and prosperity as assumed, but can end in rights violations and the exploitation of nature for human benefit (Delgado Ramos 2014; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019).<sup>24</sup>

As alternative, BV recognises the intrinsic value of nature and includes the environment as a determining principle of well-being (Acosta 2010; Delgado Ramos 2014; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019). This means that such an alternative imaginary to development is not possible without a sound relationship with the environment. BV therefore constitutes a "collective well-being of both humans and non-humans. Humans, human communities and the natural world, all living beings" (Hopkins and Escobar 2012).

### 3.3.2 Globalisation and knowledge dependencies

As second quality, BV inverts the direction of knowledge creation from local to global, opposing thereby mainstream sustainable development, which aligns with an increasing globalisation of the development sector (Kothari et al. 2014). BV criticises that through

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<sup>23</sup> Since Escobar (2012, 2018:xxxi; Hopkins and Escobar 2012) himself is a proponent of BV as possible alternative imaginary to development, many of the concept's qualities outlined here resonate with his critique in the section above.

<sup>24</sup> This line of arguing can also be used to explain the challenges many so-called 'sustainable development' efforts entail. 'Green economy,' private or public-private conservation efforts and even development initiatives to address climate change, such as REDD and REDD+, have been criticised for their utilitarian use of the environment, leading to appropriation of territories ('green grabbing'), environmental degradation and rights violations of local communities (Adelman 2018; Calma 2016; Delgado Ramos 2014; Vanhulst and Beling 2014).

globalisation current development efforts reproduce modern and Eurocentric ideals of well-being and, thus, contribute to (colonial) power relations between different forms of knowledge (cf. *ibid.*; Escobar 2018:147–48). This type of globalisation is centrally linked to questions of the environment when considering, for example, extractive activities as “path for development,” recreating colonial hegemonic structures of both material dependency and knowledge production (Acosta 2010:18; Mesa Cuadros 2019)

In contrast, BV embraces a plurality of knowledge without creating hierarchies (Acosta 2010). Different forms of (local) knowledge are considered as serious alternatives to current mainstream approaches, “without denying the technological advancements of the modern world or possible contributions from other cultures and knowledge that challenge the presuppositions of dominant modernity” (Kothari et al. 2014:367; Vanhulst 2015). These knowledge alternatives come from the very communities affected by the issues at stake. Practically speaking, governments play a supportive role, alongside other actors, in the common quest for a future that is better and more peaceful for all (Delgado Ramos 2014). This means that BV is not a mere collection of alternatives to development, but it encourages to recognise the importance of context for understandings of well-being and development (Acosta and Gudynas 2011b:79).

Consequently, BV can thus be seen as a radical call to rethink how we understand development today. It calls out the deep-rooted issues of how we conceptualise what development is and what it aspires. These issues include the persisting focus on linear (economic) progress and a well-being that derives from the commodification of nature. BV highlights that this type of development reproduces colonial, anthropocentric and androcentric power structures of knowledge through increased globalisation. In contrast, and to put it more optimistically, BV presents an “opportunity to build a different society sustained in the coexistence of human beings in their diversity and in harmony with nature, based on recognition of the diverse cultural values existing in each country and worldwide” (Acosta and Gudynas 2011a:103).

Yet, criticism of the concept focuses especially on its practical application and failures to institutionalise *buen vivir* (Acosta 2013, 2015; Vanhulst and Beling 2014), as well as the risk of idealising the ‘indigenous approach’ (Morales Pachon 2019:47–49; Stefanoni

2011). In recognising such limitations, this research refrains from using BV as a blueprint for new development scenarios. Instead, it employs the concept's qualities to construct a theoretical attitude necessary for studying alternative imaginaries and the possibility of rethinking the relationship between peace and the environment.

### 3.3.3 Linking social and environmental systems

In addition to BV, the interpretive framework proposed here draws on insights from SE to create a link between human action and the environment, allowing to think peace and the environment together. A focus lies here on the Latin American school of thought, advanced by the *Centro Latino Americano de Ecología Social* (CLAES, Latin American Centre for Social Ecology), which studies the constant interactions between human and environmental systems (Evia and Gudynas 1993).<sup>25</sup>

SE links observations of the natural environment with a striving for well-being of society. By doing so, SE allows to observe the connection between social and environmental problems. Similar to the ontology of BV present crises (both ecological and social) are seen as a result of human consumption and abuse of what was thought to be an indefinite abundance of natural resources (Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019). For example, Svampa (2012) suggests that many of the socio-environmental conflicts<sup>26</sup> we see today, such as issues related to food sovereignty, (environmental) rights violations, dispossession of land and even the criminalisation of resistance movements, can be traced back to environmentally harmful economic practices and an overexploitation of the environment.

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<sup>25</sup> For social ecologists from this school of thought, there is four basic assumptions underlying human-environmental interactions: "1) Human societies interact intensely and continuously with the environment. Neither one of the two can be studied in isolation as they mutually determine aspects of their structures and functioning; 2) interactions between human and environmental systems are dynamic and develop over time and space; 3) the boundaries of the environment are dependent on how the human system defines them; 4) the environment is complex and heterogenous in both time and space" (Evia and Gudynas 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Socio-environmental conflict describes the potential for and actual conflict arising from interactions between society and non-human nature. In Colombia, this includes societal and environmental impacts of and disputes over land use, natural resource management and economic activities (cf. Franco Gantiva 2020; Pérez-Rincón 2016).

In Latin America, the current intellectual-activist debate led by the CLAES, pinpoints extractive activities in form of hydrocarbon exploitation, large-scale mining and extensive agriculture as main reasons for ongoing conflicts and environmental degradation within the region. By proposing *postextractivist transitions* for development, alternative concepts (such as BV) offer “guiding imaginaries” for a future that thinks beyond modernity and where human activity has a minimal environmental and cultural impact (Alayza and Gudynas 2012; Escobar 2018:150–51; Svampa 2012). In this sense, the ability to understand today’s human-environment relationships as interrelated and to question the current extractivist model...

*...opens up the path to alternatives capable of breaking away from the shackles of anthropocentrism and utilitarianism. It is time treading other paths, framed by plural ethics, inclusive of the rich and diverse valuations of people and nature. Once again, it is the value of life itself that is in question.*

(Gudynas 2015, as cited in Escobar 2018:151)

Another important insight from social ecology is the contextuality that is central to how such relationship can be understood. Interactions between human and environmental systems are highly contextual, both with regards to the physical space and the historical timeline. Studying human-environment interactions, thus, needs to consider these two dimensions as well. One way to make sure of this – and to paraphrase Evia and Gudynas (1993) – unlike in other perspectives, in which the researcher describes the environment a human interacts with, within SE, that person is ‘asked’ how they ‘see’ this environment.

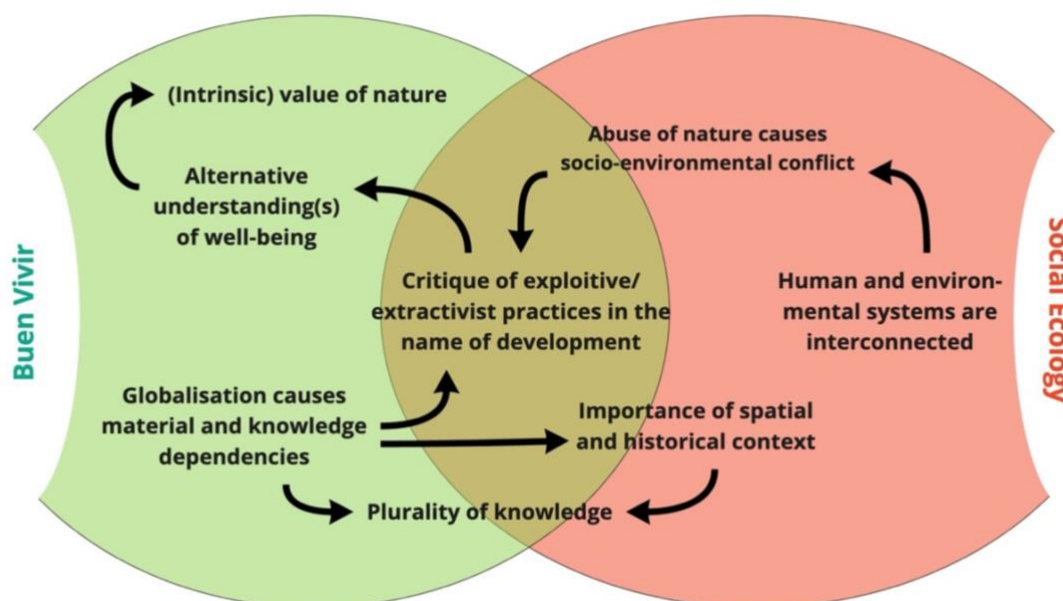
This contextual understanding of the links between social and environmental systems assists in approaching peace and the environment together. In this way, social ecology makes it possible to study their interconnections and relationship from a more holistic understanding. Such holistic understanding is necessary to address complex problems at the intersection of peace and the environment, and offer solutions benefiting both natural preservation and the well-being of society (Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019).

Figure 1 summarises how BV and SE contribute to an interpretive framework that allow studying the intersection between peace and the environment. On the one hand, BV offers

a critique on modern conceptualisations of development on the one hand. Such critique includes recognising the shortcomings of today’s development efforts to include nature as integral part in the understanding of well-being. Further, seeing BV as a concept open to the diversity of local understandings of well-being, allows to break with hegemonic structures between different types of knowledge and enables to explore alternatives perspectives. On the other hand, SE calls the problem by its name. It allows us to understand the current crises as results of the human abuse of what was understood as an infinite abundance of natural resources. By linking observations from the natural sciences with social sciences’ striving for human well-being, SE breaks with the dichotomy of the academic world and allows to explore new, joint pathways (Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019).

**Figure 1:** Combining *buen vivir* (BV) and social ecology (SE)

The diagram shows the overlap of qualities that both perspectives add to the interpretive framework. The arrows indicate the reasoning and connections between the qualities.

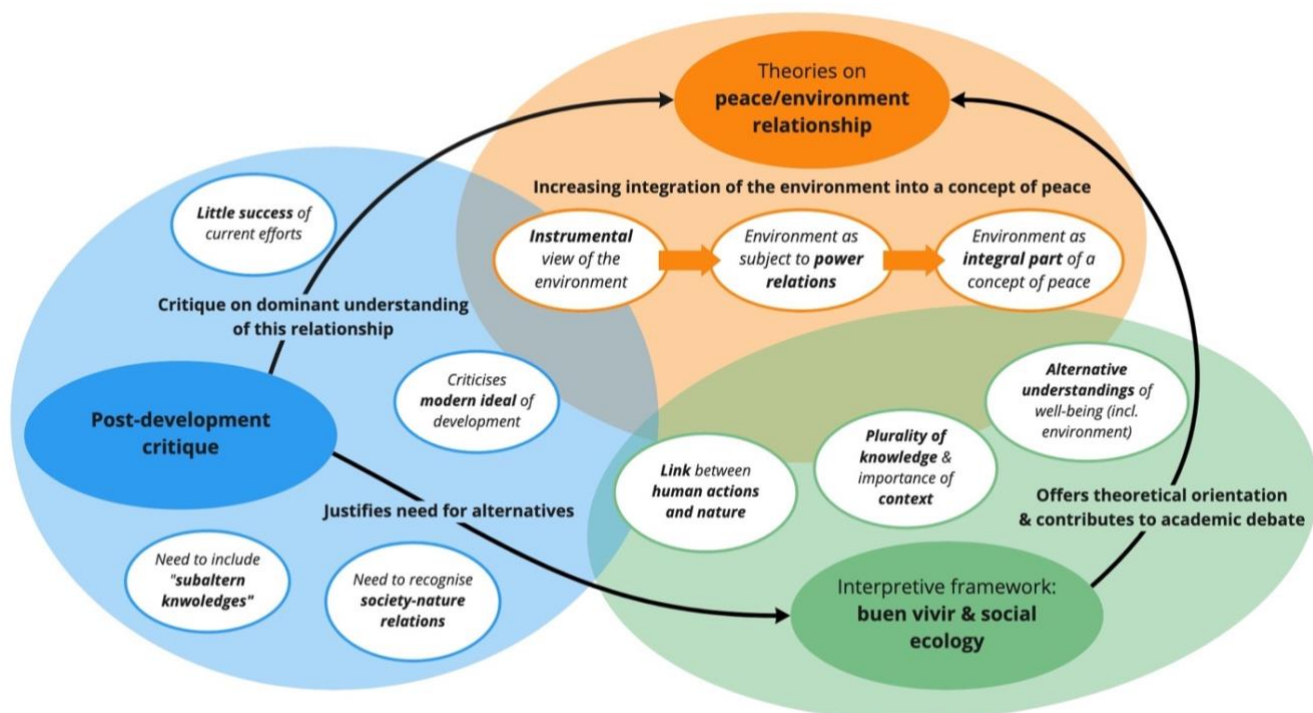


Together, BV and SE contribute therefore to an interpretive framework that is just as critical as it is optimistic. One that embraces the diversity of contextual understandings and their value for addressing today’s challenges. Regarding the relationship between peace and the environment, this means moving beyond a utilitarian logic of the two concepts being causally linked. In contrast, a rethinking of underlying concepts from a

community perspective must be open to alternative understandings, which acknowledge that both peace and the environment are an integral part of the other.

To conclude this chapter, Figure 2 summarises how the three theoretical insights presented here link together and contribute to this research. Theories on the relationship between peace and the environment provide an overview of the increasing integration of the environment into a concept of peace within the academic debate. A post-development critique highlights shortcomings of and justifies the need to rethink the current understanding of this relationship within Colombian development efforts. The interpretive framework, encompassing BV and SE, contributes to the academic debate and offers an alternative by recognising the perspectives of those most affected by conflict and environmental degradation; thereby justifying the theoretical orientation and methods of this study. Accordingly, this interpretive framework serves as “theoretical orientation that guide[s] the practice of research” (Creswell and Poth 2018:58), motivating methodological choices and the analysis. For the latter, it takes on functions of an analytical lens by inspiring coding categories for the deductive process of the analysis (see [chapter 6](#) and [Annex 8](#)).

Figure 2: Connecting theoretical insights





## 4 Methodological discussion

The preceding theoretical discussion highlights the need to move beyond the dominant understanding of peace and the environment. Such rethinking demands to be perceptive to alternative forms of knowledge and understandings that do not fit into the modernist reasoning. For this task, Gómez-Barris (2017) proposes a methodological attitude that acknowledges the otherwise overlooked. She calls this attitude “a practice of listening” that presents a point of departure for research and analysis (136). Its meaning is simple: Before recommendations for new strategies can be made, a first step is to listen to and understand what is already out there (ibid.). Such approach to research is inherently critical for it includes the voices, opinions and stories of those commonly marginalised and subject to power structures that dominate both the academic world and the reality of development practice (cf. ibid.; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019). The present chapter explains the methodological choices for this study, which adopts such practice of listening. After justifying the choices for the research design of an instrumental case study, an explanation of the participatory and visual approach to data collection follows, as well as an introduction to photo-elicitation as data collection method. The chapter proceeds by explaining the intertextual discourse analysis of resulting participant-generated photographs and interviews. Finally, potential challenges to this methodology are highlighted.

### 4.1 Research design

A case study is chosen as qualitative research design, as it allows for an in-depth study of a particular problem while simultaneously applying complementing methods of data collection (Creswell and Poth 2018:153). Some authors claim that – due to the extreme nature of the conflict – both in its extent and intensity – Colombia serves as least-likely case to study the presence of peace (Möller and Shim 2019; cf. Lamont 2015). This study chooses, instead, to use the department of Caquetá as instrumental case, illustrating the relationship between peace and the environment (Creswell and Poth 2018:157). Yet, following the theoretical discussion of the previous chapter, this research aspires to embrace a plurality of knowledge, without attempting to infer any generalisability from its findings. If anything, the present case constitutes one example of many, which should motivate further research within other contexts and encourage to consider local

understandings (and strategies of CBOs) as valid contributions to the creation of peace and a healthy environment.

While similar developments with regards to environmental degradation and violence can be observed elsewhere in Colombia (Franco Gantiva 2020; Pérez-Rincón 2016; Prem et al. 2020; Trejos Rosero et al. 2019), the department of Caquetá presents an especially interesting example due to its historical importance for the armed conflict, the extent of environmental degradation, its present importance for the peace processes, as well as a rich history of social organisation (Casanova and Higuera-Acevedo 2018; Ciro 2016; Graser et al. 2020; Pinilla 2020; see [chapter 5](#)). Such choice reflects purposeful sampling, which Patton (2015) describes as: “selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated” (401). More specifically, the case selection and sampling method present deductive theoretical construct sampling (ibid. 437-38). For the present research, this means that both case and participants have been chosen with the purpose to investigate the theoretical concept of peace in relation to the environment, and its translation into action.<sup>27</sup>

## 4.2 Why a participatory approach?

The motivation to use a participatory approach for this type of research is twofold. First, including participants in the knowledge creation process counters existing power imbalances of traditional extractive research methods: “A participatory approach should seek to reveal and validate local knowledge, destabilize the notion of the outside expert as the only true ‘knower’” (Hammett, Twyman, and Graham 2014:182). As the researcher himself belongs to a European institution, a participatory approach seeks to reduce the risk of recreating these traditional power structures. A second benefit of participatory research lies in its innovative use of different types of information. These – sometimes experimental – methods of inquiry make it possible to view questions from different perspectives, which is the very goal of this research (ibid.:185).<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the aim

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<sup>27</sup> See [Annex 1](#) for a detailed description of the data collection process, selection criteria of participants and the limitations to the data collection process.

<sup>28</sup> Having said this, participatory approaches are nothing new, and are common practice in the development sector, especially for grassroots and civil society organisations (cf. ibid.; Mayoux 2001). The decision to use a participatory approach is therefore directly inspired by observations of development practice.

is for the researcher to become “facilitator of knowledge creation [...] rather than an extractor of data” (Hammett et al. 2014:182), and for participants to gain increased agency over the research process.<sup>29</sup>

### 4.3 Why visual data?

Visual methodologies for data collection complement this participatory approach. In fact, many participatory approaches to research use visual techniques to stimulate discussion and debate (Hammett et al. 2014).<sup>30</sup> Visual methodologies have proven useful in studying various topics of development (cf. Bleiker 2018).<sup>31</sup>

A central assumption within visual methodologies is the perception of the image as carrier of information – a form of language. For example, a photograph is more than a mere depiction of the world out there; it can show us *how* we perceive this world (Bleiker 2009:7, 2018:2–3). This includes decisions to show or not to show, how things are shown and how they relate to the (discursive) context. All these qualities provide information about the perceived reality of an image’s author (ibid.). Additionally, in the same way photographs tell us something about the author and their view on the world, analysing images reveals “a complex relationship between a photograph and ourselves,” as audience (Bleiker 2009:7). This relationship depends on very subjective factors. Möller (2018) observes that “the viewer’s experience will always be dependent on the context within which it takes place” (221). Accordingly any interpretation relies on both the

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<sup>29</sup> Through interpreting meaning created by participants, this research positions itself within a social constructivist frame, while it simultaneously recognises the postmodern assumptions it makes and aims to highlight the transformative nature of challenging power relations within the creation and recognition of different kinds of knowledge. Accordingly, the role of the researcher is both to listen to and interpret answers given through the data collection process. This methodology guides therefore a process of co-creation – rather than mere extraction – of knowledge between the participant and the researcher (cf. Creswell and Poth 2018).

<sup>30</sup> The exact benefits of including visual data in a participatory approach will be further explored later within the section on photo-elicitation as data collection method (see [chapter 4.4](#)).

<sup>31</sup> Especially interesting for this study are attempts at exploring concepts of peace through visual methods (Allan 2012; Möller 2013; Möller and Shim 2019; Rolston and Ospina 2017; Walker, Myers-Bowman, and Myers-Walls 2003), as well as conflict transformation (Akande 2016; Bidey 2014), and society’s relationship to the environment (Belcher and Roberts 2012; Bleiker 2018). The ‘image’ in these examples takes different forms, ranging from (street) art (Rolston and Ospina 2017), over monuments and architecture (Möller 2013) to photography (Allan 2012; Belcher and Roberts 2012; Möller and Shim 2019).

context, in which the image was taken and – while simultaneously shaping these – our own knowledge and understanding thereof as observer (Möller 2017).

#### 4.4 Photo-elicitation as data collection method

Photo-elicitation as data collection method combines a participatory approach with a visual methodology by creating data in form of participant-generated photographs and subsequent interviews. The data encompasses 34 pictures and seven interviews from seven participants.

Before the actual data collection, an initial briefing explained purpose and intention, as well as instructions of the photography exercise to the participants.<sup>32</sup> Due to the large geographic distance between researcher and participant, pictures were taken by digital camera or camera phone and sent to the researcher via email or mobile messenger. This way of submitting the images allowed for a preselection by the participant, who might consciously have chosen not to share certain photographs as they show contents that were considered too personal or could even endanger others or the participant themselves (cf. Rose 2016). The exercise comprised the task to take up to four pictures of how the participant understands the relationship between peace and the environment.<sup>33</sup> The reason for limiting the number of pictures is the chosen analysis method of a visual discourse analysis, which is qualitative in nature. As explained in the following section, “what matters,” for this analysis method, “is the richness of textual detail, rather than the number of texts analysed” (Tonkiss 1998: 253).

After the images were taken, individual interviews were conducted discussing and analysing the pictures in detail together with the participant. This semi-structured interview focused in its first part on the meaning of the images for the participant and what is represented with regards to the relationship between peace and the environment. During the interview, room for reflections on the process of taking the

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<sup>32</sup> This material includes information about the planned research (see [Annex 4](#)), instructions for the photography exercise (see [Annex 5](#)), and a consent form explaining the use of photographs and interview answers (see [Annex 6](#)).

<sup>33</sup> While the recommended number of photographs was a maximum of four pictures, some participants decided to submit up to seven images (see [Annex 2](#) and [Annex 9](#)).

photographs is provided.<sup>34</sup> The second part of the interview addressed the significance of such understanding for the participant's work with community-driven development efforts.<sup>35</sup>

Benefits of photo-elicitation are several, ranging from encouraging more emotional and affective conversation with the participant to the increased detail of information generated (ibid.; Bagnoli 2009). For this research, however, two qualities are especially of value. First, in contrast to ordinary interviews, talking about a photograph with an interviewee can bring up different things and questions that the researcher had and could not have considered in advance (Rose 2016:315; Walker and Early 2010). Being able to discuss these "unknown unknowns" (Allen 2011), generates not only "more but different insights into phenomena, which research methods relying on oral, aural or written data cannot provide" (Bolton, Pole, and Mizen 2001). A second quality is linked to the participatory nature of photo-elicitation. Through participatory photography, participants play a central role within the research process. The method enables participants to have an active part in the knowledge creation process, while similarly being an easy and accessible way of participating (Rose 2016:316–17; Mannay 2016; Copes et al. 2018; Möller 2013:2013).<sup>36</sup> These two qualities – being able to explore unforeseen questions and transferring agency to the participant – justify this methodological choice for exploring alternative understandings at the intersection between peace and environment through photo-elicitation.

#### 4.5 Analytical method

Photo-elicitation is not based on any particular theoretical position (Rose 2016:308). Therefore, it can be used to answer a broad range of different research questions and the data produced can be analysed using conventional social science techniques (ibid.:324).

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<sup>34</sup> The interview focused not only on what the participants took pictures of, but also what has (intentionally) not been photographed and the reasons thereof (cf. Rose 2016).

<sup>35</sup> The interview guide used for these interviews with participants can be found in [Annex 7](#). In addition to participant interviews, 'expert' interviews were conducted to provide contextual and background knowledge (see [Annex 1](#)). Since each of these 'experts' had specialised knowledge (see [Annex 3](#)), the guides for these interviews looked different from case to case and are not published here.

<sup>36</sup> Möller (2018) even suggests that participatory photography helps otherwise passive subjects in the depiction of conflict to become "agents of their own image" (222). Elsewhere, Möller (2013) explains that by involving participants in the research process through the act of taking pictures, they are able "to construct their own images and potentially to influence the ways they are seen by others" (44, 166).

To analyse both photographs and interview transcripts, two different options exist (ibid.). Either they can be treated as one body of data and analysed together (e.g., Dodman 2003), or they can be analysed separately (e.g., Keats 2009). For this research, the former option will be chosen, for it is believed to be here where intertextuality can best be found.<sup>37</sup>

When analysing images, Rose (2016) differentiates four different sites (production, image itself, circulation, audiencing) and three modalities (technological, compositional, social) for interpreting visual material (24-27). While photo-elicitation is essentially a practice of image production, the analysis mainly focuses on the image itself and the social interpretation of the (intended) audience, that is the researcher and the participants themselves. Rose (2016) suggests a type of discourse analysis to explore social and socially produced meanings of the participant generated photographs and the interviews. Such method pays “attention to the notion of discourse as articulated through various kinds of visual images and verbal texts” (ibid.:192). The coding for this type of analysis considers two important aspects. First, it needs to acknowledge the complexities of photographs and speech; both between and among the two media, but also considering the social circumstances in which the discourse created by the material is taking place. A second consideration for the coding is that “invisibility can have just as powerful effects as visibility” (ibid.:214). Some photographs might show what is no longer there, and – as mentioned above – there might be certain reasons why some images have not been taken or selected by the participant in the first place (ibid.:319, 325).

In a first round of inductive coding,<sup>38</sup> this study therefore pays attention to both patterns of visibility and invisibility and the common themes between and among images and interviews, which help to create an understanding of the relationship between peace and the environment from a community perspective. Themes from the theoretical discussion and interpretive framework (see [chapter 3](#)) complement the previous round of coding through a more deductive approach. Figure 3 summarises the data collection and analysis method, including the use of ‘expert’ interviews, which have not been mentioned so far,

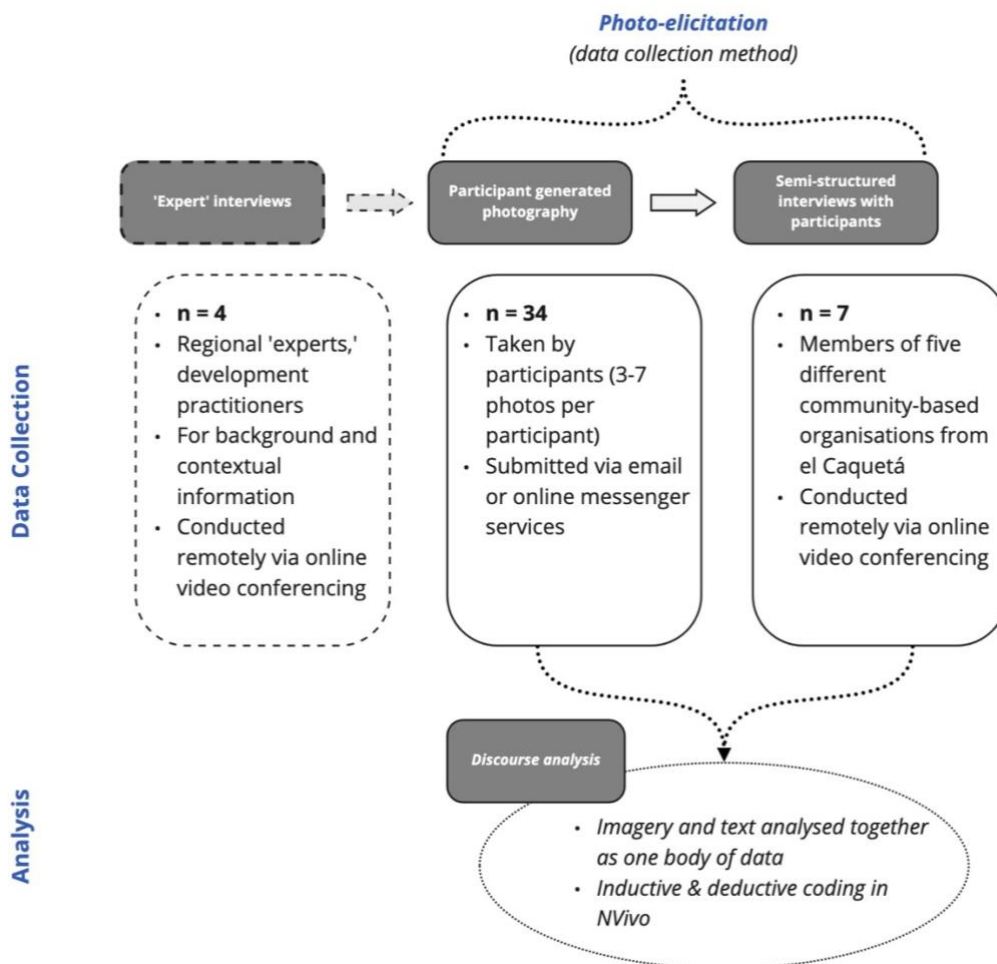
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<sup>37</sup> In the context of this study, intertextuality refers to the relationship between image and spoken word, and their dependency on each other to form a particular discursive meaning (Rose 2016:188).

<sup>38</sup> All coding was undertaken using the software NVivo. See [Annex 8](#) for details on the coding process and the codebook.

but presented a valuable source for contextual and background information.<sup>39</sup> Both participants and ‘experts’ are anonymised in the analysis for security reasons (see [Annex 1](#)).

**Figure 3: Data collection and analysis** <sup>40</sup>



#### 4.6 Challenges and limitations of the methodology

This research considers a participatory use of photo-elicitation as suitable for answering the research question since it enables to challenge epistemological and methodological power relations and encourages innovative answers. However, such method does not

<sup>39</sup> Given the importance of the contextual setting of this study, the four ‘expert’ interviews – while not being part of the analysis – provided relevant background information about the case (see [chapter 5](#)). The word ‘expert’ is highlighted as it does not refer to “the only true ‘knower”” (Hammett, Twyman, and Graham 2014:182), but rather a person with specific contextual knowledge. For more detail about the process, see [Annex 1](#). Further, [Annex 3](#) presents a list of all ‘experts’ consulted.

<sup>40</sup> For a description of the data collection process, see [Annex 1](#). A list of participants and ‘experts’ can be found in [Annex 2](#) and [Annex 3](#), respectively. All 34 photographs are shown in [Annex 9](#).

come without its own challenges. The following section discusses the limitations of the chosen research method.

A first limitation arises from the research design. Although being an illustrative case study, findings in this research are not generalisable due to the highly complex contextual setting. However, this is neither desired nor possible. On the one hand, every incidence of violence is different, and therefore every vision of peace (and its relation to the environment) will essentially look different (cf. Möller 2017, 2018). On the other hand, acknowledging a pluralism of knowledge creation within and for development efforts, inevitably means to accept that direct results from this study cannot be projected on others and scaled up. Insights into the method applied and the underlying rationale of epistemological pluralism can, however, benefit future studies.

Secondly, the nature of the participatory exercise might influence the discourse produced. Rose (2016) observes that “social context of discourse production matters in terms of the audience assumed by images and texts” (214-15) . In the present case, images are produced for research purposes. Therefore the risk remains that images and answers given constitute what the participant thinks the researcher wants to hear. To mitigate this scenario participants of the photo elicitation exercise are given the reassurance that they “do not have to take photos that (they think) the researcher will find ‘interesting’” (ibid.:327; Frith and Harcourt 2007; see [Annex 5](#)).

Thirdly, “a photograph cannot speak for itself” (Bleiker 2009:8). Even when analysed in combination with interviews, an analysis of visual information always depends on the interpretation of the observer, that is the researcher. Consequently, the following discourse analysis is eventually “constructing an interpretation rather than revealing the truth” (Phillips and Hardy 2002:83–85; as cited in Rose 2016:216). It is therefore important to recognize that – while following certain methodological guidelines as set out in this chapter – the present study is only one possible interpretation, which is based



on the researcher's experience and very specific interactions between the researcher and the participants.<sup>41</sup>

Lastly, the current circumstances of a global pandemic limit the possibilities of physical interaction between researcher and participant.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, the participatory nature of the methodology for this study "allow[s] participants to feel engaged with the researchers and the research project even when the researchers are not physically present" (Copes et al. 2018:492). Thus, while this approach demands a great amount of preparation for the researcher, it encourages increased involvement of participants, despite the current contact restrictions.

To conclude, within this research, a participatory approach and the application of visual methods complement each other in order to foster a practice of listening necessary to foreground alternative understandings of peace and the environment. Including participants in the research process breaks with traditional power structures within the research process and enables to explore different perspectives. Visual methodologies support the latter by offering a complementary source of data that makes it possible to ask questions otherwise missed. What is more, special attention is paid to a photograph's ability to "capture something of the sensory richness and human inhabitation of [...] environments," and visual analysis' ability to explore "the ways in which social positions and relations are both produced by, and produce, distinct experiences" (Rose 2016:308). In this study, imagery is thus used both as means to create information through a participatory approach, and presents – together with subsequent interviews – the locus for the following analysis. Such methodological choices address thus the lack of community perspectives in previous research and put an emphasis on the participants' understandings, allowing to trace the link between their understanding embedded in the context and related development strategies.

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<sup>41</sup> In the same vein, this research as a whole acknowledges its inherent double hermeneutic as it "make[s] claims about the claims other actors make about the environment" (Doolittle 2015:516). Accordingly, neither the study nor the author claim to be independent from the results.

<sup>42</sup> For details on how the global pandemic, among others, influenced the data collection, see [Annex 1](#).

## 5 Case Background: El Caquetá

To highlight the importance of the spatial and historical context for understanding how peace and the environment relate to each other (see [chapter 3.3.3](#)), a brief overview of the department *El Caquetá* as case for this study is appropriate. This contextual overview offers case-specific background information before starting with the analysis.

The department of Caquetá is located in the south of Colombia, stretching from the Andean foothills to the Amazon region. The local river basin presents an important water source for the Amazon river and contributes hereby to the regional and global climate. Such geographic particularities make Caquetá to one of the most biodiverse regions in the country (Morales-Muñoz et al. 2021:185). Of its about 500.000 inhabitants, 80 percent of the departments population live in rural areas and the biggest economic activity is livestock farming (DANE 2019; Fontecha-Tirado 2019). While being part of a PDET,<sup>43</sup> the department has the lowest confidence in the construction of peace, and over 83 percent of its population are not satisfied with the implementation of the peace agreement (Steele et al. 2020).

Arguably one of the most affected regions by the armed conflict, Caquetá's recent history is marked by forceful displacements, expropriation, territorial disputes and several atrocities during violent confrontations among the government and armed groups, notably the FARC-EP (Carrillo González 2016). Continued exploitation of natural resources at the expense of the rights of the local population has added to the plethora of factors shaping the socio-environmental landscape. Starting with rubber production for export at the end of the 1800s, over livestock farming and illegal cultivation of coca during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to today's increased interest in unexplored oil reserves, the capitalist extractive model has persisted throughout time.<sup>44</sup> Next to additional expropriation of land and violence against local and indigenous populations, such

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<sup>43</sup> All municipalities of the department of el Caquetá are part of the PDET *Cuenca del Caguán y Piedemonte Caqueteño*, together with one municipality from the neighbouring department of Huila (RdT 2019).

<sup>44</sup> Expert A argues that these developments are owed to global capitalist dependencies and state-directed economic development. Especially livestock farming has been encouraged by officials as economic activity for national and international export during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to expert A, this so-called *directed colonisation* was (and still is) one of the leading causes for continued deforestation (cf. Teófilo 2014:155–56).

prolonged and exploitive economic activities result also in environmental degradation through deforestation and water pollution of one of the most biodiverse regions in the world (Ciro et al. 2016; expert A). As a consequence, Caquetá has had the highest deforestation rate in the country and one of the highest in all Latin America.<sup>45</sup> In the years after the withdrawal of the FARC-EP in 2016, this rate has seen a significant increase and is still rising today (Ciro et al. 2016; Graser et al. 2020; IDEAM 2017c, 2018, 2019).

In spite – or perhaps because of this difficult situation – social organisation has a long tradition in Caquetá. Starting in the 1960s with the establishment of *Juntas de Acción Comunal* (JAC, Community Action Boards) and as a result of very little state presence, community development was promoted through shared rules and norms for coexistence. JACs also introduced rules for environmental governance, including regulations to restrict the exploitation and marketisation of natural resources and the pollution of nature and water, as well as to promote reforestation of native species and agroecological practices.<sup>46</sup> Today, the range of different organisations in Caquetá includes women's and youth organisations, indigenous groups and peasant collectives, as well as organisations advocating for the environment and demanding reparations victims of the armed conflict (Carrillo González 2016; Pinilla 2020).

Yet, these organisations are facing various challenges. Firstly, despite an overall compliance of 95% by local farmers to the conditions set out under the PNIS, a continued forced eradication of illegal crops through, for example, the large-scale, areal application of glyphosate endangers human life and nature, and is perceived as a severe breach of commitments made under the peace agreement (Pinilla 2020; UNODC 2020). Secondly, plans for new extractive petroleum projects, large scale energy projects and the licencing of new mining rights are often not properly consulted with local communities. Such interventions, mostly undertaken by multinational corporations and foreign actors, meet

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<sup>45</sup> Although 72% of this territory belong to forest reserve zones and 28% are part of the national park system, el Caquetá is the department with the highest level of tree cover loss in Colombia during the last two decades (GFW 2021; Morales 2017; RdT 2019).

<sup>46</sup> While in some incidences, the FARC-EP have supported this kind of social organisation and membership of JACs was encouraged, the coexistence of both entities was not always free of conflicts. Generally, the FARC-EP constituted themselves as military authority in the department, whereas the JAC represented the political authority. Merely in the south of the department, the presence of paramilitary groups violently oppressed the formation and most activities of CBOs (expert A; Pinilla 2020; cf. Carrillo González 2016).

frequent resistance from the communities of these territories (ibid.; Casanova and Higuera-Acevedo 2018; expert A). Additionally, indigenous communities, are forcefully displaced by the expansion of national parks or prevented from engaging in traditional practices (Pinilla 2020; expert B). Lastly, resistance from the civil society meets a double threat. On the one hand, new armed groups enter the formerly occupied areas by the FARC-EP and contribute to an increase in violence and a shrinking civic space. On the other hand, the rhetoric of the government stigmatizes CBOs, claiming to collaborator with the same armed groups. Being caught between private interests, illegal activities of criminal organisations and an increasing stigmatisation by the state results in a tense situation for everyone who stands up for their rights (Ciro 2016; Pinilla 2020).<sup>47</sup>

In conclusion, Caquetá is a highly important region for global biodiversity and has been (and is still) deeply affected by the armed conflict. Today, extractive interests and insurgent activities clash with local resistance and social organisation, which is very strong in spite of these complex challenges. Because of these qualities, Caquetá is a significant region for the development of conflict and, simultaneously, to foster sustained peace in Colombia (Casanova and Higuera-Acevedo 2018; Morales-Muñoz et al. 2021). Yet, “few [researchers] address the nexus between natural resources and post-conflict peace in practice” in this region, and including “local perceptions” in an analysis of these may benefit the peace processes (Graser et al. 2020:4).

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<sup>47</sup> A limited scope for action due to the ongoing pandemic worsens this situation, and threats and fear of systematic assassinations of social leaders are part of many communities’ reality (Ciro 2016; Pinilla 2020). According to expert A, during the pandemic, especially the stigmatisation of community organisations through the government – who claims that these organisations spread “guerrilla ideology” – has increased and provoked violence against civil society actors.

## 6 Presentation and analysis of the findings

This chapter presents the findings and analyses both photographs and interview transcripts in three parts. After having coded images and interview transcripts (see [Annex 8](#)), the findings firstly provide for a brief definition by the participants of the concepts of both the environment and peace. Subsequently, the study analyses how participants understand the connection between these two concepts, answering to SQ1. Finally, a correlation is drawn between this understanding and the different strategies and activities promoted by the CBOs, answering to SQ2.

### 6.1 Defining ‘the environment’ and ‘peace’

Before analysing the relationship between the environment and peace, it is worth examining briefly how the participants define these two concepts to acknowledge their contextual nature. When asked about the definition of the environment, all participants coincide in their understanding of the environment as something related to a human-nature interaction. For some this interaction is a rather personal experience, involving “everything that surrounds me [...], how I feel when I am in nature” (participant 2).<sup>48</sup> For others the environment relates to society as a whole:

*For me the environment is this interaction between society and nature. This interaction that we create when we go out, that is, the environment includes society. This interaction that exists between humans and nature, between animals and us. Basically, the environment is everywhere where you leave a mark, like an interaction of energy and flows.*

(Participant 4)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> All quotes have been translated by the author himself, who is fluent in Spanish. In the case of uncertainties, a native speaker (Colombian) was consulted.

<sup>49</sup> As part of the methodological attitude of “a practice of listening” (see [chapter 4](#); Gómez-Barris 2017) direct quotes by the participants are rarely cut, to provide a better representation of the participants’ voices and perspectives.

*I believe that the environment cannot be seen solely in terms of natural resources. I believe that it is the integration of precisely this relationship between the richness that nature offers us – in this case the resources, water, soil and forest ; the interaction of fauna; the interaction of human beings; and how we can begin to see how we interrelate.*

(Participant 3)

These definitions remind of Rojas Robles' (2018) understanding of the environment as "that what emerges from the relationship between human and non-human nature" (184). In the present study, all participants perceive this relationship as positive or even essential to their own lives and well-being: "we depend on many [environmental] elements to survive" (participant 1), and the environment is the "place [...] which I need to live" (participant 7). Similarly, participant 6 concludes that a healthy environment is "what all species need [...] even us humans."

When asked about the concept of peace, the predominant themes on a societal level are the "(re)construction of the social fabric" (participants 2 and 6) and "resilience" of the community (participants 1 and 5). A more personal definition of peace referred mostly to "tranquillity" (participant 4 and 6), "safety" (participant 7) and "spiritual well-being" (participant 1 and 2). The latter is very closely associated with nature. Referring to P4.4,<sup>50</sup> participant 4 describes "the peace one feels when breathing clean air, when diving into fresh water [...], listening to the sound of birds and water," and he concludes that "it is only this connection with nature, which really allows for a peace beyond any form of conflict."

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<sup>50</sup> In the text pictures are referred to with the number of the participant and number of the picture. For example, participant 1's fourth picture would be 'picture 1.4' (or P1.4) and participant 5's first picture would be 'picture 5.1' (or P5.1). All photographs can be found in [Annex 9](#).

**Picture 4.4:** “*Cascadas*” (Waterfalls)



Accordingly, a strong association between peace and nature exists, particularly on a personal level. Individual definitions here highlight themes that become relevant for the following analysis of the participants’ understanding of a relationship between peace and the environment – that is the interaction between society and nature.

## 6.2 The relationship between peace and the environment

With the interpretive frame in mind (see [chapter 3.3.3](#)), this part of the analysis starts with the human-environment interactions as issue of violence, dependencies and extractivism. In addition, both images and interview responses provide an answer to how an understanding of the relationship between the environment and peace is constructed, based on alternative views of well-being and values of nature.

### 6.2.1 Violence and the environment

Considering the issue of violence (and its causes), it is noteworthy to mention that only one out of the 34 images makes direct reference to physical violence (P6.3 shows a used shell). Yet, a predominant theme when talking about the current and historical socio-environmental context are interactions between violence, consequences of violence and environmental destruction.

Throughout the past decades, a continuation of violence has led to forced displacement in Caquetá and elsewhere in the country. Repeatedly being forced to leave the place one resides leads to the phenomenon of *desarraigo* (Spanish: 'de-rooting'; participant 5), that is the loss of a sense of belonging to a certain territory. Participant 2 observes that ownership of land changes frequently and many people "sold the land as if it had no value to them." She found the cause being "violence in the countryside, so this changed the link that people created with the territory." In consequence, identification with the territory gets lost, making it not only easier to abandon the land, but also exploit natural resources through harmful practices such as livestock farming or the use of pesticides (participant 5). Criticising exploitive agricultural practices and the use of pesticides, participant 5 locates a resulting lack of knowledge about the territory and nature as root cause of environmental degradation in the amazon region:

*It is necessary to know the Amazonian environment, to really identify what it is that surrounds us and if it is really causing us harm, or if, on the contrary, "the plague" has always been us, as a 'new' human species, that arrived in el Caquetá and in the Amazonian territory, bringing with us the same cultivation techniques that we used in the highlands of the Andes.*

(Participant 5)

Community efforts address this lack of knowledge about the natural surroundings and in doing so support non-harming livelihood practices. In one of his pictures (P5.5), participant 5 shows an environmental education workshop together with a family of bean farmers, reflecting on the role of insects within agriculture.<sup>51</sup> He emphasises the importance of the children's observations, "because children are those who observe the most" and realise that most of the insects don't do any harm to the plant.<sup>52</sup> In this way,

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<sup>51</sup> According to participant 5, many of the farmers in the region use a lot of pesticides to keep their plants free from insects and pests. The wide-spread use of these chemicals and "violence against nature" is owed to the green revolution and commercialisation of agriculture. In their opinion, this process led to a replacing the mega-biodiversity with farming crops and starting to see any other species, especially insects, as the "enemy."

<sup>52</sup> Also in other activities the work with youth appears pivotal. When talking about alternative agricultural practices, participant 6 highlights:



this exercise helps to understand that insects are not the “enemy,” but help to “keep a healthy equilibrium” that benefits the crops. This approach of (re-)learning the knowledge about the value of nature for productive activities is also highlighted by other participants (participants 2 and 6). For example, P2.4 shows a capacity development activity with farmers to learn about microorganisms found in the ground as bio-indicators for soil-health.

**Picture 5.5:** “Explorando el mundo de los insectos” (Exploring the world of the insects)



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*If you help young people to have another alternative, in their heads, in their thinking, then they can become one of the best contributors to this process of change in the future. Not only productivity, but all the things that are involved in working in the territory.*

**Picture 2.4:** “Generando conocimiento” (Generating knowledge)



Consequently, violence and forced displacement can lead to a loss of identification and knowledge about the environment, encouraging harmful agricultural practices and environmental degradation. Environmental education and collaborative capacity-development activities constitute strategies to re-create this relationship to the environment, which helps not only conservation efforts, but can also be beneficial for agricultural practices.

At the same time, participants recognise violence against nature directly. Although activities such as mining, oil and gas extraction are present in the area (Ciro et al. 2016), these are only mentioned as issue by one participant. Instead, all participants centre their concerns around deforestation caused by harmful agricultural practices, most notably large scale livestock farming (e.g., P2.1, P2.2, and P4.2). This type of violence is understood to both origin from historical and global dependencies, and maintain the current dependencies on cattle ranching for export. Direct results of such a dependency

are, for example, food insecurities when there is a shock<sup>53</sup> and limited perspectives for the future (participants 2, 4 and 5). In this context, participant 5 highlights the importance of reconciling with the environment: “Peace must also be made with the environment. We have caused a lot of violence through all the extraction we have done. We are in debt of pacification with the environment.” He observes, however, that current practices hinder such peace with the environment:

*The challenges remain the same [...]: As long as this human group that is inhabiting, that is going deeper and deeper into the Amazon rainforest, does not understand, does not learn not to destruct it and not to live together, [this pacification] will not work. We need to learn to live in a different way.*

(ibid.)

However, learning such different way of life is not easy since dependencies on extractive practices are culturally embedded in a perceived sense of well-being:

*We consider ourselves as loving and protecting parents, although today's development shows the opposite. And we kill life [the environment] to leave [our children] a cliché: a better future. And this future that we imagine consists of leaving them a house, a farm. A bare farm that is filled with cows.*

(ibid.)

Accordingly, farmers appear to have adopted an ideal of well-being, which is based on the accumulation of territory and livestock. Participant 3 confirms this assumption by stating that the size of a farm constitutes “the social status of the rancher’s culture [...]. It is something cultural, it is the ego – let’s put it that way – of the livestock farmer.” Implications of this extensive livestock farming eventually also affect the local population in the form of soil degradation, water pollution and following food insecurities (participants 3, 4, 5 and 6). Consequently, participant 5 argues that changing the

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<sup>53</sup> Recent examples of such shocks, as described by the participants are the Covid-19 pandemic and the 2021 national strike, which impacted supply chains and led to a shortage of (food) supplies in the area (participants 2,4 and 5).

understanding of well-being is essential for the survival and well-being of future generations in this region:

*Now the great question is: Are our children going to breath cows? When there is no more water, will they decapitate the cows to drink their blood? For how many cows will the water last in el Caquetá? If we really loved our children, what we should give them is a habitat, an environment where they can live. We should not think that cows will be the solution for life, because precisely they are our curse. This generation and all generations before, we will be remembered as those who did not understand the harm that we left behind.*

The solution to changing such deeply embedded mindset can be found in regaining knowledge about the environment and the value of nature:

*This destruction, this fight against the forest is exactly why we do not know what its benefits are, its function, be it environmental, planetary or biological. From this knowledge and recognition of the value of all species, we address [...] issues of conserving the Amazonas region [...]. That's why the photo of this tree is so valuable for me: Only through the valuation and knowledge of the Amazonian territory, we can construct a future society with a different way of living with the territory – without having to fight against it; without having to destroy it; without exercising extractive violence over this territory.*

(ibid. about P5.6)

Picture 5.6: *No title*



To sum up, on the one hand, violence is indirectly related to the environment by creating situations of displacement that lead to a loss of knowledge and identification with the environment. This disrupts the healthy relationship between human and non-human nature. On the other hand, violence itself can be directed against nature. This type of violence is mostly owed to historical dependencies on livestock farming and, in turn creates challenges for the future of these communities. The need for changing livelihood practices and the attitude towards these is apparent to the participants of this study.

#### 6.2.2 Getting to know the environment

Seeking to address the above described challenges, community efforts strive for making peace with and through the environment. To this end, participant 2 describes the importance of awareness of the environment through the example of a land use planning exercise (P2.5). This exercise included walking through one's surroundings and the co-

creation of a map showing environmental characteristics. Hereby it provided knowledge about their surroundings and helped participating farmers to “feel that the territory is part of them, part of their lives” (participant 2). In turn, this identification with the territory helps to also take care of the land, engage in collective conservation activities and create a “vision for the land,” which includes the environment and other members of their community (ibid.).

**Picture 2.5:** “Mejorando la calidad de vida” (Improving the quality of life)



In addition, recognising the implications of socio-environmental interactions and how these might affect others living in a shared territory plays an important role in fostering peaceful relations. When describing a community exercise visible in P3.1, participant 3 calls these efforts *constructing territory*:

*It is an exercise of collective construction [of the territory] with a group of farmers who live in different areas of the municipality [...]. Through this exercise, we [the farmers] can see a little bit of my relationship with my neighbour, but also with the neighbour in the next village; how what I do up here benefits or affects those who live downstream. So, that's what I mean when saying ,constructing territory'.*

**Picture 3.1:** *“Construyendo el territorio” (Constructing territory)*



Accordingly, knowledge of the environment and an awareness of socio-environmental interactions constitute a base for peaceful co-habitation – both with the environment and with others – by highlighting interdependencies and reducing the potential for conflict.

### 6.2.3 Alternative livelihoods and food security

Knowledge about the environment and the values about the environment is also linked to providing capacities for alternative livelihood practices, such as eco-tourism (participant 1) or agroforestry (participants 2, 4, 6 and 7). Especially alternative agriculture practices can provide viable alternatives to livestock and illicit crop farming, while also helping to regenerate the environment through the cultivation of native species. Participant 6 explains that coca production was a popular source of income during times of intense violence. After the violence had decreased, switching to agroforestry production of rubber and cacao improved the farmers' overall well-being. He recognises the benefits of this new, safer source of income for both a healthy environment and peace:

*With this photo [P6.3], I want to show the contrast between today's production and what the violence has left us, the ammunition, the shells that were fired at our homes when the violence was very bad in the country. I see it [cacao production] helping to a peaceful environment, because we not only generate resources that improve our live, but growing these plants also helps the environment. The work with cacao is pleasant because you are in the shade and all work is very manageable.*

(ibid.)

**Picture 6.3:** *“Una oportunidad de paz” (An opportunity for peace)*



In this sense, such alternative agricultural practices recognise values of nature and build on knowledge about the environment (ibid.). Simultaneously, participants associate these practices with a diversification of livelihoods. Such diversification in turn provides for food security and sovereignty of the communities, as they produce multiple products and are less dependent on imports (participants 5 and 6).

What is more, evidence of success of these alternatives shows that change is possible. When describing a farming and capacity building initiative by displaced women, widows



and single mothers, participant 5 highlights the urgency of this work amidst a poor implementation of the peace agreements:

*I took this photo [P5.4] as a reminder that change is possible, towards inhabiting a territory based on the nutrition that the territory provides. But we have a long way to go in the recovery of the [environmental and social] conditions, of the food dignity of Caquetá. And, it is a task that [...] have not made much progress. We have to persist, because conditions do not seem to change. We have the same situation of violence in the countryside, the same situation of displacement. We no longer have the excuse that everything is generated by the presence of the parties, but nevertheless, the conditions of state response to the Havana agreements and its implementation are almost null.*

**Picture 5.4:** “Los colores de la cosecha” (The colours of the harvest)

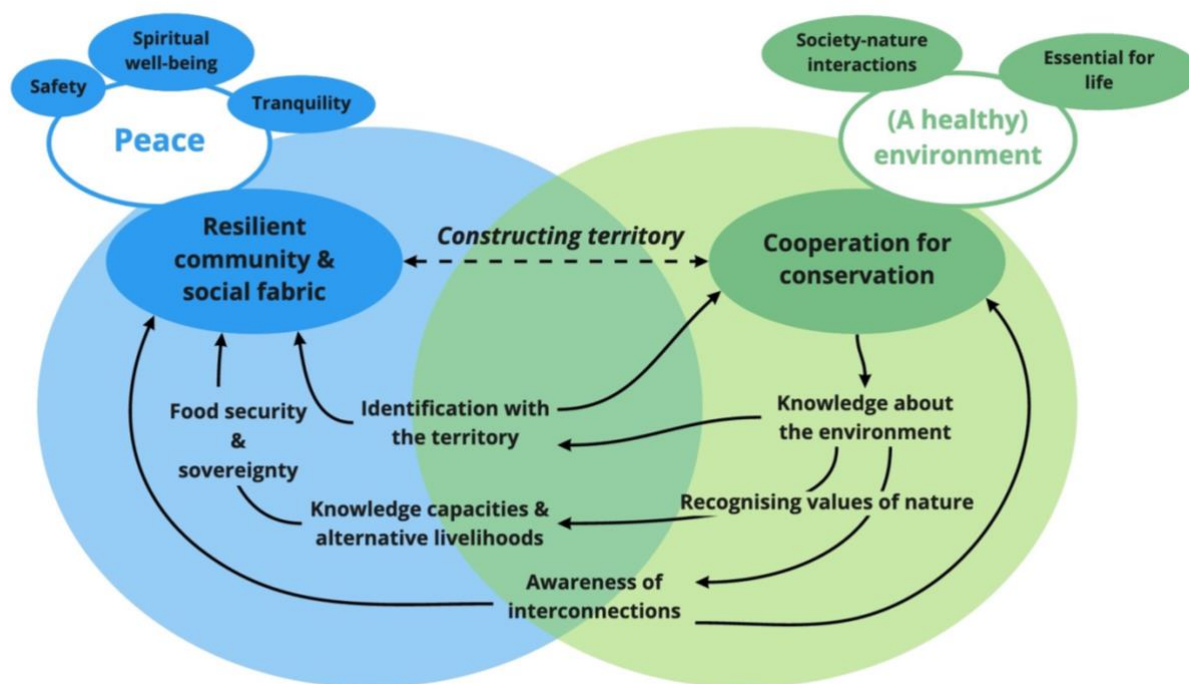


In summary, Caquetá’s past is marked by negative interactions between human and non-human nature, which have led to increased degradation and violence. Still, participants show a positive outlook and highlight the importance of knowledge and awareness creation when addressing the relationship between peace and the environment. This relationship is therefore understood as mutually reinforcing. Figure 4 shows a visualisation of the values that link (a healthy) environment to peace from the perspective of the participants. Accordingly, activities and efforts related to conservation

assist in collectively *constructing territory*, and support a resilient community and social fabric through various ways. Knowing about the environment one lives in supports the creation of a feeling of identity and belonging, which has been lost due to forced displacement. A (re-)gained identification with the territory increases the willingness to take care of the environment. By supporting the recognition of values of nature, increased knowledge about the environment also strengthens capacities and the likelihood to engage in alternative livelihood practices, which contribute to local food security and sovereignty. Lastly, understanding the interactions between humans and nature encourages both conservation activities and fosters intra-community relations. All these factors collectively add to a resilient community and social fabric, which support the participants' vision of peace.

**Figure 4:** *Creating peace together with the environment*

This figure visualises the interconnections between (a healthy) environment and peace as perceived by the participants.



### 6.3 Role of community-based efforts

As can be observed in the above, this understanding of the relationship between environment and peace is evidence of the organisations' work. In consequence, most

activities support this understanding. Table 2 shows how different activities benefit the construction of peace with the environment.

**Table 2: Contributions of different activities**

| <b>Activity</b>  | <b>Contribution</b>  | <b>Photos</b>                      |
|--|--|------------------------------------|
| <b>Environmental education</b>                             | Aims at sharing <b>knowledge of the environment</b> , recognize <b>the values of nature</b> and the <b>interactions between society and nature</b> . The involvement of children in these activities (e.g., through school activities) is crucial to pass on knowledge and importance of a healthy environment and support a sense of <b>identification with the environment</b> for the next generations.   | P1.7, P2.3, P3.2, P5.5             |
| <b>Land use planning</b>                                   | Provides <b>knowledge about the environment</b> and one's surroundings. It helps to recognise <b>interconnections</b> between the one using the land, nature and indirectly others. This type of activity can directly help resolve disputes over territory by creating agreements over land use or conservation. It creates a greater awareness that actions of one have implications for the environment and those sharing the environment with one. It can also assist in promoting <b>identification with the territory</b> by getting to know ones surroundings, contributing both to the willingness to <b>conserve</b> and strengthening the social fabric. | P2.5, P3.1                         |
| <b>Capacity development</b>                                | Similar to environmental education, capacity development activities, such as biodiversity monitoring, promote the recognition of the <b>values of nature</b> and <b>conservation</b> . Highlighting the benefits of a healthy environment for productive activities, they provide <b>knowledge capacities</b> as an essential component for <b>alternative livelihood practices</b> .  | P2.4, P2.6, P5.5                   |
| <b>Alternative &amp; sustainable production activities</b> | By making use of <b>knowledge capacities</b> related to the environment, sustainable production activities (e.g. agroforestry) offer new <b>income-generating opportunities</b> and <b>provide both food security and sovereignty</b> . In addition, they show that a different future is possible for the next generation.  | P4.3, P5.4, P6.1, P6.2, P6.4, P7.3 |
| <b>Ecotourism</b>  | Ecotourism not only <b>offers alternative livelihoods</b> , but can provide functions of <b>environmental education</b> for members of the community and national or international visitors.   | P1.1, P1.3, P1.7                   |
| <b>Conservation projects</b>                               | Conservation activities help to directly contribute to nature's <b>conservation</b> and a more <b>healthy environment</b> . They can also show in a participatory manner the <b>values of nature</b> .   | P1.6, P4.1, P4.3, P7.1             |

### 6.3.1 Co-creation

A quality, which permeates all of these activities, is co-creation. This means that different community members take part in these activities in a collaborative manner. Co-creation supports a “learn[ing] from each other” (participant 1) and recreates ties among community members. By being directly engaged in an activity, community members see and understand the role of the environment and local ownership: “The most beautiful thing about this is that these people continue to do it, without any institution or any person telling them to force them to do it, but as a matter of conviction” (participant 1 talking about P1.6; a community conservation activity). Finally, co-creation through activities related to the environment is heavily associated with contributing to a resilient social fabric and supporting the peace process:

*That is why it is called ‘rebuilding the social fabric,’ because the whole family is involved. The whole process [of co-creation] helps this part of the region to show that we want change, we want to be generators of peace. We want to be generators of change in the social and environmental part as well. We have to take into account not only the economic part, but everything that encompasses this [social] fabric so that it becomes more integrated, more complete.*

(Participant 6)

**Picture 1.6:** “Sembrar para recuperar” (Planting to recover)



### 6.3.2 Future generations

As already suggested above ([chapter 6.2.1](#)), children and youth play an important role in these efforts of co-creating the social fabric. Future generations are perceived as central actors within a process of constructing peace. For instance, participants' photographs show youth and children depicted both as audience for educational activities (2.3 and 3.2) and actively involved in productive activities (5.3 and 6.2). Describing P6.2, participant 6 emphasises this pivotal role of youth involvement for creating alternative futures:

*If you help young people to have another alternative, in their heads, in their thinking, then they can become one of the best contributors to this process of change in the future. Not only productivity, but all the things that are involved in working in the territory.*

**Picture 6.2:** *Reconstruyendo el tejido social (Reconstructing the social fabric)*



Participant 5 expands the importance of youth involvement to the peace process as a whole and adds that youth involvement represents hope within the current situation:

*The photo of the girl [P5.2] represents to me that, despite this abandoned social structure that we have,<sup>54</sup> the possibility that the new generations climb exists. We have to work towards that. What we see now that the rotten, the old, the obsolete should serve us to learn from the mistakes of negligence that we have lived; so that the next generations have the possibility of ascending.*

**Photo 5.2:** *Libertad (Freedom)*



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<sup>54</sup> Earlier, participant 5 describes that the failure of this social system affects young people in Colombia in particular:

*We have thousands of young people disappeared, hundreds of young people dead; imprisoned; held without grounds; abused by the public forces and by those who are supposed to protect our rights. We live in a system that does not value its youth, that does not value the hope for future life.*

### 6.3.3 Challenges to community-based efforts

Some participants, however, also address challenges to community-based efforts. The most prominent ones are physical remoteness and a feeling of being forgotten by the state. Due to the violence many people were forced to relocate to remote areas, which generates new issues:

*Although they are rich in terms of biodiversity, these are areas that are very much forgotten by the state. These families are very vulnerable. They are there due to extreme conditions; because they have no other opportunity; because there are no other territories, which they can use to sustain their families. This situation generates, let's say, a clash between these two words: between [natural] wealth and [social] poverty.”*

(Participant 3 talking about P3.4)

This remoteness and lack of alternatives has, among others, encouraged deforestation for the cultivation of illegal crops, as these are easier to transport and sell than other agricultural products. Selling coca, for example, is often still more profitable and less burdensome than licit cultivations (participant 3).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Participant 3 describes this dilemma as one of the most difficult challenges:

*One family said to me: ‘It is not the same thing to take a load of bananas that can only be transported on a mule. Alone the mule will cost me 50,000 pesos and I will get 70,000 pesos for the bananas. What would I be earning? It took me a year to produce a bunch of bananas. I would be earning 20,000 pesos. And only if I get a good price, otherwise I would get even less. Now, I can put a kilo of coca in a backpack. I don't have to pay the mule. I don't even have to take it to town; many times they come and buy it from me here. Now that kilo of coca is not worth the same 70,000 pesos. At the moment it is around 2,800,000 pesos a kilo. It is difficult to compete with that.’*

**Picture 3.4:** *Riqueza vs. olvido (Richness vs. neglect)*



Such remoteness increases not only the vulnerability of communities to poverty and illicit activities, but makes it difficult for organisations to access certain communities (participants 3, 6 and 7). What is more, the fact that these areas are “forgotten by the state” (both participant 2 and 3 use this term) has led to a lack of prioritisation and knowledge by the state, especially when it comes to environmental needs of the communities:

*In Caquetá, it is estimated that in 20 years there will be a water deficit and people do not know it; even those in power do not know it. And the environmental issue is not prioritised in their government plans. This is a critical element, particularly in the Colombian Amazon. There is a lack of knowledge on these basic environmental issues that are fundamental in the construction of social development.*

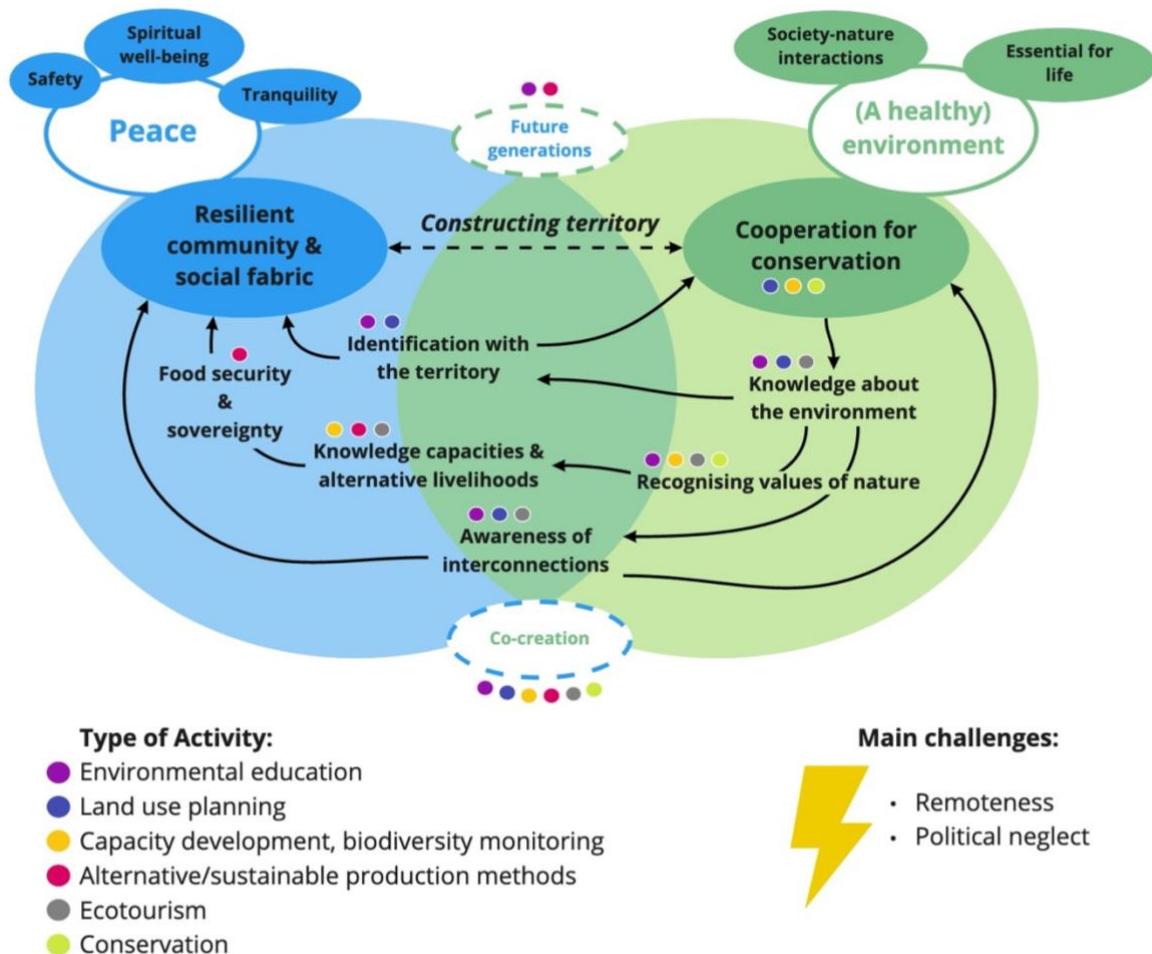
(Participant 7)

These are challenges that the organisations themselves cannot solve alone, but they rely on collaboration with both national and international actors to provide necessary infrastructure and advocate for their local needs (participants 3, 5 and 6).



In sum, the understanding of the relationship between peace and the environment from a community perspective goes beyond the economic value of nature. Such understanding motivates community-based action, and is simultaneously the very product of resulting local efforts to co-create a better future. This means that, within the community efforts of organisations in Caquetá, not only environment and peace, but also knowledge and action are inherently intertwined. Here, the involvement of youth within activities plays a central role for creating alternative futures and offering hope. However, some factors, such as physical remoteness and political neglect, present challenges to these efforts. Figure 5 brings together and visualises the understanding of interactions between peace and the environment from [chapter 6.2](#) with the community-based strategies' contributions.

**Figure 5:** Local development strategies and their relation to the community-based understanding  
 The coloured dots indicate the expected contribution underlying each activity. Through the different activities the quality of co-creation and an emphasis on future generations contribute to the construction of peace together with the environment.



## 7 Discussion

Starting on a methodological note, this research shows that photo-elicitation as research method supports a “practice of listening” within the research process (Gómez-Barris 2017:136). Judging from the responses, such methodological approach provides for a rich and personal account by encouraging participants to analyse their photographs together with the researcher. Responding to the RQ of *how community-based understandings of socio-environmental interactions inform local development strategies*, first, the findings provide an example of how local understandings of the relationship between peace and the environment contribute to the broader academic debate. Moreover, the research process provides theoretical insights into the applicability of BV and SE as theoretical orientation for studying socio-environmental issues. Finally, community-based responses build on such understanding and support the construction of peace together with the environment, and thus present valuable insights for development efforts in conflict-affected regions.

The previous analysis presents a discourse around the relationship between the environment and peace, which answers to SQ1 and contributes to the ongoing theoretical debate presented in [chapter 3.1](#). First, in accordance with a traditional perspective on said relationship (cf. Lee 2018), the environment is perceived by the participants as both a subject to and a reason for conflict. By implication, cooperation over natural resources through, for example, conservation agreements or land use planning supports peaceful relationships within the communities (participants 1, 2 and 3). Second, similar to political ecology (cf. Amster 2018), unequal power relations in the form of (economic) dependencies are considered as an aggravating factor for conflict and poor livelihood conditions. Especially marginalised and remote communities are subject to these dependencies (participants 3 and 4). By contrast, empowering themselves through knowledge about the environment encourages more independent livelihood practices, and produces viable alternatives for both communities and nature. Accordingly, Amster’s (2018) claim that a healthy environment and peace cannot be thought apart, holds true for the participants. What is more, the findings show that the environment is not merely an *instrument for* peace but is considered *a part of* this very peace. Similar to the holistic conception of peace within human ecology (cf. Goodman 2012), participants consider the environment as an integral part of their understanding of peace. The environment – and

with it a healthy relationship to non-human nature – is considered essential not only for their own basic existence, but also for safety, spiritual well-being and future opportunities (participants 4, 6 and 7). Here, the environment contributes to a good relationship within all three contexts (to oneself, to others and to nature; cf. Goodman 2012), as it promotes personal and collective well-being through a healthy environment.

The interpretive frame combining insights from BV and SE ([see chapter 3.3.3](#); Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019) proves to offer a critical and yet optimistic approach to exploring the discourse around peace and the environment from a community-based perspective. Confirming the critique by SE (cf. Svampa 2012), root causes for the current socio-environmental issues, as identified by the participants, are associated with international dependencies created by a global capitalist system. These dependencies encourage extractive practices that lead to an abuse of nature and contribute to conflict. Participants therefore acknowledge the inherent interrelation between nature and society at the centre of current challenges (participants 4 and 5; cf. Escobar 2018; Molina Orjuela and Rojas 2019). Accordingly, food insecurities, disputes over land or environmental degradation are partially prescribed to deforestation, the persistence of illicit cultivations, pesticide usage, large-scale livestock farming and other economic dependencies. In addition, participants mention that consequences of prolonged violence, notably forced displacement, lead to a disconnection with nature and encourage harmful economic practices (participants 2 and 5). Socio-environmental issues are therefore deeply rooted in the historical context of the region.

At the same time, the proposed solutions for these challenges contribute to improving the relationship between society and nature. At their core, the observed community-based development efforts support the ideals of BV, that is to provide a “collective well-being of both humans and non-humans” (Hopkins and Escobar 2012; cf. Escobar 2018). With their work, participants seek to promote alternative understandings of well-being and support knowledge sharing among each other. It is here where we find an answer to SQ2: Community-based strategies aim at recognising the value(s) of nature. Such awareness of environmental benefits supports conservation itself, and additionally helps to create social resilience in the form of food security and sovereignty, spiritual well-being,

perspectives for future generations and the reconstructing of social fabric within the communities.

Overall, the participants' understanding of the relationship between peace and the environment highlights the limits of current approaches. Decades of violence, economic dependencies and western ideals of wealth accumulation have become a "curse" for both the local population and environment (participant 5). The participants and their organisations seek to break free from this curse by pursuing an ideal of peace and well-being that is based on a healthy environment (i.e. a good relationship between human and non-human nature). Community-based strategies therefore support one of the core messages of BV: to challenge current ideals of development and highlight the importance of alternative understandings of well-being, which incorporate values of nature. Despite Caquetá's precarious situation, limited resources and little state support, the images and testimonies in this study bear witness to the success of local development efforts that emerge from such community-based understanding. Central to these community-driven efforts are co-creative practices and the involvement of future generations. Findings from this study therefore paint a picture of hope for a future of resilient communities and a type of development, which does not contribute to a continued abuse of nature or violence. Consequently, this research highlights not only the potential of the interpretive frame of BV and SE for future research on socio-environmental issues, but also provides evidence that creating *peace with the environment* is possible through community-driven efforts.

Bearing in mind the methodological (see [chapter 4.6](#)) and empirical limitations (see [Annex 1](#)), this study achieves to offer a detailed account of local understandings of the relationship between peace and the environment. More importantly, the results highlight the significance of local perspectives to constructing alternative development imaginaries, which by itself bears importance for peace processes well beyond the Colombian context. However, future research is needed to explore (long-term) impacts and effective implementation of the proposed understandings and strategies, not least to

pre-empt criticism of idealising local knowledge (see [chapter 3.3.2](#)).<sup>56</sup> Further, conditions that could support such community-based strategies present another research area. For example, future studies could explore policy reforms to address challenges of political neglect or the role of the international community within development finance accountability.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> An example of a larger project seeking to include local perspectives with regards to peace and the environment, and the implementation of which could be subject to future research in this regard, presents the *Zonificación Ambiental Participativa* (ZAP, Participatory Environmental Zoning) project in the municipality of Valparaíso in el Caquetá (Comunidades de Valparaíso et al. 2019). This participative zoning process is part of the GIZ project *Ambiente y Paz- AmPaz*. It was conducted in direct collaboration with the communities of Valparaíso and aims at creating a better understanding – from the perspective of local communities – of socio-environmental conditions to inform the implementation process of the peace agreement (ibid.).

<sup>57</sup> When asked about additional comments, participant 5 reminded the researcher of the responsibility that international donors have to hold the Colombian government accountable for corruption within development finance, as much of the financial assistance administered through official channels does not seem to reach local organisations.

## 8 Concluding remarks

More than anything, this research presents a learning opportunity, both for the researcher himself and (hopefully) for those reading these words as well. Several conclusions can be drawn from the research process. First, taking the experiences from el Caquetá as example, development based on the modern model and extractive ideals has resulted in a highly complex socio-environmental situation, visible through the extent of deforestation and continuation of violence in a post-agreement Colombia. Continuing along this path will – in the long run – create more harm than good, especially for rural populations. However, just as the environment and conflict are inherently intertwined, so is the environment an integral part of peace. The second lesson learned is therefore the importance to seek out ways of thinking and solutions that are able to acknowledge this relationship. In order to do so we need to listen to those affected and be open to learning from their perspectives and efforts. Here, a methodological, third conclusion can be drawn for both research and practice: the act of listening to and trying to understand community-based perspectives is crucial to finding alternative ideals and solutions for today's socio-environmental issues. A resulting, fourth learning presents such community-based understanding of the relationship between the environment and peace. This understanding goes beyond the mere instrumental view of natural resources. A healthy relationship to nature and knowledge about its values is perceived as essential for creating peace. Benefits of practices that recognise these connections range from alternative livelihoods for food security and sovereignty over an identification with the territory and increased collaboration to an overall more resilient community and social fabric; all while conserving nature. These efforts contribute to a vision of peace, in which the environment contributes to personal and collective well-being as well as a liveable future for next generations. Finally, while only representing one example, this study has shown that – despite the current and past history of intense violence and environmental destruction – there is hope; and this hope comes from the very communities, which have suffered the most. If visions of peace can be found here, then they can be found elsewhere. The present research is therefore also a message of encouragement to listen to, learn from and actively support community-driven development efforts. To conclude with the words of one of the participants:

*And, logically, in the midst of that, there is hope. We always say that it is in the desert where the most beautiful flowers bloom. That is what is happening here, the community-driven social processes, the indigenous movements, the women's groups, many peasant groups are flourishing, taking root, showing that it is possible. And that is what tells us that we have to continue along this path, which is one of the many possible ways.*

(Participant 5)

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## Annex 1 – Data collection process

The data collection process took place between February and June 2021. Four ‘expert’ interviews were conducted together with regional and thematic ‘experts,’ out of which two are researchers and two are development practitioners working with international and regional organisations (see [Annex 3](#)). These interviews provided background and contextual knowledge. With their knowledge about and connection to the region, the ‘experts’ functioned as gatekeepers to establish contact to participants. Other participants were contacted through the snowball sampling method.

Seven participants from five different organisations submitted a total of 34 photographs (3-7 photographs per participant) as basis for the seven semi-structured interviews with each participant. All informants are Colombian, and all but one participant are originally from el Caquetá. The selection criteria for participants was to be part of a community-based organisation, which is located in the region and addresses socio-environmental issues. The community-based organisations the participants are part of work with a broad range of issues, including agro-ecological production, ecotourism, conservation, land use planning, community biodiversity monitoring, environmental education, advocacy, social development and food security/sovereignty (see [Annex 2](#) for more detailed information).

The 34 photographs (see [Annex 9](#)) where all taken by the participants themselves. Although intended to be taken for this study, some photographs are archival material due to limited mobility of the participant because of time, security or public health restrictions.

### **Challenges to the data collection process:**

The data collection process was delayed due to two main reasons. First, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted both the researcher’s ability to travel and conduct the research in person as well as the participants ability to take pictures in several cases due to illness, quarantining and strict curfew measures. Second, continued violence against social and environmental defenders (see [chapter 2.3](#) and [chapter 5](#) ), combined with recent political developments in relation to the national strike in Colombia led to heightened levels of



caution from the side of the participants. For some of the participants, building the necessary trust between researcher and participants required several levels of gatekeeping and at least one preparatory meeting (see [chapter 4.4](#)). Even so, out of originally 30 contacted organisations, 11 showed interest to participate, eight organisations participated in a first virtual meeting, and eventually seven individuals from five different organisations contributed to and participated in this study.

These circumstances have resulted in a further limitation to the participant selection. While the selection of organisations aims to be representative of community-based organisations in the region, not all social groups could be represented. In spite of efforts by the researcher to contact these groups, especially indigenous communities and livestock farmers were not represented themselves as participants. Especially the latter would most probably have resulted in different results as livestock farming has been identified as a culturally-embedded practice, which is one of the main causes of environmental degradation in the area (see [chapter 5](#) and [chapter 6](#)).

What is more, due to the current security situation and the politization of the environment and civil society action in Colombia, some of the data and especially the informants details are very sensitive information. In order to prevent any negative consequences for participants and 'experts,' all data has been anonymised as much as possible. This is also the reason why no complete transcripts of the interviews are provided within the publication of this research, and the recordings of the interviews have been deleted after the transcription.

## Annex 2 – List of participants

| Participant | Gender identity | Occupation  | Organisation | Working areas of the organisation   | Pictures   |
|-------------|-----------------|---|--------------|---|--|
| 1           | male            | Founder & manager of the organisation, social leader, social entrepreneur | A            | Ecotourism, environmental/cultural education, conservation  | P1.1<br>P1.2<br>P1.3<br>P1.4<br>P1.5<br>P1.6<br>P1.7 |
| 2           | female          | Co-founder, director, expert in aquaculture & livestock                   | B            | Environmental education, capacity development with farmers, alternative production methods, land management & community conservation agreements, climate change mitigation & adaptation | P2.1<br>P2.2<br>P2.3<br>P2.4<br>P2.5<br>P2.6         |
| 3           | male            | Environmental engineer  |              |   | P3.1<br>P3.2<br>P3.3<br>P3.4                         |
| 4           | male            | Agroforestry engineer   |              |   | P4.1<br>P4.2<br>P4.3<br>P4.4                         |
| 5           | male            | Psychosocial professional, expert in food security & sovereignty          | C            | Food security & sovereignty, alternative production methods, capacity development, promotion of rights  | P5.1<br>P5.2<br>P5.3<br>P5.4<br>P5.5<br>P5.6         |
| 6           | male            | Cacao farmer  | D            | Cacao production, youth empowerment   | P6.1<br>P6.2<br>P6.3<br>P6.4                         |
| 7           | female          | Biologist, programme coordinator  | E            | Social development, environmental information management, youth empowerment   | P7.1<br>P7.2<br>P7.3                                 |

## Annex 3 – List of ‘experts’

| <b>‘Expert’</b> | <b>Gender identity</b> | <b>Occupation</b>          | <b>Organisation Type</b>                    | <b>Working areas, research topics</b>  |
|-----------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| <b>A</b>        | male                   | Programme Coordinator      | International Non-Governmental Organisation | Human rights   |
| <b>B</b>        | female                 | Programme Officer          | International Non-Governmental Organisation | Environmental protection   |
| <b>C</b>        | male                   | Researcher, Anthropologist | University                                  | Social and cultural anthropology, ethnography, Amazon region                   |
| <b>D</b>        | female                 | Researcher, Biologist      | University                                  | Traditional ecological knowledge, ecosystem services, environmental governance |

## Annex 4 – Information for participants & research proposal

Original:

### Información para participantes

#### Propuesta de investigación participativa – Explorar la relación entre el medio ambiente y la paz desde una perspectiva comunitaria

##### **1. Intención de la investigación:**

Esta investigación tiene como objetivo explorar la relación entre la paz y el medio ambiente en Colombia. La idea es entender cómo actores de la sociedad civil entienden y enfrentan desafíos socio-ambientales en un contexto pos-acuerdo en Colombia. La investigación forma parte de mi trabajo de maestría para el programa Desarrollo Internacional y Gestión de Organizaciones (M.Sc. International Development and Management) de la Universidad de Lund en Suecia.

Esta investigación es motivada por la crítica académica de estrategias del desarrollo frente a los conflictos socio-ambientales en Colombia. Los esfuerzos actuales se basan en un entendimiento utilitario, en el cual la naturaleza y el medio ambiente son visto solamente desde su valor económico. Lo que falta entonces es un entendimiento alternativo de la relación entre el medio ambiente y la paz, en el cual se puedan basar estrategias de desarrollo abordando una mayor gama de alternativas para la construcción de la paz. Además, las estrategias actuales han sido acusadas de no considerar suficientemente a las comunidades y actores de la sociedad civil en su planeación e implementación.

Por ello, la investigación tiene como objetivo explorar como se entiende la paz y el medio ambiente desde la perspectiva de la sociedad civil. También intenta comprender como tal entendimiento se podría utilizar como base para estrategias del desarrollo. El propósito de mi trabajo es:

- Destacar la importancia de la sociedad civil y de estrategias de desarrollo comunitarias
- Ofrecer un ejemplo de cómo se puede entender la paz y el medio ambiente desde una perspectiva comunitaria
- Proponer recomendaciones de cómo tal entendimiento puede dar forma a las estrategias de desarrollo

##### **2. Preguntas claves:**

Las preguntas que guían esta investigación son las siguientes:

*¿Cómo puede un entendimiento comunitario de las interacciones socio-ambientales ayudar a estrategias de desarrollo en un ámbito pos-acuerdo en Colombia?*

- *¿Cómo se entiende la relación entre la paz y el medio ambiente desde una perspectiva comunitaria?*
- *¿De qué manera afecta éste entendimiento las estrategias de desarrollo a nivel comunitario?*
- *¿Por qué estas perspectivas alternativas deben informar las futuras estrategias de desarrollo?*

### **3. Explicación del procedimiento:**

Por el hecho mismo de que esta investigación busca enfatizar la importancia de la participación de la sociedad civil en la creación de estrategias para el desarrollo, la recolección de datos toma una forma participativa. Se espera de esto más autonomía y control sobre el proceso de investigación por las/los participantes.

Se propone usar fotografías tomadas por las/los participantes como punto de partida para las entrevistas. Esto tiene como objetivo ofrecer una manera de investigación accesible que anima una conversación estimulante.

La recolección de datos incluye las siguientes fases: (1) una reunión de preparación, (2) el ejercicio de fotografía participativa, y (3) entrevistas individuales.

- 1) Un primer encuentro (digital) sirve para introducir a la investigación y para explicar el ejercicio de fotografía participativa, lo mismo que el procedimiento siguiente. Durante esta reunión también habrá tiempo para hacer preguntas y expresar dudas.
- 2) El ejercicio de fotografía participativa funciona como método principal de la recolección de datos para esta investigación. Se les pedirá a las/los participantes tomar de 1 a 4 fotos durante un promedio de hasta una semana. Se le pide a la/el participante tomar fotos de lugares, cosas y situaciones de su vida diaria o trabajo que la/él considere importante o relacionado a la interacción de la paz con el medio ambiente (ej. una foto de que representa al medio ambiente, y una foto de dónde está la paz en el entorno del/de la participante). Las fotos se enviarán por correo, indicando la ubicación y un título. Estas fotos formarán base de la entrevista siguiente. (Más información se puede encontrar en el documento '*Información para el Ejercicio de Fotografía Participativa*').
- 3) Las entrevistas se realizan de manera individual y en línea, entre la/el participante y el investigador. Una entrevista durará entre 45 y 60 minutos. Tomará forma de una entrevista semiestructurada (o sea, con preguntas abiertas) con enfoque en las fotografías tomadas por la/el participante. La primera parte de cada entrevista se enfoca en una reflexión sobre las fotos tomados por el/la participante. La segunda parte de la entrevista tiene como objetivo explorar la importancia de tal

entendimiento para el trabajo de la/el participante. A cualquier tiempo, la/el participante puede tomar la decisión de negar la respuesta o de no comentar ciertas fotografías sin tener que explicarlo. Un audio de la entrevista será grabado para facilitar la transcripción de la conversación solamente siempre y cuando la/el participante esté de acuerdo. (Véase también el documento '*Guía de entrevista*' para ver ejemplos de preguntas que se pueden hacer durante la entrevista)

#### **4. El análisis:**

Las fotografías (2) y las transcripciones de las entrevistas (3) funcionan como fuentes principales de información. El investigador analizará las dos con ayuda de un método discursivo para poder responder a las preguntas de la investigación.

#### **5. Lo que yo y esta investigación podemos ofrecer a las participantes:**

- Tomar parte en esta investigación ofrece al participante un entendimiento mejor de la relación entre la paz y el medio ambiente en su comunidad
- Tal entendimiento y los resultados podrían complementar proyectos actuales o ser usados como base para trabajo de la comunidad y actividades de la organización en el futuro
- La investigación también se puede usar como herramienta de incidencia

Para ello, yo voy a:

- Compartir los resultados con los participantes
- Crear un resumen de las conclusiones de los ejercicios y conservaciones
- Invitar a los participantes a compartir sus experiencias y historias en un espacio de discusión con ForumCiv y la Universidad de Lund

#### **6. Confidencialidad:**

- Las fotos tomadas por las/los participantes y las respuestas durante las entrevistas serán tratadas con la mayor confidencialidad posible. Cualquier información dada por la/el participante se presentará en el producto final de forma anónima.
- A cualquier punto de la investigación la/el participante puede decidir no continuar y/o retirar su consentimiento sin tener que explicar esta decisión.
- Además, la/el participante puede a cualquier tiempo negar la reproducción de sus fotografías o respuestas en la tesis.
- Véase también el *Formulario de Consentimiento* para más información de cómo se va a usar la información colectada durante esta investigación. El investigador mandará este formulario a cada participante individualmente.

### **7. Acerca del investigador:**

Me llamo Lorenz y estoy haciendo mi maestría en Desarrollo Internacional y la Gestión de Organizaciones, en la Universidad de Lund, en el sur de Suecia. Tengo una licenciatura en Relaciones Internacionales de la Universidad de Groninga, en los Países Bajos. También hice un intercambio académico de medio año en la Pontificia Universidad Javeriana en Bogotá.

En los últimos años, he participado en el trabajo de desarrollo con la sociedad civil, abordando temas relacionados con el medio ambiente, derechos humanos y educación en países como México, Rwanda y Suecia.

Me apasionan los temas ambientales relacionados al desarrollo internacional y me interesan preguntas de como se puede promover una buena relación entre la sociedad y la naturaleza. Estoy convencido de que la sociedad civil tiene un papel importante en asegurar un futuro sostenible y de paz para la gente y el planeta.

Por tener un origen familiar colombiano, me intereso en especial por los desarrollos acerca de la paz y la conservación de la naturaleza en este país.



## **English translation:**

### **Information for participants**

#### **Participatory research proposal - Exploring the relationship between environment and peace from a community perspective**

##### **1. Intention of the research:**

This research aims to explore the relationship between peace and the environment in Colombia. The idea is to understand how civil society actors understand and deal with socio-environmental challenges in a post-agreement context in Colombia. The research is part of my master's thesis for the M.Sc. International Development and Management programme at Lund University in Sweden.

This research is motivated by the academic critique of development strategies in the face of socio-environmental conflicts in Colombia. Current efforts are based on a utilitarian understanding, in which nature and the environment are seen only in terms of their economic value. What is missing is an alternative understanding of the relationship between the environment and peace, on which development strategies can be based that address a wider range of peacebuilding alternatives. Moreover, current strategies have been accused of not sufficiently considering communities and civil society actors in their planning and implementation.

The research therefore aims to explore how peace and the environment are understood from a civil society perspective. It also seeks to understand how such an understanding could be used as a basis for development strategies. The purpose of this research is:

- Highlight the importance of civil society and community-based development strategies
- Provide an example of how peace and the environment can be understood from a community perspective
- Propose recommendations on how such an understanding can shape development strategies

##### **2. Key questions:**

The questions guiding this research are as follows:

How can a community understanding of socio-environmental interactions help development strategies in a post-agreement setting in Colombia?

- How is the relationship between peace and the environment understood from a community perspective?
- How does this understanding affect development strategies at the community level?
- Why should these alternative perspectives inform future development strategies?



### **3. Explanation of procedure:**

By the very fact that this research seeks to emphasise the importance of civil society participation in the creation of development strategies, data collection takes a participatory form. From this, more autonomy and control over the research process by the participants is expected. It is proposed to use photographs taken by the participants as a starting point for the interviews. The aim is to offer an accessible way of research that encourages a stimulating conversation.

The data collection includes the following phases: (1) a preparatory meeting, (2) the participatory photography exercise, and (3) individual interviews.

1) A first (digital) meeting serves to introduce the research and to explain the participatory photography exercise, as well as the following procedure. During this meeting there will also be time for questions and doubts.

2) The participatory photography exercise functions as the main method of data collection for this research. Participants will be asked to take 1-4 photos during an average of up to one week. The participant is asked to take photos of places, things and situations in his/her daily life or work that he/she considers important or related to the interaction of peace with the environment (e.g. a photo of what represents the environment, and a photo of where peace is in the participant's environment). The photos will be sent via email, indicating the location and a title. These photos will form the basis of the following interview (more information can be found in the document 'Information for the Participatory Photography Exercise').

3) Interviews are conducted individually and online, between the participant and the researcher. An interview will last between 45 and 60 minutes. It will take the form of a semi-structured interview (i.e. with open-ended questions) with a focus on the photographs taken by the participant. The first part of each interview focuses on a reflection on the photos taken by the participant. The second part of the interview aims to explore the importance of such an understanding for the participant's work. At any time, the participant can make a decision to refuse to answer or not to comment on certain photographs without having to explain. An audio recording of the interview will be made to facilitate transcription of the conversation only if the participant agrees. (See also the 'Interview guide' document for examples of questions that can be asked during the interview).

### **4. Analysis:**

The photographs (2) and the interview transcripts (3) function as the main sources of information. The researcher will analyse both with the help of a discursive method in order to answer the research questions.

### **5. What I and this research can offer the participants:**

- Taking part in this research offers the participant a better understanding of the relationship between peace and the environment in their community

- Such understanding and the results could complement current projects or be used as a basis for future community work and organisational activities
- Research can also be used as an advocacy tool

To do this, I will:

- Share the results with participants
- Create a summary of the findings from the exercises and conversations
- Invite participants to share their experiences and stories in a discussion space with ForumCiv and Lund University

## **6. Confidentiality:**

- Photos taken by participants and responses during the interviews will be treated as confidentially as possible. Any information given by the participant will be presented in the final product anonymously.
- At any point in the research, the participant may decide not to continue and/or withdraw consent without having to explain this decision.
- In addition, the participant may at any time refuse to have his/her photographs or responses reproduced in the thesis.
- See also the Consent Form for more information on how the information collected during this research will be used. The researcher will send this form to each participant individually.

## **7. About the researcher:**

My name is Lorenz and I am doing my Master's degree in International Development and Organizational Management, at Lund University in southern Sweden. I have a Bachelor's degree in International Relations from the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. I also did a half-year academic exchange at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogotá.

In recent years, I have been involved in development work with civil society, addressing issues related to the environment, human rights and education in countries such as Mexico, Rwanda and Sweden.

I am passionate about environmental issues related to international development and interested in questions of how to promote a good relationship between society and nature. I am convinced that civil society has an important role to play in ensuring a sustainable and peaceful future for people and the planet.

Having a Colombian family background, I am particularly interested in developments about peace and nature conservation in this country.

## Annex 5 – Instructions for the participatory photography exercise

**Original:**



**LUND UNIVERSITY**

**FORUM CIV.**

### **Instrucciones para el ejercicio de fotografía participativa**

La idea de este ejercicio es explorar la relación entre la paz y el medio ambiente a través de la fotografía. Se esperan de una (1) a cuatro (4) fotografías por participante. Estas fotografías van a servir como punto de partida para las entrevistas siguientes.

Las siguientes preguntas le pueden ayudar como inspiración:

- ⇒ ¿Qué es el medio ambiente para usted?
- ⇒ ¿Dónde en su entorno se puede encontrar la paz?
- ⇒ ¿Cómo se ve esta paz?

### **Algunos consejos:**

- Usted puede tomar las fotografías de su vida diaria. Este ejercicio no pretende crear ninguna carga innecesaria para el/la participante.
- Tome fotografías de una manera y de cosas que usted considere importantes, no de lo que cree que el investigador quiere ver.
- Por favor, solamente tome fotografías de cosas y situaciones que se sienta cómodo tomando y compartiendo con el investigador. No se ponga a usted ni a nadie más en peligro por este ejercicio. Si hay algo que le gustaría fotografiar, pero por diversas razones no puede hacerlo, tendrá la oportunidad de compartirlo en la entrevista.

### **Información práctica:**

- De una (1) a cuatro (4) fotos por participante
- Las fotografías se pueden tomar con la cámara de un móvil o una cámara digital
- Usted las puede enviar por correo a XXXXXX o por WhatsApp: XXXXXX
- Por favor, de un título a cada foto. Si no puede pensar en un título, simplemente le puede dar un número diferente a cada foto
- Si es posible, incluya la ubicación del lugar donde se tomó la fotografía
- Por favor, envíe todas las fotografías durante una semana

Gracias por participar!

Lorenz Rodrigo Peh

## English translation:

### Instructions for the participatory photography exercise

The idea of this exercise is to explore the relationship between peace and the environment through photography. One (1) to four (4) photographs per participant are expected. These photographs will serve as a starting point for the following interviews.

The following questions may help to inspire you:

- ⇒ What is the environment to you?
- ⇒ Where in your environment can peace be found?
- ⇒ What does this peace look like?

### Some tips:

- You can take pictures of your daily life. This exercise is not intended to create any unnecessary burden for the participant.
- Take pictures in a way and of things that you consider important, not of what you think the researcher wants to see.
- Please only take pictures of things and situations that you feel comfortable taking and sharing with the researcher. Do not put yourself or anyone else at risk for this exercise. If there is something you would like to photograph, but for various reasons are unable to do so, you will have the opportunity to share it in the interview.

### Practical information:

- One (1) to four (4) photos per participant.
- Photos can be taken with a cell phone camera or digital camera.
- You can send them by mail to XXXXXXXXX or by WhatsApp: XXXXXXXXX
- Please give a title to each photo. If you cannot think of a title, you can simply give a different number to each photo.
- If possible, include the location where the photo was taken.
- Please submit all photos within one week.

Thank you for participating!

## Annex 6 – Consent form

### Original:



LUND UNIVERSITY

FORUMCIV.

### Formulario de Consentimiento – Participación en la investigación del trabajo de maestría de Lorenz Rodrigo Peh

*Este documento informa sobre el propósito y el uso de los datos recogidos durante la investigación para el trabajo de grado de maestría de Lorenz Rodrigo Peh.*

#### Propósito:

La información recogida a través de fotografías tomadas por el/la participante y entrevistas entre el/la participante y el investigador sirve como base para un análisis cualitativo de la relación entre la paz y el medio ambiente, y su significado para estrategias de desarrollo a nivel comunitario en Colombia. Este análisis forma parte del trabajo de tesis del investigador, Lorenz Rodrigo Peh, para el programa de maestría “International Development and Management” (Desarrollo Internacional y Gestión) de la Lund University (Universidad de Lund), en Suecia.

#### Uso de la información:

El uso principal de la información (fotografías y respuestas) es ofrecer datos cualitativos para la parte analítica de la tesis, como se describe arriba. La tesis, y con ella algunas fotografías y respuestas seleccionadas, será publicada en el repositorio de la Lund University.

Además, las fotografías y respuestas pueden ser usados para presentaciones relacionadas con el trabajo de tesis en un contexto académico, por ejemplo como parte de una conferencia, discusión o en posibles publicaciones. ForumCiv puede usar las fotografías con fines de comunicación, siempre que se haya dado consentimiento directo, y respetando los derechos del autor/de la autora.

#### Además le quiero informar que:

- La participación en esta investigación es voluntaria
- En cualquier momento de la investigación el/la participante puede decidir no continuar y/o retirar su consentimiento sin tener que explicar esta decisión
- Durante las entrevistas, se puede negar la respuesta a cualquier pregunta
- El/la participante puede en cualquier momento negar la reproducción de sus fotografías o respuestas a la entrevista en el trabajo final del investigador
- La grabación de la entrevista es opcional y solamente posible si el participante ha dado su consentimiento. Esta grabación sirve para facilitar la transcripción de la conversación y se eliminará posteriormente
- Todas las respuestas serán tratadas de forma anónima. Sin embargo, es posible la mención del género o de la ocupación del/de la participante. Si no lo desea, se puede evitar por indicarlo con antelación

Gracias por participar!

El consentimiento se puede dar por escrito (firma abajo) o de forma oral durante la entrevista.

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Fecha y firma del investigador

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Fecha y firma de la/el participante

## English translation:

### Consent Form - Participation in the research for Lorenz Rodrigo Peh's master's degree work.

*This document informs about the purpose and use of data collected during the research for Lorenz Rodrigo Peh's master's thesis.*

#### **Purpose:**

The information collected through photographs taken by the participant and interviews between the participant and the researcher serves as the basis for a qualitative analysis of the relationship between peace and the environment, and its significance for development strategies at the community level in Colombia. This analysis is part of the thesis work of the researcher, Lorenz Rodrigo Peh, for the Master's program "International Development and Management" at Lund University (Lund University), Sweden.

#### **Use of information:**

The main use of the information (photographs and responses) is to provide qualitative data for the analytical part of the thesis, as described above. The thesis, and with it selected photographs and responses, will be published in the Lund University repository.

In addition, the photographs and responses may be used for presentations related to the thesis work in an academic context, for example as part of a lecture, discussion or in possible publications. ForumCiv may use the photographs for communication purposes, provided that direct consent has been given, and respecting the author's rights.

#### **I would also like to inform you that:**

- Participation in this research is voluntary.
- At any time during the research, the participant may decide not to continue and/or withdraw his/her consent without having to explain this decision.
- During the interviews, the participant may refuse to answer any question.
- The participant may at any time refuse to have his/her photographs or interview responses reproduced in the researcher's final work.
- Recording of the interview is optional and only possible if the participant has given his/her consent. This recording serves to facilitate the transcription of the conversation and will be deleted afterwards.
- All answers will be treated anonymously. However, it is possible to mention the participant's gender or occupation. If this is not desired, it can be avoided by indicating it in advance.

Thank you for your participation!

Consent can be given in writing (signature below) or orally during the interview.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date and signature of the researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date and signature of the participant

## Annex 7 – Interview guide

### Original:

#### Introducción

1. *Explicación del propósito de la entrevista (del investigador)*
2. Me puede contar algo sobre usted, muy brevemente?
  - a. ¿En que trabaja usted? ¿Su posición?
  - b. ¿Cuál es su experiencia con el proceso de paz y esfuerzos comunitarios?

#### Las fotografías

3. De las fotografías que tomó, ¿hay alguna que tenga un significado especial para usted? ¿Por qué?
  - a. ¿Qué muestra la foto? ¿Qué no se puede ver en la foto? ¿Por qué?
  - b. ¿Por qué la ha tomado de esta manera?
  - c. ¿Cuál es su experiencia personal con lo que se puede ver en la foto? ¿Qué significa para usted?
4. Comparando las fotos que ha tomado, ¿hay algunas diferencias? ¿Que tienen en común?
  - a. Acerca de lo que muestran
  - b. Acerca de la razón por la cual las ha tomado/ lo que significan para usted
5. Pensando en lo que muestran las fotos,
  - a. ¿Qué es el medioambiente para usted, si tuviera que definirlo?
  - b. ¿Qué dice la foto sobre la relación que usted tiene con el medioambiente?
  - c. ¿Qué significa la paz para usted? En el contexto del Caquetá/Colombia, ¿qué significado tiene el medioambiente para la paz?
  - d. ¿Cómo entiende usted la interacción entre el medioambiente y la paz/el conflicto? (¿Se puede tener las dos, paz y un medioambiente cuidado? ¿Qué se necesitará?)
6. ¿Hay alguna fotografía que le hubiera gustado tomar, pero no pudo?
  - a. ¿Por qué no la ha podido tomar?
  - b. ¿Qué hubiera mostrado?

#### Esfuerzos, estrategias para crear paz en Caquetá

7. ¿Cómo se relaciona lo que se muestra en las imágenes con su trabajo?
  - a. Me puede contar un poco más de su trabajo, quien participa, que hacen?
8. ¿Qué significado tiene el medioambiente en su trabajo?
9. ¿Cómo contribuye su trabajo en crear paz?
10. ¿Qué son los desafíos que se presentan en su trabajo, pensando en la interacción del medioambiente y la paz?

#### ¿Hay algo que quiere añadir?

11. Alguna cosa adicional
12. Dudas o preguntas

## English translation:

### Introduction

1. Explanation of the purpose of the interview (from the researcher)
2. Can you tell me something about yourself?
  - a. What do you do for a living? Your position within the organisation?
  - b. What is your experience with the peace process and community efforts?

### Photographs

3. Of the photographs you took, are there any that have special meaning to you? Why?
  - a. What does the photo show? What cannot be seen in the photo? Why?
  - b. Why did you take it this way?
  - c. What is your personal experience with what can be seen in the photo? What does it mean to you?
4. Comparing the photos you have taken, are there any differences? What do they have in common?
  - a. About what they show
  - b. About why you have taken them/what they mean to you
5. Thinking about what the pictures show
  - a. What is the environment to you, if you had to define it?
  - b. What does the photo say about the relationship you have with the environment?
  - c. What does peace mean to you? In the context of Caquetá/Colombia, what does the environment mean for peace?
  - d. How do you understand the interaction between the environment and peace/conflict? (Can you have both, peace and a caring environment? What will it take?)
6. Is there a photograph you would have liked to take, but could not?
  - a. Why couldn't you take it?
  - b. What would it have shown?

### Efforts, strategies for creating peace in Caquetá

7. How does what is shown in the images relate to your work?
  - a. Can you tell me a little bit more about your work, who participates, what you do?
8. What significance does the environment have in your work?
9. How does your work contribute to creating peace?
10. What are the challenges in your work, thinking about the interaction of environment and peace?

### Is there anything you would like to add?

11. Anything additional
12. Doubts or questions



## Annex 8 – Coding and Codebook

All coding was undertaken using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. In order to be able to discuss visibility and invisibility, the first round of inductive coding included a thematic coding of the most prominent visual (and intertextual) themes. Even by looking at the images without the contextual knowledge through an interview, several dominant themes of visibility can be observed. The most common theme within images is that of nature in form of vegetation and animals, including conservation areas or related activities. Similarly most pictures show people, with women, children and youth being represented in at least one photograph of each participant. A specific environmental feature present throughout nearly all participants' imagery is water, mostly in form of rivers.

When looking at the images in relation to the participants explanation, a reoccurring theme is that of learning and knowledge creation, either from each other or from nature. These topics are shown through education or capacity development activities. Similarly, many of the images were related to the value that nature provides for both humans and other species. Visible livelihood activities include mainly conventional agriculture practices, but also alternative production methods and eco-tourism.

Themes that are not directly visible, but have been addressed by participants are violence, mainly related to past violence and in the form of forced displacement. Environmental degradation, especially deforestation is very present within the participants' responses, whilst only visible in the form of land used for pasture on the images. The production of illicit crops and (illegal) resource extraction is another issue addressed by participants, while not directly visible on the images.

Other, deductive codes that result from the theoretical discussion in [chapter 3](#) and which are central to the participants' concerns are socio-environmental interactions, capitalism and global dependencies, exploitation and extractivism, food security and food sovereignty, alternative understandings of well-being, value(s) of nature and the spatial and historical context.

Lastly, an iteration of inductive coding has led to the discovery of the following topics: remoteness, indigenous communities, the feeling of being forgotten by the state, international collaboration, co-creation and youth involvement.

For more details on the individual codes, please see the codebook below.

## Codebook

| <i>Name</i>                                    | <i>Description</i>   | <i>Files</i> | <i>References</i> |
|--|--|--------------|-------------------|
| <b>Inductive Codes</b>                         |  |              |                   |
| <b>Nature</b>                                  | Vegetation, animals and other environmental characteristics  | 35           | 108               |
| <b>Water</b>                                   | Bodies of water or references to water, mostly in form of rivers   | 12           | 18                |
| <b>Conservation</b>                            | Conservation activities and areas, notably agroforestry  | 18           | 70                |
| <b>Territory</b>                               | References to the concept of territory connected to natural and environmental characteristics  | 5            | 10                |
| <b>Women</b>                                   | Girls and women  | 10           | 18                |
| <b>Children &amp; Youth</b>                    | Children, youth and young adults   | 18           | 26                |
| <b>Youth involvement</b>                       | Involvement of children in activities of organisations   | 10           | 19                |
| <b>Knowledge (creation &amp; conservation)</b> | Reference to knowledge, mostly related to the environment, but also to culture. Both creation and conservation of knowledge have been emphasised | 15           | 54                |
| <b>Education</b>                               | Education activities and importance of (environmental) education   | 5            | 8                 |
| <b>Violence/Conflict</b>                       | Direct and indirect reference to past and present violence   | 13           | 42                |
| <b>(Forced) migration</b>                      | Migration as result of violence  | 4            | 6                 |

|  |   |    |    |
|--|---|----|----|
| <b>Environmental degradation</b>                     | Destruction and pollution of nature   | 13 | 27 |
| <b>Deforestation</b>                                 | Cutting of trees, mostly for economic purposes  | 12 | 25 |
| <b>Peace</b>   | Notions and visions of peace  | 12 | 33 |
| <b>Livelihoods</b>                                   | Livelihood activities   | 16 | 40 |
| <b>Livestock farming</b>                             | Cattle ranching   | 14 | 38 |
| <b>Illegal crops</b>                                 | Cultivation of illegal crops, notably coca  | 5  | 13 |
| <b>Other agriculture</b>                             | Other, mostly alternative agricultural practices, such as agroforestry  | 8  | 10 |
| <b>Tourism</b>                                       | Ecotourism  | 3  | 6  |
| <b>Remoteness</b>                                    | Physical remoteness and lack of infrastructure  | 8  | 13 |
| <b>Feeling forgotten</b>                             | Feeling of being neglected and not prioritised by the government and local politicians                            | 3  | 5  |
| <b>International collaboration</b>                   | Collaboration of community-organisations with international actors  | 6  | 14 |
| <b>Co-creation</b>                                   | Addressing issues together within the community   | 9  | 32 |
| <b>Deductive codes</b>                               |   |    |    |
| <b>Socio-environmental interactions</b>              | Interactions between nature and society, as well as resulting challenges and opportunities from this relationship | 10 | 22 |
| <b>Capitalism &amp; global economic dependencies</b> | References to capitalism and economic dependencies  | 4  | 10 |
| <b>Extractivism</b>                                  | Extractive activities, mostly large scale livestock farming   | 7  | 25 |
| <b>Food security &amp; food sovereignty</b>          | Importance of nutrition security and sovereignty over production  | 7  | 19 |
| <b>Alternative understandings of well-being</b>      | Understanding of well-being that diverges from the Western norm   | 17 | 37 |

|                                       |   |    |    |
|---------------------------------------|---|----|----|
| <b>Value(s) of nature</b>             | Recognition of values of nature, other than an economic one | 21 | 39 |
| <b>Spatial and historical context</b> | Spatial and historical particularities and characteristics  | 8  | 21 |

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## Annex 9 – Participant-generated photographs

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Participant 1

**P1.1**



“Multiculturalidad, cambio generacional y reconocimiento de las nuevas generaciones”  
*(Multiculturalism, generational change and recognition of new generations)*

Location: Cámara de Comercio de Florencia

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**P1.2**



“Mujer, vida y madre tierra”  
*(Woman, life and mother earth)*

Location: Barrio Vista Hermosa, Florencia

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**P1.3**



“Cosmovisión étnica y canastos del conocimiento Ancestral a mujeres resilientes en la Amazonia”  
*(Ethnic cosmovision and baskets of ancestral knowledge for resilient women in Amazonia)*

Location: Morelia

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**P1.4**



“Cascada Mo Buinaima, protección de la vida y ambiente sano”  
*(Mo Buinaima waterfall, protection of life and a healthy environment)*

Location: Reserva Natural el Danubio, Morelia

---

**P1.5**



“La libertad del Aotus Vociferans en la Amazonia”  
(*The freedom of the Aotus Vociferans in Amazonia*)

Location: Vereda Caldas, Municipio de Morelia, Caldas

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**P1.6**



“Planting to recover”  
(*Reserva Natural el Danubio, Morelia*)

Location: Vereda Caldas, Municipio de Morelia, Caldas

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**P1.7**



“Turismo como motor de la sustentabilidad y construcción de paz en la Amazonia”  
(Tourism as an engine for sustainability and peace-building in the Amazon)

Location: Pie de Monte Amazónico, Distrito de Agua 450msnm

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Participant 2

**P2.1**



“Conservando el agua”  
*(Conserve the waters)*

Location: Piedemonte Amazónico

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**P2.2**



“Conservando el bosque”  
*(Conserve the forest)*

Location: Cuenca del Rio San Pedro

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**P2.3**



**“Educación Ambiental”**  
*(Environmental education)*

Location: unknown school

---

**P2.4**



**“Generando conocimiento”**  
*(Generating knowledge)*

Location: unknown farm

---

**P2.5**



*“Mejorando la calidad de vida”  
(Improving the quality of life)*

Location: unknown farm

---

**P2.6**



*“Reconocimiento del entorno”  
(Getting to know the environment)*

Location: Location: Parque Nacional Alto Fragua Indi Wasi

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### Participant 3

#### P3.1



*“Construyendo el territorio”  
(Constructing the territory)*

Location: Centro recreacional Villa Laina, municipio de San José del Fragua

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#### P3.2



*“Creando conciencia ambiental”  
(Creating environmental consciousness)*

Location: Vereda La Tigra, municipio de San José del Fragua

---

**P3.3**



“Belleza natural”  
(*Natural beauty*)

Location: Charco la Abeja, vereda el Porvenir, municipio Belén de los Andaquies)

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**P3.4**



“Riqueza vs. olvido”  
(*Richness vs. neglect*)

Location: Vereda la Cristalina, municipio de Belén de los Andaquies

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## Participant 4

### P4.1



*“Panorámica Parque Nacional Alto Fragua”  
(Panoramic view of the National Park Alto Fragua)*

Location: Parque Nacional Alto Fragua Indi Wasi

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### P4.2



*“Panorámica Vereda Alto San Juan”  
(Panorama view of Vereda Alto San Juan)*

Location: Alto San Juan, Belén de los Andaquies

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**P4.3**



**“Resguardo Cerinda”**  
*(Indigenous reservation Cerinda)*

Location: Resguardo Cerinda, Belén de los Andaquies

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**P4.4**



**“Cascadas”**  
*(Waterfalls)*

Location: Las Platas, Vereda Sarabando Medio

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## Participant 5

### P5.1



*“Regresar a casa después de clases”  
(Returning home after school)*

Location: La vereda el Remanso, municipio de Cartagena del Chairá, margen izquierdo del río Caguán

*Los niños y niñas que viven en los grandes ríos, aprenden desde pequeños a defenderse por sí mismos y a transitar durante horas en situaciones difíciles para llegar a las escuelas rurales.*

(Participant 5)

---



**P5.2**



*“Libertad”  
(Freedom)*

Location: Puerto Betania, municipio de San Vicente del Caguán, margen izquierdo del río Caguán.

*La niña trepa por una estructura abandonada, como una metáfora que la juventud está llamada a sobreponerse a la adversidad social y ambiental que les heredamos.*

(Participant 5)

---

**P5.3**



“Niños pescando”  
(Children fishing)

Location: la cabecera municipal de Solita, margen izquierdo del río Caquetá, al sur del departamento

*La precariedad que viven los niños y niñas en los asentamientos por ocupación, a donde llegan las familias en situación de desplazamiento, los expone a riesgos, no valorados y no incluidos en los planes de prevención, cada año muchos menores mueren ahogados, mientras pescan solitarios en ríos y lagunas.*

(Participant 5)

---

**P5.4**



“Los colores de la cosecha” The colours of the harvest”  
*(The colours of the harvest)*

Location: La cabecera municipal de Cartagena del Chairá

*Mujeres desplazadas, viudas, madres solteras muestran la abundancia de su trabajo en agricultura urbana, dentro de los barrios por ocupación de hecho, asentamientos ilegales construidos después de la implementación del Plan patriota en el Medio Caguán.*

(Participant 5)

P5.5



“Explorando el mundo de los insectos”  
(Exploring the world of the insects)

Location: La zona de reserva campesina Pato Balsillas, vereda El Lago, San Vicente del Caguán

*La familia explora el mundo de los insectos. el desconocimiento de las relaciones simbióticas del medio ha generado una guerra perdida contra las formas de vida. En esta foto la familia es guiada para reconocer la variedad de los insectos que según ellos perjudica el cultivo de frijol. las familias invierten mucho dinero en la compra de plaguicidas, la mayoría se convierte en una acción inútil porque los insectos que interactúan con el cultivo, no causan daño, la mayoría son benéficos, con los plaguicidas deterioran el agua y el equilibrio biológico y pierden dinero en una trampa tendida por los comerciantes de venenos.*

(Participant 5)

**P5.6**



*No title*

Location: unknown

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Participant 6

**P6.1**



*“De la violencia a la producción lícita”  
(From violence to legal production)*

Location: La Unión Peneya, La Montañanita

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**P6.2**



*“Reconstruyendo el tejido social”  
(Reconstructing the social fabric)*

Location: La Unión Peneya, La Montañanita

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**P6.3**



*“Una oportunidad de paz”  
(An opportunity for peace)*

Location: La Unión Peneya, La Montañanita

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**P6.4**



*“Transformando conciencia”  
(Transforming consciousness)*

Location: La Unión Peneya, La Montañanita

---

Participant 7

**P7.1**



*No title*

Location: Family farm close to Florencia

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**P7.2**



*No title*

Location: 7 km outside of Florencia

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**P7.3**



*No title*

Location: Family farm close to Florencia

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