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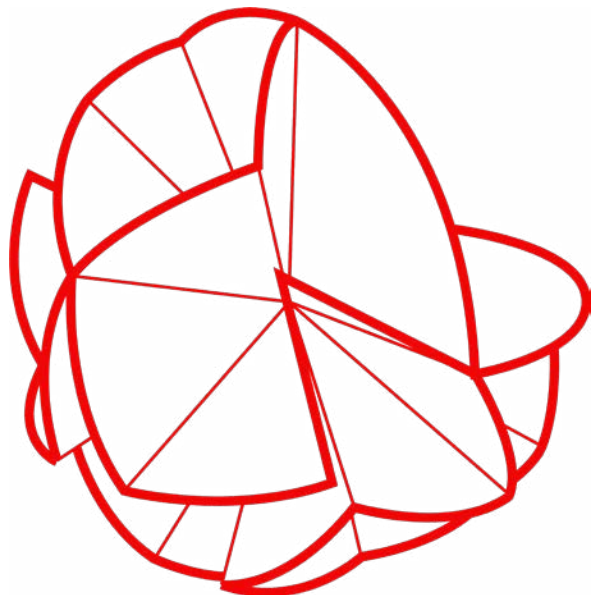
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Disrupting Geographies in the Design World

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Viva! Colinas. Service Design for Tourism and Reconciliation in Communities of Former Colombian Guerrilla

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Abstract

As a result of the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia, ex-combatant communities in the ETCR Jaime Pardo Leal in the Vereda Colinas inside the Guaviare region, recognized the potential of tourism activities to support economic growth and ensure their subsistence in rural areas. This project explores how design approaches, qualitative research, and interviews with community members facilitated the design of a community integration tool. Based on service design and user-centered methodology, Viva! Colina's toolkit comprised five workshops to train ex-combatants in tourism essentials. The application of the tool resulted in the creation of two tourist routes, reflecting the community's desire for reconciliation and preserving historical memory while generating economic benefits.

Keywords

Ex-combatants

Peace

Tourism

Colombia

Service Design

Introduction

The Colombian social conflict, lasting over five decades, has profoundly impacted the country, leading to displacement, violence, and significant challenges (Cartagena, 2016). The present phase in Colombia's history calls for dedicated efforts to end violence, address drug trafficking, support war victims, reintegrate ex-combatants, and successfully implement the 2016 peace agreement. This crucial moment provides an opportunity to reshape Colombia's path and cultivate a future characterized by peace, stability, and inclusive development.

The protracted conflict in Colombia subjected the population to distressing experiences such as kidnappings, massacres, and human rights violations (Bello Montes, 2008). These acts of violence instilled fear in communities and deterred both domestic and international travelers from perceiving Colombia as a safe and appealing destination. As a result, many previously thriving tourist attractions in the country were abandoned, negatively impacting the tourism sector's economic contributions and impeding the development of various regions (Mackey Montoya & Peña Pérez, 2016). However, the end of hostilities, disarmament processes, and the creation of transition spaces for ex-combatants, particularly the ETCR Colinas and Charras, have opened up new possibilities for tourism development in Colombia. Guaviare, a department deeply impacted by the conflict and known for its proximity to the Amazon rainforest, is an intriguing case study, becoming a focal point for rejuvenating tourism in a peaceful environment, capitalizing on the absence of active armed groups within its borders.

Amid various reintegration options for ex-combatants, tourism remains an underexplored avenue. This research, conducted in collaboration with ex-combatants from the ETCR Jaime Pardo Leal in Colinas, aims to explore the untapped potential of tourism activities shaped by their intimate knowledge of the region, close relationship with nature, and active community involvement. The investigation will comprehensively analyze the current state of the Jaime Pardo Leal territory, including its community members, existing tourism approaches, and the feasibility of developing an organic tourism proposition in this distinct context. This investigation addresses misinformation, resentment, and apprehension that impede visitation to post-conflict areas. By engaging ex-combatants and leveraging their experiences, this research introduces the "Tourism for Reconciliation" concept, demonstrating how tourism can promote healing, preserve history, and foster community connections.

ETCRs: Reintegration Challenges and Tourism Opportunities for Peacebuilding in Colombia

The 2016 peace agreement in Colombia established transitory spaces, currently known as ETCRs (Espacios Territoriales de Capacitación y Reincorporación), to facilitate the reintegration of combatants into civilian life (Ríos, 2017). However, these spaces face significant challenges, such as limited connectivity, mobility, and essential services, which isolate them from major cities (Misión Observación

Electoral, 2017). Despite these obstacles, the ETCRs have been instrumental in supporting the economic and social reintegration of ex-combatants by providing training in diverse areas, financial support, assistance in establishing productive projects, and essential services like healthcare and education (CAPAZ. Instituto Colombiano-Alemán para la Paz & Heinrich Boll Stiftung, 2018). After nearly eight years since the FARC disbanded, the Colombian peace process has made significant progress, demobilizing over 50,000 ex-combatants and fostering hopes for a better future. However, existing factors pose potential threats to the long-term sustainability of the peace plans, including security concerns (Torres Martínez & Ríos Monroy, 2021), ongoing stigmatization, and the need to maintain productive projects, and housing initiatives, improve education (Martínez & Lefebvre, 2019), and establish connections beyond the ETCR spaces. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring the stability and progress of the peace process and allowing the ETCRs to continue their positive impact and integration into local governance structures.

Located in the Guaviare department, the ETCR Jaime Pardo Leal (ETCR-JPL) in Capricho, Colinas, has gained recognition for its dedication to peacebuilding. It is the only ETCR ready to be handed over to the residing ex-combatants, demonstrating its successful transition (Martínez & Lefebvre, 2019). Situated in a remote area approximately 49 km from San José del Guaviare, the ETCR-JPL serves as a gateway to the Colombian Amazon. It accommodates nearly 400 individuals [Fig. 1](#), primarily former combatants, and presents essential services through water purification and diesel-powered plants (Vega Araujo, 2020). The ETCR-JPL community actively engages in training and project development activities, particularly in the rural sector, with support from the Colombian Government, international cooperation, and the private sector. Additionally, the community seeks to harness its unique territory, rich in natural resources, to promote tourism and foster reconciliation by sharing its perspective on war experiences and challenging negative stereotypes. Exploring tourism opportunities in the ETCR-JPL serves as a critical asset to contribute to the community's economic and social stabilization of the community (Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo, 2020) but also facilitates contact between visitors and the actors of the former armed conflict, fostering peace and understanding while preserving the true meaning of peacebuilding.



Fig. 1
Quintero, Juan Camilo.
(2019). ETCR-JPL Houses.
[Photo]. Own archive.

Methodology

A comprehensive methodology was proposed to analyze the ETCR area's tourism potential, emphasizing community collaboration. It employs qualitative and quantitative research methods, providing evidence-based insights and guidance for sustainable tourism development. The analysis contributed to a design tool for long-term growth, cultural preservation, and improved visitor experiences.

Evaluation: ETCR-JPL area tourism potential, as a visitor perspective

Interviews were conducted with 20 visitors to the ETCR-JPL area Fig. 2, including young Colombian tourists, middle-aged foreign tourists, and family groups. These interviews aimed to understand visitors' knowledge, information needs, and the importance of community engagement. The analysis revealed four key activities for tourism development: community witnessing, storytelling, connecting with the principal city, and highlighting the area's unique value. However, challenges such as remote location, inadequate infrastructure, limited transportation, and a lack of trained guides were identified. Collaboration with stakeholders was necessary to improve transportation, enhance storytelling techniques, define a compelling value proposition, and strengthen communication and promotion efforts. By addressing these issues, the ETCR-JPL area could establish itself as a sustainable and distinctive tourism destination, aligning with visitors' perceptions and preferences.



Fig. 2
Tobos Jiménez, Rodrigo
Andrés. (2021). Visitors
of the ETCR-JPL. [Photo].
Own archive.

Identification: Deepen into the ETCR-JPL community

During the community identification stage of ETCR-JPL, virtual interviews were conducted in August 2021 with 35 influential participants, including tourism committee members and community leaders Fig. 3. The interviews focused on individual and community roles, skills, community involvement, and goals. Positive aspects, such as openness and motivation, were evident, with participants expressing a desire to share their skills and experiences. However, challenges related to internal disorganization, limited availability of specific members, and issues within the tourism committee were identified. These interviews provided valuable insights into the community dynamics and emphasized the importance of collaboration and the exploration of alternative projects for future growth.



Fig. 3
Tobos Jiménez, Rodrigo
Andrés. (2021). ETCR-JPL
representatives. [Photo].
Own archive.

Connection: Outside the ETCR-JPL, the stakeholders involvement

The community's outsider approach involved virtual interviews conducted in August 2021 with current and potential stakeholders of the ETCR-JPL community Fig. 4. Participants included tourism agency owners, UN peace verification representatives, and a Municipality of San José del Guaviare social leader. Positive aspects emerged, such as the willingness of interviewees to collaborate with the community and the interest of tourism agencies in showcasing the territory's unique aspects. However, challenges, including transportation costs, political discussions during visits, and slow implementation of ideas, were identified. This stage provided valuable insights into potential collaborations between external actors and the ETCR-JPL community in developing tourism activities, highlighting the need for improved collaboration and organization within the community. Addressing transportation, political discussions, and implementation challenges was crucial to establish successful partnerships and maximizing the community's economic opportunities.



Fig. 4
(2021). Stakeholders' interview. [Image].
Own elaboration.

Co-Creation: Community building Tourism proposals for the territory

The co-creation stage involved virtual interviews with the ETCR-JPL community in September 2021 to ideate tourism development. Participants demonstrated commitment and eagerness to contribute, proposing various tourism experiences for different profiles. The exercise revealed a need for training and collaboration while highlighting challenges related to suboptimal tourist spaces and lacking training among community members. Positive aspects included participants' active engagement, the community's desire to develop alternative activities, and the tourism committee's unity of vision. However, negative points identified were suboptimal conditions in tourist spaces, the investment required for improvements, and the lack of training among community members. The exercise emphasized the community's commitment to tourism and the importance of addressing infrastructure, training, and implementation challenges to enhance visitor experiences.

Result: Tourism for reconciliation in the ETCR-JPL

Through the research process, the “Tourism for Reconciliation” concept emerged as a viable approach to support the ETCR-JPL community in developing a sustainable and economically feasible tourism proposal for their territory, aiming to establish meaningful connections between the community and external stakeholders, including service providers, educational institutions, and organizations interested in supporting the community’s local and international peace-building efforts. It is essential to recognize that while tourism has the potential to contribute to reconciliation and the transformation of societal perceptions, it cannot alone address all challenges or eliminate stigmatization. Nevertheless, it can serve as a valuable tool for fostering peace and shaping a new narrative.

The community design solution, later known as the Viva! Colina’s toolkit Fig. 5, was identified as a means to address the limitations and challenges specific to the ETCR-JPL context that could potentially hinder the success of a tourism initiative. By providing a structured framework and resources, the toolkit enhances the effectiveness of the community’s tourism efforts, ensuring they align with their sustainable development goals and economic prosperity.



Fig. 5
(2021). Viva! Colinas Logo.
[Logo]. Own elaboration.

Viva! Colinas: The process

To introduce the concept of “Tourism for Reconciliation” in the ETCR-JPL territory, five community workshops were conducted remotely between September and October 2021. These workshops engaged and trained community members, including representatives from the Tourism Committee and relevant experts. Despite connectivity challenges, the workshops aimed to gather data, share knowledge, and refine the tourism proposal development process. Activities included individual interviews and group discussions, ultimately involving and training the community in the tourism for reconciliation initiative.

Viva! Colinas: The outcome

Throughout the five workshops, the community’s potential and needs became evident. Establishing empathic connections with community members was essential for successful community

Second Workshop: Territory and community

The “Identify your territory and community” workshop, in collaboration with tourist guides and ETCR-JPL community representatives, deepens the knowledge of the territory, including its location, population, internal organization, attractions, and services, promoting knowledge sharing and alignment among participants for the final tourist route.

Third Workshop: Storytelling

The “Build your story” workshop, developed in collaboration with sociologists, involved individual and group exercises in developing storytelling skills for community members to share their experiences and ideas creatively and engagingly with the community and visitors.

Fourth Workshop: Community strengths

In collaboration with psychologists and anthropologists, the “Identify your strengths” workshop helps participants recognize their strengths and propose specific roles connected to the tourist route, aiming to instill a sense of vocation and responsibility among community members within the final tourism route.

Fifth Workshop: Roles definition

“Define your actions and roles” workshop, built upon the previous workshop and established the final roles and responsibilities of the actors involved. The goal was to collectively develop a pilot tourist route based on the community’s active participation, knowledge, and previous workshops process’.

Viva! Colinas workshops aim to decentralize tourism planning and promote active community participation. Integration with the ETCR-JPL community revealed the importance of skill development, community engagement, and employment opportunities. The workshops highlight the value of every community member’s contribution, fostering a spirit of co-creation in tourism for reconciliation.

Debate: Tourism in conflicts zone

Tourism initiatives in post-conflict zones have emerged as a means for communities to rebuild their economies and move forward, driven by individuals with personal connections to the conflict. These initiatives prioritize the untapped tourism potential of the regions rather than exploiting the morbidity associated with war tourism (Martínez-Gayo, 2021). They aim for sustainable development, empowerment and offer employment opportunities while contributing to infrastructure development and environmental awareness.

Positive impacts can be followed by analyzing case studies worldwide, such as in Indonesia, El Salvador, and Mexico. Aceh Explorer in Indonesia provided employment and contributed to tourism growth, highlighting the potential of such initiatives. However, challenges persist in the reintegration of ex-combatants (Young & Goldman, 2015). The Ruta de la Paz project in El Salvador showcases historical memory and employs former combatants but lacks further government support for its expansion and maximization of economic development and historic preservation (Bustabad Alonso & Ruiz de Andrés, 2010). Similarly, Zapatismo in Chiapas, Mexico, overcame initial safety concerns and thrived, attracting visitors interested in learning about the Zapatista combatants and benefiting the local economy. Nevertheless, the risk of commercialization and overlooking peasant communities' struggles still emphasizes the need to balance profit and social impact (Hemispheric Institute, 2010).

To ensure the long-term sustainability and meaningful impact of post-conflict tourism initiatives, addressing these challenges and prioritizing safety and government respect is crucial. The analysis of the previous case studies demonstrates that, despite stigmatization, these initiatives have fostered dialogue, tolerance, and even international tourism, gradually changing the perception of ex-combatant groups. Accompaniment from governmental and private entities is vital, providing training, economic assistance, and spaces for community interaction. By leveraging the unique knowledge of ex-combatants, tourism can serve as a viable post-demobilization economic alternative, promoting reconciliation, communication, and dialogue as bridges to peace. It can create a sense of ownership and belong to the territory, empowering demobilized groups to work toward societal reconciliation, community improvement, and territorial cohesion.

Conclusions

Design strategies have untapped potential to enhance tourism and differentiate destinations (Stickdorn & Zehrer, 2009). Integrating service design principles with community-based tourism can unlock economic and social growth in underdeveloped areas (Ramírez Hernández, 2019) by actively involving the community, leveraging design tools, and establishing connections with external actors to strengthen proposals (Stickdorn & Frischhut, 2012). Design is a powerful tool in conflict contexts, enabling the development of sustainable and socially responsible solutions (Manzini, 2016). Inclusive approaches can address weaknesses and generate lasting solutions

through design thinking and co-creation with affected populations, empowering communities and fostering collaboration for transformative change. The design process should prioritize actors and their context, facilitating an understanding of accurate data and identifying specific needs.

A prime example of the successful implementation of design strategies is the ETCR Jaime Pardo Leal (ETCR-JPL), being a unique testament to the transformative power of peacebuilding and community engagement in a post-conflict setting, empowering former combatants to rebuild their lives and contribute to society by providing essential services, training programs, and support for productive projects. The ETCR-JPL community has embraced tourism as a catalyst for positive change by leveraging its unique territory, sharing its experiences, and attracting visitors. Integrating design strategies, particularly in community-based tourism, contributes to economic and social growth opportunities, benefiting the local community and the broader region (Ramírez Hernández, 2019).

Beatriz Bonilla Berrocal
Peruvian service designer and researcher specialized in social innovation and food systems-related projects. As a designer, she has worked and led initiatives to bring positive changes to communities that contribute to having a more equal and fair society.

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The 8th International Forum of Design as a Process, themed “Disrupting Geographies in the Design World” was held in Bologna from 20 to 22 June 2022. The event was organised by the Advanced Design Unit of the Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna, Department of Architecture, in collaboration with two partner universities: Tecnológico de Monterrey (TEC) and Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

The Forum engaged speakers from the Global Design community, expanding the original vocation of the Latin Network for the Development of Design as a Process to include researchers and designers of the Mediterranean Area, Middle East, IOR (Indian Ocean Region), and Global South regions. The goal was to share new perspectives on imagining design futures in a responsible and just perspective, at the forefront of change, while building strategic partnerships and creating accessible knowledge.

Structured around three pillars — seminars, workshops, and exhibitions — the Forum hosted meetings, reflection opportunities, networking activities. It involved designers, scholars, young researchers, design entrepreneurs, in an experimental format.

Speakers’ contributions not only inspired the practices of the designers’ community, but also resonated with students and the broad audiences. The presentations explored intersections of materiality and culture, post-coloniality, decoloniality, gender studies, and other areas of human thought and action which seek to analyse, question and challenge the disruptive geographies in the world, today.

The papers submitted to the five tracks proposed are published in the Digital Special Issue 1 of *diid. disegno industriale – industrial design*, celebrating during those days its 20th anniversary and serving as the fourth partner of the event.

The Editors

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