



Tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding in Colombia

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ABSTRACT: This article analysed the intersection of tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding within the context of Colombia's post-conflict scenario, with a particular focus on the southern subregion of Tolima. Based on Nancy Fraser's (2008) theory of social justice, the study analyses institutional limitations that perpetuate the exclusion of local communities in tourism planning and development processes, serving as obstacles to achieving participatory parity. The research employs a qualitative approach, supported by document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation. It reveals how, despite recognizing tourism as a tool for social transformation and reconciliation, normative and administrative dynamics continue to marginalize the directly affected stakeholders. This study contributes to the theoretical framework of the issue by applying Fraser's concept of participatory parity to analyse tourism governance in post-conflict contexts. Furthermore, it proposes practical alternatives to rethink public policies aimed at tourism development as a means of achieving social justice.

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1. Introduction

In 2016, Colombia signed a Peace Agreement with the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC-EP), a guerrilla group active for over 50 years (Aponte, 2019). The conflict, one of the world's longest, left over 9 million victims, including displaced and deceased individuals (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2023).

To address rural conflict impacts, the agreement prioritized Development Programs with a Territorial Focus (PDET) to tackle conflict causes and improve living conditions (Decreto-Ley 893, 2017). In 2017, 170 municipalities across 16 subregions were selected, including Ataco, Chaparral, Planadas, and Rioblanco in southern Tolima. Local communities identified tourism as a means for economic recovery and lasting peace (ART, 2023).

The importance of tourism lies in its weight in the global economy and its ability to influence local and global social development. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is a key driver of socioeconomic progress, comparable to oil exports, with 922 million international tourists recorded and \$1.011 trillion generated in 2022 (UNWTO, 2023). In the same year, Colombia ranked as the fifth country in the Americas with the highest number of international tourist arrivals, with approximately 4.5 million visitors—a significant figure within the region (UNWTO, 2023).

Tourism has been recognized by the UNWTO as a tool capable of contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goals 8, 12, and 14, which relate to sustainable economic growth, responsible consumption and production, and the sustainable use of oceans and marine resources (UNWTO, 2018). Furthermore, tourism has a direct impact on SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies. According to the UNWTO, tourism can foster tolerance and understanding

between cultures, laying the foundation for more peaceful societies. In post-conflict contexts, such as Colombia, tourism holds the potential to consolidate peace by engaging and benefiting local communities (UNWTO, 2018). This is especially relevant in the Colombian context, particularly in Tolima, a region deeply marked by a history of significant violence.

During the celebration of World Tourism Day in 2020, the UNWTO emphasized the role of tourism in helping rural communities overcome the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, under the slogan “Tourism and Rural Development.” The initiative aimed to decentralize tourism from urban areas to unlock the transformative potential of this activity in rural regions (UNWTO, 2023).

Tourism is not merely an economic activity but also encompasses ethical and political dimensions that can be understood from the perspective of social justice (Seyfi, Rastegar, Kuhzady, Hall, & Saarinen, 2023). In other words, as tourism directly impacts the lives of communities where tourism activities take place, it has the potential to contribute to social justice (Jamal & Higham, 2021). This is particularly important in post-conflict societies, where peacebuilding, stemming from agreements to end conflicts, necessarily involves achieving higher levels of social justice (Rocca & Zielinski, 2022).

In this sense, tourism is positioned as a potential activity capable of driving social transformation and peacebuilding. However, for these transformations to materialize, it is necessary for communities to actively participate in the planning and development processes of tourism in their territories. In developing countries, community participation in such matters often faces significant limitations, primarily due to state-institutional structures and entrenched cultural patterns (Tosun, 2000). Thus, as long as all affected parties cannot participate in decision-making processes related to tourism development, the transformative potential of tourism in terms of peacebuilding in post-conflict contexts, such as in Colombia, will remain diminished.

From a social justice perspective, participation plays a crucial role, particularly through the lens proposed by Nancy Fraser. In general, social transformations are only possible if all those affected—who will eventually be subject to the decisions made—are able to participate as equals in decision-making processes. This perspective of participatory parity in decision-making is what Nancy Fraser considers an essential condition for achieving social justice.

Accordingly, within Fraser's theoretical framework, social justice is the ability of all individuals and groups to participate as equals in the social processes that shape their lives. This concept encompasses three fundamental dimensions: redistribution, which addresses socioeconomic inequalities; recognition, aimed at overcoming cultural and symbolic subordination dynamics; and representation, which ensures equitable inclusion in collective decision-making processes (Fraser, 2008). In the Colombian context, striving to move beyond its conflict-ridden past, this vision underscores the necessity of dismantling institutional barriers that restrict the participation of historically marginalized communities, thereby guaranteeing both the redistribution of resources and the recognition of their identities and perspectives.

With the problem framework established, the primary objective of this research is to examine how rural communities perceive tourism as a tool for addressing the causes and effects of the armed conflict while identifying the normative limitations that restrict their participation. This article is structured as follows: first, it presents a critical review of the existing literature on tourism; second, it addresses the theoretical framework that connects social justice and participatory parity in the context of tourism; third, it describes the methodology and empirical results; and finally, it concludes with a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications.

Through a qualitative research approach employing techniques such as document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and participant observation, with field visits and direct interaction with community leaders in southern Tolima during 2021 and 2022, it was demonstrated that, despite communities directly affected by Colombia's armed conflict perceiving tourism as a significant opportunity to address its causes and effects, institutionalized obstacles persist. These obstacles prevent all those affected from participating on equal terms in defining tourism development strategies in the territory. The analysis was based on an

inductive-deductive approach, triangulating information sources to ensure the robustness of the findings.

This study integrates a critical analysis of the normative structures limiting community participation with a theoretical framework based on Nancy Fraser's social justice theory, significantly contributing to the literature on tourism from a near-universal and comprehensive theoretical perspective. Unlike previous research, which has focused on tourism's economic or symbolic potential, this work examines how institutional frameworks can perpetuate dynamics of exclusion, even in contexts designed for social reconstruction. Furthermore, the on-site analysis in southern Tolima represents a valuable empirical contribution to understanding the intersections between tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding in regions affected by prolonged armed conflicts, which can also be applied to other regions experiencing similar conflict-driven challenges.

2. An approach to the literature on tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding

The review of the literature on social justice and peacebuilding in tourism reveals a wide range of research and approaches that highlight the importance of this field in the context of tourism. Over the past decades, various studies have examined how tourism can serve as a tool to promote peace and social justice, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

2.1. Tourism and peace

The relationship between tourism and peace has been extensively explored in post-conflict contexts, emphasizing its potential as a tool for reconciliation, social stabilization, and the transformation of conflict dynamics. However, the literature also underscores the challenges these initiatives face, particularly when institutional and cultural dynamics limit the active participation of local communities, thereby affecting tourism's transformative impact.

Several studies have highlighted how tourism can foster social and cultural renewal in regions devastated by conflict. Anson (1999) notes, in the case of Northern Ireland, how heritage tourism can act as a vehicle for reconciliation by using previously contentious sites as spaces for intercultural dialogue. This approach is enriched by the concept of "phoenix tourism" proposed by Causevic and Lynch (2011) in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which emphasizes that tourism must go beyond economic recovery to prioritize social restoration and community cohesion.

However, these analyses do not always examine how institutional exclusion dynamics can limit tourism's effectiveness in consolidating peace. For example, Novelli, Morgan, and Nibigira (2012), in their study in Burundi, emphasize the importance of strategic planning and international cooperation but do not delve into how local communities can equitably participate in these processes. This highlights a critical gap: the need to connect tourism efforts with a theoretical framework of social justice that ensures inclusion and active participation of affected communities.

Mair, Ritchie, and Walters (2014) focus on crisis management in conflict-affected destinations, suggesting that a coordinated response can facilitate recovery and stability. While useful, this approach tends to prioritize short-term responses, neglecting long-term implications for structural justice and social equity. Similarly, Becken and Carmignani (2016) document the stabilizing effect of tourist arrivals in countries with conflict histories but fail to address how these dynamics can perpetuate inequalities if mechanisms for economic redistribution and cultural recognition are not integrated.

In specific contexts such as Sri Lanka, Buultjens, Ratnayake, and Gnanapala (2016) highlight the role of tourism in post-conflict economic resilience but caution that the lack of inclusive policies can exacerbate pre-existing inequalities. This finding is particularly relevant for Colombia, where, according to Menchero Sánchez (2018), tourism has significant potential as a driver of sustainable development following the Peace Agreement with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia. However, it faces challenges related to the effective implementation of inclusive and reconciliation-oriented strategies.

More recent studies, such as those by Carbone (2022) and Farmaki (2017), delve into how tourism can shape social narratives in post-conflict contexts. Carbone emphasizes the role of war museums in

promoting narratives of forgiveness and reconciliation, while Farmaki proposes a methodological framework that integrates multiple stakeholders into tourism management. These approaches underscore the importance of designing tourism initiatives that respect and value local voices—an aspect also highlighted by Guasca, Vanneste, and van Broeck (2021) in their analysis of Montes de María, Colombia, where tourism has been used as a tool to resist structural violence.

Nevertheless, the existing literature reveals significant gaps at the intersection of tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding. While tourism's potential to foster peace is widely recognized, few studies explicitly incorporate a theoretical framework addressing economic and cultural inequalities in post-conflict contexts. Nancy Fraser's concept of participatory parity provides a critical framework for analysing how tourism can serve as an effective tool for social justice by ensuring the equitable inclusion of local communities in decision-making processes.

2.2. Tourism and Social Justice

The intersection between tourism and social justice has garnered growing academic interest, revealing a complex landscape in which tourism can act both as a perpetuator of inequalities and as a catalyst for social transformation. The literature emphasizes the importance of an ethical and fair approach to tourism planning and practice, highlighting the need to ensure equity, inclusion, and social responsibility. However, significant research gaps remain, particularly regarding the connection between social justice dynamics and post-conflict contexts, such as the case of Colombia.

From an ethical perspective, Hultsman (1995) emphasizes the need to integrate ethical principles into tourism, distinguishing between a paradigmatic ethics and an operational code. His proposal establishes a framework that combines economic benefits with social and ecological concerns, providing a basis for rethinking tourism from a humanistic perspective. In this regard, Higgins-Desbiolles (2006, 2008) reinforces this perspective by conceptualizing "justice tourism," an alternative that seeks to decouple tourism from the neoliberal dynamics that perpetuate inequities. The author argues that tourism can be a force for social justice if redesigned to address structural inequalities and promote a more equitable global order. In a post-conflict context, this idea points to the necessity of inclusive tourism policies that allow local communities to actively participate in and benefit from tourism.

Complementing this vision, Pritchard, Morgan, and Ateljevic (2011) introduce the notion of "hopeful tourism," a transformative approach that combines learning and action to address structural inequalities. The authors highlight tourism's potential as a driver of social justice by facilitating co-transformative learning processes between communities and visitors, an idea directly applicable to developing rural contexts where tourism can serve as a vehicle for reconciliation.

Recently, Higgins-Desbiolles (2018, 2020) has emphasized that under neoliberalism, tourism has been limited in its capacity to fulfil its transformative promise. She proposes that, in a post-COVID-19 scenario, tourism should be restructured into a more ethical, community-centred model. This call to rethink tourism presents an opportunity to analyse how tourism can be integrated into processes of social justice and peacebuilding.

Jamal y Budke (2020) and Jamal and Higham (2021) stress the need to prioritize ethical principles and justice in tourism, particularly in research aimed at sustainability and equity. Their proposals for a new platform for tourism development provide a useful framework to address contemporary challenges, highlighting the importance of ensuring rights, equity, and inclusive participation—essential elements in post-conflict contexts.

Seyfi et al. (2023) and Rastegar and Ruhanen (2022) address specific aspects such as the impacts of tourism boycotts and the rapid growth of tourism, highlighting the need for a "new ethics" to tackle the complexities of social justice. These studies emphasize that for tourism to be fair, it must go beyond economic sustainability and confront the structural inequalities affecting host communities.

In this same vein, Dodds, Ali, and Galaski (2016) propose innovative approaches, such as posthumanism

and community-based tourism, to overcome structural barriers and promote greater justice in the distribution of tourism benefits. These ideas are particularly relevant to the Colombian context, where community-based tourism could become a vehicle for fostering social justice in historically marginalized territories.

Nevertheless, despite these contributions, the literature presents significant limitations. While it acknowledges the transformative potential of tourism, few studies explicitly integrate a theoretical framework linking tourism to the economic, cultural, and political dimensions that are key to social justice according to Nancy Fraser.

2.3. Tourism and participation

The academic literature on tourism and participation emphasizes the centrality of inclusion and the empowerment of local communities as pillars of social justice and sustainability in tourism development. This field of study has evolved towards theoretical approaches addressing power relations, governance structures, and the sociopolitical dynamics that determine the degree and quality of community participation in tourism projects.

Tosun (2000) provides a seminal analysis of the structural and cultural barriers that restrict community participation in developing countries, arguing that these limitations not only reflect economic inequalities but are deeply rooted in institutional configurations that perpetuate asymmetrical power relations. This theoretical framework suggests that effective participation requires structural reforms that transform the socioeconomic and political foundations sustaining these hierarchies, highlighting the need to overcome merely symbolic participation to achieve more inclusive and equitable models.

From a normative perspective, Rocca and Zielinski (2022) explore the importance of social capital and community governance in post-conflict contexts, arguing that the ability of communities to organize collectively and manage shared resources is essential for maximizing the benefits of tourism. Without these structures, exclusionary and unequal dynamics tend to persist, limiting tourism's transformative potential as a tool for social reconstruction. This analysis underscores the interdependence between community participation and distributive justice, fundamental aspects of peacebuilding in post-conflict territories.

Gutierrez (2023) builds on this by proposing a theoretical model exploring the interplay between participation and empowerment. According to the author, effective participation in community-based tourism depends not only on the existence of formal spaces for inclusion but also on strengthening the individual and collective capacities of communities to influence decision-making. This theoretical approach highlights the need to design strategies that combine resource redistribution with the recognition of local identities and knowledge, aligning with Nancy Fraser's (2008) concept of participatory parity.

Within a post-structuralist framework, Martini, A. (2023) introduces the concept of mobility justice in post-disaster tourism in Japan, arguing that tourism practices can serve as spaces to renegotiate policies and local needs through a justice-of-recognition approach. This analysis broadens the discussion on tourism and social justice by considering affective relationships and mobility as key dimensions in shaping participation.

On the other hand, Antošová, Lima Santos, and Stradová (2021) address the perception of safety as a critical factor in promoting community participation in tourist destinations. They emphasize that security dynamics affect not only tourists' decisions but also local communities' ability to engage with and benefit from tourism activities. In post-conflict contexts, these perceptions are particularly relevant as they can either reinforce or mitigate pre-existing structural barriers.

The redistributive approach to community participation is also highlighted by Brida, Cortes-Jimenez, and Pulina (2014), who stress that actively including communities in the design and management of tourism is essential for maximizing local economic benefits and minimizing negative impacts. This framework aligns with the proposal of Higgins-Desbiolles (2006), who advocates for a tourism model that promotes social equity through the empowerment of local communities.

Finally, Pritchard, Morgan, and Ateljevic (2011) adopt a transformative approach by arguing that community participation must go beyond superficial consultation. They propose a model that links collective action to the restructuring of power relations within tourism. This approach connects participation with social justice by addressing structural inequalities as fundamental barriers to sustainability.

The reviewed literature converges on the understanding that community participation in tourism is not merely a technical component but a deeply political and normative process requiring the integration of principles of redistributive justice, recognition, and representation. However, theoretical gaps persist regarding how to operationalize these dimensions in post-conflict contexts.

2.4. Theoretical Framework: Participatory Parity as a Normative Principle of Social Justice

The theory of social justice proposed by Nancy Fraser is based on the concept of participatory parity, defined as the normative principle that allows all individuals to participate as equals in social life. For Fraser (2008), justice entails dismantling institutionalized obstacles that perpetuate economic, cultural, and political inequalities to ensure that all individuals can act as peers in decision-making processes that affect their lives. This principle, central to her theory, integrates the three dimensions of justice: redistribution, recognition, and representation.

Fraser asserts that the concept of participatory parity originates from a critique of the liberal public sphere model proposed by Habermas. According to Fraser (1997), the public sphere, while fostering formal spaces for deliberation, is conditioned by structural inequalities that restrict the full participation of certain groups due to barriers of class, gender, or race. These limitations create a framework of exclusion that prevents subordinates from achieving parity, which Fraser conceptualizes as structural injustice. Her theoretical proposal thus advocates for a "radical democracy" that overcomes these exclusions and ensures equitable participation conditions.

In the political realm, Fraser identifies three levels of representation where injustices obstruct participatory parity:

- Failed political-ordinary representation, referring to the exclusion of certain individuals from political decisions due to decision-making rules that unjustly deny them the right to participate as peers (Fraser, 2008).
- The level of meta-political injustice, which involves misframing, or the exclusion of affected groups from the frameworks themselves that determine who has the right to participate in matters of justice. These frameworks, designed by elites or political communities, consolidate inequalities by excluding key actors from deliberation processes (Fraser, 2007).
- Exclusions generated by transnational or supranational structures that fall beyond the capacities of nation-states to ensure justice. These are termed global injustices and are typical in globalized contexts where decisions transcend territorial boundaries (Fraser, 2008).

Nancy Fraser's theoretical framework finds direct application in analysing the dynamics of exclusion and inequality in tourism as a tool for peacebuilding in the southern subregion of Tolima. The Development Programs with a Territorial Focus, designed as mechanisms to address the structural causes of conflict and foster sustainable development, present obstacles that reflect the meta-political injustices identified by Fraser. Specifically, the Agency for Territorial Renewal defined participation frameworks without involving local communities in their design, constituting a clear example of misframing.

According to Fraser (2008), misframing occurs when the boundaries of participation frameworks unjustly exclude those directly affected by the decisions being made. In this case, the rural communities of southern Tolima, the primary beneficiaries of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus, were excluded from the processes of defining the rules governing their participation in tourism planning.

The empirical analysis of this case, guided by the principle of participatory parity, allows exploration of

how the three dimensions of justice proposed by Fraser interconnect in the pursuit of inclusive and transformative tourism:

- **Redistribution:** Tourism governance in southern Tolima fails to equitably distribute the resources and benefits generated by tourism. Local communities, marginalized from decision-making, face barriers to accessing economic benefits, reinforcing structural inequalities and economic subordination.
- **Recognition:** Legal and administrative frameworks exclude communities from planning and disregard their cultural identities and traditional knowledge. This misrecognition, as defined by Fraser, subordinates communities in governance, preventing their perspectives from shaping tourism policies and perpetuating a symbolic hierarchy that limits tourism's potential for social cohesion and cultural justice.
- **Representation:** Southern Tolima exemplifies meta-political injustice, as the Agency for Territorial Renewal excluded local communities from deliberative processes. This institutionalized misframing prevents them from influencing decisions affecting their territories, reinforcing exclusion and hindering peacebuilding. Reforming governance frameworks is essential to ensuring full and equitable community participation in decision-making.

Fraser's framework allows for diagnosing these injustices while providing a normative criterion for evaluating legal and administrative frameworks as guarantors of participatory parity. In this regard, the empirical analysis of tourism in southern Tolima underscores the importance of redesigning tourism governance processes to dismantle these exclusions and promote sustainable and equitable development.

Unlike theoretical approaches that address these dimensions in a fragmented manner, Fraser develops a model that interweaves economic, cultural, and political justice into a cohesive framework, establishing a normative methodology suited for addressing the complexities of contemporary societies in conflict-affected contexts.

For this reason, Fraser's multidimensional model surpasses the limitations of traditional theories that prioritize either economic redistribution or cultural recognition as isolated dimensions of justice. Her framework enables the analysis of systemic injustices from a comprehensive perspective, highlighting how economic and symbolic structures interact in producing and perpetuating inequalities. Furthermore, the principle of participatory parity stands out for its normative flexibility, making it applicable to both subnational and transnational contexts. This characteristic renders it a versatile analytical tool for examining justice-related issues across various levels of governance. Additionally, the incorporation of the meta-political dimension and the concept of misframing expands the analytical horizon by critically interrogating institutional and legal frameworks that determine who have the right to participate in justice debates, thereby exposing the structural roots of social exclusions.

However, the concept of participatory parity also presents limitations that must be addressed to ensure its applicability in specific contexts. Although it is a meta-normative theory intended for universal application, the practical translation of this principle requires strategies not always explicitly outlined in Fraser's theory. The genesis of her framework, which focuses on Western democratic contexts, raises questions about its ability to capture the complex dynamics of societies with distinct cultural values and systems. In southern Tolima, a region where collective values and community practices prevail, the concept requires adaptations to achieve full effectiveness. Another significant limitation lies in Fraser's relative lack of attention to the development of local agency. While she emphasizes the importance of removing barriers to participation, other theories, such as Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (2011) or sociological frameworks emphasizing the role of agents within their environments, like Giddens (1984), complement her vision by highlighting empowerment processes and the construction of agency as fundamental prerequisites for effective participation.

Compared to other theoretical approaches, the concept of participatory parity occupies a position of both convergence and divergence. On the one hand, it shares with Nussbaum's capabilities approach the goal of dismantling structures that limit equality of opportunity. However, while Nussbaum focuses on expanding individual freedoms and capacities to act (2011), Fraser emphasizes the structural and normative

conditions that enable equality in social interaction. Similarly, although cultural recognition is central to both Fraser and Charles Taylor (1993), Taylor addresses it from a more identity-centered perspective, whereas Fraser frames it within a multidimensional model that balances the economic, cultural, and political dimensions of justice. On the other hand, Giddens' focus on agency complements Fraser's framework by proposing a process that fosters critical awareness and collective action.

As a clarification, while this research acknowledges the limitations of the concept of participatory parity, it does not incorporate within its interpretative framework potential complements to Fraser's theory, such as Nussbaum's capabilities approach or Giddens' concept of agency. These theories emerge from the need to explain the intersubjective contexts of actors in situations of exclusion without systematically addressing the reasons why these subjects are positioned there. In this sense, this research reveals those systemic frameworks of injustice but does not aim to provide solutions for challenging them.

Thus, the case of southern Tolima highlights both the relevance and the limitations of Fraser's theoretical framework. The Development Programs with a Territorial Focus, designed to address the structural causes of armed conflict, have perpetuated dynamics of exclusion by establishing participation frameworks that exclude local communities from rule-setting and decision-making. This phenomenon of misframing illustrates how institutional frameworks can consolidate forms of exclusion by preventing the most affected from participating in decision-making processes. In this context, the dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation manifest unevenly. For instance, redistribution does not ensure equitable access to the resources generated by tourism, while the recognition of local identities and knowledge is frequently overlooked in governance policies. Representation poses significant challenges, as rural communities face direct exclusion from deliberative processes, consolidating forms of institutionalized subordination that undermine their ability to influence policies affecting their territories.

Fair tourism can be theorized from a social justice perspective as a multidimensional phenomenon that transcends its traditional conception as an economic activity, incorporating social, cultural, political, and moral dimensions essential for evaluating its equity and inclusiveness (Swarbrooke & Horner, 2012). This framework, grounded in Nancy Fraser's theory, situates tourism justice around the principle of participatory parity, which asserts that all actors affected by tourism must have the capacity to participate on equal terms in decision-making processes that impact their lives (Fraser, 1996).

The interaction among multiple actors in tourism—visitors, local communities, tourism operators, governments, and international institutions—highlights the importance of considering the political and moral dimensions of the phenomenon. These dimensions are fundamental to ensuring that tourism dynamics do not perpetuate forms of injustice, such as cultural subordination, political exclusion, or economic exploitation (Sharpley, 2014). In this context, fair tourism emerges as a critical alternative that redefines tourism within an ethical and social framework, prioritizing the well-being and inclusion of all stakeholders.

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourism as a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving the movement of people outside their usual environment for various purposes (UNWTO, n.d.). However, this definition, by focusing on the economic dimensions, neglects the moral and political implications essential for assessing justice in tourism. From a social justice perspective, fair tourism must ensure that host communities, especially those experiencing injustice, are recognized as key agents in developing tourism strategies, with respect for their culture, rights, and environments.

3. Methodology

The research was conducted within a qualitative paradigm, which is grounded in the in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena from the perspective of the involved actors Creswell, (2013) and Martínez (2010). This approach was chosen for its ability to capture the social, political, and cultural dynamics associated with tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding in a post-conflict context. The southern subregion of Tolima was selected as the case study due to its historical significance in the armed conflict and its relevance in the implementation of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus. Case studies allow

for a detailed analysis of a phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted in three complementary and interconnected stages, integrating data collection techniques such as participant observation Martínez (2024), document analysis, and semi-structured interviews, following a methodological design consistent with the qualitative approach. Each stage was structured to address the study's objectives, ensuring a critical and rigorous analysis of community participation dynamics in tourism planning and their relationship with social justice.

The first stage focused on constructing the theoretical framework. This phase involved reviewing relevant theoretical approaches to social justice, tourism, and community participation. It was determined that Nancy Fraser's theory, with its concept of participatory parity, offered a robust conceptual framework for analyzing how legal and institutional frameworks affect community inclusion in decision-making (Fraser, 2008). The choice of this theoretical framework was supported by its ability to integrate the dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation.

The second stage involved data collection, conducted between 2021 and 2022, through an ethnographic design that allowed the researchers to directly engage with the region's social dynamics (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Two complementary approaches were integrated: participant observation and document analysis. For participant observation, the researchers joined the daily activities of the leaders of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus Steering Groups, an emerging social movement in southern Tolima. This approach enabled the documentation of social interactions, power dynamics, and structural barriers to participation, enriching the contextual analysis of the studied phenomenon. Observations were recorded in field notes and memos, following Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (2011) recommendations for rigor in ethnographic data recording.

Additionally, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, five of which were selected as illustrative evidence due to their relevance in analyzing the obstacles identified in institutional participation designs. The interviews explored participants' perceptions of tourism, social justice, and peacebuilding, capturing the richness of their experiences and voices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Participants were selected through purposeful sampling based on criteria such as gender diversity, geographical representation, and leadership experience in the post-conflict context, ensuring adequate representativeness for the study's objectives (Patton, 2015). All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the informed consent of the participants, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity.

Document analysis, as part of this second stage, included a review of legal regulations and frameworks such as Legislative Decree 893 of 2017 and Decree 1223 of 2020, as well as documents produced by the Agency for Territorial Renewal and a political document drafted by community leaders titled "Agenda for the Advocacy of Steering Groups and Development Programs with a Territorial Focus Oversight Committees – Southern Tolima." This analysis identified legal provisions that act as barriers or facilitators to community participation in tourism development, following Bowen's (2009) guidelines for qualitative document analysis.

The third stage focused on data processing and analysis. A combination of inductive and deductive approaches was employed to ensure a comprehensive and critical analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The interviews were thematically coded using qualitative analysis software, which enabled the identification of key discursive patterns related to social justice and community participation. Field notes collected during participant observation were organized into thematic categories aligned with Nancy Fraser's theoretical concepts, facilitating the triangulation of data with findings from the interviews and document analysis. Content analysis was used to examine the reviewed documents, identifying how institutional regulations and policies reproduce or challenge structural exclusions in tourism governance processes (Krippendorff, 2018).

Recognizing the importance of reflexivity in qualitative research, special attention was given to the positionality of the research team and its potential influence on data collection and interpretation (Berger,

2015). The researchers, as external observers with prior academic and professional experience in tourism governance and social justice, maintained a reflexive stance throughout the study. This involved critically assessing how their perspectives, biases, and interactions with participants shaped the research process. Inspired by Ateljevic et al. (2005), the team engaged in continuous self-reflection, acknowledging their role in co-constructing knowledge and striving to minimize power asymmetries between researchers and participants.

To enhance transparency and validity, reflexive journaling was incorporated into the research process, allowing the researchers to document their positionality and evolving perspectives during fieldwork. Additionally, feedback sessions were held with community representatives to share preliminary findings and integrate their insights into the analysis. This collaborative approach aimed to ensure that the research not only accurately represented the lived experiences of local actors but also contributed to empowering the studied communities by amplifying their voices in tourism governance debates.

The methodological design adhered to ethical principles established for research in sensitive contexts, following the recommendations of the American Anthropological Association (AAA, 2012). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, always ensuring confidentiality and the protection of their rights. The ethnographic approach, complemented by qualitative data collection and analysis techniques, provided a deep and contextualized understanding of the dynamics of exclusion and participation in tourism development in southern Tolima, ensuring coherence between the study's objectives and the methodological strategies employed.

4. Discussion and Results

This section presents the findings from the field research, divided into two components: the legal aspects that limit participatory parity and the voices of the communities (Ragin, 2007), which empirically validate the prior analyses regarding injustices and citizen demands based on Nancy Fraser's theoretical framework.

For the analysis of qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was employed, allowing the identification of recurring patterns and relevant discursive markers in the interviews, participant observations, and analysed documents. This approach was chosen for its ability to structure diverse data into coherent themes aligned with the theoretical dimensions of social justice proposed by Nancy Fraser. The analytical process included an initial coding of interview transcripts and field notes, followed by the categorization of codes into emerging themes that reflected the perceptions, aspirations, and challenges of the communities in southern Tolima.

Methodological triangulation enhanced the validity of the findings by integrating data from multiple sources. For instance, themes identified in the interviews were compared with findings from participant observations and document analyses, ensuring consistency and depth in interpretation. This process facilitated the identification of structural and institutional barriers limiting community participation, as well as the transformative aspirations related to tourism as a tool for peacebuilding. Coding and analysis were conducted using qualitative software, which streamlined data systematization and the identification of key discursive patterns.

4.1. Legal obstacles to participatory parity

The Development Programs with a Territorial Focus, created as part of the first point of the 2016 Final Peace Agreement, aim to bridge the gap between rural and urban areas through a territorial approach that prioritizes citizen participation as a central element for peacebuilding. The Agreement states:

"Citizen participation is the foundation of all agreements that constitute the Final Agreement. Participation by society in peacebuilding and in the planning, execution, and monitoring of plans and programs in the territories, which is also a guarantee of transparency" (Gobierno de Colombia & Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia - Ejército del Pueblo, 2016).

However, the implementation of this premise in the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus,

formalized through Legislative Decree 893 of 2017, reveals significant contradictions. Although Article 5 of the decree stipulates that effective, broad, and pluralistic participation of territorial actors will be guaranteed at all stages of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus (Decree-Law 893, 2017), the structures designed for participation present profound limitations that undermine this objective.

4.1.1. **Logics of exclusion and their impact on participation**

Normatively and discursively, the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus operate under certain logics of exclusion, as interpreted through Nancy Fraser's theory of justice. These forms of exclusion significantly impact participation and are categorized into three areas: exclusion in the design of participatory spaces, consultative or symbolic participation, and institutional centralization in decision-making.

4.1.1.1. **Exclusion in the design of participatory spaces**

The methodological design of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus was led by the Agency for Territorial Renewal (ART), which, according to Article 7 of Decree 893 of 2017, is responsible for coordinating and structuring participation mechanisms. However, this design did not involve local communities in defining the spaces or rules of the participatory process, constituting a meta-political injustice as defined by Nancy Fraser. According to Fraser, meta-political injustices occur when the frameworks regulating participation are imposed without considering those affected, thereby excluding their ability to influence the configuration of spaces where struggles for justice are defined (Fraser, 2008).

In this case, the organizational structure of the Agency for Territorial Renewal centralizes decision-making at the institutional level, delegating the validation of participation proposals to its Board of Directors without allowing local communities to have direct influence over this critical stage.

4.1.1.2. **Consultative and symbolic participation**

During the implementation phases of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus, community participation was limited to consultative exercises aimed at identifying needs, without providing an effective mechanism for influencing program planning or execution. According to Decree 1223 of 2020, the Agency for Territorial Renewal is responsible for proposing mechanisms to ensure the participation of territorial actors in the implementation of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus. However, in practice, these consultations do not translate into effective representation, relegating communities to a secondary role in decision-making processes. This reflects what Tosun (2000) describes as **symbolic participation**, where communities are invited to validate decisions that have already been structured by governmental or technical actors.

The analysis of legal and administrative structures reveals that agency in the execution of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus predominantly lies with national and territorial entities, while local actors are excluded from deliberative processes. This imbalance perpetuates a **representation injustice**, as affected communities lack the necessary power to influence decisions impacting their territories (Gutierrez, 2023).

4.1.1.3. **Institutional centralization**

The implementation model of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus reinforces a centralist tendency characteristic of Colombia's administrative structure. As Sánchez and Sánchez (2019) argue, the centralized design of the Peace Agreement leaves the public administration architecture largely unchanged, with budget allocation and prioritization decisions remaining in the hands of the central government. This restricts the capacity of territorial entities and communities to exercise flexibility in executing allocated resources, perpetuating a vertical relationship between the centre and the regions. Restrepo and Peña (2019) emphasize that these dynamic limits regional autonomy and reduces the potential for effective community participation, particularly in tourism projects that could have a transformative impact.

4.2. Tourism and peacebuilding: voices and perceptions of the actors

During 2021 and 2022, the researchers accompanied the communities of southern Tolima in their political mobilization processes to defend the Peace Agreement and promote peacebuilding. Through ethnographic exercises and participant observation, the researchers gained personal access to the demands of social movements in the southern subregion of Tolima. This engagement enabled an understanding of how rural and grassroots communities organized into a social movement known as the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus Steering Groups.

The first finding from this ethnographic exercise was the recognition of how communities engaged in a struggle to assert their status as valid interlocutors with the government in decision-making processes. Their demands for social justice focused primarily on redistribution. However, underlying the fight for redistribution (economic equity) and the fight for recognition (the status of rural actors) was the fight for effective participation. This refers to decisions regarding territorial planning and development being made with the full and meaningful involvement of communities.

This initial finding, based on participant observation, confirmed that the legal framework for community participation in implementing development initiatives does not make community decisions binding. Instead, participation remains largely symbolic, leaving community actors without agency. These demands for participation, redistribution, and recognition—essentially, struggles for social justice—were documented in a community-authored text titled *"Agenda for the Advocacy of Steering Groups and PDET Oversight Committees – Southern Tolima."* In this document, the communities called for the effectiveness of their right to participation to be guaranteed, requesting that they be considered in decision-making processes not merely as consultants but as full decision-makers with genuine capacity to influence outcomes (Calderon, 2023).

The second significant finding was understanding how communities interested in promoting the development of their territories perceive tourism and whether they view this activity as an opportunity to build peace. Indeed, it was found that among the initiatives prioritized by the communities for development, with government support, was tourism. However, as of the project's conclusion in December 2022, tourism initiatives had not yet gained significant momentum or decisive support from the central government, which is the primary resource provider for peacebuilding.

The interviews revealed various dimensions associated with tourism and the challenges it poses for communities. Discursive markers reflected a hopeful perception. Participants believe that tourism can help address the causes and effects of an internal armed conflict lasting over 50 years and prevent its recurrence.

"I think the activation of tourism in Planadas begins to offer an opportunity to open up other economic and social alternatives and to create spaces for people to come and learn about the place. I also believe it allows for the reconstruction of the social fabric, not only within the municipality but also externally. There's an opportunity, in fact, for people from other places to come and see what Planadas is now after the conflict—not what they were told or what appeared in the news during the conflict. I believe, in that sense, the activation of tourism in Planadas is necessary for rebuilding the social fabric both within and outside the municipality. Tourism activation involves encounters with others, outsiders, with the foreigner, with the tourist." (Participant 1, Southern Tolima).

The opportunity perceived around tourism, as evidenced in the excerpt above, highlights the importance of the exchange of experiences between hosts and tourists. This encounter brings hosts closer to "the outsider" and allows them to showcase their reality through lived experiences, bypassing mediated representations, such as those from the media. In a post-conflict and peacebuilding context, these encounters with outsiders are significant because they dismantle false narratives about former conflict zones (Menchero Sánchez, 2018).

"Once the peace process was signed nationally, it was a magnificent development for us. Now people can see the potential that Planadas has in terms of tourism. Tourism in Planadas is very influential for us because we've seen people come from other places, from other countries and from within the nation, wanting to know

Planadas, and they fall in love with Planadas. That's very influential. When we were in the middle of the armed conflict, no one visited us, and there was no national investment. I think we need the national government to see us differently and invest more in Planadas." (Participant 2, Southern Tolima).

These reflections underline how tourism is perceived as a means of reshaping local and external perceptions, fostering reconciliation, and showcasing the municipality's potential. They emphasize the vital role that government investment and policy support could play in transforming tourism into a tool for social and economic development and peacebuilding in post-conflict territories.

Another notable aspect is the recognition of the Peace Agreement as an opportunity to stimulate tourism in areas previously affected by war. However, realizing tourism's transformative potential requires strong and, above all, participatory governance structures, where decisions about tourism development consider community perceptions and the recognition of future local operators' capacities (Rocca & Zielinski, 2022). While the signing of the Peace Agreement was essential to end armed confrontations between state forces and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia guerrillas, peacebuilding is a process that must be consolidated through the active and effective participation of community actors (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011).

"...to show the world, to show Colombia that we have a lot here, that we are not what people think, what governments think—that we are just a town with a lot of guerrilla activity and violence. Now Planadas is a town of peace, a town of very good people. I believe the good ones outnumber the rest. So, we hope for help to promote tourism here in Planadas. It would be great to boost this program, and I think it would help us a lot, both economically and culturally." (Participant 3, Southern Tolima).

The call to "boost a program" for tourism development aligns with the need to plan through the lens of peacebuilding (Anson, 1999). As Participant 3 perceives, tourism holds transformative potential in economic and cultural dimensions in post-conflict settings. However, as marginalized communities with scarce resources, compounded by the setbacks of over 50 years of war, it is imperative for the state, through its governments, to promote plans and programs that involve the affected communities in their design and execution.

"So, I feel this is the moment, and tourism could also be a tool for peacebuilding if internal alliances can be formed. But also, as I mentioned before, if people from other departments, other countries, can come here and realize the interaction and what we are building—and they can support the peace process through tourism initiatives like those of the community in conjunction with ex-combatants—I think that would be something, or it is already something, completely positive. The fact that we are even talking about it is progress, and it is already being discussed, it's being discussed." (Participant 4, Southern Tolima).

These reflections emphasize tourism's dual economic and cultural potential in post-conflict settings. However, for such transformative potential to be realized, government intervention is necessary to design and implement inclusive programs that center the participation of those directly affected, fostering collaboration between communities and ex-combatants to reinforce peacebuilding initiatives.

An underexplored dimension in tourism research is the aspect of reconciliation, which involves interaction between communities victimized by conflict and former combatants. In southern Tolima, some participants highlighted the intention to collaboratively build peace—civil society, the state, and ex-combatants working together (Pritchard, Morgan, & Ateljevic, 2011). This perspective of co-creation suggests a hopeful future where a form of "phoenix tourism" emerges, placing the central focus of tourism development more on the social than the economic dimension (Causevic & Lynch, 2011).

"I believe tourism plays two roles here: understanding what life in the countryside is like and also strengthening the peace process. For example, the Marquetalia route one of the resistance routes—is a place where tourists can learn about and listen to ex-combatants' stories of their experiences. Similarly, ex-combatants listen to the tourists, and they begin to interact with the communities." (Participant 5, Southern Tolima). Perceptions of tourism and peacebuilding in southern Tolima involve revaluing former war zones by transforming them into infrastructures of peace. The "Marquetalia route," once associated with the

origins of the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*, is now promoted as a tourist attraction where former combatants serve as guides, sharing their experiences. This transformation fosters interaction between tourists and hosts, turning past conflict sites into spaces for peacebuilding through tourism (Carbone, 2022).

5. Conclusions

This research is situated within a theoretical framework that connects social justice and the ethics of tourism with the challenges posed by peacebuilding in a post-conflict context (Hultsman, 1995; Jamal & Higham, 2021; Novelli, Morgan & Nibigira, 2012; Pritchard, Morgan & Ateljevic, 2011; Rastegar & Ruhanen, 2022; Seyfi, Rastegar, Kuhzady, Hall & Saarinen, 2023; Tosun, 2000). The findings emphasize the persistence of certain institutional structures that exclude rural communities and frustrate their demands for social justice when planning and developing tourism within the framework of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus. These mechanisms, operating at both formal and informal levels (Fraser, 1997), highlight the need to rethink governance dynamics in line with a radical democracy.

A key finding of the research is the identification of participatory parity, as proposed by Nancy Fraser (2008), as a normative principle crucial for introducing transformations in the institutional design of the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus. The current normative framework restricts community participation to a symbolic level, without binding capacity in vital areas such as prioritizing the implementation of initiatives, allocating resources, and monitoring resource execution. This formal exclusion promotes a centralized model that confines decision-making within state agencies, reducing rural communities to mere consultants in a process that directly impacts their living conditions and development. In this context, social justice is frustrated across the dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and political representation.

Beyond formal limitations, informal obstacles prove even more harmful. These are rooted in a flawed perception of rural actors, who are deemed incapable of engaging in the technical decision-making processes due to the bureaucratic and technocratic complexity of the state apparatus. This prejudice, which dismisses the potential of local communities, functions as a long-standing adverse cultural tradition that perpetuates subordination and systemic exclusion (Fraser, 1997).

Nevertheless, the conclusions drawn from this study underscore the transformative effects of tourism as a generator of peace and reconciliation. Tourism, as an opportunity for intercultural exchanges, facilitates the redefinition of territories historically marked by war. The community visions emerging from this research reveal how tourism can create new narratives about communicative identity, recognizing rural communities as agents of territorial transformation (Menchero Sánchez, 2018; Carbone, 2022).

Therefore, to realize this potential, it is necessary to dismantle the institutional structures that hinder effective participation and ensure the redesign of the normative frameworks regulating the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus. This involves establishing a more inclusive governance model where the agency of communities is recognized and strengthened. At the meta-political level, it is crucial for communities to participate in defining participatory frameworks, ensuring that these structures align with their needs and aspirations. At the political-ordinary level, effectively integrating community frameworks into the planning and execution of tourism development is essential to guarantee its sustainability and legitimacy.

Finally, this work provides valuable contributions to global debates on social justice and tourism in post-conflict territories by arguing that justice cannot be achieved solely through economic redistribution. It must also include cultural recognition and political representation as foundational elements of justice. Without structural transformation that ensures the effective participation of local communities, tourism in Development Programs with a Territorial Focus territories risks perpetuating historical dynamics of exclusion, missing its potential to become a catalyst for peacebuilding.

This study represents a significant contribution to contemporary debates on social justice and tourism by integrating Nancy Fraser's concept of participatory parity into the analysis of institutional barriers

hindering community participation in post-conflict contexts. The empirical findings highlight how the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus perpetuate structural inequalities across the dimensions of redistribution, recognition, and representation, posing critical challenges for justice theory. Incorporating Fraser's theoretical framework enables an exploration of these dynamics, though limitations are identified in its capacity to fully integrate the agency of local actors within highly centralized technocratic structures. This theoretical gap suggests the need to complement the analysis with additional perspectives, such as Anthony Giddens' structuration theory, which could enhance understanding of action capabilities within restrictive institutional frameworks.

In practical terms, the results emphasize the urgency of redesigning the normative and governance frameworks associated with the Development Programs with a Territorial Focus to ensure more inclusive and binding participation processes. This requires transcending the symbolic nature of community participation toward a structure where communities can effectively influence decision-making related to the planning, prioritization, and execution of tourism projects. Moreover, tourism, conceived as a tool for social transformation, must align with strategies that promote reconciliation, the rebuilding of social fabric, and the empowerment of local actors. Achieving this requires a stronger institutional commitment that connects state capabilities with rural communities through co-creation processes integrating local knowledge, identity narratives, and strategic alliances with external actors.

This study acknowledges limitations in its qualitative approach and geographic focus on southern Tolima, restricting the generalizability of findings. The temporality of the data also raises questions about evolving dynamics. Future research could address these gaps through mixed-method approaches, broader territorial analyses, and examining how governance transformations can foster social justice and fair tourism, generating replicable strategies for post-conflict settings.

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