**Yacopí – Where, who, why and how?**

**The context of Yacopí:**   
Yacopí is a municipality located in the north of Cundinamarca. It has 15.840 residents which are primarily farmers, living from agriculture.

In the 60’s the guerilla FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia) started to operate in the area of Yacopí. The aim was to get closer to the capital Bogotá, it was a strategic move. Nevertheless, the FARC did not stay alone in the zone. In the 80’s the paramilitary groups grew stronger and were attracted by the area because of the Magdalena River which is one of their principal drug trafficking routes. The result was a growing violence against the civil society. Amongst other things there occurred kidnapping, executions and violations of the human rights in general. The paramilitary group which was strong back then launched various counter-insurgency actions and practiced armed terror. Nevertheless, there existed a “no-aggression agreement”: The FARC was located in La Palma and the paramilitaries in Yacopí. This agreement was destroyed when the FARC assassinated twelve members of paramilitary groups in Caparrapí in the 90’s. It was back then, when the conflict escalated in this area and resulted in loads of dead people and displacements.

The situation today is still marked by the conflict. There are 3.062 recorded victims in total and in 2017 there have been 6 displacements, in 2016 12 and the highest number occurred in 1998 with 393 displaced persons. The highest number of victims was in 2001 with 851 victims that year.

The majority of the inhabitants live in the rural area (83%), thus the economy is mainly rural. There are no new statistics about the poverty in Yacopí but the latest is from 2005 from DANE: when the UBN (Unsatisfied Basic Needs) was 64,7%. This indicator is constructed out of the absence of school attendance (5,1%), the unsatisfying state of the housing (49,5%), access to public services (26,3%) and chronical undernourishment (2010: 18%). This malnutrition is associated with the UBN in general. In 2005 there was still a high analphabetic rate (persons with 15 years and more) with 26,9%. Another problem is the sanitary system, there are various areas where there is missing a sewer system. 90,1% of the housings in the rural area do not have a sewer system and 81,4% do not have drinking water.   
Various of these factors have led to drug-problems, alcoholism and prostitution.

All this poverty is partly associated with the armed conflict which took place in this zone. Many families, housings and farms were destroyed or taken by others. Also, there were many displacements. This results in an instable economy which produces factors like undernourishment or school absence. Still, it is not enough to promote only the economy, while the people do not have forgiven nor reconciled. As the state has been absent in this area for a long time, a lot of educational and cultural projects are missing as well as institutions that promote peace. How can a person live or work with somebody who was involved in the other side of the conflict, who was an enemy before? This is what the ESPERE tries to promote: living together again, for a better future.

**What is the ESPERE?**The Schools of Forgiveness and Reconciliation (ESPERE - *Escuelas de Perdón y Reconciliación*, in spanish) is a pedagogical process of companionship that allows to the participants to live an experience of forgiveness and reconciliation focusing on a personal case of their election. It entails a deep reflexion towards the offense, the offender, the principles that were broken (their high values) and how to restore the bond between the ones involved in an unresolved offense.

The methodology focuses on a narrative turn of a painful situation of the past to help the participants to overcome the pain and the feelings of resentment and revenge that does not allow many people to enjoy their lives. In addition, it encourages the participants to get over the ungrateful memories, to make restorative processes with themselves and the ones who may have hurt them and, to stablish pacts that guarantee them the no repetition of the offense. This narrative change is achieved by using three techniques: the *ordinances*, the *grupinho* (little groups)set, and the *holding environment*.

The *ordinances* are a deep reflection that allows the reconsideration of the discourse that people create and retain towards the offense and how this discourse entails negative values and meaning. The *grupinho* set is a special place where the participants receive support between them and they are guidance thru specific questions. Finally, the *holding environment* is a group construction that arises on the *grupinho* set and gives the participants the opportunity to understand the value of the rules created for the listening process: not be judgemental towards the others, to listen carefully,

The ESPERE process is composed by eleven modules divided in two phases: 1) forgiveness, and 2) reconciliation. During this trajectory the participants go through reflections of the case selected by each one of them, and a series of collective rituals and individual symbolic statements. It is an invitation to change their individual mindset towards the personal meaning of a forgiveness process and how this is a necessary, in order to: (1) try to establish reconciliation with one self and the others, (2) meditate about the world and their relationships as areas in constant change that requires their adaptation and, (3) build individual and social peace on a daily basis by the acts of care, compassion, gratitude and forgiveness.

The ESPERE are designed to be an alternative to the pedagogical processes that teach people to “live in peace” but fail to give the individuals an opportunity to understand the ethical values and the moral consequences involved in something as complex as it is the forgiveness and reconciliation. The participants are the main change agent and it’s not an imposition of outsiders who believe that forgiveness *is something that must be achieved*; instead, respects the comprehension that every person have of the situation and invites to build meaning together about what are the possible solutions to overcome the offense.

**Cultural festival for peace:**   
Additionally, to the ESPERE we would like to organize a cultural festival to get the community involved together. As mentioned above because of the conflict, which destructed many social structures and the absence of state institutions cultural and educational offers are missing. Not everyone is participating in the ESPERE but the festival offers an opportunity to bring everyone together. We would like to propose workshops and organize musical events. Among the workshops we would offer writing workshops related with the conflict history and truth, open talks and conversational activities about social projects, painting a big mural/graffiti together as a memorial community resilience in the postconflict contect, and theatrical performances and a circus workshops. Nevertheless, we would also like to include proposals and ideas of the people living in Yacopí. Apart from that, the idea is to organize the festival with the people from Yacopí together and support them in offering workshops. There for example many artisans who could teach others their techniques and get in contact with the people in general. The ideal situation would be that this festival takes place every year and that the people could start to organize it autonomously. That means that we will try to initiate the structures to create the festival and support the people living there to repeat it the next year. So, one will be reminded that there has been the armed conflict but that there is the opportunity to abandon the violence and promote peace right now.

**Who is the target group?**The target groups are victims of the armed conflict living in Yacopí. Actually, nearly everyone in some way is a victim of the conflict that is why would like everyone of the town to participate in the festival to create another atmosphere and social relations.   
The ESPERE should focus on adolescents because they are the future of this area. There are many problems Yacopí is facing, such as the decrease of the population, alcoholism, drug addiction and prostitution. First of all, the decrease of the population depends a lot of the adolecsents growing up now in this area, if they decide to move away, the economy, social structure and families will get more instable than they already are. To prevent adolescents getting in to these issues and to create together a brighter future, we think they are the most important target group.   
The ESPERE can help to prevent addictions. Many times these are related with problems you try to suppress without working on their causes. Unresolved problems can lead to psychoactive substances addiction. Thus trying to reconcile these issues, could partly help to resolve these addictions. We are conscious about the structures and that it is difficult to undermine prostitution and oppression or forced work in general but it could help to motivate adolescents strengthening motivation to get out of certain structures or trying to find other perspectives. Apart from the problem of addiction it is important that the next generation can grow up in peace. If they will not change their perspective, their children will grow up just like them. That is why we should teach the next parents how to live in peace, how to forgive and how to reconcile. Thus the work can have a long-term effect.