

Emerging perspectives on territory and LGBTQ+ political citizenship in Ciénaga, Magdalena (Colombia): mapping places of homosocialization¹

Perspectivas emergentes sobre el territorio y la ciudadanía política LGBTQ+ en Ciénaga, Magdalena (Colombia): mapeo de lugares de homosocialización

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Abstract

The article characterizes the territories of homosocialization and communication of the LGBTQ+ population of the Casa de Paz of Ciénaga Magdalena. Through a qualitative design and an ethnographic and grounded theory exercise developed in the municipality of Ciénaga Magdalena (Colombia), the citizens of Casa de Paz narrate and reconstruct the meanings related to the ways of living, feeling and dreaming the territory. The experiences are told through contexts that respect the differential approach, which becomes a contribution to the design and consolidation of public policies applicable to LGBTQ+ spaces to the extent that communication processes for social change and political citizenship are strengthened in the territory.

Keywords

Territory; LGBTQ+ community; Homosocialization places; Communication for social change; Discrimination; Civic engagement; Civil and political rights; Social participation.

Resumen

El artículo caracteriza los territorios de homosocialización y comunicación de la población LGBTQ+ en el territorio del municipio de Ciénaga-Magdalena (Colombia). A través de un diseño cualitativo y de un ejercicio etnográfico y de teoría fundada desarrollado en el territorio, la ciudadanía LGBTQ+ narra y reconstruye los sentidos relacionados con las formas de vivir, sentir y soñar el territorio. Las experiencias son contadas a través de contextos y experiencias que respetan el enfoque diferencial, lo que se convierte en un aporte para el diseño y consolidación de políticas públicas para personas LGBTQ+ en la medida que se fortalecen los procesos de comunicación para el cambio social y ciudadanía política en el territorio.

Palabras clave

Territorio; Comunidad LGBTQ+; Lugares de homosocialización; Comunicación para el cambio social; Discriminación; Participación cívica; Derechos civiles; Participación social.

Introduction

This article aims to characterize the territory and the communication processes for social change impacting the construction of LGBTQ+ political citizenship in the municipality of Ciénaga, Magdalena², particularly through the Casa de Paz project as a place of homosocialization. “The Casas de Paz are spaces that allow, through artistic and cultural expression, to overcome the impacts suffered by LGBTI people within the framework of the internal armed conflict due to their sexual orientation, identity, and diverse gender expression” (Corporación Caribe Afirmativo, 2024). Through these spaces, we seek to actively generate impact in the territories, communities, and the State in such a way that promotes respect for human rights, social inclusion, and recognition of diversity. In the Caribbean Region of Colombia, five Casas de Paz are located in the municipalities of Soledad (Atlántico), Maicao (La Guajira), El Carmen de Bolívar (Bolívar), Montelíbano (Córdoba), and Ciénaga (Magdalena), the latter serving as the territory where the research was carried out.

Ciénaga, Magdalena, is a municipality located in the northern Caribbean region of Colombia, known for its rich socio-historical and cultural history (Durán-Fernández, Giraldo-Ramírez, & Nuñez-Viana, 2016). Ciénaga has been an agricultural and commercial center, famous for its banana and coffee production, and the scene of the 1928 banana workers’ massacre, an emblematic event in Colombian labor struggles. Ciénaga has been designated as a Territorial-Focused Development Programs (PDET) municipality (Presidency of the Republic of Colombia, 2017, Decree-Law 893 of 2017), underscoring its importance in peace and development efforts in areas affected by armed conflict (*Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace*, 2016). This designation entails a special focus on the implementation of sustainable development and peacebuilding projects, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable and marginalized communities. In context, “the Colombian armed conflict not only confronted armed groups; it also devastated the lives of millions of civilians who had nothing to do with the war but lived in the disputed territories, including LGBTIQ+ people.” (Final Report: My Body is the Truth, 2022, p. 232)

For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and other (LGBTQ+) people in Ciénaga, the context is complex given the territorial dynamics of the armed conflict and LGBTI-phobia. Although various efforts and projects have been implemented, such as Casa de Paz, that seek to create safe spaces and promote inclusion, the daily reality for many LGBTQ+ people remains challenging in public and private settings (Tapias, 2005). Discrimination, violence, and the lack of protective environments are persistent problems, and the community faces both structural and social barriers. Nonetheless, Casa de Paz is a place of political encounter and interaction, that

² Thanks to: Omar Acendra Ahumada, Coordinator of the House of Peace of the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation and the entire LGBTIQ+ population of Ciénaga-Magdalena, Colombia.

is, of homosocialization, assumed to be a fundamental component for the integration, visibility, and empowerment of the LGBTQ+ population. (Zemelman and Valencia, 1990, p. 90, cited in Retamozo, 2011, p. 85)

The following dynamics establish communicative processes experienced in the place (Obregón, 2011; Escobar, 2008), in this case, physical-symbolic (Arendt, 1958), where the construction of political and social identities among the members of the territory is possible, taking into account their experiences and interactions. For Retamozo (2011), the category of collective subjectivity offers the possibility of advancing the investigation of the conformation of subjects by incorporating multiple constitutive dimensions of these. From this point on, the research exercise focused on listening to population dynamics from the experiences of voices, the understanding of the environment and the impact of actors in it. In this context, spaces are assumed as places of divergent enunciation of subjectivities:

Such a place of enunciation, that is, the place from which one speaks (Foucault, 2006), proposes a shift from institutional critique to the analysis of a geopolitical understanding of the spaces that traverse subjectivity, which implies a divergent perspective that does not adhere to the power mandates of the grand narratives but rather to hybrid positions that, while interacting with institutions, understand their subaltern status so as not to neglect critique, but, on the contrary, to deepen it. (Hernández-Albarracín, Ramírez-Lindarte, & Bravo, 2023, p. 106)

Territory as a place, in this case Casa de Paz, empowers, through communication, the creation of support networks, the promotion of equal rights, and the empowerment and encouragement of civic participation among the LGBTQ+ population. “Talking about sexual and gender diversity implies going beyond the acronym LGBTI+. It includes a more global perspective, since sexual and gender norms affect us all.” (Solá, 2020, p. 7). This article fluctuates between theoretical and experiential aspects where intersubjectivities unfold in a plural and coexisting way. (González et al., 2016).

The work of organizations advocating for the rights of LGBTQ+ people contributes to rebuilding the social tissue and creating inclusive societies that respect diversity (Settanni, 2013). The *Sentidos de la memoria para construir paz* (*Senses of Memory to Build Peace*) project, also known as Casa de Paz (House of Peace), developed by the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation in several municipalities in the Colombian Caribbean, seeks to overcome the aftermath of the armed conflict through art, culture, empowerment, and entrepreneurship. In this context, it is evident that there is a “lack of recognition and characterization of spaces of homosocialization by LGBTQ+ people in the municipality of Ciénaga, Magdalena” (Trans woman, Casa de Paz, 2024, interview). This lack hinders the creation of oversight bodies, political advocacy, and the recognition of rights for this diverse community.

Departmental and municipal development plans in the northern Caribbean region of Colombia present significant deficiencies in integrating improvements for LGBTQ+ people. Despite general mentions of inclusion and respect for diversity (Municipal Development Plan Ciénaga Avanza, 2020-2023, p. 45; p. 123; Development Plan of the Department of Magdalena, Magdalena Renace 2020-2023, p. 47; p. 78; p. 176), according to the coordinator of Casa de Paz of the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation in Ciénaga-Magdalena, “these plans lack concrete and effective actions that respond to the specific needs of this population. The scarcity of identified safe spaces and homosocialization, along with a limited understanding of the particular needs of the LGBTQ+ community, hinders the creation of public policies that truly promote their well-being and development” (Interview, 2024).

Within these Local and Regional Development Plans, the absence of action, organization, and effectiveness is evident from the most basic levels. According to one trans leader, “the lack of tolerance in schools and other educational spaces remains a significant obstacle to inclusion and equality. The avoidance of topics related to sexual and gender diversity in school curricula perpetuates an environment of discrimination and exclusion, negatively affecting the personal and academic development of LGBTQ+ youth” (Interview, 2024). This situation, coupled with widespread violence and discrimination, hinders the construction of a more just and equitable society. According to the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation, in its report entitled “*Follow-up Report on the Territorial Development Plans of the Colombian Caribbean*” (2020), this does not seek to deny or ignore the progress in the recognition of rights achieved by the government so far. Rather, these comments are presented as recommendations for the country’s government entities, with the goal of continuing to progress toward a more just and equitable society for all. In this sense, there exists a “call to affirm our common vulnerability, which simultaneously implies the recognition of our interdependence and proximity” (Ruiz & Gómez, 2021, p. 207).

It is pertinent to recognize and characterize, from the voices and experiences of social actors, as well as the places where meaning is constructed, interaction, and participation, that is, the spaces of homosocialization in the municipality of Ciénaga, Magdalena, to the extent that this facilitates the construction of oversight, the positioning of local LGBTQ+ agendas, political advocacy, the recognition of rights, and the visibility and listening of the population; hence, it strengthens the tissue of political citizenship in the territory. According to Padilla (2022):

The constant struggle of the LGBTQ+ community has allowed them to become more visible in society. Today, several developed countries have made great social and economic progress related to gender identity issues, allowing these people to enjoy the same rights as the rest of the population. (p. 1)

The emergence of LGBTQ+ homosocialization sites has significant historical roots. For example, in Germany before the rise of Adolf Hitler, in 1897 the Scientific and Humanitarian Committee, led by Magnus Hirschfeld, stood out as one of the first organizations in the fight

to abolish Penal Code 175, which criminalized male homosexual relations. However, with the rise of the nationalist movement and Hitler's rise to power in 1933, the repression and closure of bars and spaces for homosexual interaction in Germany began. In 1935, the purge of libraries with LGBTQ+ themes began, as did the destruction of the Scientific and Humanitarian Institute. Regarding this, Pérez (2009) mentions that "If Adolf Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany (...) he would close Parliament and outlaw political parties and unions and initiate the persecution of Jews and homosexuals." (Cited by Choque and Sanjinéz in 2023, p. 76). This era constituted a totalitarian period imposed during the first half of the 20th century, which brought with it fear, intimidation and unlimited violence, culminating in the annihilation of opponents of dictatorial ideologies.

The emergence of movements that make LGBTQ+ people visible for recognition and equality have been fundamental in contemporary social history. In the 1920s, a cultural movement emerged in New York City that began with white people, drag queens, but excluded African American men. However, in the 1960s, African Americans established their own space known as ball culture, where artistic expressions such as Vogue emerged. Music played a crucial role in the emancipation of this group, fostering values such as self-growth and self-knowledge. From the above, it can be stated that:

Vogue has emerged as one of the safest spaces for the convergence of advocacy, activism, art, dance, and an entire culture. While not new, it opens up a range of possibilities for social debates on sex and gender, where the territoriality of the body plays a crucial role. (Rojas & Pardo 2021, p. 85)

Within this emerging culture, social structures such as "houses" or "families" rose, led by trans women and drag queens, which welcomed people excluded from ball culture. These families competed together in balls, maintaining a hierarchical structure similar to that of a conventional family. For Esquivel (2023):

Gender studies, viewed through socialized bodily manifestations, clearly regulated, standardized, and normalized in society, have formed part of an antagonistic intellectual discourse in the social sciences due to their study and the way in which their historical and conceptual representations are configured. (p. 4)

The 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning* explored the lives of LGBTQ+ people in 1980s New York City and highlighted the importance of these cultural spaces in building identity and social support. Television shows like *RuPaul's Drag Race* drew inspiration from these environments, using elements like fashion and music to empower people facing exclusionary systems.

The drag phenomenon is one in which an individual seeks to find an identity they feel comfortable with as a form of self-vindication, regardless of gender or sex; to express this more simply and visibly, makeup, hairstyling, and wardrobe are used as tools. (Toquero, 2018, cited in Costas & Díaz, 2022, p. 5)

In the 1960s, the Stonewall Inn in New York City was the scene of a historic riot when police raided it, sparking a revolt that marked a milestone in the fight for civil rights for the LGBTQ+ community. Following these riots, local residents organized into activist groups to establish safe spaces and make their sexual orientation visible without fear of police repression. The historical context of the topic refers to iconic places such as the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York, and the Ball Culture movement, which have been seen as benchmarks for resistance and the struggle for respect for LGBTQ+ rights.

According to Celdán (2022), LGBTQ+ people have historically suffered violations of their fundamental rights, victims of discriminatory acts, and violent actions associated with their sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, in Paraguay, Casa Diversa was created as a shelter for trans women expelled from their homes due to discrimination. This place provides a safe environment for these people, offering support, education, and tools to build an identity and understand their rights. Similar spaces have been replicated in other Latin American countries to help LGBTQ+ people who are victims of violence in environments where governments do not guarantee their safety and respect, such as Zona Rosa in Mexico, Barrio de San Telmo in Argentina, Calle El Conde in the Dominican Republic, Lapa and Largo do Arouche in São Paulo, Brazil, and El Carmen in Venezuela. For instance, the following quote is relevant regarding Zona Rosa in Mexico:

I will do so through an analysis of the types of gay social spaces found there, through urban imaginaries about that territory, and through the life stories of different individuals who move through the city constructing and transforming an identity. When I look at the Zona Rosa, I focus on forms of gay sociability, but to do so, it is inevitable to take into account that their presence is intertwined with other sociabilities that, together, participate in the entire urban process of this territory. (Lanzagorta, 2018, p. 23)

Thus, when discussing the consolidation of identities and narratives through processes of interaction between orientations and others, we find that the rise of the LGBTQ+ struggle in Colombia dates back to the origins of the *Gay Liberation Movement* in Medellín in 1982, which organized the country's first gay pride march, supported by establishments such as bars and nightclubs, as well as activists like León Zuleta. The city of Bogotá, in particular, is an illustrative case that demonstrates the creation of an environment of sexual and gender diversity, especially in the Chapinero neighborhood, where the Corridillo de Chapigay was established and the LGBTQ+ Community Center opened in 2006.

Having special places was particularly important for those who kept their sexuality low-key in society most of the time, as this led them to seek out moments and places where gay men could meet alone and let out the feelings and expressions that were kept frozen the rest of the time. (Portillo, 2016, p. 10)

Theatron, a well-known LGBTQ+ bar in Colombia, was hailed as an open space for gay people. However, personal experiences like that of Catalina Ángel, a transgender woman, reveal restrictions on access for trans people at this venue. This type of discrimination limits participation in LGBTQ+-friendly zones and can impact the mental health of those affected, leading to isolation and a propensity for suicidal behavior. For Rocha-Buelvas:

Social stigma has caused meeting and homosocial spaces, such as bars and recreation areas, to become a kind of ghetto, where there are even differences between gay, lesbian, transgender, and transsexual spaces. This is what Cantor calls endodiscrimination, which promotes isolation, loss of social support, suicidal behavior, and, in most cases, deterioration of mental health. (2015, p. 541)

Endodiscrimination, or discrimination within the LGBTQ+ population, is a little-explored but common phenomenon (Arriaga, 2023). This discrimination limits social participation, self-acceptance, and the fight for rights for people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. Violence and disputes over spaces, economic and political power within LGBTQ+ communities often undermine the discourse of respect for diversity, perpetuating the stigmatization of certain groups. According to Alfaro and González (2020):

We defined endodiscrimination as discrimination that occurs within an LGBTIQ group or community, involving different members who identify differently but belong to the same community and reject each other, generating different reactions and results that are inconsistent with respect for and protection of human rights. (p. 11)

According to the report of the Bogotá Differential Population and Family Observatory (2022), it is highlighted that certain stereotypes related to sex, gender, and sexual orientation weigh heavily on LGBTQ+ sectors. Evidence points to a dispute over spaces, both public and private, within the LGBTQ+ population, which generates stigmatization between different manifestations of sexual orientation and gender identity. Some narratives propose that “For example, transvestites can feel safe in certain areas despite being perceived as unsafe from the outside, since these areas provide them with acceptance and respect, even though they may be unsafe in material terms and in terms of perception by other people” (Trans woman, 2024, interview).

This lack of recognition of differences within the LGBTQ+ population can obscure diversity discourse and hinder the construction of more pluralistic societies (Navarro, 2016; Cortina, 1997). Recognizing and addressing these internal dynamics is essential to achieving greater cohesion and understanding within the LGBTQ+ movement and promoting a more inclusive and respectful discourse.

Colombia is a state that, since the beginning of LGBTQ+ movements, has been consolidating small and medium-sized groups of members of the population, as well as ideas, initiatives, and proposals for the recognition of rights. In this sense, public space is understood as a space in which people participate and interact actively, politically, and inclusively (Habermas, 1981; Moufe, 1997). This idea can be supported as follows:

The 1991 Political Constitution was fundamental to the historical process of recognizing the rights of homosexuals, due to the values and principles it enshrines and the legal protection instruments such as the tutela action, which became a tool for the defense of this minority. (Mejía & Almanza, 2010, p. 88)

This research is part of the context of sexual diversity studies, specifically those related to sexual diversity. Human sexuality is assumed to be a complex concept that transcends physical or mental manifestations. According to García (2005), cited by Castelo-Branco (2005, p. 21), “it is an amalgamation of intrapsychic, interpersonal, and social factors that influence its development.” However, this notion conflicts with ideological conceptions rooted in society, limiting free expression and coexistence.

A new theoretical perspective is proposed by Esquivel (2023) who argues that studies of diverse identities are aimed at the institutional and political recognition of diverse practices and identities. Another perspective on the debate is proposed by a report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights entitled *Born Free and Equal: Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity in International Human Rights Standards* (2016), which points out legal and social restrictions that silence public discussion on sexuality and generate violence against LGBTQ+ communities due to regulations imposed by patriarchal and heteronormative structures.

Many laws prohibit the public promotion of homosexuality or homosexual propaganda, thus silencing any discussion of sexuality in the public sphere. In some countries, marches, parades, and other gatherings of LGBTQ+ people are not authorized, or are threatened and met with violence by onlookers. (United Nations, 2012, p. 56)

In some local contexts in the Caribbean Region of Colombia, individuals with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities are affected by radical and exclusionary ideas, limiting their expression and civic participation. This leads to concentrations in spaces of homosocialization, as a response to exclusion and discrimination, creating environments where they feel accepted and understood. However, from Arendt’s (1958) perspective, the concentration in these spaces can reflect the fragility of the public sphere, limiting genuine political action and perpetuating segregation. The analogy between public and private areas illustrates how these spaces of homointeraction can be interpreted as private spaces of interaction, denying intersubjectivity based on difference, due to the impossibility of its recognition by others who make up the social tissue. This reinforces isolation and discrimination.

Although these environments represent resistance and the struggle for equality, they also reflect the need to understand the practices and dynamics that develop within them. Thus, for Quintero (2021), the public sphere represents a significant space for controversies and social and political discussions, and not the constitution of isolated places for identifying ideas and ways of seeing life. Therefore, a rights-based scenario is recognized within the framework of democracy and citizen participation when interaction between different positions is possible; it is a tension of coexistence between identities and counter-identities.

Figure 1. *Location of the Colombian Caribbean Region*

In Colombia's Caribbean Region, located in the northern part of the country, a multidiverse and multiethnic region, alarming cases of violence against LGBTQ+ people have been identified. In 2017, 41 bias-motivated homicides and another 60 undetermined motives were reported, in addition to eight homicides with motives other than bias. Based on data from Colombia Diversa (2018):

This represents a slight increase compared to the percentage of bias homicides recorded in 2016, which was 33% of the total recorded cases. Bias-based violence most affected trans women (17 of 36 were killed for being trans) and gay men (20 of 44 were killed for being gay). (p. 22)

The armed conflict has also impacted the lives of these people, with at least 478 victims in the region, some of whom are still awaiting judicial answers and support from the Victims' Unit. In this regard, González highlights the following:

In terms of numbers, these are a clear reflection of the place that sexual dissidents have had in memory processes. In the Single Registry of Victims, 5,137 LGBTQ+ people are registered as victims of the armed conflict (RUV, 2023), out of the 9,472,019 victims registered in the country. (2023, p. 117)

According to Colombia Diversa, Caribe Afirmativo, and Fundación Santamaría, between 2007 and 2015, more than 140 homicides related to diverse sexual orientation or gender identities were recorded in the towns and municipalities of this region, with trans people being the most affected by challenging heteronormative approaches (2016). Caicedo (2023) analyzes that:

The western foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta have been the scene of conflicts between various armed groups for the past forty years. The connection it provides between the middle and high altitudes of the Sierra and the access to the Caribbean Sea via the Magdalena Trunk Road has made it a strategic corridor contested by various groups seeking to maintain control of drug trafficking routes and hegemonic social control in the territory. (p. 16)

Homosocialization spaces such as Blue Diamond Society, Rainbow Community Kampung, Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe, Wakaliwood, and Silueta X, located in Nepal, Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Ecuador respectively, for diverse people in these places, are located in remote and peripheral areas, where they interact and find mutual support. A workshop participant reported that “these spaces not only bring together the LGBTQ+ population, but also people excluded for various social reasons, and although there are government efforts to mitigate discrimination, barriers to access to education, representation, and participation in society still persist” (Casa de Paz citizen, 2024, quilt workshop). Contrary to this, the Casas de Paz project offers training services and programs, recognition of rights, social and political advocacy, psychosocial support, and legal advice. In relation to this context, the Casas de Paz section on the Corporación Caribe Afirmativo website (2023) proposes that:

Casas de Paz are spaces that, through artistic and cultural expression, address the impacts suffered by LGBTQ+ people during the internal armed conflict due to their sexual orientation, identity, and diverse gender expression. These places seek to impact territories, communities, society, and the State through art and emerging cultural expressions in order to promote social inclusion and recognition of sexual diversity.

Discrimination, early eviction, and economic hardship are factors that contribute to illiteracy and lack of educational opportunities among LGBTQ+ people. Another research participant reported that “despite the struggle for inclusion and diversity, access to basic rights, such as citizenship, has been denied or limited.” (Casa de Paz citizen, interview, 2024). These individuals pursue spaces where diversity is recognized and celebrated, while ensuring peaceful coexistence and inclusion in society. In this way, the concept of the public sphere is understood as a domain that has changed throughout history. The public sphere involves the possibility of active citizen participation understood within the framework of the social rule of law. (Quintero, 2021)

Method

The research design was qualitative, based on the narratives and experiences of social actors who self-identify as LGBTQ+ people in the municipality of Ciénaga, Magdalena. For Guzmán (2021), it is a perspective focused on the analysis of phenomena based on the relationships between them and the context. From their narratives, a characterization of the sites of homosocialization and social praxis emerges, which involve tours of the territory and social mapping workshops³ and patchwork quilts.⁴ From this methodological approach, local theories about territory and ways of projecting places of encounter, communication, and construction of meaning emerged.

Figure 2. *Social Mapping Activity With the LGBTQ+ Population of Casa de Paz in Ciénaga, Magdalena*



According to the results of the 2023 Human Rights Report for LGBTQ+ People in Colombia published by the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation, to embrace the recommendations of the Truth Commission (CEV) Report in its gender volume is essential. For Castañeda (2023), to overcome social complicity in violence is crucial, “the need for rapid responses from the State to prevent it, and support for the sexual and gender diversity movement in its quest to ensure safe spaces throughout the country. These measures are necessary for Colombia to move toward true peace and guarantee a dignified life for all LGBTQ+ people.” (p. 13)

³ Watch: YouTube Channel Communication, Territory and Resistance, 2024, Workshop Series: Map of Dreams Workshop Series: Map of Dreams Serie de Talleres: Mapa de sueños

⁴ See: YouTube Channel Communication, Territory and Resistance, 2024, Workshop Series: Patchwork Quilt Serie de Talleres: Colcha de Retazos

Through non-probability and purposive sampling, the study reached 90 participants. The testimonies obtained during the workshops on social mapping, patchwork quilting, walk-through interviews, and the community pot for narrating experiences were forms of gathering meaningful information and a differentiated approach to obtaining the research results. This sampling strategy would allow for the identification and specific selection of participants within the LGBTQ+ population who could offer diverse or relevant experiences related to spaces of homosocialization. Aspects such as age, gender identity, socioeconomic status, duration of involvement in these spaces, among other criteria, could be considered to ensure a varied and enriching representation within the sample.

According to the report “*Nuestras Casas*” (Our Houses), published by the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation in 2023, 3,807 beneficiaries were identified in the territories of Maicao, La Guajira; Ciénaga, Magdalena; Soledad, Atlántico; El Carmen de Bolívar; and Montelíbano, Córdoba, of which approximately 300 people are from Ciénaga, Magdalena. The grouping of participants presented challenges related to potential barriers to accessibility, trust, and willingness to participate in the study. Therefore, establishing ethical and sensitive strategies to access the stories was vital. Developing fieldwork required trust-building processes between the research team and the social tissue studied over more than two years of relationship (Bautista et al., 2021).

Regarding data collection techniques, the research identified methods and processes for generating local and community knowledge used in the community work of the Casa de Paz project in Ciénaga, Magdalena. These methods for identifying significant information are based on people’s lived experience and everyday life. The data collection techniques used in this research did not correspond to traditional qualitative research methods such as semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Instead, taking the context into account, alternative, ethnographic, and participatory methods were used to gather information. This strategy has overcome interaction barriers, promoted the freedom and organization of the LGBTQ+ population, and strengthened the listening of narratives that influence the planning and implementation of policies with a gender and territorial focus.

The research group’s epistemological position was built on an intersubjective and participatory relationship with social actors. The observation implemented was non-participant, taking into account the type and length of immersion in the territory, which in this case corresponded to the stages of trust-building and workshop development with the intentionally selected LGBTQ+ population of the Casa de Paz project of the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation in Ciénaga, Magdalena. The group of participants was constituted through criteria of intersectionality, intergenerationality, and a differential approach agreed upon with the Casa de Paz population itself.

Lo hicimos como un recorrido. Se incluyeron desde las experiencias de las personas mayores que están acá, las cuales no son las mismas experiencias que tenemos nosotros los jóvenes en el territorio, ni las experiencias de las personas que fallecieron en el marco de la lucha por nuestros derechos. Hicimos un recorrido de experiencias y de

todo eso que creemos que el territorio significa para nosotros. A nuestra colcha le pusimos como título “Recordando Mi Memoria”, ya que esto es un recordatorio de lo que hemos vivido en el territorio” (Hombre trans, 52 años, 2024, taller de colcha de retazos).⁵

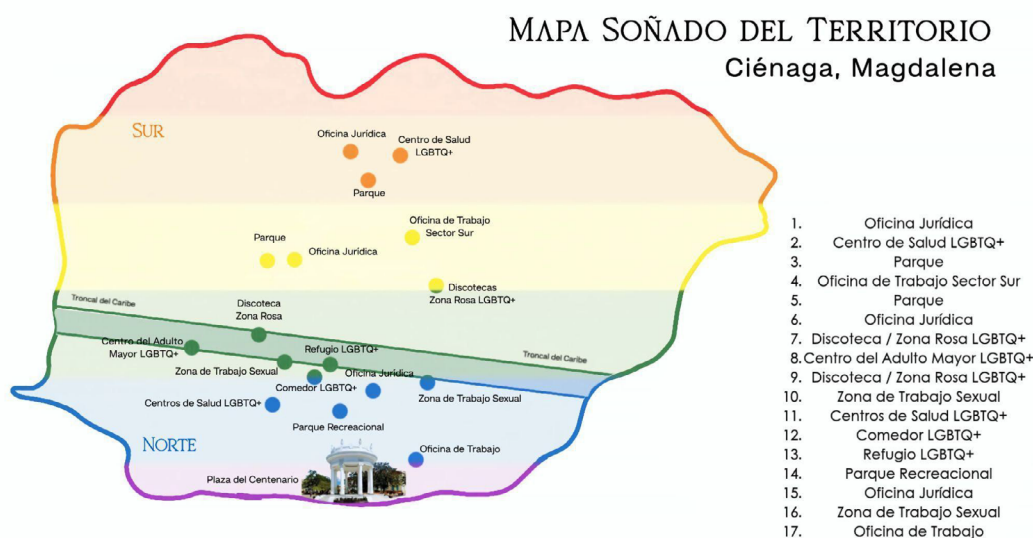
We did it as a journey. We included the experiences of the older people who are here, which are not the same experiences we, young people, have in the territory, nor the experiences of the people who died in the context of the fight for our rights. We took a tour of experiences and everything we believe the territory means to us. We titled our quilt “Remembering My Memory,” as this is a reminder of what we have experienced in the territory.” (Trans man, 52 years old, 2024, quilting workshop)

Results

The findings are presented in three sections. First, the local theoretical perspective on the concept of territory is addressed. Second, based on the participants’ narratives, spaces within the territory are identified from the integrative potential of stories, experiences, and spaces that build political citizenship within the territory. Finally, the territory is recognized in association with significant life experiences, reflecting the history of the LGBTQ+ population from happiness, encounter, violence, and repression in the municipality of Ciénaga.

Figure 3. LGBTQ+ population of CaTechnique: Social mapping

Segment 1—The emergence of a concept of territory



Technique: Social mapping. *Digitization:* Own elaboration. Year: 2024.

⁵ The English translation of the narratives of the social actors obtained during the research was generated by the research team.

Four references are established regarding the concept of territory. First, territory is defined through lived experiences related to the armed conflict and various victimizing events that cause displacement within or outside the territory. Second, territory is conceptualized through the body as a possibility for expression, visibility, and transition not only from one place to another, but from one state of life to another, amidst dynamic changes and diverse recognitions. Third, for the LGBTQ+ citizens participating in the research, territory is constituted through the street, assuming it as a safe or unsafe place, as a place of encounter, as a place from which they interpret the world, as a place of sex work, as a place of visibility. Finally, territory is perceived through cultural relations and the promotion of agendas that interconnect with the agendas of other social systems, establishing connections of political recognition.

Mi dibujo está colgando en dos hilos, pero como todo no es perfecto mis dos mundos están separados ya que el territorio donde habito no es el mismo de mi territorio natal, pero sí un territorio de acogida que es Ciénaga. La playa es mi lugar seguro, así como Casa de Paz. Por eso dibujé mi bandera azul, blanca y rosada que es mi bandera trans. Hay una parte colorida en mi dibujo y otra oscura porque no todo en la vida es felicidad ni tampoco todo es tristeza. Ciénaga es un territorio que por momentos me brinda felicidad, pero también al recordar que no es mi territorio me trae nostalgia. El territorio está asociado con mi memoria. (Hombre trans, 21 años, 2024, taller de colcha de retazos).

My drawing hangs by two threads, but since not everything is perfect, my two worlds are separated since the territory where I live is not the same as my home territory, but rather a welcoming territory, Ciénaga. The beach is my safe place, as well as Casa de Paz. That is why I drew my blue, white, and pink flag, which is my trans flag. There is a colorful part in my drawing and a dark one because not everything in life is happiness, nor is everything sadness. Ciénaga is a territory that sometimes brings me happiness, but also when I remember that it is not my territory, it brings me nostalgia. The territory is associated with my memory. (Trans man, 21 years old, 2024, patchwork quilt workshop)

The social mapping workshop, in turn, enabled the identification of places and experiences of exclusion. Based on the recognition of these areas where, for example, attempted homicides, threats, assaults, and various forms of violence have occurred, it is possible to make joint decisions and take measures to protect life. In this way, “the economic dynamics of survival and work for each of us are affected” (Trans woman, 40 years old, 2024, social mapping workshop). Likewise, some places frequented by LGBTQ+ citizens, near the main or interdepartmental highway, were identified as highly dangerous areas for the lives of trans people. From this perspective, territory is assumed to be a private sphere that denies social relations and difference, to the extent that public life is reduced and confinement is embraced as a strategy for protecting life, which prevents active relationships with others.

Figure 4. *LGBTQ+ population of Casa de Paz in Ciénaga, Magdalena*



Por lo menos en mi vida como trabajadora sexual he tenido muchos rechazos también de parte de la comunidad. Gracias al apoyo de Casa de Paz de la Corporación Caribe Afirmativo he podido salir adelante porque me han ayudado a formarme en leyes que me benefician y así también poder darles a conocer a otros. Soy estudiante, pero ha sido muy difícil ya que algunos instructores me han hecho la vida imposible. No he podido hacer las prácticas de mis estudios por rechazo en los lugares donde me presento. (Hombre trans, 23 años, 2024, entrevista recorrida).

At least, in my life as a sex worker, I've faced a lot of rejection from the community as well. Thanks to the support of Casa de Paz (House of Peace) of the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation, I've been able to move forward because they've helped me educate myself on laws that benefit me, and I've also been able to share them with others. I'm a student, but it's been very difficult because some instructors have made my life miserable. I haven't been able to do my internships due to rejection at the places where I work. (Trans man, 23 years old, 2024, walked-interview)

Some participants in the social mapping workshop stated that not even their family homes are considered safe spaces, as the people whom they live with often tend to attack them physically, psychologically, verbally, or even sexually. At the same time, sex work locations are described as places where some LGBTQ+ citizens report having experienced physical violence. In contrast, small, enclosed spaces, such as some public sector offices, are considered safe. “Although some people identified the municipal mayor’s office as an unsafe place, the only place they didn’t identify as unsafe was the LGBT office” (Non-binary person, 32 years old, 2024, social mapping workshop).

Likewise, places of homosocialization such as Casa de Paz of the Caribe Afirmativo Corporation and some of the houses in their close social circle, are considered safe spaces for free expression without fear of being singled out, stigmatized, or violated. Self-care is cited as the main strategy for protecting life. “I moved to a neighborhood and supposedly the neighborhood is very dangerous, but the danger isn’t caused by people, the danger is caused by oneself. I came to that neighborhood to take care of myself, but I have to earn people’s respect” (Trans woman, 41 years old, 2024, interview conducted). Notably, places where justice is dispensed, such as some offices of state institutions are recognized by citizens as sites of re-victimization, since the processes for receiving complaints are inefficient, the identity name or gender orientation is not recognized, and the risk of experiencing various forms of violence remains high.

Soy un hombre trans afrocolombiano. Las experiencias dentro de Casa de Paz me han formado mucho ya que yo llegué hace como dos años y no sabía que podíamos tener un espacio para nosotros. No soy de acá de Ciénaga, Magdalena, sino de Aracataca Magdalena, la tierra de Gabriel García Márquez. No he vivido muchas agresiones porque de mi casa no salgo y primero es la seguridad. Uno mismo tiene que identificar los lugares seguros. Tengo un emprendimiento. Aprendí a tejer mochilas con trapillo, también a hacer bolsos con sunchos, atrapasueños y toda clase de manualidades. La Casa de Paz me ha dado seguridad y tranquilidad. La calle está llena de muchas personas inmaduras, pero todos tenemos los mismos derechos y las mismas oportunidades (Hombre trans, 27 años, taller colcha de retazos).

I'm an Afro-Colombian trans man. The experiences at Casa de Paz have shaped me greatly, since I arrived about two years ago and didn't know we could have a space for ourselves. I'm not from here in Ciénaga, Magdalena, but from Aracataca, Magdalena, the land of Gabriel García Márquez. I haven't experienced many attacks because I don't leave my house, and safety comes first. You have to identify safe places for yourself. I have a business. I learned to weave backpacks with rag yarn, and also to make bags with straps, dreamcatchers, and all kinds of crafts. Casa de Paz has given me security and peace of mind. The streets are full of immature people, but we all have the same rights and opportunities (Trans man, 27 years old, patchwork quilt workshop).

The above testimony was given by a person displaced from their territory, an Afro-descendant and trans man. The findings of this study are constructed not only from intersectionality, as an exercise that recognizes life perspectives based on the inequalities that are shaped by the overlap,

interaction, and activation of different social factors such as gender bias, ethnic self-recognition, and the way of understanding the world from a social perspective, but also from intergenerational perspectives. For example, the older LGBTQ+ population recognizes the difficulties experienced in society 40 or 50 years ago. “I belong to that generation that had a hard time, the generation where there was more rejection from families. We suffered markedly from that discrimination, in the streets, when we went out we were physically attacked, it was always ridicule and a negative focus.” (Gay man, 35 years old, 2024, walking interview).

Family support diminished for projects such as academic, social, and work-related activities. “In my time, I participated in a gay pageant, and we did it behind closed doors. We had to escape at dawn, they lent us a place where we couldn’t applaud, and it was all very secret” (Gay man, 22 years old, 2024, walked-interview). This recognizes the diverse timelines traveled throughout the territory, all of them interconnected and linked to memories, striving for the possibility of strengthening respectful perspectives on the lives and rights of LGBTQ+ people.

Segment 3—The territory as a place of memories and stories

Through the patchwork quilt workshop, citizens connected emblematic places with significant experiences related to the construction of the life story of each of the LGBTQ+ participants in the study. A few places are defined as “emblematic symbols of our people” or as “places of celebration, happiness, and encounter.” Others evoke LGBTQ+ people who have lost their lives as a result of acts of violence and social repression while defending their rights (LGBTQ+ Citizen, 2024, patchwork quilt workshop). For some participants, the scraps on which they made the drawings were cut irregularly, breaking the uniformity and drawing attention to the imperfection of the territory and its unstable social relations.

One of the places most closely related to the life projects of LGBTQ+ citizens, valued for its connection to the consolidation of human freedom and the encounter with others, is the municipality’s beach area facing the Caribbean Sea. “For me, the territory is the beach; it represents my beginnings; the territory marks my childhood, a time when I experienced many family conflicts. It was the time I realized I was gay, and the beach was my territory for reflection and thought. That was always my territory by the sea, from where I now represent my life story.” (Gay man, 30 years old, 2024, quilting workshop)

Alternatively, the territory is associated with meanings linked to art and culture. The perspectives of young LGBTQ+ citizens interpret the territory through their visions, for example, through folkloric expressions and legends, as is the case with the story of Tomasita. The aesthetic narrative of the *Comparsa Diversa de las Caimanas de Ciénaga, Magdalena* is linked to its commitment

to peacebuilding, the consolidation of the public sphere, and the recognition of difference. The comparsa was born as an artistic expression in 2010, a year in which participation took place in the Festival del Caimán Cienaguero, the Carnival, and the LGBTQ+ March through the costume of negritas puloy (black puloy) women.

Pero sentíamos que el disfraz de negrita puloy no era un disfraz auténtico o que no nos representaba ante la comunidad, por tanto optamos por conformar la comparsa de las caimanas. Cada año nos preparamos para rediseñar, reparar o reconstruir los vestuarios y salir cada vez mucho más lujosos y más vistosos (Hombre gay, 49 años, 2024, taller de colcha de retazos).

But we felt the Negrita Puloy costume wasn't authentic or didn't represent us in the community, so we decided to form the Caiman troupe. Every year we prepare to redesign, repair, or rebuild the costumes, making them look more luxurious and colorful each time (Gay man, 49, 2024, patchwork workshop).

The territory is represented through its festivals by the famous National Festival of the Legend and Dance of the Cienaguero Caiman, held every year in January in the municipality. This celebration revives the well-known legend of a caiman that snatches and eats Tomasita, a girl from Cienaguero. During this celebration, the Comparsas parade through the city streets before making an official presentation on the main stage. The people of Cienaguero and visitors watch the competing groups compete and choose a winner. One of the groups that makes its presence felt through their comparsa performances is Las Caimanas de Ciénaga, whose LGBTQ+ approach aims to recognize the existence of other ways of telling and experiencing history.

The LGBTQ+ population is often scourged by societies where they impose a normativity or social standard as a mandatory measure of living. This can skew the possibility of being different and diverse in a region like Ciénaga that has been culturally and naturally rich. However, under the sexist and discriminatory culture of social reality, numerous people who identify with the opposite of the norm are stigmatized by indifference, intolerance, and gender-based violence.

The Caimanas de Ciénaga project is a living experience in the territory and is built on the identity of the LGBTQ+ population, victims of the armed conflict, as an example of resilience, resistance, and political power. Additionally, the project aimed at the entire LGBTQ+ community in the Caribbean Region of Colombia, often affected in their daily lives by deep patriarchal and sexist issues that generate social exclusion and intolerance.

Conclusions

The process of identifying sites of homosocialization through ethnographic data collection techniques required exploring the territory and reconstructing local history and meanings from the same place and context. “For this reason, testimonies were of interest, the broad perspective

of a community that needs to be told in order to emerge from invisibility, because it is vital to produce stories from a plural and heterogeneous memory” (Hernández-Albarracín, Ramírez-Lindarte, & López-Pena, 2019, p. 43). The trigger point was always the local dynamics from each recognized site of homosocialization, one’s own experience narrated from lived realities and the individual and collective interpretation constructed from the social fabric.

Figure 5. LGBTQ+ Population of Casa de Paz in Ciénaga, Magdalena



Note. Social mapping conducted, 2024

The research concludes that LGBTIQ+ participants associate and describe territory as a multidimensional construct. This community perceives territory as a site of encounter, complementation, and reflection. Territory is at once a safe place and an unsafe place, functioning simultaneously as a repository of memory, a connecting fabric, a space of experiences, self-recognition and recognition of others, plurality and imperfection. Consequently, contributions are established to reflect on the experiences and interactions in the territories, as well as on the forms and narratives of those who participated in the research in relation to the construction of the meaning of life and the way of seeing the world.

In summary, the different narratives demonstrate the interconnectedness between experiences and spaces of homosocialization, as well as the development of an agenda of concerns related to the defense of human rights, especially the protection of life. Along these lines, one of the main ideas demonstrated by the research links territory to the construction of memory and the experience that contributes to the cohesion of the social fabric. The emerging concept of territory implies dialogue based on ways of seeing the LGBTIQ+ world with intersectionality,

intergenerationality, and a differential approach, elements necessary for establishing dialogical and political relationships within a multi-diverse context such as that of the Colombian Caribbean, specifically that of Ciénaga, Magdalena.

Intersectionality processes (Parra and Busquier, 2022; Sánchez, García, and Japa, 2022) define interactions in spaces of homosocialization as places where LGBTQ+ people can recognize themselves, construct their identities and gender expressions, and fight for political and social inclusion in society. These spaces have been fundamental to the recognition of the rights of LGBTQ+ people in the Colombian Caribbean, creating leaders, positioning diverse agendas in development plans, and promoting citizen participation.

The territory is described and experienced as imperfect, unstable, irregular, and experiencing a power imbalance. The voices heard for this research emphasize the importance of the contributions of different gender identities, sexual orientations, and other ways of positioning themselves against prevailing and normative hegemonies to peacebuilding in Colombia. Consistent with this, a dream of the physical and symbolic multiplication of safe and happiness-producing places is possible, supported by their own initiatives and public policies recognized by the social ecosystem. In conclusion, and as a projection of the results of this research, it is relevant to highlight the following testimony:

Nosotros, nosotras, nosotres, ubicamos en ciertos puntos del mapa los lugares que queremos que se implementen en el territorio. Algunos ya existen en la política pública pero no en la vida real. Otros existen en la vida real pero no activan en su implementación el enfoque LGBTQ+. Queremos por ejemplo oficinas de trabajo, lugares de trabajo sexual, una oficina jurídica y centros de salud con enfoque LGBTQ+. Pensamos también en comedores y lugares tipo albergues. Son necesarios parques recreativos y lugares de diversión. Los lugares están ubicados en diferentes partes del mapa soñado buscando un equilibrio del poder social. (Mujer trans, 30 años, 2024, taller el mapa soñado).

Figure 6.

LGBTQ+ population of Casa de Paz in Ciénaga, Magdalena



Note: Social Mapping, 2024

We locate at certain points on the map the places we want to see implemented in the territory. Some already exist in public policy but not in real life. Others exist in real life but don't activate the LGBTQ+ approach in their implementation. For example, we want job offices, sex work spaces, a law office, and health centers with an LGBTQ+ focus. We also think about soup kitchens and shelter-type places. Recreational parks and entertainment venues are necessary. The places are located in different parts of the dream map, seeking a balance of social power. (Trans woman, 30 years old, 2024, Dream Map workshop)

Consequently, based on the insights gathered through research, it is critical that public policies connect memories, the possibility of balance, and the strengthening of the emotional state and mental health of the LGBTQ+ population. Hence the importance not only of strengthening public policies with a differential approach, but also of activating its implementation routes and procedures in places of homosocialization so that the LGBTQ+ population can, for instance, access healthcare, name changes, the right to work, in some cases, sex work, or the protection of fundamental rights. “We envision a territory with job opportunities, healthcare, recreation, and leisure, that even recognizes sex work as work and places of care for LGBTQ+ older adults” (Trans woman, 18 years old, 2024, Dream Map workshop).

Places like Casa de Paz are created not only to heal the wounds caused by the armed and social conflict in the region, but also to foster dialogue between different social groups and the rebuilding of the social fabric, establishing connections with civil society and the state, and strengthening reflection on the discrimination and violence generated by a patriarchal and heterosexist system.

Contribución de los autores

Luis Ricardo Navarro Díaz: Conceptualization (lead); Methodology (design and analytical direction); Investigation (lead social investigator); Supervision; Writing – original draft; Project administration.

Silvana Mary Martínez Coronado: Investigation (secondary social investigator); Formal analysis; Writing – review & editing; Translation (English version and Abstract); Contextualization of differential approaches and public policy.

Sergio Andrés González Leones: Investigation (fieldwork and data collection); Data curation; Theoretical-practical execution and methodological facilitation of interactive workshops (social cartography, patchwork quilt, and walking interviews).

Conflicto de intereses

Los autores declaran la inexistencia de conflictos de intereses con institución o asociación comercial de cualquier índole.

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