



The role of universities in peacebuilding processes in contexts of armed conflict: The experience of the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano in Colombia

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Abstract

In a country that has faced for decades armed conflict, the role that most of the private and public universities have play in peacebuilding is still reticent, because in most of the cases for these actors, and in general for the Colombian society and state, it is not clear which should be their role in this kind of context.

However, some universities have assumed a more active and visible role in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, through activities oriented to reconstruct the social foundations of communities. Besides, the preoccupation for the country's political and social situation, which at the same time is determined by the dynamics of conflict, have made some universities to create and lead efforts and actions for building peace that goes beyond the academic level. Through these actions, the university also becomes a decisive actor on the mentioned processes.

Building peace for structuring the post-conflict in a reconciliation environment requires the action of different state and non- state, national, local and international actors ready to participate no just on the search for solutions to the armed conflict, but

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also on the design and implementation of a peace inclusive agenda with specific strategies for giving sustainability to the process and also avoid a future violent relapse.

Part of the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes effectiveness in countries that are facing armed conflict situations, depends from the role that local actors can take on them. In this way, from the universities have emerged questions about the role that private sector, local businessman and civil actors should lead in peacebuilding.

Nonetheless, it has not been included yet on the academic agenda the enquiry about the role and the impact of the activities promoted by universities as part of their contribution to obtain peace in societies that faced or are facing armed conflict situations. More precisely, the question about the role that universities, as social transformation agents, have acquired in peacebuilding, through diverse activities such as peace and human rights education or training to ex- combatants, displaced people and other kind of victims and actors of the conflict, has not been clearly and directly included on researches about this subject.

Post-conflict peace implementation far from being a simple action is a complex task that requires involvement of different committed social sectors willing to defend and look forward structures that made possible the institutionalization of peace and reconciliation. From some conceptual approaches to peacebuilding it is stated that in the different stages that make up the process interact different actors such as the academy and the intellectual sector.

The paper will present the experience and the role assumed by the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano (UJTL), particularly by the International Relations Programme, in the peacebuilding and reconciliation processes in Colombia.

On the first 2006 academic period, the International Relations Programme established an academic alliance with the Institute for Studies in Peace and Development (Instituto de Estudios para la Paz y el Desarrollo - INDEPAZ). The alliance allowed the Programme and INDEPAZ the execution of academic activities, two of them seminars about the results and evaluation of the demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) of the paramilitary United Self Defence Forces

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of Colombia (Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia- AUC), and about the role of local businessmen in peacebuilding.

Under this alliance it was also possible the realization of the Short- course “Democracy and peace in the Colombian context” (Diplomado “Democracia y Paz en la actualidad colombiana”), with the participation of around 50 persons with different social and cultural backgrounds as community leaders, indigenous representatives, public servants, students and professors.

All those experiences and the political reality of the country make the Programme to conform the Peace and Security Studies Group, oriented to analyse peacebuilding and DDR processes, civil peace initiatives, and peace movements, among other academic subjects, throughout the study of international experiences.

Despite the role of the UJTL is still incipient in peacebuilding, the university has contributed to the configuration of a space for the sharing of ideas, for dialogue of different actors in the conflict, for the debate among diverse social sectors and government about the solutions to it. The UJTL is in a stage in which is trying to create the conditions for a more active role in Colombian social and political reality, however it keep promoting activities and initiatives for supporting the participation and involvement of different social actors, conceived as agents of transformation, in peacebuilding.

On the other hand, the International Relations Programme, under the peacebuilding research theme is progressing on the research project named “The role of universities in peacebuilding processes in context of armed conflict” which is oriented to establish strategies to the Colombian universities as part as their commitment with peacebuilding in the country.

The structure of the paper is organized in four parts:

1. A brief introduction to the Colombian armed conflict and political context.
2. A characterization of the peace initiatives led by Colombian universities.
3. The experience of the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano and

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its International Relations Programme, as peacebuilding agent.

4. Final considerations and main lessons and findings of the role of universities as peacebuilders in context of armed conflict.

Introduction

In a country that has faced for decades armed conflict, the role that most of the private and public universities have play in peacebuilding is still reticent, because in most of the cases for these actors, and in general for the Colombian society and government, it is not clear which should be their role in this kind of context.

However, some universities have assumed a more active and visible role in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes, through activities oriented to reconstruct the social foundations of communities. Besides, the preoccupation for the country's political and social situation, which at the same time is determined by the dynamics of conflict, and the social commitment assumed through the *university social responsibility* (USR), have made some universities to create and lead efforts and actions for building peace that goes beyond the academic level. Through these actions, the university also becomes a decisive actor on the mentioned processes.

Should be increased the direct area of action of universities when they are situated in context of armed conflict? Should the university social responsibility principle impulse universities to play a more active and determinant role to overcome the conflict? Are there any other motivations, different for the USR principle that inspire or make universities to participate in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes? Is there any significant difference between the type of peacebuilding actions generated in private universities and the peacebuilding actions leaded by public ones? These are just some few questions that have motivated in the Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano (UJTL) the reflection about the role that IES (more specifically, universities) should play in peacebuilding, particularly in armed conflict situations.

Those matters and questions allow guiding the reflections that are presented in this document and also allow contributing to the debate about the new challenges and emerging roles of the IES in social and human development, specifically in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

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The dilemma that Colombian universities are facing related with the role that they should assume in society presents these two options: the existence of a high level of social commitment and the voluntary isolation exclusively centred in academic tasks. In this way, the role that society has given to the university oscillates between the interaction with communities through academic activities, or a high social commitment to contribute with solutions to the problems of society through direct political action (PAPACCHINI, 2002: 17).

Ignoring the university's commitment with its social sphere limits and eliminates the knowledge and scientific research claiming character and also denies "that what happens outside directly affects the university" (PAPACCHINI, 2002: 20). Otherwise, conferring university an active role in society implies that "to this institution corresponds certain dose of responsibility, for action and omission; in the most brutal ways of violence and armed conflict degradation (...) responsibility does not mean a dispassionate exam from the role played by the university in armed conflict and violence. On the contrary, it has to project the tasks and activities that university can successfully assume to the implementation of a civilized solution to the conflict and to the multiple manifestations of violence" (PAPACCHINI, 2002: 20).

Therefore, the paper's main objective is to present the recent and incipient role that the UJTL¹ has assumed, particularly by its International Relations Programme, as a peacebuilder in the country. In this sense, the paper is organized in four parts that allow contextualising the main subject of the thematic line in a specific case or experience. The first part is a brief introduction and characterization of the Colombian armed conflict, as an important exercise to understand the context in which universities peacebuilding indicatives emerge. The second section shows the experience of the UJTL as a peacebuilder agent. The third part presents a concise characterization of the peace initiatives led by some Colombian universities. Finally, there are introduced

¹ The Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano- UJTL, is a private and lay institution, founded in 1954 with the main objective of continuing with the scientific and cultural mission that the Botanical Expedition had begun in the New World. Specifically the International Relations Programme, pioneer in the discipline in the country, has its origins in 1958.

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some final considerations about the role that universities, and more broadly Higher Education Institutions, should play in peacebuilding and reconciliation processes.

A brief approach to the Colombian armed conflict

The Colombian armed conflict² has perpetuated itself until being catalogued as one of the oldest in the contemporary world. Summarizing the dynamics of the Colombian conflict in few lines is to ignore its complexity, though, this brief contextualization exercise let to locate and to comprehend the peace initiatives that take place in Colombian Higher Education Institutions.

The dynamics of Colombian conflict, for some authors, have registered it as a “civil war”, specially because its territorial components and levels of victimization. This conflict has been perpetuated because four major elements: high rates of violence; the competition for the state sovereignty in regions in which law and order are imposed by one of the confronted armed actors; competition and fight by territorial control and access to strategic regions for drug traffic, which introduce us to the last factor: the drug traffic that finances the illegal activities of armed confronted actors (GARCIA; 2001:12). Additional factors such rising political polarization and changing nature of armed actors, also typify this conflict.

But, who are these illegal armed actors that confront for territorial control? Who are those that disproportionately have victimized civil society? For this particular case it is possible to identify the insurgent guerrillas of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- Popular Army (FARC- EP), the oldest living guerrilla in the world and the National Liberation Army (ELN); and to the paramilitary counterinsurgency groups congregated in the United Self Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC).

² The roots or antecedents of Colombian armed conflict should be situated in the period of “The Violence”, between the end of the 40’s and beginning of the 50’s, when the country is facing the two traditional political parties (Liberal and Conservador) confrontation for political power that caused the conformation of armed groups for their political goals. This period of violence result in the political victory of the Conservator party in the presidential elections, which implies the extension of its dominium and control in the national territory. By 1953, the Gustavo Rojas Pinilla government has had a relative success in the “pacification” of the country, however, it started to adopt dictatorial positions that caused a military coup and the retirement for refugee by the new party armed groups, that later became into liberal and communist guerrillas that gave birth to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia- Popular Army (FARC- EP).

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It is important to highlight that in the last 20 years, during different national governments, there were some approaches efforts with the insurgent groups, with the main objective of searching a negotiating ending to the armed conflict. Some of these efforts were “successful” in the sense that they produced a complete or high demobilisation and reintegration of ex- combatants. Recent efforts have not produced any considerable result in terms of a common agenda between government and insurgent groups for a pacific and negotiated termination of conflict.

Nevertheless, more recently, in 2005 the country witnessed a massive disarm, demobilisation, and reintegration process (DDR) of the AUC, event that generated the necessity of implementing a juridical instrument for the adequate reintegration of ex-combatants and for giving sustainability to the process. Under these circumstances the national government implemented the Peace and Justice Law³ to be applied to illegal armed groups that want to reincorporate into civil life.

In addition, the government created some other juridical mechanisms that legally support the DDR process with the AUC. Even so, in general terms, questions and doubts about the implementation of such mechanisms and about the DDR process cause serious difficulties connected with the sources of financing of paramilitary groups, the persistence in contacts with active members of the AUC, facts that affect the complete disassemble of the paramilitary structures and the victims’ compensations. The creation of new paramilitary structures has been a constant reality during the DDR process that at the same time has generated fear among the civil population, specially the paramilitaries’ victims, who do not perceive the minimum guarantees to not repetition, as a reparation right’s fundamental condition.

The complex context of the Colombian armed conflict obeys to the existence of guerrilla and paramilitary groups that keep intimidating civil sectors of society as part as their strategy of social control in regions that have become their armed confrontation bastions. This has produced, in the last ten years, an intensification of the governmental military actions mostly against the FARC, which also represent a critical issue to create possible conditions for the negotiation and implementation of a positive and structural peace.

³ The AEACE and Justice Law created alternative punishments to serious crimes such human rights violations, and also it recognises the victims’ rights to truth, justice and compensation.



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Dynamics of Colombian armed conflict are the main cause that has generated among population a massive rejection to violence that, at the same time, has impulse peace initiatives in the middle of violent confrontation. Some of these initiatives come from private and public Colombian universities that in some cases have become objects of violent threat.

The Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano: A peacebuilder agent

Implementation of peace and conditions for postconflict, far from being a simple activity is a complex mission that requires the action of diverse committed social sectors ready to support the conformation of structures that made possible the institutionalization of peace. Different peacebuilding conceptual approaches recognize that in the different stages of the process interact diverse actors, such the *academy* and the *intellectual sector* (LEDERACH; 1997:3).

In the Colombian case, the HEI's role in peacebuilding has not been defined yet, not by the government, or by the society and the same institutions. Should universities limit their activities to teach and research? Should they become referents to train and capacitate social and political leaders, decision makers, vulnerable social sectors, and ex-combatants? Should they lead culture and education peace campaigns? Should they just focus on forming responsible professionals, committed with social reality? Should they consolidate as knowledge centres from is it possible to imagine a sustainable postconflict? Specifically the UJTL and its International Relations Programme consider all those action scenarios as fundamental to contribute somehow from the universities to peacebuilding. Nonetheless, it is essential a pronouncement to the government in which universities formulate all those questions and jointly can define the type of initiatives and actions oriented to contribute to the establishment of a positive, integral and structural peace from the academy.

A socially commitment university should put knowledge and research to the disposition of development, coexistence, peacebuilding and reconciliation, and also its *ethos* should impulse it to become an active actor in such processes.



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Building peace for structuring the post- conflict in a reconciliation environment requires the action of different state and non- state, national, local and international actors ready to participate no just on the search for solutions to the armed conflict, but also on the design and implementation of a peace inclusive agenda with specific strategies for giving sustainability to the process and also to avoid a future violent relapse.

Despite the question about the role universities should assume in peacebuilding processes in societies that have faced or are facing an internal armed conflict situation has not been included in the national academic agenda, it is important to emphasize that some universities have decided to play an active role in these processes, in some cases because they have directly been affected by conflict or because in their constituent principles prevail a mayor commitment with the search of solutions to the conflict, or because they have consolidated important academic centres with the capacity to influence decision- making processes and public policy formulation to handle the conflict and to create conditions for postconflict.

On the other hand, the International Relations Programme ⁴ is sure that the international component and perspective allow the analysis of relevant initiatives, actions and motivations that in different and diverse parts of the world have been produced in HEI as part of their social commitment with peace, justice, reconciliation, development and equity, among other values. Specifically, the analysis of the role and type of initiatives that have emerged in universities located in an armed conflict situation is also a way to identify lessons that may be adopted and adapted for the Colombian case.

Among the civil peacebuilding initiatives, the activities of the universities, as socially responsible actors, should be concentrated on the analysis, reflection and debate about the possible postconflict scenarios. But the role of universities in societies that have faced or are facing armed conflict should goes beyond the academic debate

⁴ The UJTL International Relations Programme was the first academic programme created in Colombia and in Latin America for the study and analysis of the determinant dynamics and phenomena that configure international scenario. Since the beginning the Programme consolidated itself as a leader Programme in the formation of the consular and diplomatic corps of the country. Recently, the Programme has been focus on the academic subjects of International Cooperation and Peace.



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and reflection, it should show a leading position in which universities assume their part as agents of change and social transformation, as defenders of human rights, as promoters of a peace culture and education, and also as formation centres to train decision- makers in charge of formulating public policies for structuring a positive peace. Some universities, directly affected by conflict or with a wider sense of social responsibility, have decided to adopt this last role.

It is important to keep reproducing and generating spaces for the academic debate and reflection under the “neutrality umbrella” that covers the spectrum of activities that traditionally the universities have leaded, but it is also fundamental to start questioning about how the university can insert itself in its immediate social context and leads concrete development proposals, or for this case, about how the university consolidates itself as an active agent of social transformation through the formulation of specific proposals to the country’s social reconstruction.

To understand that “university autonomy” is not the same as “university indifference” is to open the field to think that the social objective of universities is related to orient and enrich society through knowledge and ethical principles of conduct is more valid than ever. Such social objective is the one that made possible the reformulation of the contract society- University under the particular context of armed conflict.

For making effective the different activities that the UJTL has promoted, through The International Relations Programme, on the first academic period of 2006 it was established an academic alliance⁵ with the Studies Institute for Development and Peace- INDEPAZ⁶. The alliances among visible and relevant civil actors are pertinent

⁵ The alliance establishes the basis for cooperation between the UJTL and INDEPAZ for guaranteeing the development of academic activities, the jointly realization of forums, seminars and courses, the formulation of projects and the realization of academic internships for the students of the Programme in projects executed by INDEPAZ.

⁶ INDEPAZ is a non governmental organization whose main objective is to contribute to the reconciliation, the dialogue, the non- violence and the respect for human life in Colombia as vital parts of an integral peace. Its principal activities are: research; peace education promotion; accompaniment to rural and urban communities, and the development of programmes oriented to obtain peace.



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because they reflect the society's capabilities to configure cooperation networks that involve diverse social agents prepared to search concrete answers to consolidate peace.

The alliance with INDEPAZ has let the jointly execution of academic activities such the realization of two seminars in 2006: the first one, an evaluation to the DDR process of the AUC, and the second one about the role of private sector in peacebuilding initiatives. In spite of the academic nature of the alliance, INDEPAZ and the UJTL have designed training and accompaniment activities for decision- makers who are in charge of formulation public policies about these subjects. In fact in 2007, INDEPAZ and the International Relations Programme elaborate a research and training project in DDR for government delegates, civil servants of the Government and Defence Ministries, social leaders, NGO's employees, victims' organizations, mainly. This project has not been implemented yet because the difficulties to obtain financial support.

Furthermore, under this alliance it was possible the realization of the extension course (Diplomado) "*Democracy and Peace in the Colombian Reality*" in the university's installations, in which more than 50 people from different social backgrounds among social leaders, civil servants, professors and students from the UJTL and from other universities participated. This kind of initiatives which training's nature make possible that universities also can be defined and identified as centres that may plan and execute capacity building strategies to civil society, through the potential's increment of individuals and communities for an active participation in institutional issues such as the formulation of actions plans and direct incidence in public policies and socio-political matters connected with democratic inclusion and participation processes.

Based on these experiences and on the political reality of the country, The Programme decided to conform in 2007 the research group about peace subjects (Grupo de Investigación en los temas de paz), that from an academic perspective wants to discuss peacebuilding international experiences, DDR processes, civil initiatives and peace movements, among otherS connected topics, throughout the analysis of international experiences and its applicability to the Colombian case. This



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academic initiative also seeks to generate some level of incidence in the governmental decisions about the particular subject of peacebuilding.

Regardless of the incipient role in peacebuilding that the UJTL has played in the country, it has contributed to the constitution of a neutral but critical space to exchange ideas, to the dialogue among different parts involved in conflict, to the debate among different sectors of society and the government representatives about the possible solutions to the conflict. Taking this into account, it is possible to conceive Colombian universities as facilitator agents and public debate promoters about the possible and feasible paths to overcome conflict and construct postconflict. The UJTL is now becoming in a more active part and more socially responsible actor with the Colombian social and political scenarios, through the support of activities that encourage participation of diverse civil society's sectors, as direct social and political transformation agents, and governmental spheres in an inclusive peacebuilding process.

The International Relations Programme and more widely the UJTL is orienting its initiatives in peacebuilding to the capacity building development and participation of social actors and decision-makers in charge of designing and implementing public policies, through the analysis of international experiences in peace and reconciliation processes. All this is supported by the mediator and facilitator roles that universities should play in peacebuilding.

In addition, the International Relations Programme is now carrying out the research project named "The Role of Universities in Peacebuilding Processes" which main objective is to formulate concrete strategies and actions that Colombian universities should employ as part as their contribution to peace taking into account the analysis of international significant experiences immersed in an internal armed conflict situation.

It is important to highlight that the research will allow us to systematize some relevant international experiences from El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Filipinas, Sri Lanka and Northern Ireland, in which universities have played an active role in peace-building processes that can be pertinent to the Colombian case. The main

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reason why those international cases were chosen obeys to the fact that these countries are facing or have faced an internal armed conflict situation.

The comprehension, definition and analysis of the different peace- building actions and strategies that have been taken out by universities around the world in contexts of armed conflict is an important step to identify concrete solutions that give sustainability to the different processes focus on implement a durable and stable peace.

The research project is not oriented to formulate educational strategies, instead it is oriented, from a broad perspective, to analyse and explore different actions led by higher education institutions to contribute to build peace in societies that have faced armed conflict. The project is guided by the next main question: Which has been the role that universities have assumed in peace- building processes on societies that have faced armed conflict situations?

The project is now on the second stage that corresponds to the systematization of the diverse peace initiatives for the six selected countries. This stage will make possible the elaboration of a document that formulates the principal lessons for each international case, which may be adopted and adapted for the Colombian universities.

The analysis of peace initiatives led by the selected universities of the international cases and the identified lessons from each of them responds to the need of strengthening the debate about peacebuilding in the country, and at the same time responds to the need of consolidating spaces for researching about this particular subject.

The possibilities of achieving the implementation of structural peace depend on contributions and roles that different actors from different sectors of society play in the processes of obtaining peace and reconciliation. Peace, as reference from a desirable social order, is the result of a significant effort that involves armed actors, government sector and civil society. Universities as agents to form citizenship are also agents of change and social transformation, and because of that they should be a referent to make the transition towards the post- conflict. That is why the activities emerged in the UJTL, specifically in the International Relations Programme are oriented to contribute

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in the formulation of public policies that promote Higher Education Institutions' peacebuilding initiatives.

Colombian Higher Education Institutions in peacebuilding

It is important to mention that peacebuilding is the whole group of "actions that identify and give support to the structures that solidify peace to avoid a relapse to conflict" (BOUTROS; 1992: 5), therefore, the concept of peacebuilding "has three dimensions: preventive, palliative and reparative" (RETTBERG; 2003: 85). Peacebuilding as a process is composed by three important phases oriented to a complete transformation of the confrontation causes: conflict prevention, conflict management and postconflict.

The type of actions focus on building peace may be group, for the case of universities, in actions of: accompaniment and consultancy; training; institutional fortifying; conflict resolution; research; social mobilization; register, analysis and diffusion of relevant information; and curricular. It is important to mention that these groups can also being identified and classified by their purposes and object population in:

Preventive actions: oriented to prevent conflict and violent situations through information diffusion in seminars, forums and lectures, as spaces for discussion and reflection about culture of peace, human rights, and possible conditions for postconflict. In this group it is also possible to find curricular activities for having a better understanding about the political and juridical reference frame of peace accords, the dilemmas of DDR processes, the political context of armed conflicts, and significant international experiences in peacebuilding, among other relevant matters. For this particular group of preventive actions research centres are pertinent initiatives to think and analyse from an academic perspective the structural roots and causes of conflicts and the possible ways to overcome them. In this group the activities of the Research Centre in Peacebuilding- CONPAZ of the Universidad de Los Andes⁷ Political Science

⁷ The Universidad de Los Andes, founded in 1948 in Bogotá, was the first private HEI in the country. Its lay nature and independent character are parts of its foundational principles. In particular, the Political Science Department, created in 1968, was pioneer in the country and

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Department, the University Network for Peace- REDUNIPAZ⁸, and the incipient experience of the UJTL International Relations Programme, are important as spaces for reflection, debate and analysis about these subjects.

Palliative actions: are oriented to handle or manage conflict by the search of possible paths of getting structural peace. In this group of actions can be classified the universities' efforts directed to bring the parts in conflict together through mediation or when the university declares itself as a "peace agent" or "neutral space" in the conflict. It is possible to classify in this group of actions the creation of the Universidad Popular del Cesar, as a result of a popular consultation for peace.

Restorative actions: initiatives created with the main objective of contributing to heal the affronts, wounds and consequences of conflict, and in wider terms, to reconstruct social ties based on solidarity, cooperation and reconciliation among the different confronted parts and among victims and victimizers. Some of the actions and projects identified are oriented to make possible an adequate ex- combatants' reinsertion to civil life. For this group the case of the Universidad de Ibagué- CORUNIVERSITARIA⁹ through its Social Development Programme is a remarkable effort to commit academy into training activities to displaced families and social leaders about peaceful conflict resolution, into virtual education programmes for isolated regions situated in the middle of conflict, and into training activities to teachers that work directly with displaced children and their families.

has become an important academic reference through its Programmes in Peacebuilding (CONPAZ) and Security and Defence.

⁸ The University Network for Peace- REDUNIPAZ, was born in 1997 by the initiative of a group of some public universities such as Universidad del Valle, Universidad Nacional, Universidad de Caldas, Universidad de Cauca, Universidad de Antioquia and the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, a private Jesuit institution, with the principal objective of configuring an space for the academic community to reflect, research and debate about peacebuilding in the country. The REDUNIPAZ also promotes different actions from social organizations, supports peace communities' activities; and participates in social practices with vulnerable communities.

⁹ The Universidad de Ibagué- Coruniversitaria is a regional private university, founded in 1980 by a group of local businessmen from the Tolima Department. In particular, the university has led actions to eliminate development problems in the region through mediation and conflict resolution activities, through projects for displacement families, through literacy activities and training actions for vulnerable populations.



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It is worth to emphasize that the different groups of initiatives focus on building peace are not exclusive, in other words, some of the initiatives can be preventive and restorative at the same time, or some others can be palliative and preventive. The exercise of classifying the different initiatives is useful because it lets identify some “tendencies” concerning the interpretation and application of the USR in peacebuilding.

Final considerations

University Socially Responsibility as a moral and ethical principle that guides the actions of universities, in the specific case of armed conflict, cannot limit university actions to the exclusive tasks of teaching, researching and extension/ projection. It should have a wider and inclusive nature that reflects the high university’s commitment with its social reality and with the complex job of building peace and reconciliation.

In some cases, universities have been forced to enlarge their actions’ scope to their social sphere because they have directly suffer the consequences of conflict or because their social commitment has obliged them to become direct actors who propose mechanisms to overcome conflict and violent confrontation. For the UJTL, its motivation to be more involve in peacebuilding is the result of the constant question about the role of universities should play when political and social reality are marked by armed conflict.

The UJTL participation in peacebuilding is part of the vital need to contribute to define the type of actions oriented to peace that may be promoted and supported by HEI when these are considered as actors that can play a decisive role in building integral peace and generating reconciliation in society.

The socio- political context in which universities are immersed is the main element that determines the commitment and range of their social responsibility, “there are different ways to interpret and to assume the concept based on the reality and immediate context that surrounds them; this lets to have a deeper understanding of the concept that replaces particular interpretations of it” (FERNANDEZ; 2006:52). The armed conflict context in which Colombian universities are immersed implies that they should participate more actively from their own capabilities and dispositions on the search for peace.



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The question about the role that universities should play in peacebuilding processes, is part of the reflection and analysis about the university “ethos” that may guide and define the function that universities should do in a social environment marked by armed conflict, even more when the university social responsibility is enrolled on the “academic institution’s reflection about itself in its social sphere and about its responsibility in the solution to the chronic problems in society”.

Therefore, based on the social, institutional and educational framework that orients the university social responsibility principle, Colombian universities should committed themselves, in general terms, with the development of the country, an in specific terms with the development of their immediate social sphere. A socially responsible university in armed conflict situations is conscious of its transformation capacities and when it socially projects its “traditional” activities for the peacebuilding. Social responsibility implies the respect for the legal framework (...) but also implies actions that go beyond the law.



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