Dialogue and Peacebuilding in Colombia: A Dialogic and a Transformative Relationship

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Abstract: This article analyses different initiatives that have emerged from the top-down and everyday bottom-up peace approach after the peace agreement in Colombia and have led to establishing dialogues among different actors to contribute to the peacebuilding process. Three years ago, Colombia signed a peace agreement with the largest guerrilla group in Latin America. After this signature, the big challenge has been the implementation of the deal in the most conflict-affected territories, characterised by poverty, high rates of violence, unemployment, etc. Despite the pitfalls in building positive peace, many communities have started generating spaces by themselves and have created initiatives of peacebuilding through nonviolent actions, the acceptance of differences, active participation and empowerment and the acknowledgement that dialogue is the only way to achieve cooperation and to rebuild another story rather than conflict. This paper seeks to examine the different characteristics that have shaped dialogue-based practices when they are produced with a top-down and a bottom-up approach of peacebuilding. To do this, it is necessary to identify the parties participating in these encounters, their motivations, conditions that have allowed parties to establish a dialogue, and the results. This paper notes that in a post-conflict society, dialogues coming from the top-down will take longer in accomplishing positive peace, rather than the dialogues that have emerged from the bottom up which may be the engine to social mobilisations and the way to capitalise on social skills in achieving justice, truth, and reconciliation.

Keywords: Dialogue, Top-down approach, Bottom approach, Local peacebuilding, Community, Empowerment, Understanding

Introduction

Colombia has faced a protracted armed conflict; after fifty years of a continuum of violence, in 2016, the government signed the General Agreement for Ending Conflict and Building a Stable and Long-Lasting Peace with the world's largest guerrilla force, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarios de Colombia, FARC). This agreement was praised by the Kroc Institute as a very well-drawn accord. It recognised the failures of peace agreements signed before and aimed to tackle the structural causes of the war. In other words, this agreement wanted to pursue not only negative peace but also positive peace. However, the same institute advised that the effectiveness of the peace agreement needed to be measured by the firmness and the quality of the implementation (Kroc Institute, 2017, 8), even though the implementation is a complex process that does not reconcile with citizens' and

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parties' expectations.

According to the Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation, there are about 8,794,542 victims of the armed conflict in Colombia, which represents almost 20% of the population. This fraction is significant considering that one of the main axes of the agreement is to guarantee and ensure the rights of the victims of armed conflict in the search for truth, justice, reparation, the guarantees of no repetition and reconciliation (Unit for the Victims Assistance and Reparation, 2019).

Nevertheless, what is true is that two years after signing the agreement, to date only 23% of the commitments have been completely fulfilled and 31% of the implementation has not been initiated (Kroc Institute 2019, 2). The reasons for this breach are partly attributed to the lack of will of the new government, which took over in October of 2018 and is opposed to the peace agreement. This has led to the new institutions created by the peace agreement delaying the implementation of the programmes, which are not prioritised in the public policy agenda.

Therefore, because the peace agreement was signed in a specific context, under certain circumstances, by specific parties, what follows is the shift to a transformative platform where people can participate, creating new dynamics of peace and replacing ongoing episodes of violence by initiatives of constructive change (Lederach 2005, 42). These dynamics will be tested by proximity and accessibility (Lederach 2005, 58). In protracted conflict settings, there is a need to build the paths towards reconciliation, restoration, and social healing. Lederach and Lederach (2010, 7) suggest that social healing:

requires a focus on the local community that takes seriously their lived experience, with their inevitable need to survive and locate both the individual and the collective voice. Voice suggests a notion of movement that is both internal, within an individual, and external, taking the form of social echo and resonance that emerges from collective spaces that build meaningful conversation, resiliency in the face of violence and purposeful action.

In this sense, it is important to analyse different dialogue-based initiatives that have emerged from the top-down and the bottom-up in Colombia and which are oriented to guarantee and protect the rights of victims and to restore social relationships. Furthermore, it is important to question how dialogue has played a key role in these processes and has contributed to generate constructive change on the different levels.

The first part of the paper will briefly review the theoretical framework in which the top-down and the everyday peace approach emerged in the field of peacebuilding. Then, through the concept of generative dialogues and resilience, this paper will

critically study three dialogue-based practices. From the top-down approach, there are truth-seeking initiatives that have been displayed by the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non Repetition in order to construct a consensual understanding of violent events and human rights violation, and a second initiative led by the same institution that we will consider a middle approach and which is oriented towards the recognition of the suffering of victims of sexual violence. From the bottom-up approach, this paper will study one initiative from civil society in conflict-beset territories in which dialogue has meant a citizen-mobilisation towards peace. This part will outline the different platforms where dialogue was present, the parties and actors involved, and the motivations and triggers that allowed parties to converge into discussion and question whether dialogue is a pivot of constructive change.

Top-down Approach to Peacebuilding

The top-down approach to peace entails the values of the liberal peace that was built after World War II, mostly by developed states. Because of the explosion of 'new wars' worldwide, foundations of peace needed to rely on values such as democracy, human rights, rule of law, and be market-guided, among others (Richmond 2006, 4).

As Richmond stated:

> liberal peace represents the biases of a specific set of actors, a knowledge system and epistemic community, allied to a narrow set of interests, norms, institutions, and techniques, developed from these. Yet, its subjects have resisted, exposed local ownership as external regulation, and have fragmented the hegemony of the liberal peace. (Richmond 2011, 3)

Liberal peace has become a hegemonic narrative and universalist within post-conflict societies (Richmond 2011). The top-down approach of peacebuilding is characterised by its technocratic appearance, in which peace is designed by experts and is the result of best practices. According to Mac Ginty and Firchow, 'The dominance of technocracy concerning peacebuilding and state-building narratives is significant in that it influences how information is collected and how contexts are described' (2016, 312). Moreover, top-down practices are commonly bureaucratised through a settled agenda where security is prioritised. Besides, the methodological practices are standardised, institutionalised, what makes them rigid and formal, are time-limited, and participation is selective and guided, dialogue commonly lacks meaningful participation and inclusion to legitimate peace at the local level. In this sense, in a transitional scenario where the state displays several mechanisms for justice, truth and reconciliation, the dialogue is essential to bring closer victims, perpetrators, and communities. However, as McEvoy (2008, 28) notes:

State-centric schemes may fail to take sufficient account of local customs and practical knowledge and to engage properly with the community and civil society structures. Such failures, often justified in the name of efficiency, professional expertise [...] may in turn [...] encourage grassroots resistance to such state-led initiatives.

In sum, as many practices are effectiveness-oriented, the role of dialogue in the different mechanisms could minimise the ownership and accountability of all the parties and reflect the distance from achieving truth, justice, and reconciliation.

Everyday Peace Approach

The notion of everyday peace is an answer to the critical research agenda of the liberal peace and conflict studies. MacGinty (2014, 549) argues:

That everyday peace refers to the routinized practices used by individuals and collectives as they navigate their way through life in a deeply divided society that may suffer from ethnic or religious cleavages and be prone to episodic direct violence in addition to chronic or structural violence.

The everyday approach relies on three principles: it recognises the 'heterogeneity of the groups, the fluidity of the social world and the environmental factors that influence the space in which communities display everyday peace' (MacGinty 2014, 549). Theoretically, the everyday peace approach recognises the agency of the 'margins' and the structural conditions that are faced by people in violent contexts. It gives voice to those who have been historically excluded and silenced because of conflict, it embraces trauma individually and collectively. Everyday peace allows people to re-appropriate spaces, adapt, develop ownership, develop political strategies and negotiate structures of power as a coping mechanism amid ongoing violence (Berents 2013, 66).

Everyday peace practices are usually informal; they promote spontaneous participation and have led the population to be innovative, creative and led them to shift from passive victims to active agents of peace.

However, bottom-up processes could fail in that they 'replicate broader social inequalities' (Mc Evoy 2008, 9). Many community-based initiatives may limit the participation of the marginalised people and reflect the patriarchy and power dynamics embedded in social relationships (2008), in which dialogue and participation may end up monopolised by few and selected voices and the most vulnerable could remain silenced.

Meaning of Dialogue and Generative Dialogue Approach

Before exploring the different initiatives, it is necessary to frame the theory of dialogue.

Dialogue, according to Freire,

> characterizes an epistemological relationship. Thus, in this sense, the dialogue is a way of knowing and should never be viewed as a mere tactic… . I engage in dialogue because I recognise the social and not merely the individualistic character of the process of knowing. In this sense, dialogue presents itself as an indispensable component of the process of both learning and knowing. (Freire 2005, 17)

Freire suggests that dialogue is, in fact, a dialectical interaction. Thus, parties need to act upon a specific context to reflect critically upon the reality, transform it or create it and hope, love, humility and critical thinking are crucial (Freire 2005). Therefore, talking about dialogue means also talking about dynamic and horizontal relationships, which are prone to setbacks. However, this contributes to generated action, reflection and could mobilise people to cooperation and new forms of identities and relationships.

This definition of dialogue will be examined in the light of a generative perspective. According to Fried and Schnitman (2000, 34), the potential of generative dialogue lies in the hidden possibilities that can arise in the midst of conflict enabling convergences and a new future that can be guided by the participants. This approach entails the reconfiguration of spaces, interests, and prejudices creating new capacities and skills, in addition to breaking ground to transformed relationships and actions built collectively. Fried (2008, 6-8.), states that generative approaches promote the development of freedoms and capacities such as proactive participation and the creation of new possibilities, in building a future from the present, rebuilding, recovering and building innovative relationships allowing the emergence of new identities and relationships. Moreover, recognizing diversity in local and daily life leads to shared values as common engines, by manifesting, expressing and listening together. At the same time, it entails more collaborative and associative relationships.

Having framed the theoretical approaches, we will examine the extent to which top, middle, bottom-up initiatives are generating new knowledge, improving relationships, transforming realities, and increasing resilience among conflict-affected communities in Colombia.

Dialogue-based initiative from the top down

The Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition has led the first initiative. This commission has the mandate to construct a historical and consensual truth about the causes and consequences of the violent conflict in Colombia. Secondly, as an extrajudicial institution, this commission was not to ascribe any individual responsibility but a collective one, and was to promote the inclusion

and recognition of victims. Thirdly, it was to urge peaceful coexistence within the conflict-affected territories. In doing so, it is necessary to cultivate social justice, cooperation, and justice through spaces in which dialogue and trust are crucial.

The first of these spaces is the 'Dialogues for Non-Repetition', which is a formal space conceived for social discussion and participation that examines the reasons for violence and the manners in which society and the official institutions have to tackle the problem. In these conversations, multiple actors participate, such as policymakers, international NGOs, senators, businessmen, academics, social media, religious authorities, social leaders and the local ombudsman. Witnesses from civil society also attend the dialogue and have limited participation. Two facilitators who are Truth Commissioners lead the dialogues.

The first dialogue, named 'Long life to human rights advocates and leaders' was held in the capital, Bogotá, and its 12 participants representatives of official and civilian institutions aimed to study the murders of social leaders and the violations of human rights. Through this conversation the commission was to identify the responsibility of the state, the mechanisms that are being implemented to tackle the problem and the mechanisms used by society to avoid murders. This dialogue is characterised by the diversity of participants such as indigenous, afro Colombian, population, associations of farmworkers' women, elders, etc.

The methodology of the dialogue consisted of raising three questions asked by the facilitators, who advised the participants that it was necessary to answer the difficult questions in order to identify the causes and to provide a solution; each participant had to respond, generate dialogue and reflection on the problem. No particular order was imposed answering the questions, participants were free to respond as they wished. Before this encounter, the Truth Commission carried out several meetings with the organisations that are monitoring the killings of human rights activists.

Some conclusions of the systematic killing of social leaders were that historically in Colombia there has been an ongoing interest over land, and most of the social leaders killed fought against land grabbing in defence of their territory. Moreover, some of the participants argued that a high level of stigmatisation and prejudice makes social leaders appear like a threat. Furthermore, they said that the state always arrives late, when damage is already done, and the legitimacy of law is very long-winded in the territories where policymakers are not familiar with the local realities.

Dialogue as a process of knowing and acting involves power and the convergence of mutuality, understanding, and accessibility (Lederach 2005). When dialogue is activated it is because it will lead into something new. Hence, this new creation will be the product of shared thoughts and feelings where there is a capacity for direct

participation and not only as observers or passive agents.

In this case, even when participation was diverse and different representatives of both government and civil society took part, interventions were characterised by the giving of their point of view. According to Bohm (1996, 3) 'only if people are able freely to listen to each other, without prejudice, and without trying to influence each other' something new can arise.

More than a dialogue, it seemed to be a discussion where officials of governmental institutions defended their acts but were not open to questioning structural assumptions and to accepting responsibility for the murders of social leaders in Colombia. Thus, answers were evasive, characterised by caution and fear of being judged. It seemed to be before an audience that there were claims of accountability, rather than a productive space where new ideas and solutions came up. Although this was a physical space in which thoughts, assumptions, and feelings converged from the different participants, this did not reduce the distance from official institutions and local representatives, what Lederach called the 'social distance of direct conversation' (2005, 57).

The conversation was sterile because institutions were not able to deconstruct assumptions of a distant and neglectful state that is not aware of the violations against human rights advocates, and they were not prepared to engage and make real commitments. While governmental institutions insisted security measures were taken to protect social leaders, civil participants alleged that these measures were adopted from a centralised view of security ignoring the real situation in the territories; this reinforces the status quo of institutional weakness and the lack of political will. If the state were not sympathetic to the assassinations of social leaders, its answers, provided from a purely rational and legal perspective, would be insufficient for preventing further human rights violations.

Building peace among violence is a very complex task in conflict-affected settings, and recovering trust, empathy, and confidence is a long-term hope. However, the state, institutions, and citizens might appeal to all the resources that contribute to a constructive change. In this sense, this paper does not have the intention of dismissing the task that is leading the Truth Commission through the 'Dialogues of non-repetition'. However, what is shown is that these dialogues built from the top reflect the resistance from the official representatives to creating social knowledge around a subject that calls for immediate but agreed actions among the communities who claim comprehension of the dynamics in the territories rather than standardised security measures. Therefore, in order to create dialogic relationships based on dialogue and not a simple transference of communication, dialogue needs to be developed alongside other strategies that help to create engagement and commitment from the

participants. For instance, leaders argued that these dialogues might have parallel actions oriented to motivate communities and build a collective memory and identity. Otherwise, they are seen as disjointed actions in which participation is formal but there is no intention of reaching a mutual understanding or a new knowledge derived from dialogues.

Dialogue-based initiative from the middle

The second dialogue-based practice, which was also led by the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, was the First Encounter for Truth called My body says the truth. It was a victim-based initiative, which focused on the recognition of women, the LGBT population and victims of sexual violence in the armed conflict. This encounter was justified as a political and ethical duty in mobilising society and rejecting invisible and silent crimes. Around 600 people attended the encounter, which was held in a region where there are a greater number of registered victims of sexual violence. Among the audience were some of the perpetrators of the crimes. More than 30 testimonies were recorded via video, others were given personally by the victims, and others were letters sent by the victims and read by different participants.

This encounter is part of a holistic process in which the commission is working hand-in-hand with victims of sexual violence. Previous to this encounter, 35 workshops were carried out with different organisations in 10 regions in which victims had the opportunity to talk about the causes, the facts and the consequences of this crime. Along with these encounters, the Truth Commission is having private meetings with the groups responsible for these crimes such as guerrillas, paramilitaries, and army officials, to initiate a process of recognition and acceptance of crime.

This encounter was accompanied by chants, theatre, and poetry that express their loss, anxiety, frustrations, and grievances and facilitate the expression of feelings and emotions such as crying, claims, and sadness, feelings that were easily raised among the audience. Through their testimonies, victims made visible the stigmatisation that they have faced, their needs, their suffering, the extent to which their dignity was hurt, and how their bodies were used as an object of war. This was very important in the process of dialogue because it allowed attendees to connect thoughts with their feelings and with their body and verbal language, and this generated connection and awareness about sexual violence within the armed conflict.

As said before, a constructive change is usually generated in spaces of proximity, understanding, and accessibility. In this case, trust was built beforehand to facilitate the participation of victims and allow them to feel safe and confident. Therefore, the physical space contributed to articulating the voices that were heard and allowed

victims to build a common meaning and cohesion. This concrete space was not about imposing arguments, analysing things or negotiating truth. Rather, as Bohm states, this encounter achieved a participatory consciousness:

to suspend opinions and to look at the opinions – to listen to everybody's opinions, to suspend them, and to see what all that means. If we can see what all of our opinions mean, then we are sharing a common content, even if we don't agree. It may turn out that the opinions are not very important – they are all assumptions. And if we can see them all, we may then move more creatively in a different direction. We can just simply share the appreciation of the meanings; and out of this whole thing, truth emerges unannounced – not that we have chosen it. If each of us in this room is suspending, then we are all doing the same thing. (1996, 30)

Testimonies implied that victims were heard; in turn, voice implies the development of an internal and external movement that in the words of Lederach and Lederach 'takes the form of social echo and resonance that emerges from collective spaces that build meaningful conversation, resiliency in the face of violence and purposeful action' (Lederach and Lederach 2010, 7). So, victims felt in a safe space where they shared a collective story that was told by their bodies; its tensions, and its pain found that refuge within.

In this sense, voices led to unveiling that which was previously silenced and had not been spoken because of fear, shame, and uncertainty. In spite of being a confronting space, it was an environment of resistance and courage. The atmosphere created a space of empathy, care, and solidarity for the victims.

This encounter resonated in all the participants that were touched by the voices and made them feel connected to each other. It took a great effort for victims to prepare and find the precise words to describe their pain, their suffering, but they recalled their experiences, which led them to reflect on their strengths, such as awareness, empowerment, recognition of themselves and recognition of the others (Bush and Folger 1994). This space gave victims back the power that was unfairly taken away from them and turned it into a way of achieving truth, a truth built collectively and inclusively. Furthermore, it allowed women and LGBT ex-combatants to give their testimonies of abuses within armed groups.

This dialogue-based initiative was framed under the middle approach. Even though this encounter was a symbolic act and organised from the top, it was the result of previous meetings in which victims participated not as passive agents but as agents that have been developing actions of prevention and actions of empowerment and human rights advocacy among the community to avoid re-victimisation. The encounter was developed with a territory approach, so inclusion was not selective and allowed the

public recognition of the victim's experiences and sorrow, helping them recover their dignity.

This encounter was relevant as it was a space where sensitive issues were spoken openly and victims were recognised and acknowledged as survivors. Nonetheless, this encounter could also fail, in becoming a mere symbolic act if such testimonies remain as narratives and the structural causes of sexual violence are not addressed. Moreover, if justice and reparation are not achieved, the whole process could end up in re-victimisation and frustration.

Dialogue-based initiative from the everyday bottom-up

Finally, the bottom-up initiative that is placed at grassroots is called 'the schools of generative conversations' and led by La Paz Querida (LPQ), an NGO formed by Colombian citizens that aims to contribute to a social transformation and promote a culture of peace, strengthening democracy.

The background of the schools of generative conversations, created in 2019, was the intergenerational dialogues which began in 2017. These dialogues arose at the challenges that the implementation of the peace agreement posed in the territories. Thus, it was important to bring the agreement closer to the people who have suffered most from the conflict and have historically been marginalised and disempowered because of the negligence of the state.

In this sense, LPQ wanted to ask citizens what their expectations about the implementation of the peace process were and their inputs to achieve a positive peace in their territories. Therefore, through an open and public call made by the local journals, the community radio, and social networks, they gathered local authorities such as civil authorities, police, social leaders, youth, parents, and educators that were interested in having this conversation.

One of the facilitators of the intergenerational dialogues in the territory talked about the challenges and difficulties faced to ensure engagement and commitment of participants, considering the latent fear and distrust among the population because of the problems of violence that are still present in the territories. Then, meetings were usually celebrated along with cultural events that ranged from festivals to celebrations that were planned by the town hall or by other civic organisations and were open to the public instead of remaining closed spaces.

Through time, they observed and recognised the common ideas and initiatives shared to contribute to embracing a common and a better future for children and youth. These spaces provided security and care among participants. One of the representatives

of the LPQ suggested that 'conversation was crucial: it requires care in the context in which dialogue is performed, care in how questions are asked and care in the process of listening' (Lemoine 2018). Then, for the dialogues to be constructive, they need to set clear purposes. As Bohm states (1996), dialogue is a movement and a movement is energy. Therefore, the key is to channel this energy to the extent that smart answers are formulated for complex problems.

For some young people that participated in this initiative, how questions were formulated was the key that allowed dialogues to be dynamic. The starting point of some dialogues in territories was the question 'What would people thank the past generations for?' This question served its purpose, which was to create exchange, knowledge, and reflection among participants. Some of the conclusions of these dialogues were the importance of the legacy left by the past generations in learning and transforming realities and the need to empower the young and children as active agents in this process of peacebuilding.

These dialogues had a great impact: they allowed participants to construct collective thinking and made them aware of the importance of active listening, listening to the dreams of the people, the families, and the towns. This also led them to organise and along with parents and educators, they started a project of peace education and culture of peace within schools (testimony of one of the dialogues). The dialogues granted participants with conflict-resolution resources and conversation skills and strengthened their political capacities of participation.

Consequently, the schools of generative conversation emerged as a result of the understanding, consensus and coordinated action among the participants, specifically with the leadership of young people and teachers in each territory. Although the schools are a work in progress, they are present in seven territories and are integrated mostly by students, teachers, parents and human rights advocates. According to the needs identified in the dialogues, each school sets an agenda that is aligned with the principles of LPQ.

This empowerment from all the participants made LPQ think about how to catalyse undiscovered social capital into something visible, sustainable and accessible for every citizen interested in contributing to building local peace. It was a demand from the participants to turn words into action and commitment after going through a process of 'conscientisation' in which participants were invited to reflect on their history, their heritage and the capacities they developed even during armed conflict (Lederach 1995, 25).

Galtung suggests that empathy, creativity, and non-violence are essential values to peacebuilding and conflict transformation. He stated that in a structurally violent

context, communities are required to make use of their creative potential, so processes cannot be professionalised and fall into legal and technical rigidities (Graf and Krammer 2006) because it explores the knowledge rooted in the local practices and local understandings. In intergenerational dialogues, this was important from the beginning of the process because they ensure engagement through creativity, and creativity was the main catalyst that allowed the schools of generative conversations to arise.

The experience of schools of generative conversation integrates a generative dialogue approach that understands dialogue as an emerging process (Fried 2008) in which exchange among participants turns into a learning community so that knowledge is being built socially. This initiative drives self and collective organisation processes (Fried 2008) and also unveils social capital and allows a process of reflection that arises from the individual and collective experiences, and from specific episodes that have marked the history of communities. Amid the complexities and contradictions that have emerged in a conflict, the confrontations, and disputes, this is a space that contributes to the circulation and interweaving of new possibilities and perspectives for participants that could help them to visualise a new future and build towards it (Fried and Schnitnam 2000).

What the middle and bottom-up dialogue initiatives have in common is the capacity to generate and strengthen the resilience built by the communities affected. Understanding resilience entails that society and ecology are complex adaptive systems that are interconnected and in constant variation.

As noted below, bottom-up initiatives could also fail in romanticised local communities and could lead to reproducing systems of power and dominance embedded in social networks. Moreover, as Lefranc (2011) argues, bottom-up practices of peacebuilding could dismiss political and social issues relevant to tackling structural causes of conflict, leaving individuals the responsibility of peacebuilding, and modifying their ways of interacting and thinking. In this sense, the experiences described in this paper from the middle and bottom-up initiatives would not pretend to idealise communities. For instance, the schools of generative conversation have faced drawbacks as well: some families have rejected the participation of their children in the schools to avoid any stigmatisation caused by the fear that is still alive in some territories.

Nevertheless, as MacGinty (2014, 552) states, everyday peacebuilding is fluid; it entails many expressions such as change, avoidance, cooptation, and resistance. Furthermore, everyday peacebuilding can be episodic, sometimes it can be strong and at others weak, and this is very important to understand resilience in a context in which violence is still latent and communities are trying to negotiate and build better life conditions amid adversity. These variations are the result of a non-linear process

into systems that involve several interactions that happen at the same time and cannot be controlled in an equal and homogeneous way.

Walker et al (2006) propose the following attributes as necessary for a society to be resilient:

- Diversity – a variety of social (ethnics), political parties, economic models, cultural inclusion.
- Connectivity or modularity – the degree of elements in a system is linked.
- Reserves – a system is necessary to acknowledge slow variables to control predictable variables or feedback associated with thresholds.
- Tight feedbacks – the ability to respond properly and on time to feedback.
- Governance – the redundancy in governance structures need to be addressed.
- Social capital – the building of trust and balance networks.
- Innovation – the capacity to encourage change and novelty into a system.
- Fairness and equity – foster equality in the system.

These attributes are relevant to understanding the potential vulnerabilities that the system can endure and how intervention must be addressed to transform and recover from shocks.

Relationships and everyday practices increase resilience in the local context. Despite violent conflicts, individuals are capable of transforming their daily lives and building a pacific coexistence.

This scenario saw the emergence of the term 'transformability/ as 'the capacity to create a fundamentally new system when ecological, economic, or social (including political) conditions make the existing system untenable. Transformability means defining and creating new stability landscapes by introducing new components and ways of making a living, thereby changing the state of variables, and often the scale, that defines the system' (Walker, Holling, Carpenter, and Kinzig 2004).

Furthermore, these two initiatives reflect the extent to which dialogue can lead to an awakened or strengthened agency. According to Giddens (1984), agency is the capacity of individuals to make choices within a specific context. For him, this

capability involves the power of resisting or embracing the structures (1984, 9-17). The victims of the second encounter effectively manifested that this encounter was part of the path of resistance that they had been paving. Likewise, in the last initiative, the dialogue was also the main resource that awoke agency in youth, teachers, and parents to generate a social mobilisation towards peace when faced with adversity and fear.

Conclusion

This paper examined three dialogue-based initiatives through the top-down, middle and bottom-up approach. These experiences show the extent to which dialogue can contribute to creating change in conflict-affected societies. Change is not linear: it is wrapped in a complex web of relationships in which interest, prejudices, thoughts, and assumptions coexist. However, dialogue plays a crucial role in bridging people, communities, and societies. As Freire argues, dialogue is a process of learning and understanding. Hence, it is based on a horizontal relationship in which power is neutralised. When dialogue achieves this, people feel that they are being heard and they can raise their voice, so something new is built and a common understanding is shared. In post-conflict societies like Colombia, it is through dialogue, that the perception of distrust as social value needs to be deconstructed.

Dialogues cannot be instrumentalised and be forced by the Institution or by specific interest conversely, promoting dialogues in which shared needs are expressed, trust among the population should emerge organically. Furthermore, this could lead to empowerment, consensus and coordinated action towards a new meaning of peace within the different approaches.

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