Local Ownership in Reconciliation Processes

The Case of the Association of Peasant Workers of Carare in Colombia

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# Table of contents

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 2
List of figures .................................................................................................................................. 5

## 1. Introduction .......................................................................................................................... 7
    1.1 Problem statement ............................................................................................................... 7
    1.2 Conceptual framework ....................................................................................................... 8
    1.3 Conflict, peace and reconciliation in Colombia ................................................................. 8
    1.4 Research question ............................................................................................................. 10
    1.5 Methodology and research relevance ................................................................................. 11

## 2. Theory of reconciliation ....................................................................................................... 12
    2.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 12
    2.2 Defining reconciliation ..................................................................................................... 12
    2.3 A voluntary and internal process ..................................................................................... 14
    2.4 Reconciliation peacebuilding, and humanitarian intervention .......................................... 14
    2.5 Why reconciliation matters ............................................................................................. 15
    2.6 Reconciliation during and after conflict ........................................................................... 17
    2.7 Different paths to reconciliation ...................................................................................... 18
    2.8 Participants in the reconciliation process ....................................................................... 19
    2.9 Bottom-up reconciliation ............................................................................................... 20
    2.10 Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 21

## 3. Literature review on local ownership and operationalisation ............................................... 22
    3.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 22
    3.2 The importance of local ownership for reconciliation ....................................................... 22
    3.3 Interpreting local ownership ............................................................................................. 23
    3.4 Conceptual and practical dilemma’s in local ownership .................................................... 24
    3.5 Historical review on external and internal actors in reconciliation .................................... 25
        3.5.1 The do-no-harm approach ......................................................................................... 27
        3.5.2 The facilitative approach .......................................................................................... 28
    3.6 The local and external actor ............................................................................................. 29
    3.7 Relationships between internal and external actors ......................................................... 30
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Capacity building and local ownership</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Methodology</strong></td>
<td><strong>33</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Introduction</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 The research design</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 The case selection and sampling methods</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4 The research process</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5 Methods</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6 Conclusion</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. The ATCC and reconciliation</strong></td>
<td><strong>37</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1 Introduction</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 Regional background</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3 History of the ATCC</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4 The ATCC in the Colombian peace process</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5 The ATCC and the community</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6 A bottom-up reconciliation process</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7 Conclusion</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6. Relations between the ATCC and external actors</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1 Introduction</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2 The external actors</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3 The need for external support</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4 From accompaniment to productive projects</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5 Decision-making processes</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6 Equality or dominance in relationships with external actors</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7 Obstacles to equal relationships</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.8 Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7. The role of capacity building in external support to the ATCC</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 The use of capacity building for the ATCC</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 Forms of capacity building employed by external actors</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 Adjustment to the local level</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Conclusions ......................................................................................................................... 64
  8.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 64
  8.2 Answers to the sub-questions .......................................................................................... 64
  8.3 General conclusion .......................................................................................................... 66
  8.4 Constraints and limitations ............................................................................................. 68
  8.5 Recommendations .......................................................................................................... 68

Bibliography .............................................................................................................................. 70
  Primary sources ...................................................................................................................... 70
  Secondary sources .................................................................................................................. 70

Appendices ................................................................................................................................ 76
  Appendix 1: Map of Santander and the Magdalena Medio santandereano ....................... 76
  Appendix 2: External actors that worked with the ATCC .................................................... 77

List of figures

  Figure 1: Measurement of local ownership in reconciliation processes ......................... 32
  Figure 2: Local leadership as a gatekeeper for external interventions ......................... 59
### List of acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATCC</td>
<td>Asociación de Trabajadores Campesinos del Carare (Association of Peasant Workers of Carare)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUC</td>
<td>Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNRR</td>
<td>Comisión Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación (National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FARC</td>
<td>Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELN</td>
<td>Ejército de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPL</td>
<td>Ejército Popular de Liberación (Popular Liberation Army)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person</td>
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<tr>
<td>IO</td>
<td>International Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M19</td>
<td>Movimiento 19 de Abril (April 19th Movement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Nongovernmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Nongovernmental Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIAG</td>
<td>New Illegal Armed Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organisation of American States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDPMM</td>
<td>Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de Magdalena Medio (Magdalena Medio Development and Peace Programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBCPI</td>
<td>Socially Based Civil Peace Initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SENA</td>
<td>Servicio Nacional de Aprendizaje (National Learning Service)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

The changed nature of contemporary conflicts has changed the nature of conflict resolution and external interventions. Since the end of the Cold War, virtually all conflicts are intrastate. Together with an increased interdependence and globalisation, this causes that conflicting parties cannot be separated from each other when violence ends (Assefa 339; Brounéus 292). Because of this development, there is an increased need to pay attention to post-conflict periods, in which former enemies are forced to live side by side again. Likewise, considering the increase in the number of complex emergencies since the 1990s, in humanitarian assistance it is essential to take into account how inter-societal relationships are affected by external interventions (Anderson 232). Therefore, there has been a growing attention for the concept of reconciliation, as it represents the way through which relationships damaged by conflict are restored.

Reconciliation processes need to be voluntary and come from within. Only the people who have been affected by violence themselves can take the decision to try to come into terms with the past, and take the necessary steps towards a new, interdependent future. External actors who try to provide assistance in this process, such as nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), International Organisations (IOs), churches, and other civil society or state actors, cannot impose a reconciliation process on others (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 23). Not surprisingly, therefore, the importance of local ownership is one of the key lessons learned in the past few decades of research and experience in fields like peacebuilding (Sending 4) and is particularly relevant for reconciliation, considering its internal nature.

Despite the common recognition of the importance of local ownership for reconciliation, there is little empirical knowledge on the relation between local ownership and the reconciliation process. In addition, there is a lack of clarity what is meant by local ownership, as often it is used by external actors as a principle, but without clear guidelines of how it should be implemented (Reich 6-7). Therefore, this research has attempted to measure local ownership at the local level, by studying a case of local reconciliation in Colombia. Through this approach, the dynamics between internal and external actors are
taken into account, providing new insights to improve external support to reconciliation at the local level.

1.2 Conceptual framework

There is no agreement on a single definition of reconciliation. In this research, reconciliation is defined as a process to overcome past conflict, involving a transformation of relationships of a divided society, moving towards positive and sustainable peace. In chapter five, the reconciliation process of the Association of Peasant Workers of Carare (ATCC), in Colombia, is analysed. This case study shows a bottom-up, informal reconciliation process that is slightly different from academic views on reconciliation.

Local ownership, on the other hand, can also be approached in different ways. Here, local ownership is defined as the level of control exercised by local actors over the design and implementation of processes implemented in their community. In this paper, a model of operationalising local ownership is used that combines different aspects of local ownership emphasized in the literature, mainly borrowed from the field of peacebuilding. According to this model, local ownership is likely to be present in a reconciliation process to the extent that the following three requirements are met: 1) There is a local organisation that engages actively in the reconciliation process and is representative for the local community; 2) Relations with external actors are based on equality and power sharing; and 3) External actors use capacity building adjusted to local circumstances as a way to produce or increase local ownership. This approach is based on the assumption that both local and external actors play an important role in determining the level of local ownership.

1.3 Conflict, peace and reconciliation in Colombia

Violence in Colombia today can be traced back to the 1840s, when the two main parties, the Liberal and the Conservative party, were formed along strong party loyalties (McDonald 1). The current episode of violence, that has been going on for over five decades, started in the 1960s involving leftist guerrilla movements that took up an armed struggle against the state (Gomez Serna 74). The conflict still has high humanitarian costs. Colombia has the highest number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the world after Sudan (Bouvier 4), which implies around 3,5 million people (UNHCR), representing about
7% of the total population (OCHA). Furthermore, the country faces a large number of victims caused by landmines (Paladini 346), and the human rights situation in Colombia is critical, as there is no difference made between civilians and combatants in the armed struggle (Amnesty International 108). The most affected groups in the population are indigenous people, Afro-descendants, and peasants (idem).

While the international image of the Colombian conflict is often linked to drug trade, the reality is more complex (Bouvier 3). The conflict differs from other internal conflicts in that the country is not emerging from an authoritarian regime, nor are there two parties that are fighting each other (Carrillo 154; Henao Gaviria 175). The different armed groups that have been involved, comprise guerrilla movements like the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), as well as paramilitary groups such as the United Self-defences of Colombia (AUC), and the army. All these armed groups have been related to human rights violations (Esquivia and Gerlach 300).

Under the previous government of Álvaro Uribe, around 30,000 paramilitary members were demobilized, however, critics argue that this has led to impunity of crimes against humanity (Isacson and Rojas Rodríguez 32). Furthermore, many of the former paramilitary structures persist through new illegal armed groups (NIAGs) (ICG). At the same time, the Justice and Peace Law summoned the establishment of the National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation (CNRR), that focuses on truth-telling, and aims at overseeing the reparations process (Carrillo 133-145). Furthermore, the current president Juan Manuel Santos, who took office in 2010, passed a law to compensate around four million victims of the armed conflict (BBC News). Through this Victims’ Law, the current government also recognised the existence of the armed conflict, which was denied by its predecessor (El País).

Apart from national efforts to end the conflict, Colombia knows a wealth of local and regional peace initiatives (Esquivia Ballestas and Gerlach 295). Among these are Peace Communities, laboratories of peace, and humanitarian zones, that aim for new structures of participation and a deepening of democracy (Bouvier 14). Civil society has been growing in the country since the mid-1990s, but faced a hard time during the Uribe years, as many NGOs were accused by the state as being too soft on guerrillas (Isacson and Rojas...
Rodríguez 31). Although civil society organisations have grown and become more mature, it will take many years before wounds of people affected by violence that have been opened can be healed (Moncayo 275).

The case study of this research, the ATCC, is a so-called Peace Community, that was founded in 1987 in the Magdalena Medio region, after having experienced years of extreme violence, and being invaded by all types of armed actors, including the public forces. Their unique dialogue strategy and informal process of reconciliation developed by the community members, caught the attention of many, and makes it an interesting case of both reconciliation and local ownership.

1.4 Research question

The factors outlined above, lead to the following research question addressed in this paper: “What is the relation between reconciliation and local ownership, and to what extent does the reconciliation process of the ATCC in Colombia contain a high level of initiative and organisation in the community, equal relationships between the ATCC and external actors, and the use of capacity building by external actors adapted to the local context.” This research question represents the three main requirements of local ownership, mentioned earlier, that are seen as the ideal situation of local ownership in a reconciliation process.

This question is divided up in several sub-questions that lead to the answer of the main research question, and are addressed in the remaining chapters. The first sub-question, “what is reconciliation?” will be addressed in chapter two, and is asked order to provide clarity about this key concept in this research. This chapter discusses the concept of reconciliation from different angles, such as its importance and main characteristics.

Chapter three elaborates on the importance of local ownership in reconciliation processes, and analyses sub-question two: “What is the role of local ownership in reconciliation and how can local ownership be measured?” The second part of the question refers to the way how the research will be operationalised, as explained in chapter four on methodology.

The last three chapters of the paper are the empirical chapters, in which the findings of the research are presented. In chapter five, two sub-questions will be posed. First, the third sub-question asks: “To what extent does the ATCC represent the local community?”
This question is posed in order to know whether the level of local ownership measured in the last part of the paper is also representative for the whole community. Subsequently, the chapter deals with sub-question four: “Has the ATCC initiated a process of reconciliation and to what extent does the ATCC actively engage in a process of reconciliation?” Following the operationalisational model, this question is the first step in measuring local ownership in the ATCC.

Next, in chapter six, the second element of local ownership will be analysed: “To what extent are relations between the ATCC and external actors based on equality and power sharing?” According to Hanna Reich, instead of demanding local ownership as a project goal, the focus should be on relationships between external and internal actors. In these relationships, power can be shared or not, relations are equal or not (4). This will be analysed in the case of the ATCC.

Finally, in chapter seven, the last element of local ownership will be scrutinised, answering the sixth sub-question: “To what extent are capacity building activities, provided by external actors, tailored to local needs of the ATCC community?” This last sub-question is researched, as in the literature capacity building is often mentioned as a way of producing or increasing local ownership, but in a way that it is adjusted to local circumstances in order to be able to fulfil this role. Finally, the sum of the answers given to these sub-questions, will lead to an answer of the overall research question, and provide an original view on local ownership in the case of the ATCC.

1.5 Methodology and research relevance

As for the relevance of the study, there is a lack of empirical knowledge on reconciliation (Brounéus 292), as well as about local ownership (Reich 7), that complement theoretical elaborations on these topics. Furthermore, Colombia has a high number of peace initiatives, that require more investigation (Hernández, "Paces Desde" 184). Most research on peace in Colombia focuses on the government level, and is published in Spanish (Bouvier 6-7). Therefore, there is a need for English language material on local peace initiatives in Colombia in order to provide new insights for a more encompassing theory. Furthermore, a lot of research on external efforts in peace processes focuses on the project level, instead of how experiences are influenced by external support in a broader sense.
(Paffenholz and Spurk 35). This study aims to contribute to the filling of this and the previously mentioned research “gaps”.

On a more practical level, this research intends to add something to the lessons learned that tell external actors how reconciliation initiatives at the local level can be supported and how local ownership can be increased. At the same time, sharing the experience of the ATCC can inspire communities around the world that are facing similar challenges.

To the end of increasing empirical knowledge about the relations between reconciliation and local ownership, a case study has been conducted, which provides in-depth, qualitative information about the dynamics between these elements. The main research methods used are literature review and interviews. As there is some literature available about the ATCC, this is used to answer part of the research questions. This information is complemented by information from interviews done with key informants, such as leaders, ex-leaders, founders, other members of the ATCC, and an external expert on Peace Communities. This way, the case study gives an “from within” view on the dynamics between the community and external actors.

2. Theory of reconciliation

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical foundations of this research will be laid, by exploring the concept of reconciliation. For this purpose, the meaning, characteristics, its relation to peacebuilding and humanitarian intervention, its importance, and other aspects will be addressed. Furthermore, features of reconciliation that are related to the main theme of this paper – reconciliation and local ownership – will be highlighted. This way, the internal and voluntary nature, as well as the bottom-up aspects of reconciliation are emphasised.

2.2 Defining reconciliation

Reconciliation is a complex concept that contains paradoxical elements (Lederach “Building Peace” 20). Although it has been recognised as a vital part of peacebuilding (Hamber and Kelly 1-2), there is not much understanding of what it exactly means (Assefa
It has become a buzzword in transitional justice discourse, however, for the purpose of a research, it is important to be clear about the values behind it (Meierhenrich 233). Broadly, reconciliation can be described as "a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future" (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 12). This provides a general approximation of what reconciliation stands for. A further step towards the meaning of reconciliation can be done by looking at the elements that comprise a reconciliation process.

In the literature, main elements of reconciliation are the acknowledgement of past suffering, the building of new, positive relationships (Assefa 340; Hamber and Kelly 4), forgiveness (Meierhenrich 206), and the search for a “long-term and interdependent future” (Hamber and Kelly 4). Most definitions of reconciliation also include the elements of truth, justice, mercy, and peace (Hamber and Kelly 4; Lederach, “Building Peace” 49; Ramsbothan et al. 243). Some of the elements of reconciliation are seen as contradictory, such as peace versus justice, and mercy versus truth. However, according to John Paul Lederach, one of the main scholars in this field, reconciliation provides the space for all of these elements to meet, one is not more important than the other (“Building Peace” 53-54). However, as will also be shown in the case study, not all of these elements are present in each reconciliation process.

Furthermore, it is recognised that the balance between the different components of reconciliation can differ per individual or society. People have different priorities with regard to reconciliation. For some, reconciliation might be possible without acknowledgement of past suffering, while for others this is essential. Also, whether justice is a prerequisite for reconciliation is debatable. On the other hand, to avoid harmful acts of the past and building new positive relationships is usually considered indispensible for reconciliation (Lambourne 8). Thus, it can be stated that there is no true meaning of reconciliation (Meierhenrich 233), as the meaning of reconciliation is culturally affected (Lambourne 8), and through the case study it will be suggested that sometimes the need for reconciliation can be stronger than the need for truth and justice.
2.3 A voluntary and internal process

Having discussed how to define reconciliation, there are a few other aspects about reconciliation that are important to take into account in this research. First of all, reconciliation can be either a process or an end-state. Often reconciliation is described as a process (Brounéus 294, Ramsbotham et al. 231), sometimes as a goal (Auerbach 304). As a process, it is generally seen as long-term, deep and complex in character (Ramsbotham et al. 231). As a goal it is something very difficult to achieve, almost unattainable (Auerbach 304). However, whether it is described as a process or goal, this depends more on the context rather than the concept (Meierhenrich 214). In this research, reconciliation is mainly treated as a process, although in agreement with Meierhenrich it is assumed that it is not necessary to chose between reconciliation as a process or a goal, as this depends on how one phrases a sentence, rather than on a conceptual difference.

Furthermore, it is important to note that reconciliation is voluntary and internal (Assefa 341). The people affected by violence themselves choose to accommodate hostilities in a consensual manner (Meierhenrich 211). For example, the element of forgiveness implies a change of feeling. Therefore, it is something that needs to come from within and cannot be forced by outsiders (idem 206). This is important because this means that reconciliation cannot be imposed from outside. As a consequence, a top-down approach is not likely to be effective in a reconciliation process. Moreover, compared with other conflict handling mechanisms, such as mediation or negotiation, reconciliation has the highest level of participation of the stakeholders in a conflict (Assefa 336), another characteristic that points into the direction of the importance of local ownership in reconciliation.

2.4 Reconciliation peacebuilding, and humanitarian intervention

In order to understand where reconciliation stands in conflict resolution and humanitarian intervention theory, now the relation between reconciliation, peacebuilding and humanitarian intervention will be addressed. Peacebuilding is a an overarching term (Paffenholz and Spurk 15), that is more extensive than reconciliation, thus reconciliation can be seen as a part of peacebuilding (Hamber and Kelly 1-2). Both peacebuilding and reconciliation focus on long-term support to a conflict ridden society, addressing the root
causes of conflict, and seeking sustainable peace (OECD 86). Reconciliation focuses specifically on re-establishing damaged interpersonal and social relations (Hamber and Kelly 1-2), while peacebuilding "(…) encompasses the full array of states and approaches needed to transform conflict toward sustainable, peaceful relationships and outcomes" (Lederach, “Building Peace” 14). To conclude, peacebuilding encompasses more than reconciliation, but the two concepts are closely related.

Furthermore, reconciliation is something that needs to be considered from a humanitarian action perspective. Humanitarian intervention has become more and more complex over the past few decades, and affects the course of conflict, by reinforcing or diminishing the incentives for violence (Anderson 232). Thus, humanitarian aid workers should also take into account how their actions affect interpersonal and intergroup relationships. To conclude, this research sometimes will borrow from the field of peacebuilding, as there is more literature about peacebuilding than about reconciliation specifically, and where possible, comparisons between the two fields will be made.

2.5 Why reconciliation matters

Increasingly, reconciliation is recognised as important by donors and others (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 17). But why is it important? As mentioned earlier, reconciliation addresses interpersonal and societal relations in a society damaged by conflict. There are several arguments why this is important or necessary.

Firstly, as stated in the introduction of this paper, reconciliation has gained importance in the post-Cold War period, due to the nature of contemporary conflicts. As almost all conflicts nowadays are intrastate, it is hard to physically separate adversaries or former adversaries (Assefa 339; Brounéus 292). Since it is not possible to separate those, it is argued that it is necessary to pay attention to their damaged relationships. After the Cold War, expectations for peace were high, but wars, for example in Somalia and Yugoslavia, proved that these were not realistic. Consequently, classic conflict management has been increasingly questioned (Svenson 16). Hence, contemporary conflicts need peacebuilding approaches that correspond to their nature, and that are more creative than conventional realpolitik (Lederach, “Building Peace” 50).
Secondly, the world has become more interconnected and interdependent. This is another reason why physical separation is no feasible option, and an interdependent future of former enemies becomes unavoidable (Ramsbothan et al. 233). Globalisation makes people’s fates intertwined (Assefa 340). Thus, the idea that “good fences make good neighbours” is hard to sustain in our contemporary, globalised world (Ramsbothan et al. 232-233).

Another argument in favour of reconciliation is that for the people affected by conflict, there is a need to pay attention to the things that occurred in a violent past. As stated by Priscilla B. Hayner, "(t)he history can be lost quickly, but the pain of those who have suffered doesn’t necessarily subside over time. This is especially true when that pain or facts behind the pain are denied or not acknowledged" (in Anonymous 221). But not only victims need closure. When it comes to emotional needs after conflict, both those of victims and perpetrators have to be addressed. For a victim, it is important to restore the sense of power that has been under threat. For the perpetrator, on the other hand, it is the public moral image that has been damaged, and he or she needs to be accepted back in society in order to come into terms with the past (Schnabel and Nadler 116). In short, in order to overcome a conflict, not just political and legal aspects require attention, psychological needs are also vital (Lambourne 20-21).

Finally, reconciliation is important because it is crucial to prevent outbreaks of conflict in the future. A history of violent conflict is a high risk factor for conflict in the future, particularly when the impacts of conflict have not been sufficiently addressed (OECD 51). Often, the focus lies on the “essentials” in a post-conflict situation, like rebuilding the physical infrastructure of the country, reforming the security sector, while reconciliation is seen as a “by-product”, that will follow automatically (Nilsson 49). However, within two years after the end of a conflict, 30% of the countries experience a new outbreak of conflict, and 44% relapses into conflict within five years (Sending 3). Reconciliation is a more proactive approach to conflict with a bigger long-term potential (Lederach, “Building Peace” 62).

Summarizing, reconciliation has become an important element of peacebuilding. On the one hand because of the nature of contemporary conflicts and a globalised world, and on the other hand because paying attention to the psychological needs of survivors of
conflict is a proactive way of dealing with conflict, which can contribute to a more sustainable peace and avoid outbreaks of violence in the future.

2.6 Reconciliation during and after conflict

Although often is spoken about post-conflict reconciliation, this process does not necessarily start after a formal peace agreement has been signed. Some see peacebuilding, and thereby reconciliation, as a post-conflict process (Goulding 89), or state that it can be risky or counterproductive to start a reconciliation process in early stages, due to the deep trauma’s caused by conflict (Ramsbothan et al. 232). However, others argue that it is important to start a reconciliation process early, when attitudes are still receptive to change (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 17). In conventional conflict theory is spoken about the moment when a conflict is “ripe” for settlement, at the moment of a “Mutually Hurting Stalemate” (Zartman 8). However, for reconciliation there is not such a point in time.

Theoretically, a conflict can be described along a continuum, starting from latent conflict, followed by confrontation, then negotiation, and finally dynamic peaceful relationships (Lederach, “Building Peace” 34). However, in reality, conflicts are more dynamic, and can jump back and forth along this continuum (idem 37; Svenson 15). Experience has shown that communities have the capacities to start peacebuilding activities even in the midst of violence, way before there is a formal peace agreement (OECD 53). This is also illustrated by the case study of this paper discussed in chapters five, six, and seven. Hence, in this research reconciliation is seen as something that can start in all phases of conflict, regardless of the formal peace process.

Furthermore, as has been mentioned earlier, reconciliation takes a long time, and continues long after a formal peace agreement has been signed. As expressed by Mari Fitzduff, "life moves on, and the victims are left to carry the cost, often for decades after the wars that are over. Stay for a while with their needs if you can; the work does not end when the worst of the violence is over" (141). Often, the international community loses interest in a conflict when the main violence has gone away (OECD 59). However, reconciliation is something that should be seen as a process that can take decades or generations, and should be given time to develop (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 17-22). In
summary, the process of reconciliation can start at any point of the conflict continuum, but it needs to continue long after formal conflict settlements have taken place.

2.7 Different paths to reconciliation

The next question that arises is how a reconciliation process can be conducted, and what are the methods used to promote reconciliation. In fact, there are many different forms a reconciliation process can have (Hamber and Kelly 7-8; Lederach, “Building Peace” v). On the national level, broadly a choice can be made whether the emphasis is on amnesia, “to forgive and forget”, or on a process focused on justice, for example through trials (Ramsbothan et al. 235). Providing amnesty can be a way to move on from conflict, but it carries the risk to lead to impunity and more mistrust on the long run (OECD 57). Adversarial trials, on the other hand, may create increased division in a society (Betts 747).

Alternatively, a truth commission can help a society to come to terms with its past (Hayner, in Anonymous 221–222). Truth commissions were held for example in South-Africa, Chile, and Guatemala, and is a middle way between amnesia and conventional justice as its function is to investigate and expose the facts of the past, without necessarily putting all perpetrators to trial in a conventional court (Ramsbothan et al. 237). However, national reconciliation is perhaps a too ambitious goal for a truth commission on the short run, as reconciliation generally needs a long time (Hayner, in Anonymous 221). Reparation may also be part of a national reconciliation strategy, but is difficult when large parts, or almost the entire population, are affected by the conflict (idem 222). Retaliation or vengeance, is considered the antithesis of reconciliation, but can have a strong presence in some cultures (Ramsbothan et al. 242).

As there are different paths that can lead to reconciliation, it follows that those paths vary cross-culturally (Betts 748). There is no rule that says which methods work and which do not (Brounéus 297). Also, there have been indigenous societies that have dealt with conflict in other, traditional ways, that sometimes have greatly impressed the outside world. Examples stem from traditional healers in Mozambique, and lineage leaders in Somalia (Ramsbothan et al. 242). Likewise, the case study of this paper will provide an example of a local community that has found its own way of dealing with conflict (see chapters five to seven). This highlights that resources to deal with conflict are not just material, but that
people of various cultures should be seen as a very important resource for reconciliation (Lederach, “Building Peace” 58).

Summing up, there is no single way of conducting a reconciliation process. The chosen path can emphasize amnesty or justice, depending on the society and its culture, and may both include a formalised, national reconciliation process, and a localised, informal peace process.

2.8 Participants in the reconciliation process

Everyone in a society affected by conflict should be included in a reconciliation process, not only direct victims (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 13). Reconciliation can be a process between former enemies (Ramsbotham et al. 231), or between victims and perpetrators (Schnabel and Nadler 116). However, the important thing is that reconciliation is an inclusive process (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 13), as the higher the participation of the parties of the conflict, the higher is the chance to find a durable solution (Assefa 338).

To give some examples, participation in the reconciliation process in Rwanda was seen as important, because of the mass-participatory nature of the genocide of 1994 (Betts 747). On the other hand, in the reconciliation process led by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South-Africa, not all parties felt represented by this institution, which led to the alienation of people from the process (de Klerk, in Anonymous 214). Thus, it is suggested that the more participation in a reconciliation process, and the better different parties feel represented, the more effective reconciliation will be.

Apart from that, there is also a gender aspect that is important to reconciliation. Women and men are affected in different ways by conflict. Often women are not sufficiently included in negotiation processes and decision-making (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 13), while they can also make important contributions to peace processes (OECD 25).

Finally, the international community has also a role to play in reconciliation processes. Members from the international community, such as UN agencies, INGOs, and individual countries can contribute to reconciliation in various ways. Their role, along with the role of other external actors, will be discussed in the next chapter.
2.9 Bottom-up reconciliation

This section focuses on at what level a reconciliation takes place, and whether a bottom-up strategy or a top-down approach is most feasible. Reconciliation efforts can be done at the local, national, and global level (Betts 738), or at the middle-range level, in between the grassroots and national level (Brounéus 298). In some cases, reconciliation is a state-driven process, such as in Rwanda, while in others it is grassroots-driven, like was the case in Mozambique (Brounéus 307-308).

A bottom-up approach refers to a process led by grassroots and community leaders (Svenson 19), where knowledge is generated from concrete experience (Sending 8). Taking into account that reconciliation is something that needs to happen in a voluntary and internal manner, the advantage of a bottom-up approach is that it comes from within a community, so that it is more likely to be a genuine process of reconciliation (Lederach, “Building Peace” 29-31). Working at the community level means that hundreds or thousands of people are directly engaged, increasing the sense of ownership (Barnes 9). However, there are often not enough local initiatives or they are too small to have an impact (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 75). Also, people at the local level might not have the energy to work for resolving conflict (Lederach, “Building Peace” 27). Furthermore, grassroots are not neutral in the conflict, and might be biased towards other groups in society (Racioppi and O’Sullivan See 364).

A top-down approach departs from the assumption that national reform has to take place first (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 26), and that external actors know what is best (Sending 8). In this approach, the actors involved, are few in number and occupy important military, political, or religious positions that represent the conflicting parties (Svenson 19). In contemporary conflicts, state centric approaches alone are not seen as adequate to address conflict (Muller 12). Top-down strategies can be insincere and, in that sense, can even pose risks to peace (Brounéus 311). Nevertheless, although top-down incentives for reconciliation do not automatically produce reconciliation at the individual level (Brounéus 309; IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 26), authorities can help to establish an environment to encourage reconciliation (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 26), and the international community can be useful in supporting local reconciliation programmes (idem 23). This way, each level can complement each other (Betts 736; Lederach, “Building Peace” 34).
A third approach is the so-called middle-out approach, involving society leaders without military power, that have connections both to lower and top levels, like churches and NGOs (Svenson 22). This level is seen as important by Lederach (“Building Peace” 20). However, the assumption held that middle range actors would exercise an automatic influence at the top level is contested by other studies (Svenson 22; Paffenholtz and Spurk 26).

Most contemporary studies recognise the importance to support local level capacities for managing conflict, and working simultaneously at all three levels (IDEA, “Democracy And” 5). Each level has a potential to contribute to reconciliation (Lederach, “Building Peace” 35), while at each level also manipulation can take place (Bett 743-744). It is important to gain understanding about how relationships between international and domestic efforts interact, and which ways of interaction are the most productive (Donais 5; Bett 750). Although in this research the focus lies on local reconciliation processes, as ownership on the local level is seen as important (see chapter three), this does not mean that this level is considered to be better than the other levels. Each level is legitimate in its own right (Lederach, “Building Peace” 34), and efforts at each level are needed for reconciliation.

2.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the concept of reconciliation has been explored. Several key aspects stand out that are of importance for this research. Reconciliation is a process that needs to come from within, and is voluntary. It is a conflict handling mechanism with a high level of participation, and can start at any moment of the conflict cycle. It can also be initiated at different levels, from the local to the global, and these levels ideally complement each other. However, because of the characteristics mentioned above, a purely top-down strategy in reconciliation is not likely to work.

With regard to the meaning of reconciliation, this is in part dependent on the context. Reconciliation is defined here in broad terms as a process to overcome past conflict, involving a transformation of relationships of a divided society, moving towards positive and sustainable peace. The exact way of how this process looks like may differ per society, for example with regard to the importance of justice herein.
Considering the relevance of participation and the voluntary nature of reconciliation, the local level plays an important role in such a process. Therefore, the next chapter will focus on the concept of local ownership in relation to reconciliation, and establish the conceptual framework of this study.

3. Literature review on local ownership and operationalisation

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will analyse the relation between reconciliation and local ownership. To this end, the sub-question “what is the role of local ownership in reconciliation and how can local ownership be measured?” will be examined. Furthermore, a conceptual framework will be provided that aims at measuring local ownership based on three elements of local ownership that are highlighted in the literature: 1) The level of local organisation, active engagement in the reconciliation process, and representativeness for the local community; 2) The type of relations with external actors, and the level of equality and power sharing; and 3) The use of capacity building by external actors and whether this is adjusted to local needs as a way to produce or increase local ownership. These elements will be discussed in separate sections in this chapter, but first the importance of local ownership, its definition, and difficulties, will be discussed.

3.2 The importance of local ownership for reconciliation

Local ownership, like reconciliation, is a key concept in this research. Therefore, this section aims to analyse the importance of local ownership for reconciliation. In recent peacebuilding and reconciliation literature, a lot of importance is given to local ownership by scholars (Betts 749; Garcia 5; IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 23; Muller 12; Sending 4; Svenson 17), as well as by institutions like the UN, World Bank, and OECD-DAC (Sending 4). It has become a common term of peacebuilding vocabulary (Donais 3). Peacebuilding is not the only field where local ownership is important, as “‘local ownership’ is the current phrase on the lips of all agencies for development cooperation (…)”. In short, local ownership reflects the need for home-grown solutions instead of external ones (Reich 3).
There are several reasons why local ownership is seen as important in relation to reconciliation. As already discussed in the previous chapter, the nature of reconciliation suggests that ownership on the local level is important, because people that are directly affected by the conflict must embrace the peace process for this to be sustainable (Betts 749; Lederach, “Building Peace” 29). Secondly, local cultures may provide resources for reconciliation that remain unexploited otherwise (Donais 11; Lambourne 3; Lederach “Building Peace” 62; Moore 104; OECD 103). Thirdly, local ownership is important in order to gain legitimacy of newly build structures within the state (Muller 13; Sending 4). Correspondingly, local ownership has the potential to make external efforts more effective (Garcia 5; Sending 4). Another reason why local ownership is important is because in contemporary conflicts, violence is often localised, and thus people affected by conflict live in specific regions, or belong to specific sectors of a country and need to deal with violence in those areas (IDEA, “Democracy And” 50; Muller 12). Summarizing, local ownership is widely recognised as an important element to make peace more sustainable and effective. It is argued that this is especially true for reconciliation, as it is a process that needs to come from within.

3.3 Interpreting local ownership

Despite of the wide recognition of the importance of local ownership, there is not much literature that defines what is meant by this concept (Donais 3), or that specifically focuses on it (Reich 5). Local ownership can be interpreted in different ways. Sometimes it is seen as mere participation, in other cases as full ownership (Reich 6). Broadly, there are two main views on local ownership. One is the Liberal, and the other one the Communitarian vision (Donais 5). The first one is a more limited vision of self-determination, where local actors take over pre-determined ideas developed by external actors, while the second one is more bottom-up, where the process, design, and implementation is managed by locals (idem 5-6).

The current interpretation in the field of peacebuilding, for example, is more influenced by the first vision, as externally defined reforms are transferred to the local level (Sending 19). This is a rather disempowering version of local ownership, as often societies in conflict are described in terms of lacking capacity and political will (idem). However,
researchers state that neither the communitarian form or liberal version of local ownership is adequate on its own, rather the aim should be to combine internal and external efforts to serve a common end, to ensure that principles of liberal democracy are adequately adjusted to the local level in a genuine partnership relation (Donais 14; Sending 12). In summary, local ownership is more than just the implementation of external ideas by local actors, but ideally is formed by a harmonious and respectful relationship between internal and external actors.

Hannah Reich argues that local ownership is a too pretentious term, when used as a project objective by donors (15):

Given the current structures of international cooperation, it [local ownership] cannot be seriously implemented. Instead of highlighting those power asymmetries and working towards more transparency of the decision-making processes within the project work, it serves more to cover up a ‘business as usual’ approach where rhetoric and practice widely diverge (3-4).

Furthermore, she argues that in the current environment of hierarchical donor-recipient relations, it is almost impossible to implement local ownership (15). She states that instead of being a project objective, local ownership should be a long-term vision (7). Other authors confirm that there are many practical complications in implementing local ownership (Donais 3-4; Goodhand and Sedra 81; Sending 4). These issues will be addressed in the next section.

3.4 Conceptual and practical dilemma’s in local ownership

Local ownership has become a buzzword, that is used by many different actors in peacebuilding (Donais 3). However, there are several problems related to the practical use of the principle of local ownership. As Timothy Donais points out wisely: "If the operationalisation of local ownership principles were entirely unproblematic, there would be no need for external intervention in the first place" (12).

There is a lack of guidelines for how to implement local ownership, which is why the term remains rather vague (Goodhand and Sedra 81; Reich 6-7). Besides this conceptual problem, other types of issues arise, like the fear that local actors will not have the capacity or will to work towards a more just, stable society, or that local leaders lack legitimacy (Donais 12). Accordingly, it can be asked, “(...) should one seek to foster
ownership by building on local institutions even when doing so means supporting illiberal forms of rule?" (Sending 21). Curiously, there is wide consensus about the importance of local ownership, but it is rarely practiced (Donais 4).

Furthermore, it is difficult to include everyone, as there might exist marginalised groups in society, or groups that did not participate in the armed conflict and are therefore excluded from the peace process (Barnes 11). And finally, it is often hard to sustain local engagement when basic human needs are not fulfilled (Paffenholz and Spurk 30).

In conclusion, there are both conceptual issues and practical dilemma’s in the implementation of local ownership. So how can local ownership be further operationalised? Jonathan Goodhand and Mark Sedra argue for a more open debate on the implementation of local ownership, and a distinction between regime ownership and national ownership (s97). In addition, Reich argues that when thinking of local ownership, it is useful to look at the relationship between internal and external actors, by looking at whether these relationships are based on equality and power sharing or not (4). Based on the idea that local ownership cannot be seen as something implemented in a project, but is rather a matter of long-term relationships, this research will consider both internal and external actors, and the relationships built between them. The next section will give a historical review of the changing view on the approaches towards external support, and will outline lessons learned for external actors.

3.5 Historical review on external and internal actors in reconciliation

Reconciliation is a subfield within peacebuilding, and there is not much literature that specifically focuses on the relation between internal and external actors. Therefore, although this section will draw as much as possible on literature that addresses reconciliation, many times there will be a need to recur to the wider field of peacebuilding. Also, there are many guidelines for external actors, while there is less literature that focuses on internal actors. As a result, the section on approaches by external actors is longer than the part on internal actors.

After the end of the Cold War, many peacebuilding guidelines and doctrines developed, based on lessons learned (Sending 3). During the 1990s, peacebuilding researchers focused on which external actors could best address conflict issues, with which
kind of approaches. The main lesson learned was that there is a need for a variety of actors and approaches in order for peacebuilding to be sustainable, including community-based organisations (Paffenholz and Spurk 18). Consequently, the amount of peacebuilding actors increased considerably during the 1990s (Svenson 17).

In the same decade, there were two important influences that changed the peacebuilding landscape. The first one was the “do-no-harm approach” incited by Mary B. Anderson (Svenson 17). According to this view, that originated in the field of humanitarian assistance, there are patterns of external aid that unintentionally reinforce conflict, and peacebuilders, as well as aid workers, need to be aware of these possible side-effects of their work (Anderson 229-232).

The second milestone for peacebuilding, also in the 1990s, was Lederach’s work on peacebuilding and reconciliation (Svenson 18), in which he advocated for a limited role of external actors in peacebuilding, that consists in supporting internal actors, facilitating reconciliation, and respecting local ownership (Paffenholz and Spurk 22; Svenson 18). Due to these new insights, in the mid-1990s there was a shift in focus from external actors towards the recognition of the importance of internal actors (Paffenholz and Spurk 18).

After 9/11, the international community prioritised security issues, based on individual states’ interest, at the expense of trying to find sustainable solutions to complex conflicts (Svenson 15). However, at the same time the effectiveness of classic conflict management is being questioned, as the nature of contemporary conflicts demands different strategies (idem 16). The current understanding of peacebuilding is largely in line with Lederach’s model, that focuses on deep-rooted conflict transformation, supporting reconciliation potential of internal actors, being culturally sensitive, and advocating for a community-based bottom-up approach (Paffenholz and Spurk 22-24).

Considering the statistics that in 30% of the countries conflict returns within two years, and 44% of the countries relapse in conflict in five years, there is still a need for peacebuilding to become more sustainable (Sending 3-4). The next sections will discuss into more detail two of the main approaches to external support, that are determined here as the “do-no-harm approach”, and the “facilitative approach”.
3.5.1 The do-no-harm approach

The idea that peacebuilders and aid workers must be aware of the inadvertent negative effects of their work was first stated by Anderson (232), and echoed by many others (Lambourne 2; Lederach “Building Peace” 61; OECD 23; Reich 19). According to Anderson, there are patterns caused by aid and peacebuilding, that reinforce conflict (229). Such patterns are, for example, aid goods that are stolen and used in the war, effects on wages, prices, and profits that result in incentives for violence, or resources that substitute local resources (idem). Some of the harm caused by external aid are escapable cruelties, that can be resolved by increased professionalism of the aid industry, however, other dilemma’s remain (de Waal s130).

Peacebuilding often carries implicit messages to the local population (Anderson 232; Barnes 6; Reich 19). For instance, the implicit message that locals are not capable of making peace without help from outside “experts” (Anderson 232), the implicit message that international peace workers are more important than their local colleagues when they are privileged in evacuation strategies (Reich 19), and the implicit message that violence pays, by excluding from peace negotiations the people that did not take up arms (Barnes 6).

Other pitfalls that external actors should take into account are the risk of creating dependencies (OECD 105), the overburdening internal actors with resources that go beyond their capacities (idem 24), drawing out the most competent people from local institutions (idem 53), and imposing Western models that lead to a marginalisation of local actors (Reich 14; de Waal s136). All these negative side effects make external assistance a complex task, and might lead to the question whether external intervention is a good idea in the first place. This question is hard to answer, although the case of Somaliland suggests that not receiving external aid is not necessarily bad for a country, as this can have positive effects on internal accountability mechanisms (Eubank 2).

Nevertheless, the fact cannot be ignored that IOs and other external actors have become an integral part of conflict settings all over the world (Reich 19; Svenson 17). As it is unrealistic to think that this will change soon (if desirable), it is important to increase understanding of dynamics between internal and external actors. In short, despite of the many risks and pitfalls that carries the work in conflict settings, the option for external
actors to do nothing is even less feasible. Therefore, it is important to increase knowledge about how external support can be done in such a way that it does no harm. The approach discussed in the next session, goes beyond doing no harm, and suggests that external actors should play a facilitative role in supporting local actors in reconciliation processes.

3.5.2 The facilitative approach

The literature on reconciliation contends that the reconciliation process must be nurtured from within (Betts 746; IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 23; Lambourne 15), hence confirming the importance of local ownership, as outlined in the first part of this chapter. As a consequence, many authors state that external actors should play a facilitative role instead of a controlling one (Betts 746; IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 163-164; Lederach “Building Peace” 43–44), as expressed in this quote:

Durable reconciliation must be home-grown (…). Only the victims and perpetrators can reconcile themselves with one another. From this it follows that the international community must facilitate instead of impose, empower the people instead of “picking the fruits of sorrow”, support local initiatives instead of drowning the post-conflict society in a sea of foreign projects, (...), and choose capacity building above importing experts (IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 163-164).

The principles of empowerment, supporting local initiatives, and capacity building are widely represented in the literature. For example, empowerment reflects the idea that external actors should not replace local actors, but strengthen them (Lederach, “Where Do” 46). Also, external actors should recognise that "communities have the capacity to initiate peace-building activities even at the height of conflict, before formal peace processes are initiated” and “support them where appropriate" (OECD 53).

The facilitative role of external actors also implies a less paternalistic approach (Donais 20), to see local actors as resources for peacebuilding, and not just as recipients (Donais 11; Lederach, “Building Peace” 62), to be sensitive to culture (Betts 750; IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 23) and context (Donais 20; IDEA, “Reconciliation After” 23), not just focus on the state level (OECD 20), work with local communities (Paffenholz and Spurk 30; OECD 86), recognise the limits of what external actors can do (OECD 23), listen to the needs expressed by survivors (Lambourne 15), create space for dialogue (OECD 51;
Racioppi and O'Sullivan (See 364), and facilitate a judicial process (Last 6), among other things.

Capacity building is another important part of this facilitative approach (Reich 24), and is often considered as a way of producing local ownership. In this research, capacity building is used to operationalise local ownership, as the third and final element to measure local ownership in the case. In the following three sections, the meaning of local and external actors, the relationships between internal and external actors, and capacity building as a method of increasing local ownership at the local level will be discussed.

### 3.6 The local and external actor

First of all, a clarification is needed to what is meant with the terms internal and external actors. Basically, grassroots actors can be seen as individuals that are locally based, located within the local area, and working closely to local individuals (Muller 14). However, in a globalised world, the term “local” causes confusion. Therefore, it is more adequate to state that instead of being related to a geographic area, a local actor rather means someone who is directly affected by the violence and the implications of the peace process (Reich 21). External actors are those who become involved in the conflict, but personally have not much to lose. As a result, even someone living in the area can be an outsider (idem).

Examples of internal actors include grassroots organisations, indigenous NGOs, community leaders, and local health officials (Lederach, “Building Peace” 19). External actors are exemplified by national NGOs, church entities, international NGOs (INGOs), International Organisations (IOs), and academic institutions that become involved in the peace process at the local level. Despite the concern about local level actors, most studies focus on the role of external actors and the ways in which they should support the local actors (Reich 6). Therefore, this study considers it important to take into account local actors when measuring local ownership, and uses as the first variable to measure local ownership the level of organisation of the local actors. In the next section, the relationship between local actors and external actors will be analysed.
3.7 Relationships between internal and external actors

In establishing a relationship between external and internal actors, external actors have to be careful with which organisation they engage, as a local organisation can reflect the positions of conflicting parties instead of representing a community. Therefore, local organisations should be subjected to careful scrutiny (OECD 120). However, the fact that outsiders can decide who benefits, creates a power shift, and may for example cause the emergence of new NGOs that respond to the external’s needs (Reich 13). In addition, the international community directs most of its resources to urban NGOs, that do not always represent wider populations, which may cause disempowerment of local communities (Paffenholz and Spurk 26).

The nature of IOs, as bureaucratic organisations, makes it also difficult to transcend unequal power relations (Sending 7). Accordingly, donor-driven NGOs and INGOs have little capacity to allow for ownership in the process (Paffenholz and Spurk 35). Assistance from between external to internal actors are in many cases characterised by a patron-client relationship, in which the externals expect enthusiastic participation on behalf of the internals (Reich 21-22). There is often more effort needed from the part of the outsiders to understand the local context, which requires a change in communication strategy and capacities (idem 20). Considering the current emphasis put on legitimacy in the literature, it is important how local actors see external actors. In that sense, principles upheld by external actors are not necessarily shared by local actors (Sending 15).

Another important factor in favour of openness is the need for citizens to feel a sense of ownership of the settlement. Given sensitivities about sovereignty, the impression must be avoided that it is being imposed on them by foreigners. They should be encouraged to feel that it contains elements that they have contributed (Goulding 89).

The way it is stated in the quote above, it seems that local ownership is something that is given to the local community. However, local ownership is not necessarily something generated by external actors, it can also be claimed from within. In Mali, for example, a reconciliation process was started by local communities, who took ownership in absence of an effective top-down effort for reconciliation (Lode 66). A similar process took place in Nicaragua (Nilsson 49). Although these perceptions are important, it is important
to note that it is about more than just winning the hearts and minds of the locals. Instead, the local and top-down should be merged in order to improve perception (Donais 20).

In summary, in relations between external and internal actors, it is difficult to overcome asymmetrical power relations. An open and respectful attitude by the external actor, can help to overcome some of these barriers. However, in this research, it is seen as not only depending on the external actor how much control local actors have over their peace process, the local actors themselves may also influence on this. To finalise this chapter, a section on capacity building will analyse how external actors can use capacity building as a tool to implement local ownership strategies.

### 3.8 Capacity building and local ownership

From the point of view of an external actor, capacity building is seen as an important way to increase empowerment and local ownership in local communities (IDEA, “Democracy And” 5; OECD 52; Racioppi and O'Sullivan See 364; Reich 24), because it transfers decision-making ability to local actors (Donais 15). Thus, it is assumed that by building capacity of local actors, this will lead to an increased empowerment and thereby local ownership in the reconciliation process.

Therefore, capacity building can be a useful way to measure the level of local ownership (Donais 15). However, some remarks must be made. Not all forms of building capacity increase local ownership. In order to be empowering, capacity building should be tailored to local circumstances (idem) and have a long-term focus, as building capacity and withdrawing quickly can be counterproductive (OECD 59). Often, when capacity building is linked to the liberal interpretation of peacebuilding, the process is controlled by outsiders. They decide where, when, and what kind of capacity building is provided (Donais 15). Therefore, the case study will look at if and how capacity building is used, and whether this tool is adjusted adequately to the local context, in order to be able to empower the local community and increase ownership.

### 3.9 Conclusion

Local ownership is considered important in fields like development and peacebuilding. In this research, it is argued that local ownership is particularly important for reconciliation, because of the characteristics of reconciliation identified in the previous
chapter, such as voluntariness and internality. Furthermore, local ownership increases effectiveness of outside interventions, as people who feel ownership are likely to be more committed to the process.

In this research, local ownership is therefore defined as the level of control exercised by local actors over the design and implementation of processes implemented in their community, in this case reconciliation processes. As has been outlined in this chapter, there are different ways to approach local ownership. This research follows the idea proposed by Reich that the principle concern in studying local ownership should be the local actors, and the focus should not solely lie on the role of external actors. Also, following Reich, this research analyses the relationships between internal and external actors, and does not see local ownership as a short-term objective that can be implemented through a project. Furthermore, considering the importance given to capacity building in the literature, as an important way for external actors to foster ownership, this concept leads to the final step to measure local ownership. In short, these three elements that are considered key with regard to local ownership, are used to measure local ownership in qualitative terms. As there is no existing model to operationalise local ownership, this new model (represented in figure 1) still needs to be tested on its usefulness.

Figure 1: Measurement of local ownership in reconciliation processes
4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This research was conducted in order to find an answer to the question “What is the relation between reconciliation and local ownership, and to what extent does the reconciliation process of the ATCC in Colombia correspond to the ideal situation of local ownership in a reconciliation process?” The aim of this study was to provide for empirical knowledge, that is needed to bridge the gap between theoretical assumptions about reconciliation and local ownership. To this end, an in-depth case study in the ATCC community in Colombia was carried out. In this community, key informants were selected by means of a snowball sampling strategy, and interviewed. This chapter will explain more into detail how the research was designed, the sampling strategies applied, the methods used, and the data processing and analysis conducted.

4.2 The research design

One of the objectives of this research was to analyse the reconciliation process at the local level in Colombia. To this end, an insight view on reconciliation of members of the ATCC was used, complemented by an outside view based on literature and expert knowledge. The insiders view is considered important, as it has been established in chapter two that there is no true meaning of reconciliation, and no single way to achieve reconciliation, but that it is dependent on the context.

In the previous chapter, the logic behind the operationalisation of local ownership in a reconciliation context was explained. In this model, there are independent and dependent variables. The dependent variable in this case is the level local ownership in the reconciliation process, while the independent variables are 1) The level of local organisation and engagement in a process of reconciliation, and representativeness of the local community; 2) The level of equality and power sharing in relations between internal and external actors; and 3) The use of capacity building by external actors and the extent to which this is adjusted to the local context. The independent variables have been established after a literature analysis that led to the emphasis on these elements.
Furthermore, the nature of this investigation was a qualitative study. This approach implies an in-depth study, aimed at finding detailed information about the subject (Sarantakos 344). The justification for this approach, as explained in the introduction of this paper, is the fact that there is a lack of empirical knowledge in the area of reconciliation, and case studies are needed to gain understanding about reconciliation at the local level. Furthermore, there is little research done that specifically addresses local ownership (Reich 5), and the dynamics between internal and external actors in reconciliation.

Additionally, a single-case study was conducted, that examined the dynamics between one community in which a peace process was initiated and various external actors that worked with the community. The focus in the research lied on the perceptions of local community members, in order to gain knowledge about their view on reconciliation, detailed information about the way a reconciliation process took place in their community, and a bottom-up view on the role of external actors that have come to support the community in their reconciliation process. This approach is useful because it generates empirical knowledge, and gives new insights about the influence of external actors on this local reconciliation process.

4.3 The case selection and sampling methods

For this research, a case was needed to represent a reconciliation process at the local level in Colombia. The starting point for this search was the notion of Peace Communities, that represent grassroots peace initiatives founded by afro-descendent, indigenous, and peasant communities (Alther 279). These communities, formed by populations that are the most affected by violence, developed their own strategies to promote peace in their areas (idem 280). There exist around a 100 peace communities in Colombia (Mitchell and Ramírez 267), some of which have received national peace prices (Alther 282-284).

The academic name given to these type of peace initiatives is “socially based civil peace initiatives” (SBCPIs)\(^1\) (Hernández, “Paces Desde” 178). They are characterised by forming imperfect, unfinished forms of peace, constructed from below, based on different values of diverse cultures in the country, with a potential of peace generating activities in settings with diverse types of violence (idem).

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\(^1\) Translated from Spanish: "Iniciativas civiles de paz de base social" (ICPBS)
One of those communities is the peasant organisation ATCC, that emerged in a region called Magdalena Medio Santandereano, and was founded in the late 1980s (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 302). The ATCC was selected as a case study for this research for several reasons. First of all, the Association has a clear proposal towards reconciliation, which is reflected in their guiding principles (Lederach, “The Moral” 13). Furthermore, this community has received national and international recognition for its work, such as the Rights Livelihood Award in 1990, and has endured over a long time (Hernández, “Resistencias Para” 10). Finally, there were more pragmatic reasons for selecting this case, like accessibility, the openness of the community, and safety.

It is important to add that this case is not representative for all SBCPIs in the country. Although they do share some characteristics in common, (Hernández, “Paces Desde” 178), each case is also unique. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalised to other peace initiatives. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, the case study is aimed at generating empirical knowledge. Nevertheless, this case can be used as an example, and perhaps refute other assumptions about reconciliation and local ownership.

With regard to the interviewees, selection was done by means of a snowball sampling strategy. This implies that once the first contacts were made, the interviewees referred to other people that could be interviewed, and this process repeated itself. The participants selected were therefore key informants for this research, which included ex-leaders, co-founders, current leaders, IDPs, a local expert on reconciliation, and members of a women’s organisation linked to the ATCC.

4.4 The research process

The total research for this paper took place over a period of approximately ten months, of which the researcher stayed six months in Colombia. The researcher had no prior experience in doing field research. After the establishment of the main research topic, literature research was done on reconciliation, and subsequently on local ownership and external actors. Furthermore, reconciliation in Colombia was investigated, which led to the focus on Peace Communities in the country.

After arrival to Colombia, the case study was selected, the earlier mentioned ATCC in the Magdalena Medio region. Following the selection of the case, contact was made
with two members of the ATCC on the *V National Reconciliation Congress* that took place in Bogotá, capital city of Colombia, from the tenth to the twelfth of August of 2011. The contact was established through the organising NGO of the event. During this congress, an interview was conducted with one of the two representatives of the ATCC, and a visit to the community was planned for the following week. During this two-day visit, ten key informants were interviewed.

After returning from this visit, an additional interview was done with the researcher Esperanza Hernández, who did extensive research on civil based peace initiatives in Colombia, for a period more than ten years, and did research on the ATCC as well. Furthermore, two additional interviews were done with ATCC members in occasional meetings. Together with the existing literature on the ATCC, this information formed the basis for the findings of this research. When the data collection was completed, the interviews were transcribed and systematically ordered by means of a coding system. Finally, the data was analysed and the findings of this analysis are presented in Chapters five to seven.

### 4.5 Methods

The methods used in this research are literature analysis and semi-structured interviews. As there was previously existing literature available on the case, this information is used as a base and where necessary complemented with information from the interviews. The advantages of interviews as a method are its flexibility, the high response rate, and the opportunity to clarify misunderstandings and record spontaneous answers. On the negative side, there can be an interviewer bias, and the interviewee can have less patience and motivation (Sarantakos 270-271).

Because the interview is semi-structured, the interview is more respondent-focused than in a structured interview. This is appropriate for this case, as a more open minded approach can generate more knowledge about local understandings of reconciliation, and leaves room for unforeseen information to be taken into account (idem).
4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter the research process and methodology have been outlined. The operational model is based on the literature review, and still needs to be tested in order to be able to know its value. For the empirical research, an in-depth qualitative case study was used that emphasises bottom-up knowledge. In the next chapter, the case of the ATCC will be further introduced, and its engagement in reconciliation will be analysed.

5. The ATCC and reconciliation

5.1 Introduction

The civil peace initiative of the ATCC emerged in a violent area and in a time of escalation of violence caused by multiple armed actors that were present in the region. At the time of its emergence in 1987, the peasants living in the Carare region, were put with their back against the wall by an ultimatum, imposed on them by an army captain. Nevertheless, the community decided to take its own course, as the history of the ATCC shows. This chapter takes a close look at the emergence of the ATCC, and will address the regional background and the ATCC history. Also, the ATCC will be placed in the broader spectrum of civil peace initiatives in Colombia. Finally, an answer will be sought to the sub-questions 3) “to what extent does the ATCC represent the local community?”, and 4) “has the ATCC initiated a process of reconciliation and to what extent does the ATCC actively engage in a process of reconciliation?”

5.2 Regional background

The wider region where the ATCC originated is the part of the Magdalena Medio region belonging to the department of Santander, called the Magdalena Medio santandereano (see appendix 1). This strategic region in military and economic terms (Barreto Henríques 502), is comprised by the municipalities of Barrancabermeja, Betulia, Bolívar, Cimitarra, El Cármen, El Peñon, Landázuri, Puerto Parra, Puerto Wilches, Sabana de Torres, San Vicente de Chucurí, and Simacota (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 303). Historically, the region has been peripheral, characterised by a weak state presence and low public services (Barreto Henriques 502).
Within the Magdalena Medio santandereano, the Carare region is situated near to Cimitarra, on the banks of the Carare river, after which the ATCC is named. Originally inhabited by nomadic people, around the mid-twentieth century the Carare became populated with settlers that came from elsewhere in the country (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 303). These were peasants that fled during the violent period from 1948 to 1958 called La Violencia, and descendents of slaves, but also people and companies that were attracted to its natural riches, like oil and emerald (Moncayo 273; Valenzuela 1), as well as its fertile soils, water resources, cattle raising, and industry (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 307).

In addition, the region has been a strategic zone for conflict, and a frontline of armed actors (Berbero Domeño 11). Over the years, the Magdalena Medio has been one of the most violent zones of the country (McDonald 16). Violence existed permanently since the Spanish invasion, involving structural, direct, and political forms of violence (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 304-305). As part of the latest, still ongoing wave of violence, guerrillas emerged in the Carare during the 1960s, first by the establishment of the National Liberation Army (ELN), which was quickly removed by the army, and later with the entry of the FARC (Valenzuela 2). The military response of the government to the emergence of these insurgent groups further escalated the conflict (Lederach, “Building Peace” 12). As the army did not succeed in defeating the guerrillas, a third armed actor emerged, that were first called self-defence groups and later paramilitary groups. These groups were founded sometimes in cooperation with the army, sometimes together with drug traffickers, and sometimes with emerald dealers that tried to protect their interests (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 306).

Meanwhile, the peasant population got caught in a cycle of violence. The armed actors dominated the region (idem 306-307), and imposed rules such as the “Law of Silence”, which prohibited peasants to talk about, for example, the death of a family member (Lederach, "The Moral" 12). In many municipalities the guerrillas exercised social and political control. Although they initially received a lot of support from the local population, they soon started to use oppressive methods like extortion and kidnapping, which let to more resentment among the people (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 307). But it was not until the period between 1975 and 1987, that the conflict in the Carare region
really escalated, with all armed actors, including the army, increasingly targeting the civil peasant population (idem 307). Especially the paramilitaries attacked all people that were suspected to be cooperating with the insurgents, or supporters of any left-winged group, backed up with army bombings (Valenzuela 3). Between 1983-1987, it is estimated that the self-defence groups killed about 200 peasants, out of a total number of approximately 500 casualties in the area (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 324-325).

5.3 History of the ATCC

In the violent times of the late 1980s in the Carare, there was one event that was as “the last straw” for the community members. An army captain came to the peasants and offered them amnesty if they would join the fight against the guerrillas, and he gave the peasants an ultimatum to decide what they would do. According to him, the community had four alternatives: to arm themselves and join the militias to fight against the guerrilla, to join the guerrilla, to leave their houses, or to die (Lederach “The Moral” 12-13). However, none of these options was attractive to the peasants.

The community saw itself forced to look for an alternative and said well, we don’t want to collaborate with the guerrilla, but we don’t want to collaborate with the paramilitaries either, nor do we want to leave, but we also don’t want to die. So, what would be the way?2

Despite of the ultimatum imposed by the army captain, members of the community started to look for an alternative solution to their situation. In small, informal meetings, several community members from the village La India started to develop the idea of civil resistance without taking up arms (Valenzuela 4), and using dialogue as a method to defend themselves against the armed actors (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 23). Furthermore, they autonomously decided to declare themselves neutral, and not being part of the conflict (Valenzuela 1). The first armed actor they approached for dialogue was the FARC, and with a letter they invited the FARC for a meeting (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 329).

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2 Hernández, M. “Buscar alternativa.” (La comunidad pues se veía obligada a buscar alternativa y dijo bueno, nosotros no queremos colaborar a la guerrilla, pero nosotros no queremos tampoco colaborar a los paramilitares, pero tampoco nos queremos ir, pero tampoco nos queremos morir. Entonces, ¿cuál sería la forma?)
We got there, and there were three captains, a few soldiers of them, the guerrillas. So we got there. Well, after a while the session opened. And it was my task always to open the session in those kind of things. And I told them, well: “Gentlemen, Captains, the reason for our visit, is because of this: Because we have been thinking. And you, the people that arrived here, making propaganda to us that you were from the army of the people, and that you were going to collaborate with the peasant and to help us. You have finished us off with this region”. (...) Well, you know I, very little I told them, I told them what I felt. Without any fear. There were these three captains standing in front of us, and us a few peasants were standing over here.\(^3\)

Surprisingly or not, the strategy of the peasants started to work, they managed to gain the respect of the FARC and later of the other armed actors (McDonald 16). Their strategy included active non-violence, a permanent search for dialogue, non-collaboration with any armed actor, and also the autonomy to manage their own conflicts within the community (Valenzuela 5).

So [people] started to live in peace. There were no more deaths, no more forced disappearances, no more kidnappings, and the Association of Peasant Workers of Carare consolidated, where its principal objective was to fight for the right of life, peace, and work.\(^4\)

Since the first success, the history of the ATCC has been with ups and downs. The ATCC succeeded in making several peace agreements with armed actors, and significantly decreasing the violence in the region. A major setback was the massacre of Cimitarra in 1990, in which three of their leaders, including one of its founders Josué Vargas, and one journalist that was working on a documentary about the ATCC, were killed. Nevertheless, the ATCC managed to respond peacefully, and decided to not denounce the murders.

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\(^3\) Córdoba, R. “Tres comandantes”. (Y llegamos, y ahí había tres comandantes, un poco de soldados de ellos de sus guerrilleros. Llegamos y ya. Bueno, al rato pues, se abrió la sesión. Y a mí me tocaba siempre abrir la sesión en esas cosas. Y ya les dije, bueno, pues: “Señores Comandantes, aquí la motiva de la visita de nosotros, es por esto. Porque hemos pensado, que ustedes, las personas que llegaron aquí, haciéndonos la propaganda que venía del ejército del pueblo, y que viniera a colaborar con el campesino hay que ayudarlos. Ustedes nos han acabado aquí con esta región”. (...) Bueno, y yo pues, muy poco pues les dije, les dije lo que yo sentía. Sin miedo ninguno. Estaban los tres comandantes parados al frente, y estamos nosotros poquitos de campesinos estábamos acá).

\(^4\) Palacios, S.P. “Cesaron los muertos.” (Entonces empezó a vivirse una paz. Cesaron los muertos, cesaron los desaparecimientos forzados, cesaron los secuestros, y se consolidó la Asociación de Trabajadores del Carare, donde su principal objetivo era luchar por el derecho por la vida, la paz y el trabajo).
Instead they deepened their dialogue strategy, and their efforts were rewarded with the UN Rights Livelihood Price the same year (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 330-347).

Difficulties arose during the 1990s with some leaders being less committed to the principles of the ATCC. The second half of the 1990s was characterised by internal divisions, illicit activities, and the abandoning of external actors, such as academic institutions, some churches, and national and international NGOs (idem 347-348). This period was at the time even seen as the downfall of the ATCC (McDonald 17). However, at the beginning of the 21st Century, the process re-strengthened, and new committed board members took lead, although at the same time the peasant organisation was confronted with new eruptions of violence (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 349-350). After 24 years of emergence, the ATCC still persists, and the region is much more peaceful than before its existence, although the community is still struggling with things like self-sustainability.

There are some aspects of the ATCC that stand out. First of all, the ATCC has an integral concept of peace, that goes beyond the defence of life, and is linked to development and democracy. To this end, they designed their own collective, participatory development plan, to assure food security in the area (Berbero Domeño 12). Secondly, they developed a collective dialogue strategy, which implies that they recognise the armed actor as such, as well as its viewpoints. The armed actors are by the ATCC not seen as the enemy, but treated as human beings. Also, they do not denounce all crimes publicly in order to not alienate possibilities for dialogue (Valenzuela 8-9).

Important achievements of the ATCC include its persistence over time, a solid proposal for peace and development, national and international recognition leading to the acquirement of resources and visibility (Hernández, “Resistencias Para” 11), limits put to the actions of the armed actors, and historic dialogues and agreements with armed actors (Berbero Domeño 12).

Challenges still remain for the ATCC. In interviews, several members of the ATCC expressed the need for more self-sustainability of the association, as the community still struggles with making productive projects work. Also, from time to time there are problems with illicit activities in the zone, they stated, for which the community has to be alert. However, the situation in the Carare is clearly different than before the existence of the ATCC, even though the community still has little means.
It’s better, that there is little money, and not being on war. Because when there is war, the money is worth nothing. During the violence, there were people that arrived here, leaving everything, chicken, cattle, harvests. And it was like “go get it up there if you want (...).” Who would go up there? Everything got lost. So, when there is violence, it is better to be poor, and being in peace. And not, rich with violence. Because as long as there is money, well it is worse, because the [armed] groups stay where there is more money.\(^5\)

The ATCC is now an exemplifying peacebuilding initiative (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 308), and has subsisted for 24 years, which makes it one of the longest existing civil peace initiatives in Colombia.

5.4 The ATCC in the Colombian peace process

So far, the history of the ATCC has been explained, but the ATCC is not the only civil peace initiative in Colombia. In this section, the ATCC will be placed in the wider context of civil peace experiences in the country, as to give an idea of the communalities and the differences of this particular experience in comparison with other initiatives.

In Colombia, there are many communities that, like happened in case of the Carare, decided to peacefully resist violence imposed by the armed actors (Berbero Domeño 4). Estimates on the number of civil peace communities range from fifty (Alther 282) to more than hundred (Mitchell and Ramírez 267). Different names have been used to describe those kind of communities, like Peace Communities, Peace Zones, Laboratories of Peace, or simply experiences (idem 248). On the other hand, Hernández’ typology of SBCPIs is more specific in academic terms ("Paces Desde"). According to this typology, SBCPIs are characterised by non-violent action, a comprehensive approach to peace, imperfect types of peace, and highly participant organisations (idem 178-182). In this research, the scientific name SBCPI is used, as well as the more popular notion of Peace Community.

Comparative studies on Peace Communities in Colombia have had different focuses. Some make a difference between peace communities formed by IDPs or people

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\(^5\) Palacios S., “Poco dinero” (Es mejor, que haiga poco dinero, y no estar en guerra. Porque cuando hay guerra, no vale el dinero. En la violencia, había gente que llegaba aquí, dejando todo, gallinas, ganado, cosechas. Y “que vayan a cogerla si quieren (...).” ¿Quién se iba para allá? Todo se perdía. Entonces, habiendo violencia, es mejor que estemos pobres, y en paz. Y no, ricos en violencia, porque mientras más plata pues peor es, porque los grupos donde hay más plata siguen más).
that stayed in their place of origin (see for example Mitchell and Ramírez), others focus on
the role of NGOs in the support of these initiatives (see for example Alther), and again
others distinguish between traditional peace initiatives that emerged due to the lack of
human conditions (e.g. the ATCC), and more recent initiatives that emerge around the
formation of peace agreements or negotiations, such as victims’ organisations (Berbero
Domeño 7-9).

As shown above, SBCPIs can be categorised in different ways. Nevertheless, there
are some common characteristics. For example, they are bottom-up initiatives, formed by
sectors in society that are most marginalised and most affected by the violence, such as
indigenous, Afrocolombian, and peasant communities (Alther 279). Furthermore, these
communities have been formed in the context of escalating violence, when options were
limited (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 25). And finally, they are similar because they all
reject war, break the logic of violence, and their integrants refuse to carry arms (Berbero
Domeño 7).

SBCPIs have diverse types of strategies, goals, and achievements. Strategies include
civil resistance, active neutrality, autonomy, self-determination, transparency, non-
collaboration with armed actors, capacity building, acquiring accompaniment and support
from churches (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 27). Among goals are the protection of life,
integrity of the communities, self-determination, not being displaced, not participate in the
conflict, deepening democracy, participation (idem 26), ending corruption, finding
opportunities for local youth, and protecting their culture (Mitchell and Ramírez 249). And
finally, achievements of SBCPIs are resistance through time, democratic governance,
increased participation, development practices based on solidarity and public service,
cohesion and social organisation (Berbero Domeño 21), getting back land, protecting lives,
agreements with armed actors, and the protection of culture, among others (Hernández,
“Paces Desde” 183).

SBCPIs are hope giving for Colombia, and they show that peace is not something
that is just built between the state and the armed actors. Still, the communities face many
challenges. For example, it remains hard for a lot of them to protect themselves in times of
escalation of conflict, they still need more support from external actors (Alther 285;
Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 36), and they need to transcend the local level to the
regional and national level (Berbero Domeño 23). Many SBCPIs form now part of a network, set up by the organisation REDEPAZ, in which they are able to learn from each other and share experiences (Mitchell and Ramírez 267). In conclusion, Peace Communities are meaningful, bottom-up peace initiatives, that have considerably contributed to peacebuilding in Colombia.

5.5 The ATCC and the community

After having discussed the wider context of peace initiatives in Colombia, now the ATCC will be placed the local context. Here, the third sub-question will be answered, “to what extent does the ATCC represent the local community?” This is important to know in order to whether the level of local ownership found later in the research is a legitimate representation that benefits the whole community.

Several arguments can be found that suggest that the ATCC is indeed representative of the local community. First of all, the organisation is inclusive in nature. From the beginning, the organisation involved people from different ethnic and religious groups (Berbero Domeño 12), and people that were victimised during the twelve years of escalating violence (Hernández, "Resistencia Civil" 326), like women and young people (Hernández, “Resistencias Para” 14).

Secondly, collectivity has been an important element in the ATCC processes, for example through collective dialogues with the armed actors. Many meetings with armed actors were attended by large numbers of peasants, as a way to ensure protection and participation. For example, one meeting in which an agreement was reached with the FARC was attended by 2000 to 2500 ATCC members (Hernández, “Resistencia Civil” 331-332).

Furthermore, the diffusion of the experience goes in two directions. Not just to the outside world, by means of communiqués and institutional contacts, but also to the inside, by establishing personal contacts with the peasants, through house visits (idem 335). Also, dialogues and agreements with armed actors used to be recorded, and transmitted through large speakers in the urban centres of the villages to make everyone aware of the process (Berbero Domeño 12). In addition, the ATCC manages small conflicts that occur within the community, acting as a mediator (McDonald 16) and has an integral approach towards
peace, development, and democracy, which implies its aim is to represent everyone’s interests in the community.

We have asked the countries in the world, and there is no democracy as pure as the one we have here. It is because here we defend everyone’s life, we want everyone to go ahead, here we have no money interests. (...) We are a real democracy, that pure democracy that has to exist. Yes, because in Colombia there is no [national] democracy.6

An IDP who came to live in the area after having been displaced from another region, expresses that he feels his interests are represented by the ATCC:

The ATCC works very well with the peasant, basically they are always more intelligent than oneself, they think better than oneself. “What is it that is lacking us? What is it we need?” As a peasant, one thinks about how to get food every day, because, “what other hope does he have?” He is like working a lot, too much.7

Recently, the ATCC has done a reform of the organisation that limits membership. According to members of the ATCC this was a necessary measure to prevent drug traffickers from entering the organisation, but according to Hernández, who affirms that the organisation is deeply rooted in the region, the new membership includes a monthly payment, which is something many peasants are not used to.8

Summarizing, the ATCC emerged out of an inclusive process, involving different segments of the local community of peasants affected by violence in the region. This inclusiveness suggests that, in a region that for a long time has been abandoned by the state, the ATCC can be seen as the one entity that represents the interests of the whole community.

6 Piñeras, H. “Democracia pura.” (Hemos preguntado de los países del mundo, y no hay democracia tan pura como la de aquí. Es que aquí defendemos la vida de todos, queremos que todos salgamos adelante, aquí no hay intereses de plata. La ATCC es una organización que no tiene interés de plata (...). Nosotros somos una verdadera democracia, esa democracia pura que debe existir. Sí, porque en Colombia no hay democracia).

7 IDP/ATCC member 1. “Más inteligente” (La ATCC trabaja muy bien con el campesino, prácticamente son ellos los que siempre son más inteligente que uno, ellos piensan mejor que uno. “¿Qué es lo que más nos falta, qué es lo que necesitamos?” Uno como campesino piensa en cómo puede conseguir la comida de todos los días, porque, “¿qué más esperanza tiene?” Está como trabajando mucho, demasiado).

8 Hernández, E., “Reconciliación informal”.
5.6 A bottom-up reconciliation process

The history of the ATCC shows an interesting proposal for peace, characterised by the culture of dialogue developed by the community over the years. In this section it will be analysed whether this process has also involved reconciliation, and whether the community has been active in pursuing a process of reconciliation. To answer this question, the principles of the ATCC will be addressed briefly, after which the findings from the interviews with ATCC members will be presented.

The basic principles that the ATCC adopted are “1) Faced with individualisation: solidarity, 2) Faced with the Law of Silence and Secrecy: Do everything publicly. Speak loud and never hide anything, 3) Faced with fear: Sincerity and disposition to dialogue. We shall understand those who do not understand us, 4) Faced with violence: Talk and negotiate with everyone. We do not have enemies” (Lederach “The Moral” 13). It can be argued that these principles imply a proposal for reconciliation, even though this is not explicitly mentioned. Especially the elements of disposition to dialogue, and the open attitude towards the “other”, fit well into the concept of reconciliation, as they may be associated with mercy, forgiveness, and the transformation from conflictive relations towards peaceful relations.

However, it is important to look at whether and how these ideas are put into practice by the ATCC members. The interviewees were asked whether reconciliation was something important for the ATCC. To this question, all of them answered affirmative.

It [reconciliation] is important because the victims are hurt you know, because they have been removed from their lands, their family members have been killed, and then the perpetrators come to live with the victims...⁹

(...) (R)econciliation is very good, because after all we know that we are going to live in peace. As long as there is no reconciliation we do not live in peace.¹⁰

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⁹ “Rentería, L.C. “Las víctimas” (Es importante porque las víctimas están pues dolidas por lo que les han despojado de sus tierras, que les han matado sus familiares, y después los victimarios entran a convivir con las víctimas...)

¹⁰ IDP/ATCC member 2. “Muy bueno.” ([...]) (L)a reconciliación pues muy bueno, porque de todas maneras sabemos que vamos a vivir en paz. Mientras no haya reconciliación no vivimos en paz).
The subject of reconciliation is like the main point, where we can find the formula for peacebuilding. We believe that reconciliation is, let’s say, the path we have to start walking, from now on towards the future, where everyone, independently of what we have been in the “civil world”, or in an armed actor, of different ideological thinking that we represent in the country... We want all of us to reconcile with one another.  

Furthermore, ATCC members were asked what they thought reconciliation meant, in the context of the ATCC. All the people interviewed had a slightly different explanation of reconciliation, although these explanations were not contradictory.

For me, reconciliation means peace. That there is peace, that we have peace and that we can live all together in this community.

For us here, reconciliation is forgiveness, it is leaving behind the war, the problems that happened before, such as death, exiles, tortures and other things that happened in the past.

As ATCC, for us reconciliation means, I think, the whole guarantee that things will not happen again. Living together, with everyone, without the past being important, that the people and the community are willing to live as a community. Starting over, to ensure that the things that hurt our society in the past are transformed into positive things to build a community based on respect, based on coexistence, with tolerance towards our differences. All of that, for us is reconciliation.

Also, the interviewees were asked whether a reconciliation process had taken in the ATCC community according to them. Again, virtually all participants said there had been a
reconciliation process, and explained in what ways this process had taken place. One contestant said this process had been finished, while several other interviewees said the process was still ongoing.

Yes, here amongst us that process [reconciliation] has taken place, because we started the dialogues, we started to call upon the armed actors, to make them stop violating human rights, so that they would understand us through dialogue. So yes, reconciliation has achieved a lot within the community.\(^\text{15}\)

For example, in the area we found people that belonged to different armed actors, say guerrillas, paramilitaries, when the ELM and the M19\(^\text{16}\) also existed in the region. And a lot of those people were called upon, they were asked, in what way were they going to stay in the area, if they were going to continue to commit crimes or not. There was an awareness raising job done, so that they would change their mentality, and they stayed in the “civil world”, working like any peasant, or as a worker or, if there were opportunities, well, as farmers.\(^\text{17}\)

According to investigator Hernández:

Well, I think there has been an informal process of reconciliation, since a long time. Because they were a population that during twelve years, from 1975 until 1987, suffered from a very strong indiscriminate violence. (...) I feel like only recently they are starting in a very important part, in this process of reconciliation. Because even though their attitude towards the adversary through the method of dialogue, they have done like a reconciliation process between them in the community, and at the same time with the armed actor, but it seems to me that they have just started off in basic elements of justice and reparation. Because truth, well, they did not have it there, I think, at any moment. They are victims that are building peace, but they have never seen realized their rights to truth, justice, and reparation.\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{15}\) Piñeras, “Democracia pura.” (Sí, aquí dentro de nosotros se ha dado ese proceso, porque empezamos con el diálogo, empezamos a llamar a los actores armados, para que dejaran de violar los derechos humanos, que nos entendiéramos por medio del diálogo. Si entonces eso logró mucho la reconciliación dentro de la comunidad).
\(^{16}\) April 19th Movement (guerrilla movement, Movimiento 19 de Abril).
\(^{17}\) Hernández, M. “Buscar alternativa.” (Por ejemplo, en la zona encontramos personas que fueron pertenecientes a diferentes actores armados, llamemos guerrillas, paramilitares, cuando existió ELM y M19 también en la zona. Y mucha de esa gente se llamó, se le preguntaba, de que manera que ya seguía en la zona, si iba seguir delinquiendo o no. Se le hizo un trabajo como de generación de consciencia, para que ellos cambiaran su mentalidad, y se quedaran en la civilidad, trabajando como cualquier campesino, o como obrero o si tenían oportunidades pues, como finqueros).
\(^{18}\) Hernández, E. “Reconciliación informal.” (Bueno, yo creo que ha habido un proceso de reconciliación informal, desde hace mucho tiempo. Porque fue una población que durante doce años, dese 1975 hasta 1987, sufrió una violencia indiscriminada muy fuerte. (...) Yo siento que apenas están
Summarizing, based on the perception of the interviewees, reconciliation has been an important element in the ATCC peace process. Although informal, this process contained elements of dialogue, forgiveness, an attitude of non-vengeance towards the adversary, and the will to move on to an interdependent future.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, two questions have been examined. The first question was whether the ATCC represents the local community. As far as the information presented in this chapter suggests, the ATCC seems to be a fairly representative community, based on inclusiveness, collectivism, and diversity. These elements are represented in the organisational structure, their collective dialogue processes, their role in the community as conflict mediators, and their integral approach towards peace, development and democracy.

The second question was whether there has been a reconciliation process in the community, and whether the ATCC has actively engaged in this process. Derived from the information from the interviews, it can be concluded that reconciliation is seen as an important part of peace by the ATCC members themselves, and that reconciliation has taken place in the community in the form of dialoguing with the armed actors, without vengeance, and accepting ex-combatants back in the community. Furthermore, it can be argued that the ATCC has had an active role in this process because its members were the initiators and primary actors in this process. Nevertheless, this process has been informal, and does not (yet) include elements of truth, justice, and reparations, which makes it different from conventional concepts of reconciliation.
6. Relations between the ATCC and external actors

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the reconciliation process of the ATCC has been analysed. So far, the role of external actors in this process has been ignored. When the ATCC emerged, the region was being abandoned by the state, and the ATCC did not have any help with their dialogue processes. However, throughout the years, many (I)NGOs, IOs, churches, academic institutions, and state entities have become involved in supporting the ATCC.

With regard to local ownership, it is important to analyse the relationship between the community and external actors, as it is assumed that local ownership is a long-term goal that can be achieved by establishing equal and respectful relationships. Therefore, this chapter will analyse how the ATCC relates to those external actors, and asks to what extent this relationship is based on equality and power sharing. In order to answer this question, the need for external support, control over decision-making processes, the level of equality, and problems encountered in the relationships with external actors will be addressed. In the first section, an overview of the external actors involved will be given.

6.2 The external actors

The external actors that have worked with the ATCC can be divided up into five categories based on research done by Hernández, which are 1) Academic world, 2) Church institutions, 3) International Community, 4) National NGOs, and 5) State entities (“Resistencia Civil”). Thus, excluded here are armed actors, including the army, as they are not actors that are considered to work with the ATCC. An overview of external actors that have worked with this community can be found in appendix 2. This list does not contain all external actors, instead, it contains all the actors that were mentioned either in the literature or in the interviews with the community members.

There has been a variety of actors that have come to work with the community over the past 24 years. One of the first programmes that worked with the ATCC was the Development and Peace Programme of the Magdalena Medio (PDPMM - Programa de Desarrollo y Paz de Magdalena Medio), while the Swiss NGO Peace Watch worked with
the community last year. Also early was the regional office of the Catholic organisation Pastoral Social (Cáritas Colombia), who still do accompaniment with them. Furthermore, many UN organisations and state entities have assisted the community.

**6.3 The need for external support**

As has been discussed before, the ATCC has not always had external support, and they started their dialogues with the armed actors on their own. Therefore, the community has shown that it was able to take control over its own destiny, and transform a violent situation into a more peaceful coexistence. For this reason, it is legitimate to ask whether this community in fact needs external support for its reconciliation process. This question was posed to the members of the ATCC that were interviewed. None of the interviewees rejected external support as such. Most of them stated that the ATCC has needed, and still needs, external support, for a variety of reasons.

The most important function of support by external actors was considered to be a form of protection, since the presence of especially international organisations generates the respect of armed actors, above all during the most critical moments of its existence. It was also pointed out that the reconciliation process goes beyond the temporary presence of external actors, that reconciliation needs a long time, and does not depend on the arrival of one particular external actor.

The workers association [ATCC] has always needed in some spaces, the support of external actors, especially at the moments when we were most vulnerable. When we received latent threats by illicit groups, and even in moments when we basically had a lot of questioning by legally established entities.19

Their support [of external actors] has been very important, because we did not feel alone. Instead, there were other communities, both national and international, that have come and said to the [armed] actors: “they are not alone”. They have had an important role.20

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19 Hernández, M. “Buscar alternativa.” (La Asociación de Trabajadores, siempre ha necesitado en algunos espacios, del apoyo de actores externos, sobre todo en los momentos que más vulnerables hemos sido. Cuando hemos tenido las amenazas latentes de los grupos al margen de la ley, e inclusive en momentos donde tuvimos prácticamente muchos cuestionamientos por parte de las autoridades legalmente constituidas).

20 Women’s group representative. “Muy importante.” (Ha sido muy importante esos apoyos de ellos, porque no nos sentimos solos nosotros, sino que hay otras comunidades tanto nacionales como las
In summary, ATCC members confirm the need for external support, especially at vulnerable moments, but reconciliation in the community is a long-term process that continues while external actors may come and go.

6.4 From accompaniment to productive projects

The interviewees were also asked what kind of support had been provided by external actors to the community. Most often were mentioned accompaniment, productive projects, financial support, and capacity building, respectively.

They see here the NGOs accompanying, walking through the field, through all the little villages, through all the places. So the armed groups of the state and the guerrilla themselves, they see that you are there accompanying, so they keep quiet and do nothing. And more so because the armed groups have realised that the NGOs do not only do accompaniment. They also have contributed with projects, right?21

In terms of reconciliation, it was mentioned that external actors, most notably from the academic world, had helped the community to gain understanding of the community’s reconciliation process, to move beyond the empirical level.

Since we established ourselves as an organisation, already 24 years ago, with our example of reconciliation, many institutions, organisations, NGOs, individuals, have come to give us their support. A lot of investigators, sociologists. Merely to try to guide us, above all academically, right? Because our thing has been very empirical, very natural, it has not been very academic. (...) So, the academics have come to understand us, and say “well, so this is called reconciliation”.22

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21 Piñeras, H. “Democracia pura.” (Mirán aqui las ONGs acompañando, andando por el campo, por todas las veredas, por todos los lugares. Entonces ven los grupos armados del estado y la misma guerrilla, ven que ustedes están ahí acompañando entonces se quedan quietos y no hacen nada. Y más porque los grupos armados también se han dado cuenta que las ONGs no solamente hacen acompañamiento. Han aportado proyectos, ¿sí?).

22 Serna, I.C. “Convivir como comunidad.” (A partir de que nos constituimos como organización, ya hace 24 años, con nuestro ejemplo de reconciliación, muchas instituciones, organizaciones, ONGs, personas particulares, han venido a prestarnos su apoyo. Muchos investigadores, muchos sociólogos. Más bien a tratar de direccionarnos, más que todo académico, ¿no? Porque lo nuestro ha sido muy empírico, muy natural, no ha sido tan académico. (...) Entonces, los académicos han venido a tratar de entendernos, y a decir “bueno, entonces esto se llama reconciliación”.)
The dioceses themselves have put a lot of effort in inviting us to participate to regional encounters as well (...), and now here [in Bogotá], where we can meet a number of victims, reflect, and I think that this congress gives us strength to go ahead, that we really have to pursue reconciliation.23

As for state entities, processes like reparations to victims through the CNRR have only recently started to take of. Although a high number of state entities that worked with the community was identified (see appendix 2), community members stated that the region has been abandoned by the state for a long time, and that the strongest state institution present was the army.

Only now, since two years, support of the national and departmental government is arriving to this region that has always been marginalised by the state, and has been invaded during some periods by the national army, the guerrilla, by the paramilitaries. And now you know, they want to give something back through the [National] Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation [CNRR]. They say they want to give back a little bit of the rights of the people that have been violated.24

In summary, different kinds of support were given to the ATCC by external actors. For the reconciliation process, the most direct support came in the form of academic guidance, while accompaniment is also seen as an important form of protection against violence, and thereby contributing to a peaceful coexistence in the community.

6.5 Decision-making processes

With regard to decision-making processes, it was asked whether the community members had a sense of control over decisions made regarding external interventions. Through the interviews, ATCC members recognised that NGOs sometimes bring their projects ready-made to the community, and that aid often comes with certain conditions. However, they stressed that the ATCC always evaluates whether an external actor works

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23 Hernández, M. “Buscar alternativa.” (Las mismas diócesis han sido muy juiciosos en invitarnos a participar en los encuentros regionales también (...) y pues ahora acá [en Bogotá], donde permiten reencontrarnos con una cantidad de víctimas, pensarnos, y yo creo que este congreso nos fuerza para seguir adelante, de que realmente hay que buscar la reconciliación).

24 Rentería, L.C. “Las víctimas” (Hasta ahora están llegando hace dos años la ayuda del gobierno nacional, departamental a esta zona que ha sido marginada siempre por el estado, y ha sido atropellado en algunos tiempos por el ejército nacional, por la guerrilla, por los paramilitares, y ahora pues, quieren como devolverle a través de la Comisión de Reparación y Reconciliación. Dicen que quieren devolverle un poquitico de los derechos a la gente que han sido violentados).
according to the principles of the ATCC. Furthermore, they negotiate with the incoming organisation until the proposal is acceptable for both parties.

Our decisions to accept or not, we always look at the characteristics of some organisations and some institutions. Then we decide, if it is in our interest or not to receive that support. It has always been like that.

There are some that bring their matters already defined, because they bring a model already made that has to be accomplished. But there are others that come and look how to adjust to the needs here and to the things that the ATCC needs. And we also demand that, that they do things that are adjusted to the needs and things that do not harm us.

In that sense, many interviewees stated that the ATCC has a lot of control over its own peace and reconciliation process. Also, as has been shown in the previous chapter, the initiative of the reconciliation process is entirely coming from the community itself, and has not been initiated by external actors.

What I want to tell you is that there are many experiences where they have created beautiful proposals, but those are proposals where other sectors have also intervened, right? In the Peace Community San José de Apartadó, the church was very present. But here in the ATCC the proposal is essentially coming from the peasants. The church did arrive, they helped, yes, yes, yes! Afterwards. And has helped a lot.

A difference was observed between the leaders of the ATCC, and “ordinary” members of the community, in the sense that leaders tended to be more critical towards external actors, while non-leaders were more likely to accept any form of aid.

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25 Serna, I.C. “Convivir como comunidad.” (Nuestras decisiones de aceptar o no, siempre miramos cuáles son las características, de algunas organizaciones y de algunas instituciones. Entonces decidimos, si nos conviene o no recibir ese apoyo. Siempre ha sido así).

26 Piñeras, H. “Democracia pura” (Hay algunas que ya traen como cuestiones ya definidas, porque ya traen un preplomo ya hecho que se tiene que cumplir. Pero hay otros que vienen y miran como se ajustan aquí a las necesidades y a las cosas que necesita la ATCC. Y también nosotros exigimos eso, que nos hagan cosas que sean ajustadas a las necesidades y cosas que no nos hagan daño).

27 Hernández, E. “Reconciliación informal.” (Yo lo que te quiero decir es que hay muchas experiencias donde han creado bellas propuestas, pero son propuestas donde también han intervenido otros sectores, ¿no? En la comunidad de paz de San José de Apartadó la iglesia estuvo muy presente. Pero aquí en la ATCC la propuesta es netamente campesina. La iglesia sí llegó, la ayudó, sí, sí, sí! Después. Y ha colaborado mucho).
Well, basically, like the saying goes: ‘You do not put a price on a gift.’ Here, any organisation that says it is going to give us something, or support us, is welcome.28

In conclusion, the ATCC leaders claim to have control over decision-making processes, at least at the moment of entry of the external actor to the community. As the initiative of the reconciliation process lies with the community, the association has built a strong proposal based on clear principles, which facilitates the control over decision-making in relation to external actors.

6.6 Equality or dominance in relationships with external actors

In terms of the level of equality in the relationships between the ATCC and external actors, the external organisations were generally described as respectful by the interviewees. As mentioned in the previous section, the ATCC members consider they have significant control over the decisions taken at the beginning of a relationship with an external actor. Furthermore, it was stated that the external actors are understanding towards the ATCC, and therefore avoid to do damage in the sometimes delicate situations, in which the association has to deal with different kind of threats from outside, for example from armed actors.

(...) (T)he NGOs have been very careful and they have heard us, they have helped us, they have understood our situation. So, they try as well to not do harm to us. Here damage has never been done.29

From the side of the community, the ATCC members show openness towards external actors, and do not reject a relationship with any external actor, unless the actor does not act in according to the principles of the ATCC. On the other hand, ATCC members stated that they did not think external actors had changed them or the

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28 IDP/ATCC member 2. “Muy bueno.” (Pues, prácticamente, aquí nosotros de todas maneras como el dice el dicho: “lo que es regalado uno no le pone precio.” Aquí nosotros, cualquier organización que nos dice les vamos a regalar eso o apoyar en esto para nosotros es bienvenido).

29 Piñeras, H. “Democracia pura.” (…) Las ONGs han tenido mucho cuidado y nos han oído, nos han ayudado, nos han entendido en lo que nosotros nos movemos. Entonces, ellos procuran también de no hacernos daño. Aquí nunca se ha hecho daño).
reconciliation process. They only thought that the process had been strengthened by the interventions of external actors.

Thank God the organisations help us a lot. First, an organisation contributes with resources here for the community, and after a month or two they come to see in what it has been invested, and it is showed to them: “This has been invested here and this has been invested here”. So that is why the organisations are very happy with us.\textsuperscript{30}

I want to tell you for example in case of the academic part, in the investigations that I do, I only work with the participant action method, right? Which is a methodology where it is not the investigator over there, in a crystal cage, in a vertical relation.\textsuperscript{31}

In short, according to the perception of the ATCC members, external actors do not dominate them. They stated that external actors in general have been respectful, and clearly contested the idea that external support would have changed their community, or that external interventions were damaging.

\textbf{6.7 Obstacles to equal relationships}

Although in general problems with external actors were perceived as scarce, or temporary, a few obstacles to equal relationships were identified. The most mentioned difficulties were organisations that were rejected by the ATCC because their principles were not in accordance with the ATCC, organisations that left because other communities had bigger needs, misinterpretations by people within the community about how money was being spent, and organisations that took too little time to get to know the community. In case there were any problems, the ATCC knew how to respond to these effectively, according to the interviewees.

\textsuperscript{30} IDP/ATCC member 1. “Más inteligente” (Gracias a Dios, las organizaciones nos apoyan mucho. En primer lugar, que una organización aporta aquí con un recurso aquí para la comunidad, y al mes o a los dos meses vienen para ver en qué se ha invertido, y se les muestra: “Esto se invirtió acá y esto se invirtió acá”. Entonces por eso las organizaciones están muy contentas con nosotros).

\textsuperscript{31} Hernández, E. “Reconciliación informal.” ([...] [T]e quiero contar que por ejemplo en el caso de la academia, en las investigaciones que yo realicé, solamente trabajo con método de acción participante, ¿no? Que es una metodología donde no es la investigadora allí, en la cajita de cristal, en una relación vertical).
There are organisations, you know, normally we take very good care that the organisation that is coming normally is an organisation that goes in accordance with the principles of the ATCC. That means that it should not jeopardize us in the future. Anyway, we have not had a lot of experience with regard to offers of NGOs that have had this kind of behaviour.\footnote{Hernández, M. “Buscar alternativa.” (Hay organizaciones pues, normalmente nos cuidamos mucho, de que la organización que venga, que normalmente es una organización que vaya acorde a los principios de la ATCC. Es decir que no vaya traer un impedimento más adelante. Pues, no hemos tenido como la mucha experiencia en cuanto a ofrecimientos de ONGs que tengan ese tipo de acción).}

Clearly, I have had news of some proposals that were not very in accordance with what they [the ATCC] are, but they have been able to defend themselves very well.\footnote{Hernández, E. “Reconciliación informal.” (Evidentemente, he tenido noticias de algunas propuestas que no son muy acordes a lo que son ellos, pero han sabido defenderse muy bien).}

With regard to reconciliation, division in the community would be the opposite of a desired reconciliation process. According to some interviewees, there was never division caused because of actions of external actors. According to others, sometimes there was division caused, but rather due to individuals within institutions or misinterpretations by local community members, than by external actors as such. Also, in case of internal division, again the community knew how to overcome these differences, they stated.

The people are in control. People learn – at some point it gets perforated – but the people learn to understand when they are like getting too much on the farm. I would say. They get themselves too much on the farm, they get themselves too much in the house and they do not allow us to be ourselves.\footnote{Serna, I.C. “Con vivir como comunidad.” (No, la gente tiene control. La gente aprende - en un momento se perrea – pero la gente aprende a entender cuando están como metiéndose en el rancho demasiado, diría yo. Se meten demasiado en el rancho, se meten demasiado en la casa y no nos permiten ser nosotros mismos).}

There has never been division in the community because always when an organisation arrives to the community it always sits down with the board of directors before taking it to the community. The board of directors looks if it is viable, if it benefits the community. And when its a benefit, well it gets adopted, the organisation is welcomed. If they see it is a disadvantage for the community it is better to say no. Everything is always done looking at what benefits the community, so that is why there have been no divisions in the community.\footnote{Palacios, S.P. “Cesaron los muertos.” (División en la comunidad no ha habido porque siempre cuando llega una organización a la comunidad siempre se sienta con la mesa directiva antes de llevarlo a la}
Finally, most critiques by community members were addressed to the state. These critiques included for example corruption, negligence, and stigmatization of (leftist) NGOs that worked with the ATCC.

6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the relationships between the ATCC and external actors have been exposed. It has been shown that there are a lot of external actors that worked with the community over the past 24 years. The community members see the external support as important, especially when being under threat by armed actors, but also for economic support and guidance in the reconciliation process. With regard to decision-making processes, the ATCC maintains control by holding on to its principles when a relationship between them and the external actor is established.

Likewise, the level of equality between the ATCC and external actors can be seen as high. The open attitude of the ATCC, in combination with the respectfulness of external actors, facilitates relationships based on dialogue, and not on dominance. In a few cases, the fact that some organisations bring fixed projects ready to be implemented in the community, causes some friction in these relationships. However, the ATCC is able to handle those situations. This way, the leadership of the ATCC acts as some kind of gatekeeper, that decides which interventions are accepted or not in the community, or that can even demand adjustments of the intervention. The fact that the ATCC established itself as an organisation before external actors came into the picture, may explain why this community is able to exercise a relatively large control over these external interventions. This idea is represented in figure 2.

In short, in this case study the fact that the internal actor established itself firmly before external actors came in seems to have favoured the level of equality in the relationships with external actors and thereby the level of local ownership. Hence, even though external actors may all have different approaches, the reconciliation process of the community does not get disturbed, as the community leadership protects the basic comunidad. La mesa directiva mira si es viable, si es un beneficio para la comunidad. Y si es un beneficio, pues se adopta, se acoge la organización. Si se ve que es un perjuicio para la comunidad es mejor decir no. Siempre se hace todo mirando lo que beneficia la comunidad, entonces por eso no ha habido divisiones para la comunidad).
principles of the organisation. This may imply that in case such a local leadership is absent, local ownership is harder to achieve, and more effort on the side of the external actor may be needed to increase local ownership. The next chapter will analyse more into depth the role of external actors, by focusing on capacity building as a way to promote local ownership.

Figure 2: Local leadership as a gatekeeper for external interventions

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7. The role of capacity building in external support to the ATCC

7.1 Introduction

There are many ways in which external actors can try to support local communities in a reconciliation process, as has been shown in chapter six. Nevertheless, this final and shortest chapter is devoted to capacity building, as it is seen as an important way of producing or increasing local ownership from outside, both by scholars and international institutions (See for example OECD 52; Donais 15). However, for capacity building to fulfil this role, it should be adjusted to the local context (Donais 15).

Therefore, this chapter analyses the question whether capacity building in the case of the ATCC is used to increase local ownership and to what extent capacity building is adjusted to the needs of the community. The ATCC received many forms of capacity building, from leadership formation to training in productive projects. The chapter is divided into three sections, addressing the importance of capacity building in the ATCC,
different types of capacity building received by the community, and the extent to which these efforts are adjusted to local needs.

### 7.2 The use of capacity building for the ATCC

When the interviewees were asked about the role of capacity building, they generally responded that it was important to them. Reasons why they considered it to be important were because there were many things they did not know (e.g. about rights), it helped to strengthen the process of the ATCC, because of the fact that there is still a lot to improve, and in order to gain control over the process.

Capacity building is very important because that also ensures that the community gains control and gets to know, what rights it has, what rights it does not have, to defend its rights, to defend its environment, its territory. Because a lot of institutions arrive painting them birds in the sky and the people do not learn to interpret the context of all of that, that is also brought in from outside, because they are rootless as well.  

Capacity building is important, because there are many things that are needed. (…) It means knowing certain things that we do not know, be it political, be it economic, or in the business part.  

The more trainings there are, and the more the rural people are instructed, well a lot of things get better, and people are living better together. Because in some instances there were trainings of violence within families, of coexistence within the family, and that also helps a lot. Although it also depends on whether the person assimilates those trainings and puts them into practice. Capacity building without the effort of the community does not have any result, it does not make sense.

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36 Serna, I.C. “Convivir como comunidad.” (Las capacitaciones son muy buenas porque eso también hace que la comunidad se vaya empoderando y sabiendo, a qué tiene derecho, a qué no tiene derecho, a defender sus derechos, a defender su entorno, su territorio. Porque muchas instituciones llegan pintándoles pajaritos en el aire y la gente no aprende a leer el contexto de todo eso, que les traen de fuera también, por lo que se encuentran también, están desarraigados).

37 Piñeras, H. “Democracia pura.” (Capacitación es importante, porque hay muchas cosas que se necesita. (…) Eso es conocer ciertas cosas que nosotros no conocemos, ya sea político, sea económico, o en la parte empresarial).

38 Palacios, S.P. “Cesaron los muertos.” ([…] [M]ientras haya más capacitación, y se instruya más a la gente campesina, pues van a mejorar muchas de las cosas, y va a mejorar la convivencia. Porque en algunas ocasiones se han dado capacitaciones de violencia intrafamiliar, de convivencia en la familia, y eso también ayuda mucho. Aunque también depende de si la persona asimile esas capacitaciones y las ponga en práctica. La capacitación sin el esfuerzo de la comunidad no tiene resultado, no tiene sentido).
Summarizing, the importance of capacity building is affirmed by the ATCC members. Also, some evidence has been found that capacity building indeed can be linked to local ownership, as some interviewees stated that it helped them to gain control over the process.

### 7.3 Forms of capacity building employed by external actors

During the interviews, many different types of capacity building were mentioned, including leadership formation, community trainings, training in political participation and advocacy, economic and business training, as well as capacity building in the areas of agriculture, environment, reforestation, and rights.

We recognise that the national and international entities have oriented us in different ways. The topic of for example (...) leadership formation, (...) and permanent training of communities, helps to ensure that the process is stronger every day, that it has more ground, that the base is more solid every time.39

SENA [National Learning Service] has supported us in training workshops, economic training, industrial training, business training. Well, it has been very good because here a lot of people have been prepared that today have experience in the environmental part, in agriculture, in reforestations. So, this has been handled well, with regard to capacity building in the academic sphere.40

Thus, in the ATCC community many different forms of capacity building have been employed, that range from leadership formation to education in rights. The former helps local people to become better leaders and represent their community, while the latter may help the community members to defend themselves against external threats to their territory or human rights violations. All different types of capacity building share the ability to transfer tools to community members to help them to gain more control over their lives.

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39 Hernández, M. “Buscar alternativa.” (Reconocemos de que las entidades nacionales, internacionales muchos nos han orientado en diferentes formas. En el tema por ejemplo (...) de formación de líderes, (...) y capacitación permanentemente a las comunidades, para hacer que el proceso se cada día más fuerte, que tenga más base, que la base sea cada vez más solida).

40 Piñeras, H. “Democracia pura.” (El SENA es lo más nos ha apoyado en talleres de capacitaciones, capacitaciones económicas, capacitaciones industriales, capacitaciones empresariales. Bueno, eso ha sido muy bueno porque aquí se ha preparado muchas personas que hoy ya tienen experiencias en la parte ambiental, en la parte de agricultura, en la parte de reforestaciones. Entonces, se ha manejado bien esa parte. En las capacitaciones en la cuestión académica).
7.4 Adjustment to the local level

In general, the types of capacity building received were seen as very valuable, as has been shown in the previous sections. Nevertheless, there were several comments made that suggested that capacity building is not always adjusted to the needs of the community. These suggestions were related to the need for a better relation between capacity building and its application, the need for more continuity in training, and the need for more specific capacity building for women. Also, different examples were given of unsuccessful productive projects and training.

There also have been some trainings. And there still are. However, there is a need for more projects in which those who receive training can work.41

In the agrarian sector, it has not been given the importance as it should, because maybe some experimental projects have been done, that have not had the impact they should have, and what they do is generate disillusions in the communities. (...) An example is a project that was done in the region with cane. There are some mills here that they set up that are very good mills, but the people do not have the tradition to sow cane. So now there are some mills that are not being used (...).42

Let’s see, there have been many different types of capacity building here. Thanks to those trainings, nowadays, at least I form part of this foundation of women Manos Limpias. We were a group of women, and we have been caught in the fighting for so many years, that we wanted to get out and organise us as women. We have received training, but I feel, personally, that for women, training has been very poor. For women. Why for women? Because the woman here, has been affected so much by the war, that she still has not been able to get rid of this, to be herself, and to learn to take decisions for herself. She feels like she has to do what the man tells her to do.43

41 Palacios, S. “Poco dinero” (También ha habido algunas capacitaciones. Y todavía siguen habiendo. Sino que, faltan proyectos para que esos que se capacitan puedan trabajar).
42 Palacios, S.P. “Cesar en los muertos.” (En el sector agrario, no se ha dado la importancia que debería, porque se han hecho de pronto algunos proyectos que son experimentales, y no dan el impacto que deberían tener, y lo que hacen es generar desilusiones en las comunidades. [...] Un ejemplo es un proyecto que hubo en la zona de caña. Hay unos molinos que montaron que son unos muy buenos molinos, pero la gente no tenía la tradición para sembrar caña. Entonces ahora hay unos molinos que están en desuso [...]).
43 Women’s group representative. “Muy importante.” (A ver, aquí han llegado muchas capacitaciones. Gracias, a esas capacitaciones, hoy en día, yo por lo menos hago parte de la fundación de mujeres Manos Limpias. Éramos un grupo de mujeres, y pues tenemos años desde estar en la pataleta, que queríamos salir como mujeres organizarnos. Hemos recibido capacitaciones, pero siento, siento yo, que han sido, para la mujer ¿no?, para las mujeres, que han sido capacitaciones muy flojas. Para la mujer. ¿Por qué para la mujer? Porque la mujer de acá, tiene una secuela grandísima por la guerra, que todavía no ha sido
In conclusion, some difficulties in relation to capacity building have been identified by the ATCC members. This suggests that adjustment to the local level in this community can be improved, although the previous sections also show that capacity building in general is appreciated. The most difficulties in terms of adaptation to the local level arise with regard to trainings in the agricultural sector, for example when a type of project is initiated that is not in accordance with the traditions in the community. In case such capacity building efforts fail to be effective, this can lead to frustrations in the community. Nevertheless, other types of capacity building such as formation in rights and leadership were not criticised by the community members.

**7.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the role of capacity building in relation to local ownership in the reconciliation process of the ATCC has been examined. The information from the interviews suggests that capacity building is an important element in external support. Community members expressed that they felt strengthened by receiving trainings. It helps to strengthen the reconciliation process of the ATCC in a variety of ways, including to make leaders better prepared, and to make their members more aware of their rights.

In short, it can be stated that capacity building has helped to increase local ownership in this case. However, sometimes the lack of continuity in capacity building projects can cause frustration, especially when there is no link between the training provided and the application in practice of the capacities achieved. Also, it was suggested that there is a need for a more specific focus on women, however, this aspect was not thoroughly investigated in this research.

In relation to the previous chapter, it is hard to tell how big the part of capacity building has really been in increasing local ownership, as the role of the local leadership has been very important in this sense. Most likely, the role of capacity building has been more of a complementary character in the case of the ATCC, that has strengthened the reconciliation process, while the role of local leaders has been more fundamental. Again, in situations where local organisation is less strong or absent, this might be different, as the role of external actors could be more crucial for local ownership in those cases.

capaz de desprenderse, de ser ella, y de aprender a tomar decisiones ella. Se siente que tiene que estar amarrada a lo que el hombre dice).
8. Conclusions

8.1 Introduction

In this research, the relation between local ownership and reconciliation has been analysed, by studying the case of the ATCC in Colombia. This community is an example of an SBCPI, that while the internal conflict in Colombia is still ongoing, established a community of peace, in which a reconciliation process took shape based on empirical knowledge. Furthermore, the level of local ownership in this process was analysed in the case from a community perspective.

This chapter will summarize the answers to the sub-questions and general research question, outline a general conclusion of the research, and discuss limitations and recommendations. At the beginning of this paper, the question was asked “What is the relation between reconciliation and local ownership, and to what extent does the reconciliation process of the ATCC in Colombia contain a high level of initiative and organisation in the community, equal relationships between the ATCC and external actors, and the use of capacity building by external actors adapted to the local context?” To answer this question, different sub-questions have been analysed in the previous chapters, of which the answers will be discussed in the next section.

8.2 Answers to the sub-questions

In this research reconciliation is defined as a process to overcome past conflict, involving a transformation of relations of a divided society, moving towards positive and sustainable peace. Furthermore, in the light of this research and its focus on local ownership, it is important to emphasize that reconciliation is a voluntary process and needs to come from within. For this reason, a top-down approach to reconciliation is not feasible, and local ownership is needed in order to ensure that a genuine reconciliation process takes place. Thus, because of the internal and voluntary aspects that are important for reconciliation, local ownership becomes a vital element. Furthermore, local ownership in general makes external interventions more effective, because of increased commitment of the participants.
Concerning the measurement of local ownership, this research departed from a model based on lessons learned from the literature, that considers three elements to be key for measuring local ownership: 1) The level of local organisation, active engagement in the reconciliation process, and representativeness for the local community; 2) The level of equality and power sharing in relationships with external actors, and 3) The use of capacity building by external actors and whether this is adjusted to the local context as a way to produce or increase local ownership. These three elements were applied to the case of the ATCC.

With regard to the representativeness of the ATCC in relation to the whole community, the evidence found in this case study showed that the ATCC to a large extent represents all community members, for several reasons. First, the association was founded with the support of a large number of community members, of different ethnic groups and political aspirations. And second, the process of the ATCC has been inclusive, and representative of the interests of all community members, including ex-combatants that were accepted back into the community as part of its reconciliation process.

In addition, it was shown that community members recognise the importance of reconciliation, and that the community has experienced a reconciliation process in an empirical way. Although the elements of truth, justice and reparations were not included in this process, it did imply a transformation of a violent situation into a peaceful coexistence, in which ex-combatants were able to reconcile with the rest of the community, people start to reconcile with the past and move on towards a new, interdependent future, regardless of the things that someone has done in the past. As this process was started without the accompaniment of external actors, it remains clear that the ATCC did actively engage in it.

In relation to the level of equality in relationships between internal and external actors, it can be concluded that at least from the perception of the community members, the ATCC is in control of its reconciliation process. Even though there were some difficulties in cases where external actors tried to undertake actions that were not in accordance with the principles of the community, the ATCC was able to respond to these issues in an effective way. Also, this study found that in this case the local leaders act as a sort of gatekeeper for the community, that decides what comes in and what stays out.
Finally, as to capacity building, this last aspect of local ownership analysed was seen as valuable by the majority of the community, although it was not in all cases sufficiently adjusted to local circumstances. Also, it seemed to play a less crucial role in assuring local ownership than the role of local leadership, due to the strength of the local organisation and its clear principles.

8.3 General conclusion

After having discussed all the sub-questions, an answer to the general research question can be given. With regard to the first part of the main research question, it can be stated that local ownership is an indispensable element of a reconciliation process, considering the argument that reconciliation needs to come from within, is voluntary and thrives by a high level of participation. In case of the ATCC, the informal process of reconciliation, in which the protagonists developed dialogue strategies and reconciled themselves with ex-combatants in the community, the process came from within the community, as there were no external actors (at least in the initial phase) that persuaded the community to engage in a reconciliation process.

Furthermore, the local ownership situation in the reconciliation process of the ATCC is to a large extent in accordance with the ideal situation of local ownership. Firstly, the community appears to experience a high level of organisation and is actively involved in the reconciliation process. Secondly, evidence suggests that the ATCC exercises control in the relations with external actors, while being open to them at the same time. Also, the external actors generally show respect towards the community, which facilitates this equal relationship. However, there was also evidence found that in some cases external actors tend to overrun the community with pre-fixed projects or taking little time to get to know the community. Despite of this, the ATCC knows how to regain control in those kind of situations.

Finally, with regard to capacity building, some evidence has been found that this approach indeed strengthened the reconciliation process in the ATCC, although capacity building was not always adjusted to the community’s context and, as mentioned earlier, this element was of a less pivotal importance than the role of local leaders in the control over decision-making processes.
Overall, the case study of the ATCC is an example of a community that organised themselves in a desperate need for peace. In this process, an original approach to reconciliation was developed. On the way, many external actors have come to the community to support and work with them. Despite of their large number, this research suggests that their arrival have generally strengthened the experience and has not taken over ownership from the community. Sometimes, in the literature it seems to be assumed that local ownership is something that is implemented by external actors. This case, however, is an example of the contrary, where local ownership is something that is already there, and is apparently not taken away despite of the interventions of external actors. Nevertheless, this might be different in situations where local leadership is less strong or when a community is less united.

There are several possible explanations for the high level of local ownership found in this case. Firstly, in case of the ATCC the need for peace and reconciliation was very high at the time the association was founded. Due to this high needs, the peasants of the time were almost forced to do something, or they would be torn apart by the conflict. Secondly, because of the delicateness of the process and the setbacks along the way, the community has learned to protect the process, as it would be risky for them to give control out of their hands. Thus, although the community has experienced the risk of falling apart during critical periods of the existence of the ATCC, the organisation has grown stronger in the end. Either way, it seems that the role of the local leaders and the community as a whole was decisive in the level of local ownership in the case of the ATCC, as they managed to control their reconciliation process by protecting their guiding principles.

In conclusion, based on this case study there are some elements that should be added to the existing literature. First of all, when studying local ownership, scholars should increase their focus on the role of local actors, as was already stated by Reich, since their role was of crucial importance in this case. And finally, the findings of this research suggest that when a local community is organised prior to the arrival of the external actor, the chances for local ownership are likely to be higher. Thus, it should be taken into account whether there is a local organisation that represents the local community and acts as a “gatekeeper” in relation with external interventions. This implies that external actors aiming at increasing local ownership, probably need more time to develop this when a
Community is very organised itself, which means that communities might require different strategies by external actors depending on their level of organisation. How these strategies exactly look like cannot be told on the basis of this research, but capacity building in combination with taking the time to get to know the local context in order to ensure continuity might be a useful approach.

8.4 Constraints and Limitations

This research also knows several constraints and limitations. First of all, because it is a qualitative study, the findings cannot be generalised. The results say something about the case but do not necessarily tell something about other cases. Furthermore, the conceptual framework is limited as a new model is used to measure ownership, which means that its usefulness has not been proven. In this case, a relation was found between all three elements of the model and local ownership, however, it is not clear exactly how important each of these elements are. Also, as more internal actors were interviewed than external actors, this might have influenced the results, as this might be partly causing the fact that a stronger emphasis was laid on the influence that local actors have on the level of local ownership. Nevertheless, this research aimed at giving a view on the relations with external actors from within the community. And finally, due to time limits and logistical reasons, several external actors that were approached for the research could not be interviewed.

8.5 Recommendations

The findings of this research lead to some practical recommendations, and some recommendations for further research. In relation to the general conclusion, it can be argued that more research is needed that address the relationships between external actors and local communities that have a low level of organisation. As this was an example of a community that was very organised, it has been suggested that this positively influenced the level of local ownership. Nevertheless, this needs to be compared with communities that are less organised in order to know with more certainty how these dynamics operate.

Furthermore, based on this research that confirmed the importance of local ownership for reconciliation, external actors should be more aware of this when they work
with communities that are in a process of reconciliation, no matter whether the reason for intervention is humanitarian, peacebuilding, or development. In this case, the community was able to defend itself against possible negative influences, however, this might not be true for all communities. Needless to say, interventions that might lead to division in communities should be avoided.

Finally, although this research did not specifically focus on gender, during the research process the idea was confirmed that special attention needs to be paid to capacity building for women, as the way they are affected by conflict differs from that of men, and also their needs after conflict differ. In this sense, further research is needed on the relationship between gender, reconciliation and external interventions, in order to improve the attention to women paid by external actors in reconciliation processes.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of Santander and the Magdalena Medio santandereano

Source: Adapted from OCHA
### Appendix 2: External actors that worked with the ATCC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC WORLD</th>
<th>CHURCH INSTITUTIONS</th>
<th>INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY</th>
<th>NATIONAL NGOs</th>
<th>STATE ENTITIES/PROGRAMMES</th>
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<td>Fundación Sueca</td>
<td>Asociación Feminina Popular (AFP)</td>
<td>Acción Social (Agencia Presidencial para la Acción Social y la Cooperación Internacional)</td>
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<td>Catholic Church</td>
<td>International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)</td>
<td>Fundación Luis Galán</td>
<td>CNRR (National Commission of Reparation and Reconciliation)</td>
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<td>Diocese of Barrancabermeja</td>
<td>European Union: Programme “Paz y Desarrollo”</td>
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<td>Familias Guardabosques (National Development Plan)</td>
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<td><strong>Landázuri, Bolívar, and Sucre</strong></td>
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* Belongs to more than one category