



Graduate School of Development Studies

**“RE-INVENTING EL SALADO”**

**COMMUNITY, PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE STATE IN POST-CONFLICT  
RECONSTRUCTION IN COLOMBIA**

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*Juliana Villarreal Ramírez*  
(Colombia)

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Members of the examining committee:

Dr. Dubravka Zarkov (Supervisor)

Dr. Gerd Junne (Reader)

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***Inquiries:***

Postal address:           Institute of Social Studies  
                                  P.O. Box 29776  
                                  2502 LT The Hague  
                                  The Netherlands

Location:                 Kortenaerkade 12  
                                  2518 AX The Hague  
                                  The Netherlands

Telephone:               +31 70 426 0460

Fax:                       +31 70 426 0799

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## **List of Acronyms**

AUC – United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia

CDS - Community Development Strategies

CNRR – Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation

FARC – Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia

IDP – Internal Displaced Population

PPP -Public-Private Partnerships

PS – Private Sector

SF – Semana Foundation

## **Abstract**

This research is focused on the process of post-conflict reconstruction of a local community, 11 years after a massacre that transformed it in an empty territory, physically and socially destroyed. I concentrate on the reconstruction process of a small town in Colombia called El Salado, which was promoted by a foundation and mainly supported by the Private Sector (PS). In particular, this study intends to examine the reconstruction process of this town and consider how the role of the Community, the Foundation, the Private Sector and the State, as well as the relationships of power among them, have shaped the outcomes of the process in the territory so far. The study finds an indissoluble relation between the “space” as socially produced by relationships of power between the actors present in a reconstruction process, and the physical, economical, social and symbolic reconstruction aspects in the town.

Accordingly, this research engages in the relevance of the role of the different actors in the production of meanings around the “new constructed space” in El Salado, which far from being essentially physical and material, are connected with social transformations and consequently, with the other aspects of the town’s reconstruction. The findings show that the role of different actors in the reconstruction of a post-conflict society goes beyond the economic restructuring; moreover, these roles are embedded in their social power relations, which influence all the dynamics, present in the reconstruction initiatives. Additionally, results suggest that El Salado as a “space” holds specific meanings to each actor involved in the reconstruction of the town, determined by their positions and perceptions of the town, their relations to the past violence as well as the relationships of power among them.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Post-conflict reconstruction – and especially its economic/ private business aspect – is a major field of intervention in development thinking, policy and practice. This research contributes to all three aspects of development by examining a specific post-conflict reconstruction initiative beyond economic recovery. The case study of El Salado shows a different path to reconstruct a post-conflict society, lead by non-government actors and mainly supported by Private Sector companies, but without replacing the role of the state in the territory. Besides, it uses what many authors refer to as “peace building from below”, a concept according to which the role of the local community is established as a priority to the development of the reconstruction projects.

Furthermore, this research brings an innovative perspective to the debates about reconstruction by connecting the understanding of “space” as socially constructed by social power relations between actors, with the reconstruction process of a post-conflict society. It presents how actors build different

understandings of a “newly reconstructed space” influenced not only by their own perceptions, social beliefs and experiences but also by the power relationships among them. On the other hand, it also shows how the construction of the “space” also influences the social power relationships between the actors, giving shape to the final outcomes of the reconstruction process of a specific society.

## **Keywords**

Post-conflict Reconstruction – Private Sector – Space – Local Ownership – Colombia – El Salado

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# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research focus

This research is focused on the process of post-conflict reconstruction of a small local community, eleven years after a massacre that transformed it into an empty space, physically and socially. I concentrate on the reconstruction process of a small town in Colombia called El Salado, which was promoted by a foundation and mainly supported by the Private Sector (PS). In particular, this study intends to examine the project of the reconstruction process in El Salado and consider how the roles of the Community, the Private Sector, and the State, as well as the relationships of power among them have shaped the outcomes of the process in the territory so far<sup>1</sup>.

The study finds the economic, social and symbolic reconstruction processes in the town inherently related to the “space”, as socially produced by relationships of power between the actors present in a reconstruction process. Accordingly, this research engages in discussing the relevance of the role of the different actors in the production of meanings around the new constructed “space” in El Salado, which far from been essentially physical and material, are connected with social and symbolic transformations and consequently, with the other aspects of the reconstruction in the town.

This paper starts with a contextual background and methodology of the research. Thereafter, the next three chapters use three specific infrastructure initiatives, taking place in the reconstruction of El Salado, to explain the role and social power relationships in the development of each initiative, as well as the configuration of meanings around the “new space” being constructed through the relations between the actors. This paper uses academic literature on the importance of local ownership in post conflict reconstruction, debates around the role of private sector and the state in reconstruction processes, and

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<sup>1</sup> The PS is divided into three categories in this research: i) the media, as the creator and the leader of the development of the reconstruction process; ii) national and multinational enterprises (of different sizes) that later became involved in the reconstruction process; lastly, iii) the small local entrepreneurs (community members) that existed before or have been created during the reconstruction process.

The state refers to Colombian state, using Chesterman et al. (2005: 2) definition as a group of institutions with power, which create and implement top-down policies in a territory. Lastly the community is defined as the current inhabitants of El Salado being part of the reconstruction process.

Despite these definitions I recognize these are not homogeneous groups, yet in some parts of this RP the interviews proof that a particular sentiment was a ‘consensus’ sentiment/view.

theories around the poststructuralist view of space as socially constructed to deepen its analysis and conclusions.

## **1.2 Motivation of this research**

The motivation for this research stems from my work experience and engagement with the conflict field in Colombia. Having worked with demobilized persons from illegal armed groups (paramilitaries and guerrillas) on reintegration initiatives helped me understand some dynamics of the conflict. During this work I felt that only the perspectives of the members of those illegal armed groups was present, while the perceptions of the victims and other actors was missing.

The main aim of this research is to analyze the reconstruction process in a post-conflict area in Colombia, specifically examining the role and influence of the PS and the relations of power between the actors giving shape to the process. For the first time, non-state actors are the ones promoting public-private alliances in order to reconstruct a post-conflict town. It is hoped that by discussing different and innovative ways of work in this field, that this research may contribute to a broader understanding of the actors involved in reconstruction processes and challenge perceptions in Colombia where the government is seen as the main actor capable of and responsible for promoting reconstruction and peace processes.

This study will not present a model to follow or a “correct” path. Instead, it aims to present a specific initiative, giving voice to specific actors present in a reconstruction process. It is hoped that this will contribute to the current dialogue on post-conflict reconstruction initiatives in Colombia, and elsewhere.

## **1.3 Contextual background**

### ***1.3.2 Conflict in El Salado***

El Salado is a small town located in the municipality of Carmen de Bolívar that lays in the region of Montes de María, the central region of Bolívar, a department of Northern Colombia.

**Map 1.1**  
**Map of Colombia**



Source: <http://www.elcarmen-bolivar.gov.co/>

**Map 1.2**  
**Map of Location of El Salado**



Source: Accion Social 2011

Beginning in 1970s, El Salado prospered in the production of tobacco and cattle ranching. Before 2000, El Salado was recognized as the “Tobacco Capital” of the Caribbean region. (CNRR 2009:9) This prosperity meant that the town had a water supply, electricity, a small health center and an elementary and high school facility all economically supported by the inhabitants of the town (Cordero 2010:17).

Long before this economic prosperity was taking place in El Salado, Colombia was already facing a huge wave of violence that has been taking place for more than 60 years and is still ongoing today.<sup>2</sup> The region where El Salado is situated started being highly affected by violence in the 1990s after it was recognized as a strategic corridor to access the port system in the northern part of the country (Cordero 2010:17).

Between 1999 and 2001, the concentration of massacres perpetrated by the paramilitary groups (specifically United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia, AUC) escalated in the Northern part of Colombia. In Montes de Maria, 42

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<sup>2</sup> Annex A explains more details of Colombian conflict.

massacres were perpetrated, resulting in more than 350 casualties. These acts were symbolized as victories for the consolidation of the paramilitary groups in the region. Violent acts such as massacres were based on the use and propagation of terror as a mean to control the territory (CNRR 2009:9).

In February 2000, one of the bloodiest massacres was committed in El Salado by the paramilitary group of that zone, “El Bloque Norte” (The Northern Block; Fundación Semana 2011c: 9). From the 16th to the 21st of February, 450 paramilitaries executed and tortured more than 60 civilians: 28 of them in a small-football field in the center of the town, and 33 in the countryside, near the town. The paramilitaries argued that the habitants of El Salado were helping the left wing guerrillas, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). They turned these deaths into a celebration of power, and for several days the inhabitants of the town were forced to see how their families were killed and tortured. To choose the victims the AUC first used a list of suspected names that were labeled as ‘supporters’ of the FARC guerrillas; when they could not allocate any of those people, they started using the method of ‘gambling’. The AUC tortured most of the victims before killing them, using practices that included dismembering and stabbing the victims, slow and painful deaths, raping and impalements -all of which were in front of the town’s inhabitants (CNRR 2009:28-60).

Several important issues characterized the massacre: the spectacle of death as an instrument of power, the physical torture as an instrument of fear and punishment, and the stigmatization of the town as supporters of the FARC. Additionally, lack of protection from the government was represented in the fact that the Marine Infants in charge of this region arrived the day the paramilitaries decided to leave town, after more than three days of ongoing massacre (CNRR 2009:28-60).

The massacre not only left casualties, but also destroyed the town. The symbolic places where the massacre happened and the physiological damages the perpetrators inflicted on this community affected the future reconstruction of the town. After the massacre in 2000, all the main tobacco companies decided to close their industries and leave the zone. The survivors (around 7000 inhabitants of the town in that year) left their hometown in an enormous mass migration to bigger cities around the region. This was the beginning life as displaced persons for the remaining population of El Salado (CNRR 2009:28-60).

In 2002, approximately 300 families decided to return to the town after being unable to start a new life in other places. They went back with no support from the government for the reconstruction or reconciliation process, which contributed, to the feeling of abandonment for the community, both during the massacre and after (CNRR 2009:28-60).

Public institutions started appearing in the town in 2003. First the military armed forces arrived as part of the “The Democratic Security Policy” - a military strategy focused on recovering security as the major solution for the



development and prosperity of Colombia. After 2005, the National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR)<sup>3</sup> arrived to El Salado and initiated a project to recover the memory of the victims, culminating in a book that was published at the same time the reconstruction process of the town started. In the same year “Acción Social”, the official entity responsible for contributing to poverty-reduction and assisting in the process of reconciliation of victims of violence arrived (Acción Social 2011).

Despite these projects, the CNRR suggests that after more than 10 years, their work has still not resulted in any major practical achievements and has created many expectations in the community, which have not been met (CNRR 2009:28-60). The results show that as many other towns in Bolívar Department, the level of poverty is still very high; poverty measured in terms of income generation shows that 94% of the population is poor and 63% of them live in extreme poverty (Fundación Semana 2011a: 29). Only after the Semana Foundation arrived in El Salado did the inhabitants begin to see the possibility for reconstruction. This idea is further developed in the following chapters.

### *1.3.3 The reconstruction of El Salado*

In April 2009, Semana Foundation (SF) was created by the directors of Semana Publications, one of the largest media groups of Colombia. It was created as a nonprofit organization with the main objective of working for social inclusion of vulnerable population (Fundación Semana 2011b: 9).

The first decision of the Foundation was to focus on post-conflict projects. Specifically they wanted to work with victims of conflict. The director of SF, Claudia Garcia, did an investigation into several initiatives that the CNRR team was developing in different regions of the country. El Salado was chosen because, like many others, it was a place where reconstruction was needed but additionally, it was the place where the pilot of the CNRR's recompilation of historical memory about the violence in the territory was almost complete.

“All these towns I visited had similar characteristics in terms of massacres, displacement, and extreme poverty...it was hard to choose one among the others, but El Salado had an additional factor: The CNRR had almost finished the reconstruction of the historical memory about the violence in the territory, something crucial for the beginning of a reconstruction process...” (Interviewee # 2 Director of SF).

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<sup>3</sup> The CNRR was created to contribute to the access to truth, justice and integral reparation to all the victims of Colombian Conflict, a declaration of the “Justice and Peace Law”, which was promulgated after the demobilization of the AUC on which part of the declared was the right for victims for truth (CNRR 2009).

In August 2009 SF choose El Salado as the place where the reconstruction project was going to take place. Its main goal was “to promote a public-private model which demonstrates that with good will and a common goal it is possible to transform a place from a symbol of violence into a symbol of reconciliation” (Fundación Semana 2011b: 9). In September of 2009, the project, called “Alliance for the Reconstruction of El Salado”, was formalized. This initiative has been going on for more than one year with the support and commitment of more than 60 allies<sup>4</sup>, mainly of the private sector (PS), who are working together to reconstruct the town (Fundación Semana 2011b: 41-182).

#### ***1.3.4 The role of Semana Foundation***

As mentioned at the beginning of this research, SF was the promoter and has been the leader of the reconstruction initiative in El Salado.

Since SF started working in El Salado, a clear message has been transmitted to the community: they don't finance projects, they don't operate them, they articulate the allies and make sure that the community's voice is heard on those initiatives and they support the projects with their technical team in the region. SF team is normally the bridge between the allies, mostly PS companies, and the community and is the central hub for the information of the initiatives.

All the allies interviewed mentioned the importance of the role of Semana's team in El Salado. The main factors mentioned were SF's trusted team; their clarity about the project; their equal treatment of all the allies; and their physiological and communitarian strategy supporting each project.

“The work with the regional team of SF specifically in topics of the community and social issues has been crucial for us.”(Interviewee # 1 Member of a PS Company)

“The business sector trusts them. We are in because they are leading”. (Interviewee # 7 Member of a PS Company)

The community also recognizes the unique role of SF. In this case, the role is also related to trust built on results - so SF is seen as different from other organization and institutions from the past. In most of the interviews, it was acknowledged that SF will leave the town and the community will be responsible for the sustainability of the projects, which shows understanding of the temporality of the presence of SF and a sense of reliability of the inhabitants of the town around the process.

“When SF arrived we thought they were like the others...that they will come, ask questions, take pictures, promise a lot and go...but they are different...look, here they are” (Interviewees # 12-18 Community Members).

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<sup>4</sup> This research will not present the specific names of the supporters because it was a request made by some of the interviewees.

“When SF is gone we need to be able to manage this town and they are teaching us how to do it” (Interviewees # 12-18 Community Members).

After the project started and with the creation of the regional team, the duties were divided between the regional and the national teams. The national team is in charge of the allies, the resources and all the administrative duties of the foundation, while the regional team is responsible for the articulation and monitoring of the initiatives. Additionally, the working team is recognized as part of the town and SF is regarded as an open place to go.

### 1.3.5 *The beginning of the project, the media campaign & the involvement of new allies*

In September 2009, after choosing the location and the goal of the project, SF decided to launch a major media campaign supported by other Colombian media sources (Radio and TV networks) and Semana magazine. The goal of this campaign was to sensitize Colombian society to the isolation of El Salado after the conflict and to link different public, private and civil actors with this initiative (Fundación Semana 2011b: 22). One of the initiatives for example, was the coming together of an important Colombian designer to design bracelets, for free, and to produce them with investments from the private sector to manufacture them all over the country. They were given away for free to the public as part of the campaign.

To have a better understanding of the campaign, the words of the radio publicity and the picture of the bracelet are presented below:

**Figure 1.1**  
**Media Campaign**



“IMAGINE its  
you. IMAGINE you  
were born in a small  
village in El Carmen de  
Bolívar. IMAGINE that  
its name is  
El Salado. IMAGINE  
you have family and  
friends in that  
place. IMAGINE that  
one afternoon  
everything you know  
and take for granted  
starts to

change. IMAGINE that 300 armed men spill blood on everything you  
know. IMAGINE they make you witness it. IMAGINE that hours go by and  
nobody gets there to help you. IMAGINE that miraculously, you  
survive. IMAGINE 10 years have passed. IMAGINE that, today, you are still  
waiting for someone to help you. IMAGINE you can change their  
history. IMAGINE you can change their future” (translated text of radio  
campaign in W Radio) (Fundación Semana 2011b: 22).

While the media campaign was running, SF started the process of planning and formulating the reconstruction project in El Salado. After a couple of trips to El Salado and having identified some of the leaders of the town, a planning session was established in Bogotá with some of the community leaders and some of the private and public sector allies. The basic needs -according to the community- were established and prioritized in a document called the Strategic Plan for the Reconstruction Process of El Salado (Fundación Semana 2011b: 41-182). Afterwards, SF began looking for crucial allies to carry out the projects outlined in the plan.

SF's role, lead mainly by Claudia Garcia –the director of the organization, was crucial in identifying PS allies and partners for the reconstruction project in El Salado. Two strategies were used by this organization to achieve the number of allies participating today in the process:

“There are two types of mechanisms. The first is to look for the important allies according to the necessities of the community and the other is when people started looking for us” (Interviewee # 2 Director of SF).

The first allies to get involved in the project found out about it on individual meetings with the director of SF, on which the project was presented with a portfolio of specific needs and possible initiatives.

“Claudia Garcia came here to introduce the project to us with a portfolio of initiatives” (Interviewee #7 Member of a PS Company).

Other type of allies came later, after the media campaign. In this case the representatives, mainly directors of the companies, looked for SF to get to know the project.

“They listened to the radio campaign and decided to contact SF to see how could they support the initiative” (Interviewee #5 Member of a PS Company).

At the time of this research (August 2011) 66 public private and civic allies were supporting the reconstruction of El Salado. Of those 66, were companies from the national and multinational PS. Six of these companies participated in the media campaign and the promotion of the bracelet; 35 of them are participating in different types of projects while the other 11 are involved in planning new initiatives and projects<sup>5</sup>.

In this research, I argue that the reconstruction process promoted by SF and supported mainly by the PS has shown that the living space of a small town of El Salado is made of a mixture of economic, physical, social and symbolic dynamics, which are affecting the impact and outcomes of the project. Moreover, these multiple dynamics and meanings inform and are informed by relationships of power between different actors of the reconstruction, which are shaping the results of this unique experiment.

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<sup>5</sup> Further details and discussion on the break-down of PS involvement per initiative can be found in Chapter 3

## **1.4 Theoretical perspective in this research**

Post-conflict reconstruction and development requires more than economic growth; the enhancement of the living conditions of the whole society is needed, including improvements in health, education, infrastructure and societal participation (among others) (Junne and Verkoren 2005: 3). Cooperation of different actors is essential in conflict recovery processes because different forms of cooperation may then be established to achieve sustainable reconstruction (Multipart 2010:177). This research presents a case of study of a public-private partnership promoted by non-governmental actors, in which the role of actors and the relationships of power among them influence the outcome of the reconstruction process.

As mentioned above, this paper found an unbreakable relation between “space” as concept constructed by social power relationships and the other dynamics of a post conflict reconstruction processes. Thus, as stated by Brown (2005), the construction of infrastructural initiatives goes beyond technical issues and entails a strong understanding of the participating communities. Additionally, to achieve a long-term sustainable infrastructure local community ownership of the process is a crucial foundation to establish (Brown 2005:105).

Accordingly, in this research, I have aimed at creating a dialogue between different understandings of space –from physical to symbolic– that are influenced by the roles and social power relationships of different actors. Likewise, it is relevant to relate such relationships with the theorizing of post-conflict reconstruction that transcends mere economic recovery.

## **1.5 Research objectives and questions**

### **Research objectives**

- Analyze the social relationships of power between the different categories of PS (media, big national and international enterprises and small local entrepreneurs), the community and other institutions, that have shaped the economic, physical, social and symbolic reconstruction process in El Salado.
- Identify and analyze how these social relationships of power between the actors create different meanings around the “new space” being socially constructed and recognize the connections inside these meanings with the economical, social and symbolic aspects taking place in the reconstruction process of El Salado.

### **Main research question**

- How the social power relationships among different actors in post-war reconstruction processes produce different meanings of the newly reconstructed spaces?

### **Sub-questions:**

- What meanings of space are created around specific reconstruction projects in El Salado, and how they relate to the memories of the conflict?
- What are the roles of the community, the PS (media, big enterprises, and local entrepreneurs), the State and the SF in the reconstruction of El Salado?

To answer these questions this paper tries to first establish and map the importance and role of the different actors in the reconstruction of the town, specially the relationships within and between the PS categories, and with the other actors in the reconstruction process. Issues like the importance of media, the decision-making processes in each project, the implementation of initiatives and the links between motivations and expectations of the different actors are discussed.

On the other hand, this paper seeks to determine how the rebuilding of the physical environment of the town has been socially constructed going beyond the material meaning, and discussing the influence this has for the development of other areas of the reconstruction process. This analysis then connects the new physical constructions (town house, individual houses, bathrooms, sewage, and open spaces) with social and symbolic meanings of those spaces, in relation to the memories of the war.

## **1.6 Methodology**

The central focus of this research is the case study of a small town, El Salado, in Colombia and the motivations and expectations of different actors involved in its reconstruction. I use qualitative data obtained by several sources. Observation and in depth interviews were chosen as the main research techniques which were complemented with secondary data.

The fieldwork was conducted in Colombia during 4 weeks in two specific places, Bogotá (the capital city of Colombia) and El Salado. A total of 36 interviews were conducted, 11 of them in Bogotá and 25 in El Salado, which allowed a variety of key actors to be included, from managers of PS businesses, representatives of governmental institutions to inhabitants of El Salado –all of them involved in the reconstruction process of the town. Due to logistical conveniences, I decided to start the process of interviews in Bogotá. There I had the opportunity to talk with the Director of SF, creator and leader of the reconstruction project, and with one member of her team. Afterwards, I interviewed 8 representatives of the PS business companies and 2 representatives of governmental institutions participating in the reconstruction process.

Many of the PS interviewees were directors with senior positions in the companies who had limited availability of time. Thus, most of the information was gathered through targeted interviews; first with a pre-selection according to the intervention of each actor in the process in El Salado and secondly, depending on their availability, to meet with me in established interviews.

In El Salado, an initial observation process was carried out that assisted in mapping some of the basic dynamics of the town and the different roles of the people. During this process I stayed in the house of a local woman, which assisted in my becoming more familiar in the town and to have them become familiar with my presence. After the observation process, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 people of the community using a snowballing technique; 8 individual in-depth interviews and 12 in-group interviews. The qualitative data was collected from different strategic actors including men and women leaders of the community, young people, elderly people and local entrepreneurs, among others. Additionally, 5 members of the regional team of SF in charge of operating the projects were interviewed.

All the qualitative information gathered on the interviews was then transcribed and analyzed by topics, selected by following my research questions on the one hand, and the importance of the issue as seen by the interviewees, on the other.

The secondary data obtained in the field contains information on the ideology of the project, vision, mission and specific objectives promoted by SF, as well as reports, statistics, documentation, news and existing reviews of the massacre and of the town reconstruction project.

## **Chapter 2      The Role of the Community & the Meanings of Space: The construction of the Town House**

### **2.1 Brief description of the Town House project**

The Town House was a very symbolic place for the inhabitants of El Salado before the massacre. It was the place where all the communitarian meetings and events took place and where all cultural activities developed. It was located in the center of the town, in front of the small football field where the massacre occurred. During the massacre, it was completely destroyed, as well as all its contents including musical instruments, which were used to celebrate the deaths.

In the strategic planning session, the community asked for the reconstruction of the House, and it was prioritized as one of the most important projects of the reconstruction process.

“That House was the life of the town, the place for meetings, the place to make music and now it is even more important because it is also giving work to the people here, and it is not only a small house as it used to be, but a big place that is right in the centre of the town” (Interviewee # 20 Community Member).

“...The Town House will be like in the old times, only better jajajaja... We will go there every day to chat with our friends; with our children to read...it is great...I want it ready now” (Interviewee # 11 Community Member)

Due to the importance of the place as part of the community's cultural heritage, and its location in the center of the town, its reconstruction exceeded the physical aspects of the reconstruction of a house and became the reconstruction of the “town's heart”<sup>6</sup>.

To better understand the relevance of this project for the community, and how it became one of the priorities in the reconstruction process, it is important to comprehend the different social power relationships between the actors during the process, and the significant role of the community in the whole process. Accordingly, in the next sections I will refer to theoretical debates about the importance of local actors in reconstruction processes, linking them with the relationships developed between the community and the other actors involved in the construction of the Town House in El Salado. I try to illustrate the dynamics involved not only in the development of this initiative but also those present in the general reconstruction process of the town.

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<sup>6</sup> For pictures refer to Appendix C



## **2.2 The Role of the community and social power relationships with other actors**

Theoretical literature related to post conflict reconstruction and peace building processes is increasingly presenting debates around the importance of international participation in national peace building processes and the relationships and roles between national and international actors in post conflict situations<sup>7</sup>. However, when trying to understand debates on post conflict reconstruction at local levels, inside national boundaries, there is less academic literature. Lack of literature notwithstanding, when analyzing a reconstruction process in a small town, I argue, many of the characteristics of local ownership and community-based approaches (normally focused on the national and international levels) are in fact present in the reconstruction of a local post-conflict territory such as El Salado.

In response to the debates around what some authors call an “international formula”, based on an economic liberal recipe implemented mostly by external actors (David 1999:35), strong arguments have evolved around the importance of the local community in reconstruction and peace processes. This relevance of local actors in peace building efforts in a post-conflict society is reflected in the concept of local ownership proposed by Donais (2009:3), according to which the involvement of public, private and civil local actors is determinant in the planning and accomplishment of a peace process.

For the aim of this research, this chapter will take as the leading theoretical point the approaches around the importance of local actors in a reconstruction process, including concepts of local ownership, community-based and peace building from below, because it helps to better understand the relationships that can be established between local actors involved in the reconstruction process of the case study.

Several concepts have referred to the need of including local actors in peace-building processes. Practitioners as John Paul Lederach, frequently describe this process as “peace building from below”, where the ability of local people to build a peaceful place is based on their identification of key resources and conditions inside their societies (Bush, in Donais 2009:6). This type of

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<sup>7</sup> The importance of local actors and concepts such as local ownership and peace building from below are normally mentioned in the literature that questions and critiques the neoliberal approach around peace building processes. Paris (2002:638) refers to such an approach as “Liberal Peace”, and argues that from this perspective, peace building is seen as the transformation of conflict to an “adequate” international system built on “good governance” practices. In this standpoint, self-determination of local actors is limited to a fixed vision of peace imposed by a universal recipe (Donais 2009:5).

approach claims the possibility of a post-conflict community to choose the path to follow towards a peace process and to construct a commitment towards implementation (Donais 2009:7).

Conteh – Morgan (2005: 79 - 84) refer to communitarian approach to peace building. The argument is that most of the local actors are involved in conflict dynamics as active participants or victims. Consequently, to achieve sustainable peace, the involvement of this segment of actors in the reconstruction process of the society is required. The author states that in a peace-building process, external actors should not impose the “new” reality; it has to be socially and culturally constructed by the local actors.

Development theories have increasingly paid attention to the importance of Community Development Strategies (CDS) as means to empower local actors, as well as to ensure that financial resources are spent on the real needs of the community. It is also stated that when CDS are implemented, transparency in the processes can be enhanced, contributing to the construction of social trust that encourages the participation of a more vital civil society (Cliffe et al., 2003).

Finally, the local private business sector, civil actors and the local government may contribute to the creation of peace, but they cannot work alone. This process requires all actors to be committed and a sense of local ownership about the process, so the contribution of all actors has to be sustained by a common goal on the way to achieve peace (Tripathi and Gunduz 2008).

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the first stage of the reconstruction process of El Salado was the identification of the community needs. Thus, the *initial* activity was the formulation of a strategic plan by holding sessions that engaged specific PS allies like Fundación Carvajal (experts in modeling interventions for vulnerable conflict/post-conflict populations) and most importantly, the community.

“They won our trust because they were involved in everything since the beginning...they came house by house, understanding our lives, asking questions about our worries, our occupations and all...” (Interviewee # 12 to 18 Community Members)

“The best thing here is that we, the community, have been involved since the beginning. They took some of us to Bogotá, and we spoke about the plan and our needs” (Interviewee # 24 Community Member).

In the initial planning session, the majority of the projects prioritized by the community leaders were infrastructure initiatives, yet many of those were connected with social or economical changes resulting from the massacre.

“We always wanted the face of El Salado to be changed and they told us they would help us” (Interviewee #11 Community Member).

“I always dreamed having a bathroom inside my house... a nice one” (Interviewee # 11 Community Member).

“The Town House... this idea came from us, the people of the town, we told SF the importance of it and how it was destroyed” (Interviewees # 12 to 18 Community Members).

Two important issues around the physical initiatives can be highlighted here. First, there is a clear connection between the infrastructure initiatives and the symbolic and social needs of the community. And second, there is a clear paradox in the perceptions of the community around the new initiatives. For example, in many of the interviews conducted in the fieldwork, the inhabitants related what has been gained in the reconstruction process to what was lost during the massacre. The relation between the past and the present is always mentioned as an important issue. These ideas will be further developed in the next section, where the actors socially construct meanings around “space”.

But the community was not the only actor involved in the prioritization of needs and the establishment of initiatives. Perceptions and interests of other actors, such as private companies donating economical resources, and the participation of SF, also shaped the outcomes of this process. One of the most important roles is that of SF, which mediates the relationships between the PS supporters and the community.

“The relationships with the community are always held through SF, who are the ones who actually know how to manage social processes” (Interviewee #1 Member of a PS Company).

“The contact with the community is normally in hands of the regional team of SF... they give us feedback of our projects” (Interviewee #4 Member of a PS Company).

The particular role played by SF has developed certain dynamics in the reconstruction process of this town.

First, even if the community understands that the projects are being developed with the support of private and public sector, they do not know the names of the companies participating in specific initiative. On the other hand, they recognize the state as an actor responsible for the sustainability of the project, through the presence of governmental institutions.

Second, SF centralizes much of the information of the reconstruction process by playing the role of mediator. The communication of the perceptions, problems and risks identified by the community or the allies in each initiative are centralized with SF’s regional team, making it easier to have a complete picture of the reconstruction process of the town.

Third, SF has assisted in controlling the rising expectations or promises that can be generated with the appearance of new external allies.

Finally, SF’s role helped to reduce the negative impact caused by the rotation of multiple allies inside the initiatives. This is especially important in El Salado because, as mentioned by the representatives of the community, many institutions came with promises and then left without results. In the current dynamics of El Salado, the visible ally to the community is SF, not the other allies giving specific short-term contributions and/or those who eventually leave the initiatives.

At the same time, there are “technical committees”, in which some PS allies get in direct contact with the community leaders. Representatives of the community, public and PS institutions and members of SF attend these technical sessions. Every four months, six technical committees (one for each area of the town’s reconstruction process) get together in El Salado to review the advances and next steps of the initiatives.

“The idea was not to arrive to the town with a bag of money and projects, but to construct the project with the people and other institutions...that is why there are working teams in charge of topics” (Interviewee #3 Member of a PS Company).

“It is amazing that there are theme tables where groups are distributed according to their knowledge and capabilities and where we can hear from the community how they feel about the process” (Interviewee # 4 Member of a PS Company).

“We don't agree with everything that SF or any other institution bring... but the big difference is that we have the space to speak up, and we talk, and there is no fear of talking, and we arrange solutions...”(Interviewee # 21 Community Member).

The construction of the Town House was established in the “Infrastructure Technical Committee” as a major priority. It was an initiative requested by the community, but it was SF who gathered the PS in order to start the construction. Moreover, the director of SF looked for a very special architect to donate the design of the house and lead the construction process: Simon Hosie. He is one of Colombia’s most recognized architects for enhancing communitarian projects around architecture. In 2004 he became the youngest architect, at 29, to win Colombia’s National Architecture Prize for a communitarian project around a ‘soaring bamboo library’ in an Andean village. When the Director of SF explained the project, he decided to donate the design of the ‘Town House’. The project was related to Hosie’s main model of work, in which architecture can enhance development models in vulnerable communities. During the interview stage of this research, Hosie explained that the project also aligned with one of his main beliefs –that there is always a community around a physical space that understands the space according to the life system they have created around it. Furthermore, the space continues to exist because of the values, principles and cultural reasons that communities create, giving different meanings to that specific space (Interviewee #6 Architect of the Town House).

“ ... My work is based on how architecture can enhance development models by generating sense of progress consistent with the local space, specifically promoting the habits and traditions of the inhabitants of that specific place... I believe that when development models are close to the inhabitants’ traditions and customs, they are more feasible construction projects... these processes enhance the creativity of the population and what is more important, they enhance the ownership and proximity of the inhabitants with the development project” (Interviewee #6 Architect of the Town House).

This project was totally different from any other traditional architectural project in El Salado. It started with 6 months of ethnographic work in which one ethnographer lived in the town and tried to understand its dynamics. This idea was a requirement of the architect in charge of designing the Town House.

“Before starting any construction, you have to go and live there, understand the dynamics, the logic, talk to the people... you have to reach the moment when you can feel how it is to live in that place, why people live there, what they miss, and then you start structuring the project” (Interviewee #6 Architect of the Town’s House).

During this ethnographic work the importance of the town house was discerned, including reflections on what the community wanted, how they dreamed their town to be, their needs, their fears, and their motivations. All these specific aspects became part of the major insights shaping all the reconstruction project initiatives. The results of the ethnographic work helped SF to visualize the perception of the town’s inhabitants; what they expected and the reasons for asking for certain projects during the strategic planning session.

With the results of the ethnographic work, the architect presented the design of the “Town House” to the community. It was approved and mentioned to fully represent what the inhabitants wanted. This design includes many important symbolic aspects, which were visualized and communicated during the community interviews. For example, the house had an open walled library and three “huts” (*ranchos*) used by the community to make activities such as weddings, dancing shows and cooking events. Around the whole house, specific spaces that were mentioned as relevant by the community were planned: leisure spaces, playing fields for kids and gathering spaces.

An important income-generating initiative was also included in the design: the *hamadora* and the *comunitarios*. The former is a mix between a hammock and a rocking chair, and the latter consists of place mats made with fabric scraps. Both objects are considered by the community as the most common instruments used in El Salado to rest in the afternoon hours. Both objects were designed by the architect and are currently established as small production projects for the association of women of El Salado to improve their income generation possibilities.

With the ethnographic survey complete and the design ready, SF began looking for private sector to find economic resources for the reconstruction of the Town House. Different PS allies started supporting this initiative with financial resources and construction materials, making possible the project’s materialization. The motivations for being involved in this type of initiative will be further analyzed in the next chapter of this research, which focuses on the role of the PS.

### 2.3 Construction of the Space as a social product: the Town House

The infrastructure reconstruction projects developed in El Salado have been more than material and physical improvements for the community. The social relationships of power between the actors have constructed different meanings around the “space” –shaping the understanding of the reconstruction process outcomes.

Using Town House as an example, this section will lead the reader to understand connections between memories and experiences of conflict, power and space in the reconstruction process of El Salado. Literature review about the importance of “space” as a social product, as well as literature about the importance of architecture as a key factor in a reconstruction process will guide the analysis.

One of the common understandings of space is that it is viewed as essentially physical, something outside social relations. This perception has influenced many forms of spatial analysis, especially in the materialist study of society. Soja critiques the materialist conceptualization of space as missing the understanding of space as socially produced, as implicated in social transformations of human relationships (1989:79-80). Thus, the importance of understanding space as ideological and political is stressed.

Arias expands on the poststructuralist interpretation of space as a group of located and negotiated practices (Arias 2010: 29). Space, according to Arias, is presented as *matter* –referring to the physical tangible constructions, and as *meaning* –referring to social constructions or social circumstances embedded in a specific locality (ibid). Arias (2010) states that Soja’s notion of socio-spatial dialectic is crucial to comprehend space as a social process embedded in practices, power and ideology. Space has an important role in the construction and reconstruction of social relations in different locations, related to identities, gender, ethnicity and many other power relations of human beings that give shape to social life (Arias 2010: 30).

Spatiality understood as a figure of social theory underpins the understanding of space and places not only as a condition but also as an outcome of human relationships and practices (Arias 2010: 39).

Henry Lefebvre similarly expands on the duality of space, where it is not only *produced* by social relations between subjects and their society, but also a *producer* of social relations of that society (in Sletto 2002:394). Three important elements are pointed in Lefebvre’s definition of space: i) first, “representation of space” refers to the space that is directly experienced by the body –the visually conceived space; ii) secondly, the ideology or representations of space are arguably influenced by knowledge and social and political realities; and, iii) the third, space has to be analyzed historically (Sletto 2002:395). As Sletto argues (2002:396), space holds meanings to individuals and to social groups, and the control of the representations of space is informed by relationships of power, normally produced by dominant groups of societies.

The process of reconstruction of the Town House involved different social relationships of power between SF, the architect, the community and the business sector. Building on Lefebvre's dual relationship between the physical environments and social relations of those within the space, Junne discusses the relevance of architecture and the significance of physical environments in achieving stability of post-conflict cities (2010: 30). Additionally, he presents the relation between the physical environments and social relations analyzing the influence that city planning and physical reconstruction have on the social relations of people inside a specific place. Architectural organization of space can focus on stability; it can include a future perspective that shifts attention from past experiences to future changes; and it can create or build a long-term perspective that assist with transformation (Junne 2010: 31).

The conservation of cultural heritage is another major topic around the physical reconstruction of a post-conflict society. After the destruction of many historically and culturally symbolic spaces, the recreation of spaces is fundamental in the reconstruction process of a society. As Junne states, the rebuilding process after conflict is not only a physical reconstruction process, but also a new construction process symbolizing change of many aspects of the community (Junne 2010: 31).

Foucault's remarks on the importance of balancing history and space when critically analyzing modern social theory, have gained tremendous significance (Soja 1989:11). Foucault argues that the "external space", on which humans actually live, is heterogeneous and composed by numerous relations that define sites. Therefore, they exist differently in each society and continuously vary over time (Soja 1989:18). Social relationships are not only expressed in space and its political configurations but they also produce them (Soja 1989:76).

Consequently, it is possible to argue that the Town House has special meanings for the community. It has a physical meaning reflected in their descriptions of the size of the new building and its importance on making the town look nicer.

"This house is more than beautiful... you can see from it how beautiful this town is going to be... look at the huge library, the place for meetings, everything is beautiful" (Interviewee # 12-18 Community Members).

Reflections on the symbolic and social meanings of the House were present too. The Town House connects the past with the future, what the massacre destroyed with what the reconstruction of the town is bringing. The community refers to this place as the town's "new heart"; it includes not only the House as a physical place but also its location, right in front of the small-football field where the massacre was perpetrated. Meanings around the reconstruction of social tissues of the town and the recovery of cultural heritage like the importance of music are all present in the narratives of the community on the House.

"I remember that before the massacre I used to hear music since the morning all over the town, it was always full of people. But after the massacre all this tradition was lost, there was no music, no people, no work" (Interviewee#21 Community Member).

“It makes me think that we are living a new life, I now can look to this football field without having a negative feeling... maybe I feel hope and joy because of this new place” (Interviewee#21 Community Member).

This initiative also has an economic meaning. It is mentioned to be a good source of job generation for the inhabitants of the town.

“It is the perfect House... you see it is good for us. My husband and friends have a job, which will contribute in the reconstruction of my town, and I have a new productive project ...the one of the “*hamadoras*” (Interviewee # 12-18 Community Members).

In the case of the PS supporters, the construction of meanings around this “space” varies depending on their role and perceptions of the project. For instance, in the case of the Town House architect, this project goes beyond the physical building, and implies a social and communitarian transformation; for him, it is a representation of the heart of the town and the recovery of values and traditions.

“For me ... the transformation is far from being only physical... it is not a physical transformation but a communitarian one... It is important to acknowledge that in a space, there is always a community around and it continuous to exist because there are values, principles, cultural reasons that give meaning to that specific space” (Interviewee #6 Architect of the Town’s House).

The architect’s relationship with the community was much closer than that of other PS actors, and thus his understanding of “space” is connected much closer to the perceptions of the inhabitants of El Salado.

In the case of the PS companies, however, the meaning of “space” - when referring to the “Town House” is more physical and economic than symbolic. For the private sector, the Town House is a physical location useful for making the town look better; an important place for the community to meet and interact. Additionally, the House is also important in terms of companies’ visibility. They could invest economical resources in a project that was considered by SF and by the community as one of the most important initiatives of the reconstruction.

“We decided to get involved in the infrastructure project of the Town House because it was very important for the community, we had economical resources to participate, and it had good visibility for being the most important project according to the portfolio” (Interviewee #1 Member of a PS Company).

“We had the resources and we knew how to contribute to it... it was very important for everybody: for the people in the town, for SF and for us, because, with this building, it was possible to show what we were doing” (Interviewee #5 Member of a PS Company).

Thus, the importance of the Town House for the community, architect and the prioritization of the project by SF and community in the



reconstruction plan, meant that it had value also for the PS –it was a project that they wanted to be positively associated with and involved in.

## **2.4 Conclusion of the chapter**

This chapter has discussed two important issues – the process of the reconstruction planning and the importance of involving local actor from the post conflict society; second, the proximity of the actors to the reconstruction process and their construction of meanings for the new spaces.

It has been presented that the involvement of the community by different mechanisms such as the ethnographic research, the strategic planning sessions and the technical committees has influenced the reconstruction projects and priorities. Secondly, the role of SF has been discussed as the buffer between some PS investors and the community, negating false hopes and top-down interventions. Also, they are the central hub of information and coordinator of efforts between PS actors and the community. One important outcome is that through the process of planning and prioritizing projects, SF and the community have created value by organizing the project in such a way that it has attracted investments from the PS who want to be positively associated with the projects.

The relationship between the inhabitants of the town, SF, and PS actors have shaped the reconstruction process outcomes in El Salado and especially, for constructing different meanings around the interpretation of the “new space”. Different understandings of the Town House were created due to the proximity of the actors to the space. For the community and the architect meanings went beyond the physical interpretation of the space to a more symbolic and social interpretation that was transformative; a relation between the past and the future is present, the town house location next to the massacre sight and its positive sentiment for the community meant that the location’s perception changed. This has helped to reconstruct the social tissues of the community. As well, the house represents a revival of cultural heritage. On the other hand, for the PS companies, meanings went around economical and physical aspects, all depending on their experience in the town and their involvement inside the project.

## **Chapter 3 The Role of Private Sector Companies: The Construction of Connectivity Initiatives and the Improvement of the Electrical Network.**

### **3.1 Brief description of the construction of connectivity initiatives and improvements of the electrical network**

Until recently, communication with the “outside” world was almost impossible for the inhabitants of El Salado. For example, using mobile phones required leaving the town and climbing to the top of an elevated area in order to get a signal, if possible. Beside this “communicational adventure”, the inhabitants of the town had no virtual contact with the other parts of the country, no telephone service, no private mobile network and no Internet service. This is captured in the narratives collected during fieldwork:

“We didn’t exist for the outside. You have no idea how is it to survive with no communication, no phones, no internet, no systems to talk to the other regions...it was like being apart from the rest of the world” (Interviewee # 20 Community Member).

In the strategic plan the community mentioned these issues as an urgent need. Surprisingly for many of the other actors present in the strategic plan, these matters were far from being only related to communication services. They were connected with security concerns related to the experience of the massacre.

“We explicitly asked for help in security matters such as access to mobile phones to be able to ask for help and communicate with the outside world” (Interviewee # 11 Community Member).

“Talking with the community, we understood that the communications were very important because at the time of the massacre they couldn't contact anyone in more than three days... The construction of mobile network was determinant and urgent” (Interviewee #2 Director of SF).

Consequently, SF began surveying specific PS companies with experience in these types of projects. They managed to engage the participation of one of the biggest international companies of telecommunication services, which installed an antenna in the region to cover the whole area. This antenna allowed the El Salado community not only to have access to a landline service and mobile network but also connect to Internet.

However, after the construction of this antenna the telecommunication company realized that the signal reaching the town was still intermittent as it depended on the supply of energy services. Other projects and interventions were also contingent on the supply of electricity. For example, prior to the

reconstruction process a multilateral organization donated some computers to the school of the El Salado, which could not be used due to lack of electricity.

In view of this situation SF asked for help from one of the Colombian PS companies responsible for providing electricity in the region. The company was notified about the intermittence of the electrical service of the town, and soon they started working on solution. Currently, El Salado is provided with a mobile network antenna, Internet service and an improved delivery of electricity. The importance of this project is evidenced during the interview stage -- every interviewee during the fieldwork mentioned this initiative as important for the reconstruction of El Salado.<sup>8</sup>

As stated in previous chapters, in the strategic plan structured at the beginning of the reconstruction process on El Salado, the community prioritized different infrastructure initiatives. The PS has participated differently in all of these projects and the motivations and forms of participations have been different in many cases. In spite of this, trends and patterns can be established in the behaviour, motivations and participation of private sector in the case of El Salado.

Accordingly, this chapter analyzes motivations of the business sector companies to be involved in the infrastructure projects. Using the connectivity initiatives I offer insights on different social relationships of power between the PS and other actors, explaining how these relationships have shaped several understandings of the new space being constructed in the town.

### **3.2 The role of PS companies and social power relationships with other Actors**

The socio-economic reconstruction in a post-conflict society is most often seen as the principal factor to assure a long-term stable peace. Rebuilding the territory, as well as restructuring different fields to ensure the needed conditions for a stable process of economic rehabilitation are the major objectives proposed by this approach (David 1999:29). The supporters of this approach argue that the economic and social developments of a territory are the key issues to overcome most violent conflicts. These developments include job generation, investment in education and health systems and improvements on infrastructure (Knight 2003:248).

Authors like Pugh (2005) state that this socio-economic approach is based on a huge contradiction of bringing a model of intervention, which ignores the actual social-economic problems of the post-conflict society. Accordingly inclusive involvement of local actors is proposed, in which an active and strong state<sup>9</sup> is required in order to accomplish those needs and requirements.

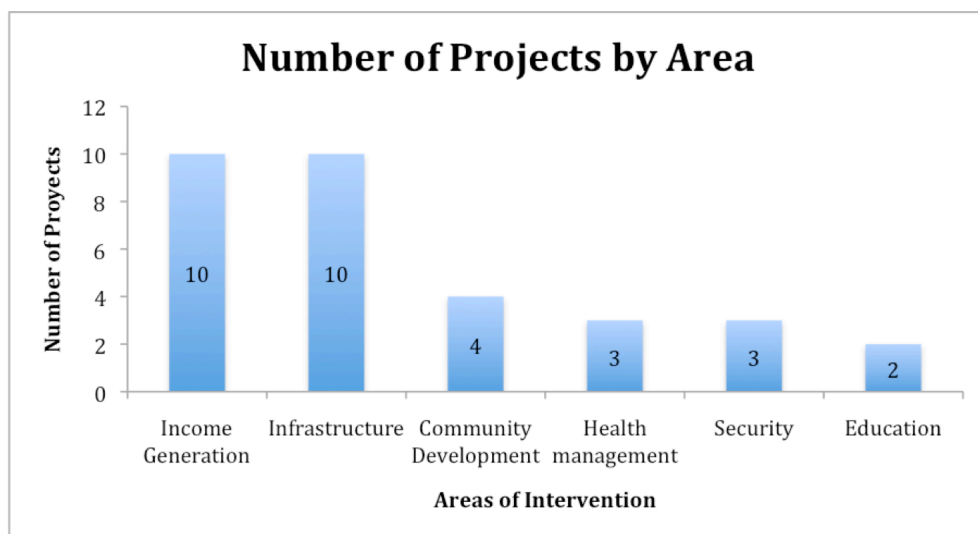
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<sup>8</sup> For pictures refer to Appendix C

<sup>9</sup> The role of the state and the social power relationships with other actors are analyzed in the chapter 4.

In El Salado, recall that the prioritization of the working areas was done with the community and not imposed by the external actors. In the strategic plan six main areas of work were identified: Infrastructure, Income Generation, Community Development, Health Management, Security and Education, each of them with specific needs according to the community. The similarities between the El Salado process and the socio-economic approach discussed above in relate only in terms of *types* of interventions, but in general the process in El Salado was more inclusive and driven by local actors. The following chart shows the distributions of the projects that until August 2011 have been or are being developed in El Salado (Fundación Semana 2011b: 41-182).

**Figure 3.2**  
**Projects per Area**



As presented above, Income generation and Infrastructure are the two major areas of work in El Salado. This may be influenced not only by the preferences of the community but also by the role of SF as a third sector actor leading and promoting this initiative as well as by the role of the PS companies economically and technically supporting the initiatives.

Bray (2006) mentions an increased need to create public-private cooperation in a reconstruction process after a conflicted period. The author remarks that the PS includes not only big national and multinational companies but also the local business leaders. These local businesses are mention to be vital to the reconstruction process, not only because they need to survive, but also because they know the place and the economical dynamics of the regions. In this type of approach, the motivations of PS companies to be involved in post conflict societies is based on opportunities to invest small amounts of capital and obtain immediate profits; often the investment is in projects related to the core work of the PS company. Additionally, it is mentioned that small companies are more likely to take risks in these projects, again in hope of winning back revenue (Bray 2007:5).

Contrary to what Bray (2007) stated, the national and international PS allies involved in this initiative vary not only in their business focus but also in their sizes, views, social motivations and commercial reasons. A range of big national corporations are working with small national companies, some of them competing in the market with similar products and others with opposite commercial and social purposes. As it will be clear, motivation for engagement is in economic returns, but not focused only or exclusively on their commercial core activities. They were more related to improving the credibility and visibility of the companies. The companies all mentioned to be working for same goal: contributing, for the first time, to the reconstruction of a post-conflict territory in Colombia.

“We are all working for the same project, without caring who the other allies are...SF has been very smart because we are treated the same, no matter the type of help each of us is giving” (Interviewee #5 Member of a PS Company)

“We are very different in what we do...in other times I would have never contemplated working with some of the companies ...but here we are all contributing for the same cause” (Interviewee#7 Member of a PS Company).

It is important to call to attention the fact that most of the representatives of the PS interviewees mentioned they knew very little about El Salado before becoming involved in the reconstruction effort. Most made reference to the massacre, but also referenced the SF media campaign. The motivations of the PS allies to become involved in the reconstruction process in El Salado are diverse, but most mentioned the following factors:

A) The first factor was the credibility on SF and the conviction of the director of the organization.

“Claudia Garcia’s humility was crucial. When she came to us for help, she was willing to learn from us” (Interviewee #7 Member of a PS Company).

“Claudia’s leadership and transparency when she presented the project was crucial” (Interviewee #10 Member of a PS Company).

“SF is an entity you can trust, you can tell you are going along the right path” (Interviewee # 5 Member of a PS Company).

An important remark that came out in the interviewees was the equal treatment established by SF around the allies. In every media report about the reconstruction of El Salado, the logos of all the supporters are shown in the same size and with the same importance, diminishing the competition between the actors. Additionally since the beginning of the project, allies mentioned that the director of SF specifically told them that no logos or big names were going to be visible in the initiatives.

“With the business sector it has been great... The success is there because they can contribute according to they strengths...and the recognition and visibility is the same for all of them...It doesn't matter how much do you put on each project, you appear as everybody else in the magazine” (Interviewee #2 Director of SF).

B) The second factor was the PS interest in projects related to peace and vulnerable communities. Most of the representatives of the business companies mentioned their interest to contribute to peace initiatives in Colombia. Some of them were already working in this field through the corporate social responsibility strategies.

“We were participating in peace projects supporting demobilized people and armed forces of the state, but there were no programs supporting victims” (Interviewee #4 Member of a PS Company).

“We were already working in an intervention model of development in vulnerable communities and we wanted to see if it could be implemented in a project like El Salado” (Interviewee #3 Member of a PS Company).

C) The visibility in media was also crucial for motivating new allies to participate in the projects. The fact that the promoter of the initiative was SF, one of the major media groups in Colombia, gave visibility to the project and to the PS allies involved; the exposure provided a motivating incentive for the PS.

“...We knew that being involved in the biggest infrastructure initiative was good not only for the people but for us, for example, in terms of visibility” (Interviewee #1 Member of a PS Company).

“One of our motivations was the visibility of the project as being promoted and supported by SF” (interviewee #6 Architect of the Town’s House).

Interestingly, the motivation of the PS due to increased visibility is paradoxical. The reconstruction process of El Salado has gained a lot of media coverage through some media channels, but the media attention has not been focused on the names and roles of the PS companies individually. Many of the reports talk about a huge alliance of more than 60 supporters mainly of the PS but their names and contributions were not as visible as some of them mentioned.

“I think the foundation has been very cautious in the use of media exposure around the project, maybe because they are waiting to have more results to do it...but I think it is something that is needed in the process” (Interviewee #4 Member of a PS Company).

However, despite not being individually named in media campaigns, many of the companies stated in interviews that in spite of the lack of visibility, positive aspects have been achieved from this alliance, such as Corporate Social Responsibility prizes, increase of budget to this area inside the companies, and good image between the employees inside their companies.

“The Corporate Social Responsibility program of the company won the ANDESCO prize, and El Salado is a big part of this program” (Interviewee #5 Member of a PS Company).

“Our employees feel proud of being part of a company that participates in the construction of peace of the country. They wear the bracelet of the

campaign and they keep sending us messages wanting to know the initiative better” (Interviewee #10 Member of a PS Company).

D) One motivation that was mentioned less was increased opportunity for the core business of the PS companies, such as tobacco producers, telecommunication companies and energy service providers.

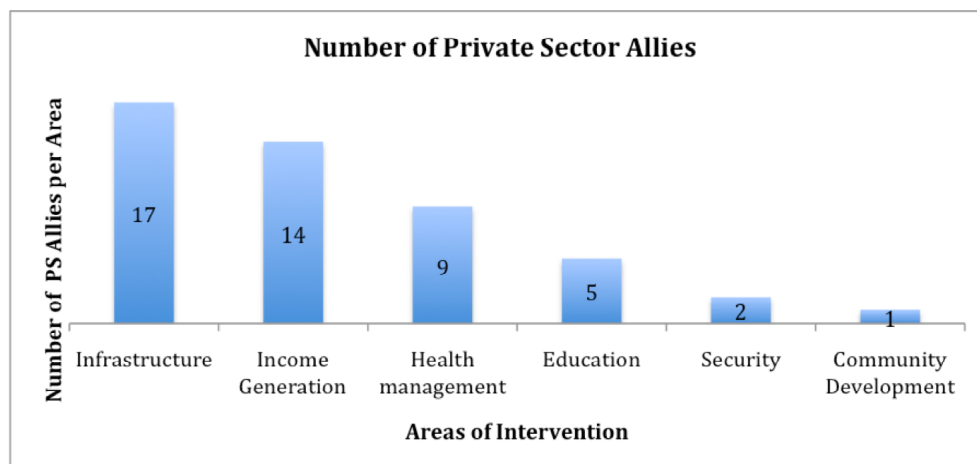
“We are participating in more than one project, but one of the motivations to be involved in the productive sector was because Montes de Maria is a tobacco region. We were already planning to work in the region and El Salado appeared as an opportunity” (Interviewee #1 Member of a PS Company).

### 3.2.1 *What do they do?*

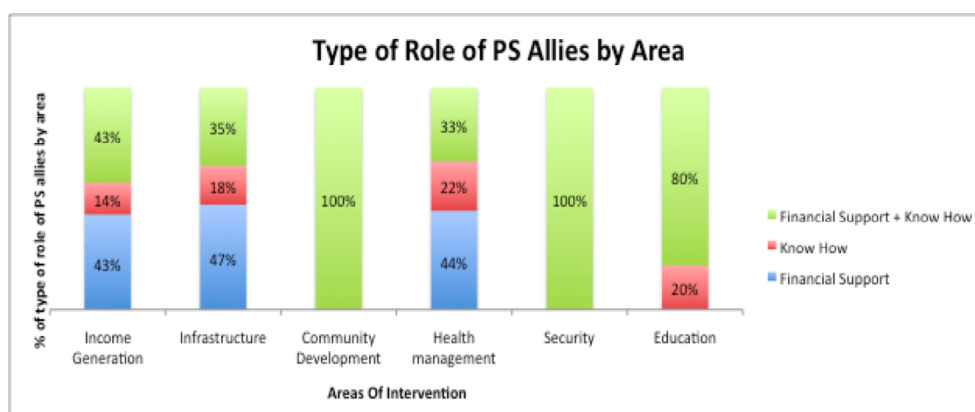
The role of the PS in the reconstruction process most prominently presents an opportunity to draw on the expertise and economic resources of the company, two factors often missing in governmental offices after conflict periods (Bray 2006). Bray (2007) mentions that overall the most important contribution of the PS in a post conflict society involves the core commercial activities of the company and is focused on creating economic conditions for the socio-economic recovery process of the society.

The reconstruction process of El Salado proposed by SF had 6 main working areas in which 32 projects were or are being developed. The following charts show the number of allies supporting each area of the reconstruction process (Figure 3) and how the roles of the actors are distributed in each area (Figure 4).

**Figure 3.3**  
**Private Sector Allies per Area**



**Figure 3.4**  
**Role of Private Sector Allies**



The majority of the PS allies are involved in infrastructure and income generation initiatives. Financial support and know-how (technical expertise) are their major contributions. Nevertheless most of them started giving financial support before contributing with their know-how in any specific project. These first economic resources were invested in the media campaigns, the bracelets and in some infrastructure projects like the Town House.

“The first initiative was to invest a specific amount of money in the infrastructure project of the Town House. We decided to be involved in it because it was the central infrastructure project which would have high impact in the community and in terms of results, we could present it as a corporate social responsible initiative with high media visibility” (interviewee #1 Member of a PS Company).

“We started participating with a small amount of money to support the general project. We wanted to contribute but also to get to know the alliance better” (Interviewee #10 Member of a PS Company)

After the initial investments, many of the PS allies became involved in initiatives more related to their businesses, not in commercial terms, but in terms of know-how. The contributions were focused on technical support on specific areas (treatment of water, engineering services, agricultural techniques, etc), advising on materials needed, expertise in the designs of physical and social projects, and research on the different services needed. This know-how was complemented with more economic resources depending on the capacity of each actor. Still, the two main fields supported by the PS were infrastructure and income generation.

“We decided to contribute with the study of the quality of water, because it is our primary activity. We sent our experts to El Salado for the research...with this information we then contributed with a water treatment plant” (Interviewee #4 Member of a PS Company)



“After giving some money, we designed the sewage system for the town. We are experts in this type of designs.” (Interviewee #5 Member of a PS Company)

“We are participating as a second level foundation in projects of economic recovery, which is the expertise of this organization” (Interviewee #7 Member of a PS Company).

As has been shown, next to economic resources and expertise, PS and especially big national and international companies often have huge power, reflected in influencing the relationships between the actors, which inevitably shapes the outcomes of a reconstruction process like the one been considered in this research.

In the example used in this chapter, the electrical connectivity initiatives, specific relationships between the PS companies and the other actors were present that determined how the projects were established in the town.

At the first stage of the reconstruction process, the fact of having a mobile antenna and Internet was not a priority for SF. Many actors considered this as a secondary stage, and other initiatives seen as more urgent. However, the community started asking for these initiatives since the strategic planning meeting, making reference to the lack of contact with the outside world and security matters. This concern was continuously mentioned in the security technical committees making clear the importance for the community.

As in the other cases mentioned during this research, the final decision about the implementation and prioritization of the initiatives highly depended on the role of SF, as it was the SF who achieved the support of all the allies needed to implement each initiative. However, the PS companies were also crucial in this decision-making process, as they had the immediate power to decide where and how to invest. They had the experience, technical knowledge and financial resources to execute the projects –factors that gave them a huge power in the implementation of each initiative. For example, once the community prioritized the electrical and connectivity initiatives as important, the PS companies quickly became involved in their implementation. In a short period of time the antenna was placed, making possible the access to communication services in the town. The electrical network of the town was also fixed by the PS Company in charged of electrical services in the region. It is important to remark that PS companies provided all the financial resources required for these initiatives.

### **3.3 Construction of the “Space” as a social product, around infrastructure initiatives supported by the business sector companies.**

The second chapter of this research presented some theoretical discussions around the poststructuralist view of the “space”. “Space” is understood as social and symbolic, constructed and continuously altered by social power relations (Arias 2010:31). For this section the same approach is used to

recognize the different significances of space around the connectivity initiatives and the improvement of the electrical network.

Several meanings have been constructed around these improvements in El Salado. For the community, meanings are far from being technical. The inhabitants of el Salado reflect around these initiatives in terms of security for the town. Again, symbolic relations between the past and the present are clear in those meanings. Insecurity in the period of the massacre was highly related to the impossibility of communicating with the outside world. Most of the inhabitants in the ethnographic study made by SF, mentioned feelings of fear and powerlessness for not being able to ask for help during the massacre. Moreover, isolation was mentioned as one of the reasons the town suffered more than three days of torture. Accordingly, these new initiatives were pointed out to be a huge improvement for the town, and a symbol of no repetition of an event like the one suffered in the year 2000.

“Now we have more security; we have the possibility to communicate by mobile phones with other people outside the town... If we have had the phones before maybe we could have called for help...but unfortunately we were alone and separated from the rest of the world” (Interviewee # 21 Community Member).

The local entrepreneurs of the town also pointed out economic meanings of these initiatives. Currently these entrepreneurs have three major activities in the town: production of agricultural crops, production of tobacco and establishment of small stores. Thus, these infrastructure initiatives mean new economical possibilities for their income, especially in terms of transportation and commercialization of goods. Additionally, they argued that having a more stable electricity service means they have the opportunity to improve their businesses and service.

“Now days I can arrange the transportation of my products by phone with people in Carmen de Bolivar making sure there is someone waiting to negotiate with me the sales of my products. Before I had to walk there and start looking for contacts, often my products of the month were totally lost because I had no way to arrange sales beforehand” (Interviewee # 30 Community Member).

Moving to the perceptions of the PS business companies, these infrastructure initiatives have a more material meaning related to the practical provisions of services for the community. Communication and energy are seen as improvements for the development of the town.

“Some of the initiatives are helping the development of this town. Having the possibility of communicating with the rest of the country and the access to Internet are huge advances in terms of development for this community” (Interviewee #5 Member of a PS Company).

An economic meaning is also present for the PS companies in terms of opportunities to invest in the reconstruction initiative promoted by SF.

Moreover, these physical initiatives generate economic benefits for the companies in terms of use of services from the inhabitants of the town.

### **3.4 Conclusion of the chapter**

This chapter has shown that the PS companies in the reconstruction process of El Salado have been mainly involved in infrastructure and income generation initiatives, specifically in terms of financial resources and know-how. Yet it was apparent that this involvement is embedded in social relationships of power, on which this actor has had a huge influence. For example, the PS has the ability to achieve faster results that, without their economic contributions and expertise, may have taken years and maybe decades as it happened before the arrival of SF.

Additionally, it also illustrated that the power of big private sector companies is somehow counterbalanced by the role of SF, which is at the end the actor taking the final decisions in the establishment and prioritisation of the projects. It is then important to reflect that in this case study; many of the interests of the community are represented by this foundation; at the same time, the community insisted, and were able to voice, that their isolation and thus their connectivity, represented more than an improvement in infrastructure –it represented a more secure and prosperous future.

All these dynamics finally shaped the understandings around the connectivity and electricity improvement initiatives from the perspectives of the different actors. It was discussed that, for the community, meanings of those initiatives go beyond material and physical aspects, addressing social and symbolic aspects, which are related to historical background of their lives and experiences. Alternatively, the PS companies produced a different understanding around the same initiatives, also constructed from their experiences in the process, being more related to economic and physical aspects of the projects.

## **Chapter 4 The Role of the State in Post – Conflict Reconstruction: The Construction of Infrastructure Initiatives Around Basic Needs**

### **4.1 Brief description of the construction of Sewerage –Home Improvements – construction of Health Center**

In year 2010, SF asked one of the supporters of the reconstruction process to carry out a “Health Diagnosis” of the total population of El Salado. Several issues were pointed out in this research, some of which resulted in important infrastructure initiatives, such as the construction of a sewage system, housing improvements and equipment and provision of health services (Fundacion Ser 2010: 1-54).

#### ***4.1.1 Construction of the Sewage System***

El Salado has historically had a bearable aqueduct, however no sewage system existed before the reconstruction process. The “Health Diagnosis” study found that a sewage system was required specifically to improve the quality of life of the people and reduce health risks in the community, especially the incidence of dangerous diseases for children. Consequently, the technical health committee prioritized the sewage system as a sanitation concern, which meant that the participation of the government was necessary, as this was one of the major responsibilities of the local government.

“We don't want to substitute what the government is supposed to do... That is why we don't want to assume the costs of the water service... that is the government's responsibility” (Interviewee # 4 Member of a PS Company).

After long meetings with regional and national government institutions, a public-private alliance was established, according to which the public sector provided the financial aid needed to construct the sewage system, while private companies donated the system design, the materials, the technical support, ground studies and the operation of the initiative. This sewage system was constructed in six months, and as it progressed, two other specific needs were recognized to guarantee health improvements for the inhabitants: a wastewater treatment system and a water purification plant. Both were required to successfully guarantee health improvements for the town's inhabitants. After looking for more support, SF collected the economic resources to satisfy both needs, the former financed by a multilateral organization and the latter donated by a private company.

#### ***4.1.2 Housing Improvements***

When the reconstruction process started most of the houses of El Salado were extremely worn out and lacked the basic sanitation supplies such as bathrooms, kitchens and toilets. At that moment, the national and local government institutions were starting the implementation of a national strategy called “house improvements” through *Acción Social*, the national institution in charge of vulnerable population.

Such improvements did not vary according to the characteristics of the region or the population being assisted; they were “pre-established models” which sometimes did not match the contextual needs of the local population. For example, weather conditions did not fit with the construction materials used, and they lacked important requirements like bathrooms or kitchens.

Accordingly, when SF arrived, another public-private alliance was established and with the support of PS companies. New building material and resources were donated to improve the state-led program.

#### ***4.1.3 “Tent Plan” and the Medical Problem***

Health is probably one of the sectors that reflect the difficulties present in regions like El Salado when looking at basic needs satisfaction. Before the reconstruction project started, a high quality health center was constructed in El Salado with the support of The United States Agency for International Development, USAID, and the National Commission for Reconciliation and Reparation, CNRR. However, when SF arrived, the medical center did not have the equipment to function; there were no medicines, and the local government had not appointed a doctor for this health center. Moreover, the local government had not paid the only local nurse’s salary for more than 24 months.

Accordingly, SF, supported by other PS allies involved in the reconstruction process, and installed a tent in the town centre: “the tent plan”, during one month provided free health service to the community. After this process, and taking into account that health system is a major responsibility of Colombian State, SF looked for the help of governmental institutions, showing them the results of the “tent plan” and making evident the urgent need of an equipped health center. Finally an agreement was achieved, which ended in the accomplishment of a permanent doctor, and a permanent dentist for the town provided by the state. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Protection agreed to transfer a considerable amount of money to the local government in order to acquire an ambulance and the medicines needed for the center to function<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> For pictures of these three projects refer to Appendix C.

## 4.2 The role of the state and social power relationships with other actors

Bray (2006) states that when a society is recovering from conflict, the relation between government and the business sector is crucial. The government is essential in guaranteeing stability and the development of the society, as it is responsible for setting peace agreements, legal frameworks and security.

Yet, according to Bray (2006), the public-private alliances need to be based on three major principles: i) All the actions performed by public or private actors must strengthen and support government capabilities, never replacing them; ii) Each project and action has to be accountable and transparent; and iii) The involvement and support of local actors is crucial in any project for the reform process.

According to SF and other allies, to guarantee the project's long-term sustainability, communication with and involvement of the government was one of the most crucial issues in El Salado. This sentiment was reflected in the answers of the PS allies during the interview process: many reiterated that they are not in El Salado to replace the government and its responsibilities. Secondly, they emphasized that the most important ally for achieving the sustainability of the town's reconstruction process was the government.

“One important thing is that from the beginning it was clear, for us and for SF, that we as allies didn't want to replace the government, but to complement its work... SF reminded us that one of our jobs was to bring them into the project” (Interviewee # 3 Member of a PS Company).

While interviewing SF, it was mentioned that including the government institutions has been a tough job, but crucial in the whole creation and development of the process.

“Since the beginning, and regardless of what we believed about the state institutions, we understood that they were crucial for the sustainability of the project. This has been a very tough task... hours of meetings to achieve results ... it has been hard to make them realize that they have to be the main actor in this process... that we are not the government” (Interviewee #2 Director of SF).

Thus, in the basic needs infrastructure initiatives, state cooperation was a major priority. The government, when trying to get the PS involved in some processes, normally looks for public-private initiatives. In the “Guidebook on Promoting Good Governance in Public-Private Partnerships” proposed by United Nations (2008:1) Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) are mentioned to be an efficient method used by the public sector to finance, designs and operate public sector services by contracting them with the PS. It is stated that the public sector uses the financial capital and expertise of the PS to deliver projects on shorter times, while the responsibility to provide the services is retained in the hands of the public sector.

In El Salado, however, the opposite process took place because it was SF who lobbied and engaged the government, even when the projects were the government's responsibility. In the three initiatives described in the beginning

of this chapter, the participation of the government was achieved only through SF's intensive intervention.

One of the major achievements in El Salado is the fact that all the infrastructural projects related to state duties have been economically supported by the state. Even when the total amount of the economic resources did not come from the public sources, part of what had been invested always came from the government. For example, in the sewage system, health center equipment and home improvement initiatives, part of the economic resources came from the government, and then the other allies complemented them. This has contributed, according to SF's team, not only to restoring the legitimacy of the government institutions in the town, but also it has been the starting point of making the community realize that the government is in charge of providing certain services and satisfying certain needs.

Interestingly, while the PS actors are presented as nameless allies although they are working in the projects and participate in meetings with the community, the government is mentioned as the service provider.

“We think that the fact that the interventions are partly done with public resources is crucial for the community to believe that change is possible and that the government is present in the reconstruction process” (Interviewee # 3 Member of a PS Company).

Subsequently, in the interviews with the community, the inhabitants of the town started to mention the presence and support of the government, however, it was always related to the role of SF. People's perception of the government role is changing, but the state is still seen as problematic.

“They were not present before... they didn't come. They appeared thanks to SF and they are helping us with our home improvements... at least they are now thinking about us... they realized that we exist” (Interviewee # 11 Community Member).

“They were not here before; the only government institution present here was the CNRR. Now they are working together with SF in the construction of the sewage system and in providing other important basic services” (Interviewee # 12-28 Community Members).

“They have changed, at least they are now willing to do something for us... Moreover, the President came and asked us for forgiveness... but we will have to wait and see what happens” (Interviewee # 24 Community Member).

Connections, but also disconnections, were found when speaking with some representatives of the national governmental institution “Accion Social” involved in the project. As mentioned above, the reason for choosing this agency was due to the fact that they were present in the town before the reconstruction process promoted by SF. From the standpoint of their representatives, many of the initiatives that are now developed in the town were already present when the private sector arrived. They argue that the big difference is the way of publicizing such presence and participation. They think that *Semana's* media exposure has made the difference and that they did not have such publicity when they were working there.

“We were making things there but as the government we don't have the visibility that SF has... many of the things that are visible now were already there, maybe not as good as they are now, but there was something...” (Interviewee # 8 Public Sector Representative).

The projects mentioned by the government representatives are subsidies and special programs for displaced people, food safety initiatives (REZA project), investments on the roads recovery, projects of housing improvement, investment on education and health services. In all the reports presented by SF, these projects are mentioned.

“Action Social was present not only in El Salado but in the region of Montes de Maria, because of the violence... projects for education, health, subsidies for displaced population, recovery of houses, education... were present when Semana arrived ...” (Interviewee # 9 Public Sector Representative).

However, from the community's point of view, most of these projects were not working as the government representatives argue they were. Community members say they received (irregular) subsidies for being displaced population, including food safety initiatives based on the distribution of monthly packages of food. They also mention that the first improvements of some of the houses were there before SF arrived, but these improvements were not adequate for the region and only when SF arrived they changed them. In health services, they were affiliated to a health system, but as mentioned prior, the health center was neither equipped nor staffed with a doctor (the closest one was 4 hours away by donkey). In terms of education, it is true that there was a school but the inhabitants argue that there were not permanent teachers.

“Well, they came from time to time... our living situation was critical. No security, no food, kids were sick... now they come because SF is here” (Interviewee # 19 Community Member)

“A lot of other institutions came before, including those of the government, they talked to us and left... without any results”. (Interviewee #11 Community Member)

Clearly, the community perceives the state as absent. On the other hand, despite the fact that the projects were functional, they are always mentioned in SF's reports as part of what they found already in the town. More importantly, as mentioned above, SF considers the government a crucial ally, and despite its limited contribution to the current projects, SF always mentioned government as supporter and responsible for the projects. This is reflected in the fact that in the initiatives described in the first part of this chapter, the government has been involved and mentioned as an important part of the initiatives, trying to make this participation evident for the community.

It is then clear that the involvement of the government was a priority for SF, and it was achieved in all cases because of the role of this foundation. The way this involvement was accomplished was not always the same. In the case of the sewage system, SF arrived to the government institution with a designed project, financed partly by the PS and the rest of financial resources were



directly requested from the government. Contrary to this, in the case of the house improvements initiative, the government was already involved in the process, and the role of SF was to design and propose new strategies to make better improvements according to the context and the needs of the community. Finally, in the initiative of the health center, a totally different strategy was implemented: the creation of a free provisional health service revealed the need of a health center.

In the three cases, it was evident that the aim of SF and of the other allies was not to assume the government responsibilities but to complement them. On the other hand, this process of involvement may have a negative effect in the future of the reconstruction process. The power SF had in achieving the involvement of the government in the initiatives is a big concern for some of the actors involved in this project. The presence of SF is not permanent in the town, and one huge fear of the community is if the government is going to maintain the support when SF leaves the town.

“We know the government is here because SF is here, but I can’t stop asking about our future when SF is gone... is the government going to disappear again? Can you believe that they needed *Semana* to tell them to do that we needed them to do?”(Interviewee #22 Community Member).

The concern of the community may be related to the fact that it was impossible for me to speak with local government representatives during the fieldwork. I did not have the opportunity of testing the community perceptions of the government from the perspective of the government itself. Several appointments were made but none of these local meetings were realized. Some of the government officials did not answer the request for the interviews and others canceled the last minute. This is an open question for this research and due to the fact that no sufficient evidence was collected around this topic it cannot be answered.

### **4.3 Construction of the “Space” as a social product around infrastructure initiatives supported by the government and provision of basic needs.**

Different social power relationships between the state, the community, the Foundation and the PS allies were mentioned above and have constructed several interpretations about physical space in the town; specifically those related to public services or basic needs. The next part of this section aims to illustrate these meanings.

In the case of the community, the meanings around the sewage system, home improvements and the equipment of the health system are mainly related to their quality of life and the fulfillment of basic needs. Accordingly, these social meanings have relevant connections with the government responsibilities and the government absence for many years in the town.

For some interviewees, the government’s abandonment for more than ten years and its inability to provide basic needs to El Salado during all those years was a strong but changing perception. These sentiments were also connected to a major feeling of gratitude to SF for making the government comply with

its responsibilities. On the other hand, even for those for whom this feeling of abandonment is evident, the interviewees recognize the presence of the government as if it “finally” remembered this town existed and tried to prove this was a “real” initiative.

“We didn’t have any of these things, the government was absent even then, but now look... we have safe homes and sewerage, this has improved our quality of life... we have a health center... a nice one, with a doctor and equipment and an ambulance and medicines, now we don’t have the risk of dying before arriving to the hospital ... as we did before” (Interviewee # 11 Community Member).

In contrast with other initiatives, symbolic meanings are more related to the moments after the massacre and the status of displaced population. They constantly relate these new initiatives with a new life, comparing it with the problematic and difficult scenarios they had to face as displaced populations after the massacre.

“You can’t imagine how my life was after the massacre... we starved, we couldn’t feed our kids, we got sick, there was no security... and nobody cared... Now look at us, we have hope, we are starting a new life” (Interviewee # 24 Community Member).

One important social meaning is related to the future of the youth. There is a positive meaning related to the future of the next generations of “Salaeros”. A sense of change of habits and a new knowledge on health issues, management of trash and the safe use of water, among other topics, are related to the new infrastructure projects. Moreover, the initiatives are mentioned as the starting point of this new knowledge.

It is important to point out that physical aspects of the town were also related to social meanings. Reflections on a different view of the streets, a cleaner town, a big, clean and functional health center and new faces of the houses were some of the issues pointed out by the community.

“Now there is a program of trash management... they are teaching us how to use the garbage, where to put it, where to put the animals outside the house and not inside them, as we did before jajajajaja... how to use clean water and all that... that is a success... look how clean the town is. The sewerage brought the culture of cleaning the town. Kids are the ones learning faster” (Interviewee # 24 Community Member).

“As the town is more beautiful, people are more optimistic because they are seeing changes “(Interviewee # 21 Community Member).

Economic meanings are also present in reference to these initiatives. This understanding is related to job generation. The majority of the interviewees related the new infrastructure projects with new job opportunities. Most of the employees involved in them were inhabitants of the town.

“People have more solvency, they have more resources with the projects SF is implementing” (Interviewee # 24 Community Member).

For the state's point of view, the physical changes of the town have a tremendous symbolic meaning in terms of legitimacy and trust. These projects signify an opportunity to consolidate and legitimize government institutions in a territory characterized by distrust and lack of State legitimacy.

“For us it is important that the people recover their trust in the state. Trust is determinant in this project and we are showing results with the work of the government and the PS companies” (Interviewee # 8 Public Sector Representative).

For the national representatives of the government, the sewerage, the health center and the improvement of the houses are initiatives that represent examples of what they are doing in Colombian “returning areas” - those territories like El Salado on which displaced people are returning to try to restart their lives. They perceive these initiatives as actual results of their national “returning strategy”.

“This plan is complemented with different responsibilities for the state institutions focused on displacement and returning strategies... part of a return plan, as this is one of the strategies of the government. If the process in El Salado works then more families will return... and this will show that the public-private alliance of the government is working... Results like the sewerage and the home improvements are part of this strategy” (Interviewee # 9 Public Sector Representative).

Meanings associated with projects for the public sector relate to physical, social and economic understandings. The new image of El Salado was pointed out in many meetings conducted in the fieldwork. Additionally, the importance of public-private initiatives related to the provision of basic needs is understood as major improvements in the relationship between the state and the private sector. Finally, an economic meaning of those initiatives is mentioned, based on the creation of job opportunities for the inhabitants of the town.

#### **4.4 Conclusion of the chapter**

This chapter has aimed to present the role of the state in the reconstruction process of El Salado and its relationships with the other actors, such as private sector, community and SF. The involvement of the state was presented as a major priority for SF in order to achieve a sustainable project in the town. Moreover, it was exposed that no single model or path has to be used in order to create public-private partnerships and that these alliances could be proposed by an actor other than the government.

Connections and disconnections were present in the perceptions between the community members and the governmental representatives around the role of the state before the reconstruction process started. Therefore the process of improving legitimacy of the state institutions may be harder than the expected from the public representatives.

Finally it was presented how meanings around the space are socially constructed, specifically around those physical initiatives concerning basic needs. The community constructs social and symbolic meanings reflecting on their past and historical events during the displaced period, as well as understandings around the future of the new generations of the town. On the other hand, the state may construct a utilitarian meaning around the strengthening of its legitimacy and power inside the town. Alternatively, the PS companies see the projects more in terms of economic benefits of physical spaces.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

In this research, I have aimed to discuss social power relations between different actors involved in reconstructing El Salado, and its influence on creating different understandings of the space –from physical to symbolic– that are the base on which infrastructure initiatives have been carried out.

The role of SF and the private companies in the reconstruction of a post conflict town goes beyond economic recourses and expertise; these issues are embedded in their power as dominant actors in the reconstruction process. Furthermore, power is reflected from the first stages of the reconstruction process, when choosing a specific territory like El Salado. Factors such as media influence and visibility of SF, the selection of specific PS allies to be involved in the project, economic resources and the possibility of showing results in a short period of time, also reflect how the dominant power of this specific actor shaped the outcomes of the reconstruction of El Salado.

Thus, as paradoxical as it may be, it was discussed how the role of the community and the importance of its voice in the reconstruction process may have been determined by SF and the PS companies, especially when considering the decision to *give* the local actors a space for their voice and participation from the beginning of the process.

On the other hand, it was argued that the role of the government and its involvement in the reconstruction process was also highly influenced by the relations between the State and other actors. It was presented how non-government actors like SF could promote public-private partnerships, using not a single model in particular, in order to achieve these alliances. Nonetheless, this relation also contains risks related to the government's legitimacy in the community, particularly considering the uncertainty of their involvement after SF leaves the town. Major questions arise when thinking that to achieve the participation of the government in the majority of the initiatives in El Salado, the role of SF was imperative. Is it desirable that an organization such as this foundation exists in each town where basic needs projects are required? Was the government planning to participate in these initiatives and was it a coincidence that the reconstruction process started at the same time? This research cannot address these questions in general, but will pose them for further research on the reconstruction initiatives in the country.

The second main question of this research deals with how all these power relationships are embedded in the reconstruction process and influence the construction of different understandings of “space”. El Salado as a “space” holds specific meanings to each actor involved in the reconstruction of the town, determined by their positions and perceptions of the town that are informed by relationships of power among them.

Accordingly, the research presented that the relevance of the infrastructure initiatives for the community went beyond the physical interpretation of the space to a more symbolic and social understanding of it.

Meanings around the past and the future, memories related to the massacre and their IDP's experiences, revival of cultural heritage, recovery of social tissues, and improvements in quality of life and security concerns were reflected during the study.

Alternatively, the PS companies constructed different meanings around the same initiatives, also informed by their experiences in the process. These understandings were more related to economic and physical aspects of the projects, highlighting material improvements in the physical aspect of the town and enhancements of the economic recovery of the inhabitants of the town. Thus, these actors stated reflections on job generation, new physical spaces, and improvement of infrastructures and transformation of the physical aspect of the town. On the other hand, the infrastructure initiatives had a more utilitarian meaning for the government, related to the reinforcement and reconstruction of its legitimacy among the inhabitants.

In this concluding chapter I also aim to present what I found as missing factors, determinant for the sustainability of the reconstruction process of El Salado.

First there is the need of creating an "exit plan" for SF. Even though the community is aware that this will happen, all the actors involved in the process should have a clear picture of how to address this issue so they might redefine their roles after SF's leaves El Salado.

Additionally, even if it was not the aim of this research, a gap was found in the topic of reconciliation and reparation of victims. From my standpoint, it is unlikely to establish a sustainable post conflict reconstruction process without addressing these issues. Accordingly, I reflect on the important role of the government to prioritize this while the other aspects of the reconstruction project are advancing.

At last, it was stated that one of the objectives of the project presented by SF was to create a model of public-private alliances on which a post conflict society could be transformed into a symbol: from a symbol of violence to a symbol of reconciliation. I will argue that despite the huge positive results of this project, it could not be promoted as a "model" to follow due to several reasons. First because as many other models and "best practices" of reconstruction show, recipes are never useful because they miss the importance of understanding that each society has unique characteristics, making impossible to achieve the same results. Second, because SF is a unique foundation, created to reconstruct a specific society; therefore, after seeing its major role in this reconstruction process it would mean that many other SFs would be needed to be able to reconstruct all the societies that had suffered the consequences of conflict in Colombia. And third, replicating this model assumes that the PS supporters would be willing to continue supporting these initiatives all over the country, and despite of their role and participation on this specific case, it has to be acknowledged that it is not their responsibility and no one could guarantee such participation.

Accordingly, I would then argue that despite of this intervention, from my standpoint it is not a replicable model. But it gives important insights and lessons for future reconstruction processes. The main lesson is that the voice

of the community is crucial to create empowerment, trust, legitimacy and ownership in a reconstruction process. Additionally, it reflected that public-private partnerships might work, even if the government does not promote them, and for them to work it is important to understand the different motivations and social power relationships of the actors inside the process.

Conclusively, I will state that this type of interventions create a new conscience in Colombian society, according to which we Colombians are learning that we can all have a role to play in reconstruction of the country and that there are still many other forgotten places awaiting assistance.

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## **Appendix A: Brief Description of Colombian Conflict**

Dating the specific time when Colombian conflict started has been an issue of study for many years, yet it has been stated that it started in 1940 when a large period of violence called “La Violencia” took place. It was a power dispute between the two dominant political parties of the country: Conservatives and Liberals. In 1957, after this bloody period an accord between the two party leaders –members of Colombian social elite- was signed, according to which a power sharing agreement was established, called the “National Front”. The agreement allowed the parties to shift the presidency position among them for the next four terms. The agreement was perceived as an exclusive deal, leaving other political views such as the socialists out of the political domain (Guaqueta 2006: 273-277).

This discontent summed to high levels of disparate development and a growing inequality gap gave raise to the two main left wing guerrillas still present in the country: Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN). In the 1970’s, these groups were small guerrillas in minor rural areas of the country. Around 1980, an expansion of these illegal armed groups took place, due to the financial support they found through kidnapping and extortions (Guaqueta 2006: 273-277).

In the same period, other illegal armed groups started coming into light, specifically illegal paramilitary groups of right-wing ideologies, all united under the umbrella of the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC). They were independent illegal groups mainly supported by large landowners, agricultural elites and cattle ranchers willing to get protection against the violent attacks of the guerrillas. Since then, strong relations between the AUC, politicians and landlords have been evidenced, linked to what many affected communities mention to be the cause of the absence of protection of the government in massacres and attacks perpetrated by these groups (Guaqueta 2006: 273-277).

Violent confrontations escalated rapidly in the 1990’s and methods for controlling the territory became increasingly bloodiest. Murders, massacres, terrorist attacks are some of the violent events that Colombian societies have suffered. Internal displacement became a major problem and an increasingly amount of victims have suffered the hard consequences of this armed conflict (Guaqueta 2006: 273-277).

Consecutive governments have implemented different strategies to end conflict, including peace negotiations attempts and strong military strategies, and some results have been achieved. In 2002, Alvaro Uribe Velez won the presidential elections with a campaign which main objective was focused on a militarized strategy to defeat illegal armed groups. It was done with US assistance embedded in the anti-terrorism strategy promoted by the US (Guaqueta 2006: 273-277).

The strategy’s ‘programs and projects were called the “Democratic Security Policy”, which achieved, in 2002, a collective demobilization of the

AUC members after a strong negotiation process between the government and the paramilitary groups' leaders. As part of this process, in 2005 the "Justice and Peace Law" was promulgated, which included mechanisms of transitional justice focused on the victims' rights (Llorente and Arnson 2009: 5). On the other hand, the military strategy to defeat the left wing guerrillas has achieved important results in terms of security, yet the FARC and ELN guerrillas are still active, causing millions of casualties and victims all over the country (Guaqueta 2006: 273-277).

Despite these results, many debates and ambiguities are still present in Colombia, related to the rearming of paramilitary members, the links of politicians with paramilitaries, the weak process of reparation of victims, etc., which are not the focus of this research but will affect the further reconstruction processes of the country.

## Appendix B: List of Interviews

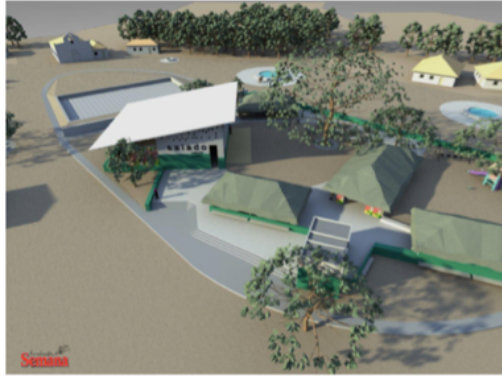
All the interviews were done between the 15th of July and the 15th of August 2011.

**Table 1.1**  
**List of Participants and their Characteristics**

<b>Interviewee #</b>	<b>Actor</b>	<b>Role</b>
1	Private Sector Company	Representative of PS Company
2	Semana Foundation	Director of Semana Foundation
3	Private Sector Company	Representative of PS Company
4	Private Sector Company	Representative of PS Company
5	Private Sector Company	Representative of PS Company
6	Private Sector Company	Architect
7	Private Sector Company	Representative of PS Company
8	Public Sector	Representative of state institution
9	Public Sector	Representative of state institution
10	Private Sector Company	Representative of PS Company
11	Community of El Salado	Woman Local Entrepreneur
12 to 18	Community of El Salado	Communitarian Women association
19	Community of El Salado	Women - Community Member
20	Community of El Salado	Men - Community Member
21	Community of El Salado	Women – Leader
22	Community of El Salado	Women - Community Member
23	Community of El Salado	Men - Community Member
24	Community of El Salado	Men - Leader
25 to 29	Semana Foundation	Regional Team
30	Community of El Salado	Men - Local entrepreneur

## Appendix C: Photos

**Figure C.1**  
**Design of the Center of the Town**



*Source:* Semana Foundation

**Figure C.2**  
**Design of the Town House**



*Source:* Semana Foundation

**Figure C.3**  
**Construction of the Town House**



*Source:* Semana Foundation

**Figure C.4**  
**Old Electrical Network**



*Source: Semana Foundation*

**Figure C.5**  
**New Electrical Network**



*Source: Semana Foundation*

**Figure C.6**  
**Computer Lab with Internet**



*Source: Semana Foundation*

**Figure C.7**  
**Home Improvements**



Source: Semana Foundation

**Figure C.8**  
**Bathroom Improvements**



Source: Semana Foundation

**Figure C.9**  
**Kitchen Improvements**



Source: Semana Foundation

**Figure C.9**  
**New Ambulance**



*Source: Semana Foundation*

**Figure C.10**  
**Construction of Sewerage**



*Source: Semana Foundation*