

# The mystique of the peasant reserve zones and the closing of the agricultural frontier

## Introduction

Rural communities that demand recognition by the State as Peasant Reserve Zones -ZRC, are characterized by having endured long periods of confrontation between the armed actors, on the other hand they have undertaken their prodigious colonizing task, away from the intervention of the State. They have adapted the infrastructure as a result of an exercise in solidarity, which today has become a strength to work towards improving their quality of life in post-conflict scenarios that are expected in the very short term. The rural families that are located in these areas expect a quick intervention of the State institutions to improve their living conditions, these actions must guarantee the conservation of the social, environmental and economic elements that gave rise to their peasant territoriality.

According to Law 160 of 1994 known as the “Agrarian Reform Law”, the ZRCs are constituted as areas for stabilizing the agrarian frontier and strengthening peasant economies. Thus, these areas become a figure of “social, environmental and productive organization of a region” (Judgment C-371 of 2014 of the Constitutional Court) and an important instrument of integral rural development, agrarian reform and social justice.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, there are 62 peasant organizations from different regions of the country that are affiliated to the National Association of Peasant Reserve Zones -ANZORC<sup>1</sup>. So far, there are six Peasant Reserve Zones in the country that add up to an area of 831,111 hectares, which is equivalent to 9.4%. In the process of constitution of ZRC, there are about 7 processes that represent some 963,735 hectares, and in initiatives of constitution, there are about 44 processes, which can be approximately six million seven hundred thousand hectares (6,763,828 ha).

But, ultimately, what is a ZRC and what does it represent? A definition based on the legal framework could be found in Article 80 of Law 160, where ZRCs are defined as geographic areas selected by the Board of Directors of INCORA,<sup>2</sup> having taking into account the regional agroecological and socioeconomic characteristics, however, where is the mystique of the ZRCs? And where are the historical antecedents that could have led to the construction of a public policy from below? Areas of stabilization of the agrarian frontier and strengthening of peasant economies, as indicated above, add to

<sup>1</sup>The ANZORC is a process of articulation of the Colombian peasant organizations, which seeks the full recognition of the rights of the peasantry and the exercise of territoriality through the figure of Peasant Reserve Zones. Strategic objectives to contribute to the recognition of the peasant as a political subject of rights and promotion of the rights of the peasantry. 1) Contribute to the promotion of the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform through the democratization of the land in the Peasant Reserve Zones. 2) Promote and strengthen the peasant organization and its capacity to influence politics. 3) Promote, strengthen and consolidate the figure of Peasant Reserve Zones.

<sup>2</sup>Decree 2365 of 2015, measures are adopted on the occasion of the closing of the liquidation of the Colombian Institute of Rural Development - INCODER. Decree 2363 of 2015, by which the National Land Agency -ANT is created.

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what are peace strategies and at the same time represent alternatives for rural development, in the face of exogenous, homogenizing and unsustainable models (economically and environmentally) promoted for the rural sector since the 1950s, which contributes to the displacement of small farmers to areas of interest environmental.<sup>3</sup>

Consequently, the ZRCs represent the recognition of the State to the protection of the peasant economy, but in that sense we could place this cultural recognition of the peasantry in three important aspects, the production of food and its gastronomy, the relationship with natural resources and the organization community. In this last aspect, it is that we dare to think that the mystique of the ZRCs is found, although many rural communities manifest expressions organized around a variety of topics, for the specific case of the Peasant Reserve Zones, a cultural identity is observed in direct proportion to a unified proposal with respect to territorial ordering and social organization, which must be observed in detail given a singular conjunction of elements in expressions of representativeness mechanisms, participation mechanisms, forms of conflict resolution and finally the construction of consensus that well for rural communities far from the management by the State institutions, can converge in the real implementation of coexistence manuals that ultimately represented the ability to adapt to inhospitable geographical spaces, a fundamental element of the construction of rules of coexistence that finally influenced the land use planning, understood as the distribution of areas with a specific purpose in general, a distribution of uses very similar to the one that

<sup>3</sup>These modern planning policies based on agribusiness generated the displacement of small farmers from the best soils in the country: the plains of Valle del Cauca, Tolima, Cesar, Atlántico, and belatedly the terraces of Ariari, in Meta; which were the territories inherited from the process of concentration of the estates. (Fajardo, 1993. 208 p.

today invites us to build the Environmental Zoning Plan of point 1.10 of the Peace Accords.<sup>4</sup>

On some occasions in institutional settings, an invitation is made not to promote the idealization of the figure of ZRC, however, when an in-depth review is made regarding the organization of rural communities, it is impossible to stop highlighting the valuable aspects that are behind it.<sup>2-4</sup>

Now, the conceptual revision invites us to interpret the social organization and the elements behind this cultural production, for which, Habermas analyzes the conditions of the rationality of social action from the interaction based on the use of language, supported by the principle that the underlying reason in the action of the subjects is a property of the communication structures, but not of the individuals by themselves. The work entitled "Theory of Communicative Action" is one of Habermas's most transcendental, since in this work he analyzed he developed the rational foundations of a theory of action capable of superimposing itself on the subjectivism and individualism of the modern philosophy of the epoch. The association that Habermas builds between norms or rules and the production of agreements based on consensus, arising from individual thoughts, is a determining element in studying rural communities that, apart from norms and rules promoted by the State, had to build alternatives of coexistence. The concept of action regulated by norms refers not to the behavior of an actor who is, in principle alone, encountering other actors in his environment, but to the members of a social group that guides their actions by common values.

Currently in many academic texts, reference is made to the capacity of local communities to manage their resources, and this is a fundamental element when it comes to marking the development of rural communities, in principle the recognition by the institutions of the State, is related to the recognition of the presence of local communities with the ability to organize production, manage their resources, develop their own knowledge and recognize these elements as structuring the economy and society with their own diversities. Social capital is that type of resources, assets and capacities of communities, present in networks, ties and personal, family and social relationships, in organizations, associations and institutions. This is the capital of the ZRC, a resource that is not exhausted, but on the contrary increases with its use, which is useful for the pursuit of development objectives.

According to Durston the concept of social capital "is particularly useful for rethinking the problem posed by the persistence of rural poverty" (p. 15). This leads us to think about the close relationship between this concept and the reality of rural communities, so that

<sup>4</sup>Within the framework of the Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict, the Comprehensive Rural Reform -RRI, lays the foundations for the structural transformation of the countryside, creates conditions of well-being for the rural population. Point 1.1. Access and Use. Unproductive lands. Formalization of the property. Agricultural border and protection of reserve areas. 1.1.10. Closure of the agricultural frontier and protection of reserve areas. In order to promote the proper use of the land, in addition to the new cadastral structure and the progressivity of the property tax (1.1.9.), The Government will adopt the measures and create the necessary incentives to prevent and promote solutions to conflicts between the vocation of the land and its actual use, taking into special consideration the Environmental Zoning Plan discussed in this point and taking into account the principle of Well-being and Good Living. The removals of the Forest Reserve Zones to which this Agreement refers, will prioritize access to land for peasants without land or with insufficient land, through different forms of organization or association, including the Peasant Reserve Zones, that contribute to the closure of the agricultural frontier, to the strengthening of the peasant economy and family farming.

social capital in them can be a key element as a strategy or development factor. The concept of social capital has become so widely used because it puts into the debate a set of issues rendered invisible by dominant policies and theories, however, the social dimension of human existence can be as important as the economic dimensions; [...] The social underlies any other economic or political action.

In what has been described above, we can redefine the concept of Peasant Reserve Zones, as that of organized peasant communities in the Territory,<sup>5</sup> in itself, a legal and legitimate representation of a peasant demand in relation to the recognition of their culture.<sup>6</sup> It is surprising how a legal figure whose purpose is to defend peasant culture, would have suffered and to this day continue to suffer stigmatization and suppression by many social and institutional actors.

### ZRCs and the closing of the agricultural border

Deforestation is a complex phenomenon, motivated by various direct and underlying causes. It is executed by multiple actors and, usually, constitutes the first step of the expansion process of the agricultural frontier, giving rise to uncovered soils that can be used for agricultural activities (legal and illegal), livestock, mining, infrastructure construction or pasture land for the accumulation of land. A concrete result of this social production in relation to land use planning is given by the results of the recent evaluation of the ZRC, carried out by the FAO, where the ZRC of Cabrera and El Pato-Balsillas, which have intermediate areas compared to the others (44,000 and 88,000 ha, respectively), show the lowest internal and external deforestation rates (less than 1% per year), which are usually lower or very close to the national deforestation rates and whose historical behavior is similar to the trend national. This set of characteristics, and the community conservation agreements that exist there, make these two ZRCs successful examples of controlling deforestation and contributing to the stabilization of the agricultural frontier.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, it is necessary to point out that the areas of the ZRC, where the management of the social organization of the ZRC, has not been able to contain the phenomenon of deforestation, is related to the dynamics of an institutional development approach (in many cases intersectoral) that they have overwhelmed them, and they have not been able to contain neither the attributes of their culture, nor their organizations, nor their project of territorial ordering, and not even the integrity of their community, nor that of their leaders.

Some international experiences show that forests managed by local communities are in better ecological conditions than forests managed by the State, in addition to providing greater social and economic benefits. Similarly, it is evident that these forest management strategies by organized local communities have managed to stabilize and even reduce deforestation rates. With this, greater degrees of governance have been achieved by stopping the advance of the agricultural frontier and controlling the advance of forest fires.

Faced with environmental functionality in territorial environmental planning. In this context, the coincident ZRCs in many of these

<sup>5</sup>The forum "Contributions and challenges of the ZRCs to the closure of the agricultural frontier and participatory environmental zoning" - held last week, convened by the Ministry of the Environment and Anzorc (National Association of ZRCs), and funded by UNDP and the European Union to support the implementation of the Peace Agreement— highlighted the organizational, technical and conceptual capacity of the peasant organizations to dialogue with the institutions, and the level of commitment of some actors to promote the ZRCs. Juan Pablo Ruiz Soto. Column The Spectator July 27, 2018.

<sup>6</sup>The recognition of the culture of the peasantry in aspects as important as gastronomy, myths and legends, music, spatial distribution, the relationship with natural resources and community organization, among others.

territories are a historical-concrete experience of social production of the territory linked and determined by the consolidated organizational processes in the process of formation of the peasant communities according to their own logics and trajectories, where They promote democratic forms of social and economic self-regulation, claims of the peasant subject and their rights and especially promoting balanced relationships with nature<sup>6</sup> from their forms of economy and livelihood.

The occupation models in the ZRCs for the present analysis can be disaggregated into the following dimensions, a spatial dimension and a cultural dimension, the first given that the geographical location of most of the processes present special conditions of fragility and environmental importance, which has in turn conditioned its development and consolidation. On the other hand, a cultural dimension, determined among other factors, such as intangibles and / or local cultural and spiritual values, as well as their own productive and adaptive practices in these environments with serious environmental limitations and access to economic and social benefits, developing community standards and pacts for environmental care through their organizational forms.

These dimensions of the occupation models also allow inferring that the communities of the ZRC, due to their location and cultural appropriations insitu, have their own spatial rationality, which determines their relationship with the environment, their own modes of ordering and management of the territory, as well as such as the establishment of internal community standards and measures inextricably linked to caring for the environment and self-support, always supported by social organization.

In practice, the case of the ZRC of Cabrera located in the department of Cundinamarca, which in turn is influenced by an important páramo complex recognized for its importance in the production of water for the center of the country, called the Páramo de Sumapaz , has also developed processes of social resistance and environmental justice in the face of invasive energy projects, proposals and strategies regarding the use, occupation and management of the soil, in accordance with its local conditions and the fragility of the mentioned ecosystem.

Therefore, the approach of the different models of occupation in the ZRC as experiences of social production of the territory, are of vital importance to better understand the scope, inter and intra relationships in front of the environmental component of the figure in each territory In conclusion, the peasant occupation models give rise to the forms of environmental ordering of the territory, in fact, peasant-nature relations around the peasant economy and environmental conservation.

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## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing interests.

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