



Ecotourism in a Country Rich in Both Biodiversity and Hope

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Introduction

Lucelia Triana was a professor of biology for 30 years in different rural and urban schools in Tolima where she was characterized by being a person who loved her profession and someone who loved to share and teach her knowledge. She was also an activist for the protection of the environment. After she obtained her pension, she decided to invest her capital in the purchase of a land located in San Bernardo, Ibagué. Lucelia faced a great dilemma: to decide if she should put her land on the National Registry of Protected Areas or not.

How was this dilemma created? Some of Lucelia's friends or colleagues had already retired and lived a quiet and familiar life. Lucelia's family's plan had those same expectations. The land was called "La Primavera" and had 5 hectares, one of them was tropical forest only. Lucelia diversified the land with agricultural production and, despite of the evident insecurity of the nearby town. Mrs. Triana was very happy with "La Primavera" because she had the dream of conserving and contributing to the environment and practice clean cultivation. Her idea was a place to rest, but also had some crops as a means of sustenance with products for a healthy diet.

One day Mrs. Triana invited her neighbor to "La Primavera" to her farm. This neighbor was a biologist of Universidad of Tolima. After Lucelia's young friend completed a tour of La Primavera he enthusiastically recommended her to get in contact with ResNatur. ResNatur was an initiative at a national level of Natural Reserves. Therefore, she followed his advice without knowing the dilemma she would face shortly. Next, Lucelia got in contact with Jorge Rubiano from ResNatur. She identified her new farm with huge potential as a formal natural reserve. His reasons were mainly based on the relatively big tropical forest, the same kind of forest that harbored an armed conflict in the country's rural areas in Colombia for more than 40 years.

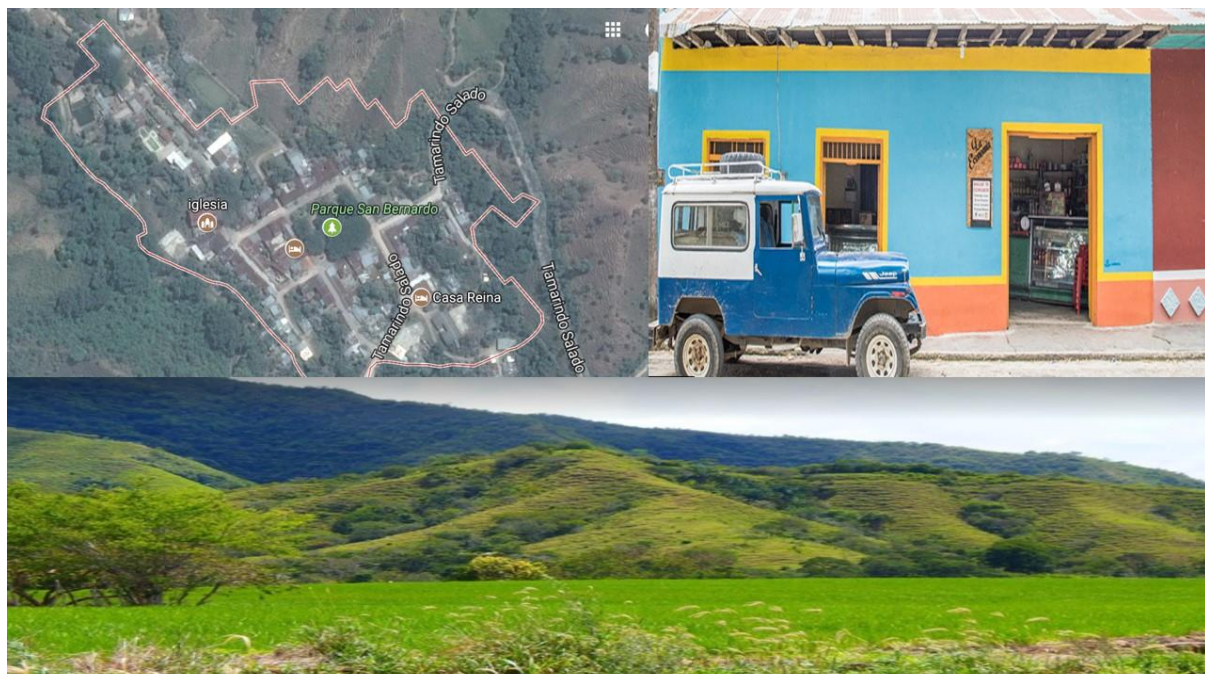
Figure 1: Mrs. Lucelia Triana Sanchez



(Cortés, 2017)

Ibagué & San Bernardo

Figure 2: San Bernardo, location & landscape



(Cortés, 2017)

Ibagué, the Capital city of the Tolima state, one of the main cities in Colombia, was 213 km far away from Bogota (capital city and most important city of Colombia). The economy of Ibagué was based on commerce, industry, agriculture, cattle raising and mining. It was recognized as the musical city of Colombia and had some cultural festivals around the year. Thanks to its position on the central mountain range, the city was rich in biodiversity and had



amazing landscapes, one of the most popular natural places was the “Snowy mountain of Tolima”.

San Bernardo was the town where the farm was located. It was a little town 20 minutes away from Ibagué; sadly, this was a conflict zone in Colombia, an example of the violence where a gas cylinder was detonated in the main park of the town and the target was a police station. This kind of events made San Bernardo a relatively secluded place in 2001. Violence in this area was one reason to displace a lot of people from the town and made everybody alert all the time.

Socioeconomic Conditions

Retirement Conditions for Teachers in Colombia

In Colombia, there were some social and economic conditions that generated an increasingly complex working environment. Some of those characteristics were few chances to develop a high-quality education. Teachers in Colombia faced the historical oblivion by the Colombian state. Despite of that fact, being a teacher was not only a job, it was also a social role that had the power to transform different realities of our country. It also allowed to reach basic and universal knowledge to people.

These were some important data and a basic contextualization about how hard it was for teachers to get their retirement status according to FECODE and other secondary data:

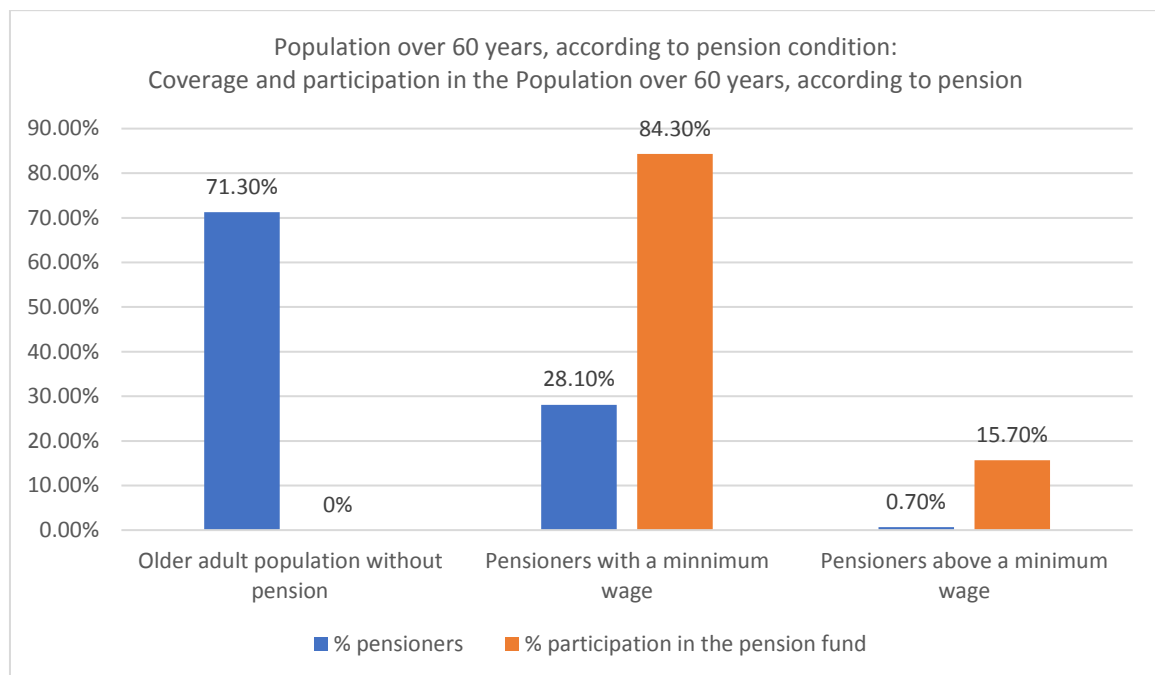
In our country, the population of educators was incorporated into the General System of Social Security in Pensions, through Law 812 of 2003, that established a retirement age of 57 years for both women and men.

According to data from the National Federation of Educators, FECODE, of the more than 330 thousand teachers currently working, about 20,000 teachers were pensioned each year.

There were 250 thousand teachers linked to the National Federation of Educators, who stated that the main problem they had to manage their pensions was the lack of knowledge of the rules by municipal employees who oversaw these processes.

To experts, such as TG Consultants, the main inconvenience that teachers faced to access their pension was the difficult legal task by the ministry of education. It consisted on providing their work history, with the aid of offices, that on many occasions, did not have a clear, systematized file and, in the worst cases, face the absence of a physical file, which turned a legal requirement into an obstacle that hindered the effective evidence that supported their request.

"it was important for teachers, that before submitting their pension application, they had all the documents up to date plus the labor certifications. Additionally, it was needed to verify the compliance with requirements described in Law 812 of 2003, so that they were able to access to pension rights.

Graph 1: Population greater than 60 years according to pension income

(Libido, 2013)

Armed Conflict

Talking about the armed conflict in Colombia, it makes us think of a context and history permeated by many failed attempts to achieve peace with different armed groups outside the law. In our country, these groups belong to the two great political extremes the right and the left.

To understand a little more how the armed conflict had impacted on the history of Lucelia's decision-making, we should describe critical moments about the armed conflict, where achieving a stable and lasting peace has proved almost impossible, these moments are: the failed try of peace process between the FARC and the Ex-President Andres Pastrana and the peace between the Ex-President Alvaro Uribe Velez and the Paramilitaries.

Failed Try of Peace Process between the FARC and the Ex-President Andrés Pastrana

It was fundamental to begin to understand that the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) guerrillas existed as an armed group for more than 50 years. It was born from the great inequality between the social classes, especially from the rural and urban gap. The FARC was motivated at their beginning by the struggle for land, the re-vindication for peasant populations and the liberation of oppressed peoples.

Although we could understand their origins, it must also be understood that within this framework, this armed group was identified as participating on multiple violations of human rights and environmental rights, as well as those were responsible along with paramilitaries, by the increase of drug trafficking and micro trafficking in Colombia.

"The former president Andrés Pastrana must be recognized by his commitment with peace during his government. He was elected president of the Colombians in 1998,



and on July 9th of that same year, he made the bold decision to go and interview FARC's top leader, Manuel Marulanda Vélez, in the mountains of Colombia in secret.

Everything was euphoric, and the country was about to reach a definite peace with the most ideologically and militarily organized guerrilla in the country. In that conversation Pastrana, with a cigar in his fingers, said to "Tirofijo": "Well Manuel, with me is saying and doing, as it happened in the mayor's office ... The first obligation of my government is to make peace, even if I do not do anything else".

As president, he came to the meeting accompanied by Victor G. Ricardo, the Peace Commissioner of his government. Everything happened in an atmosphere of camaraderie. Greetings came and went.

The population was surprised that the new president arrived at that meeting without any written document in which he would make his previous proposal for peace and, at least get a serious pact from the insurgents; To show that the government marked the course of a future negotiation, and not the FARC, as it evidently happened in the meeting of marras.

"We are going to look for peace without marked letters, no agenda, (let's do) an open thing," Pastrana said. Big mistake. That is why he failed in his purpose. Pastrana, like many of the elite, always believed that the guerrillas were criminals without ideological and organizational vitality, and calculated that, in word and with good intentions, it would open the way to reconciliation.

The FARC appeared with a video and arrived with a document in hand and with the proposal to clear five municipalities. To this bold initiative of the guerrilla, there was no convincing answer, and less a manifestation of rejection on the impact that would provoke the withdrawal to the public force. Moreover, the new president of Colombian did not think that this region was crucial in the counterinsurgency. It such was an improvisation with which the former Pastrana "designed" his meeting, that he only managed to say: "Let's take 90 days from the 7th of August. It is decreed the clearance of the five municipalities to a definite term and if there are conditions, we sit down to speak".

Then everything happened what the country knew at the time: 42 thousand kilometers of clearance that the guerrilla handled at its whim without accountability to anyone, and they turned the region into a kind of free zone that served to rearm and hide all the kidnapped, while making their release effective, in exchange for large sums of money.

Then the president-elect did not demand the guerrillas, he begged for a "gesture, some detail" so that the international community would welcome a peace process in Colombia.

To finish off, in that commented meeting, that I encourage you to see on YouTube, there was a talk of "money" to eradicate the drug traffic as if it were bread eaten; to include in the National Development Plan, without knowing that, the themes of peace; even amidst laughter at how the president-elect and his companions evaded state

security to reach the mountains; there was a talk of discretion that was not fulfilled; but they never talked about, for example, the victims.

Thus, we could continue to list the mistakes of a meeting that sought to create trust between the parties, and which ended in the anecdote of the peace processes that failed in Colombia for a simple reason, because an agenda was never designed with common agreement with limits in the issues and commitments of the parties, as put forward by the current process that is about to settle the conflict via a negotiation.

I understand Pastrana's nostalgia for failure and opposes today's negotiations, but it would be more gallant for him to do so from a huddled tribune and full of arguments and not overreacting, like saying that the future agreement in Cuba is a "Coup" to the Colombian institutionality. That's not right. (Pastrana and his failed peace process, Taken from revista Semana).

Figure 3: Pastrana and Guerrilla Leaders



(Justicia, 2015).

Peace Process between the AUC and the Ex-President Alvaro Uribe 2002-2006

The Ex-President Alvaro Uribe started the dialogues with the AUC in 2002, on November 11. The leaders of the AUC had a meeting with Luis Carlos Restrepo, the high commissioner for peace. Because of the meeting the AUC declared the ceasefire, then government and the AUC signed the agreement of Santa Fe de Ralito in July of 2003. Law 975 of June, 2005 called "Law of justice and peace" was created within the pressure of USA and in the middle of big controversy because the law gave some benefits to the AUC but it did not stop there, it also gave the group the definition, as politics that took on weapons because the state forgot them to be able to give the benefits promised. (Grajales, 2011).

According to *El Tiempo* in the article *Signed peace agreement with the Paramilitaries between 2002 and 2008* published on December 15, 2010 (*El Tiempo*, 2010). In 2004 Carlos Castaño was killed by his own men because he was argued to serve as a platform for drug



traffickers to gain political benefits. Beside Carlos's death, in 2006 all the AUC members were demobilized according to Luis Carlos Restrepo, a high commissioner for peace.

The supreme court verified the agreement and toughened the conditions of the Law of Justice and peace. Due to this change on the law, the debate on the constitutional ruling was prolonged and the trust on the agreement by the paramilitaries decreased. Alvaro Uribe stated that all the demobilized should follow the law or they could lose their benefits, and as a prove of his power sent the AUC leaders to jail on August 2006. Most of the leaders followed the order and just a few of them ran to the clandestinity (Grajales, 2011).

After understanding a little more about this peace agreement with the AUC, it was important to highlight and recognize that, many of the members who formerly belonged to these paramilitary groups, were basically private security of landowners and power figures in the country. In almost all Colombian territory they were under the name of BACRIM (Criminal Bands), which were accused by citizens of committing multiple violations of human rights, as well as engaging in criminal practices such as extortion, hired killers and so on.

Democratic Security (Ex-president Álvaro Uribe-2002)

Colombia lived under an endless war, so it was in the memory of elders who saw their lives traversed by horror stories bathed in blood; stories that generated feelings of revenge, hatred, uncertainty, fear, among many other things in the citizens. This was the case of former President Álvaro Uribe, who launched his presidential candidacy in 2002, raising flags of more "war as a solution to the war," politics of the arms and a front confrontation against the essential and historical enemy of the State: the FARC.

Basically, democratic security was a state policy and discourse that generated an increase in violent acts and the number of people who were victims of war, but it was also the possibility that many would think that they could return to their farms and go back to rural places that were in the hands of the FARC. To understand a little more about what democratic security was, it would be explained from its pillars of action in the country:

1. *Citizen security. It seeks to regain confidence in democracy through the social control of violence. Crime will be combated with the armed forces, and a network of cooperation will be organized with one million people, who will receive a reward for their information tasks.*

The charm of the initiative can be found in the creation of new jobs, by turning thousands of fortunate people into informants. However, trust in democracy is not achieved by incentives used by anyone who assumes the power to watch in the shadow of others, not when society is threatened by the crossfire of the armed forces, and tomorrow, frightened by the opinion of his neighbors.

2. *Negotiation policy. The solution of the conflict with the armed groups in arms can be negotiated. In the case of the ELN, without a clearing zone; with the FARC, if it agrees to the cessation of hostilities and international oversight; and with the AUC, if they undertake not to kill Colombians. If the groups do not accept, the armed forces will intervene.*



Ironically, the appeal of this strategy is that the bargaining requirements do not apply. The scheme of negotiation in the middle of the war failed, and the most insistent alternative is the military confrontation, to the point that public opinion (66%) believes that the guerrilla can be defeated by the military. But are the armed forces prepared for war?

Although, in the last two years, the military forces have strengthened at the technical level -armament- and at the tactical level-men and training-; the effectiveness of the operational level -action and reaction in the battle- is an alarming mystery: In empirical terms, there is no single evidence to demonstrate the superiority of these in the face of armed uprisings.

3. International military cooperation. The presence of foreign troops and UN blue helmets will support the armed forces to combat the rebel groups and to curb kidnapping, massacres, forced displacement and the taking of municipalities.

The grace of military assistance may be related to the sense that foreign soldiers (31%) will be able to defeat guerrillas and paramilitaries on the battlefield. This impression has been strengthened by the relentless US war on terrorism in Afghanistan and by the absence of offensive actions and operational results from the military.

The formula of a foreign militia is not viable under the UN scheme and, if a country is willing to provide military cooperation, the cost of the mission is very high and the legion's effectiveness in the national territory is uncertain.

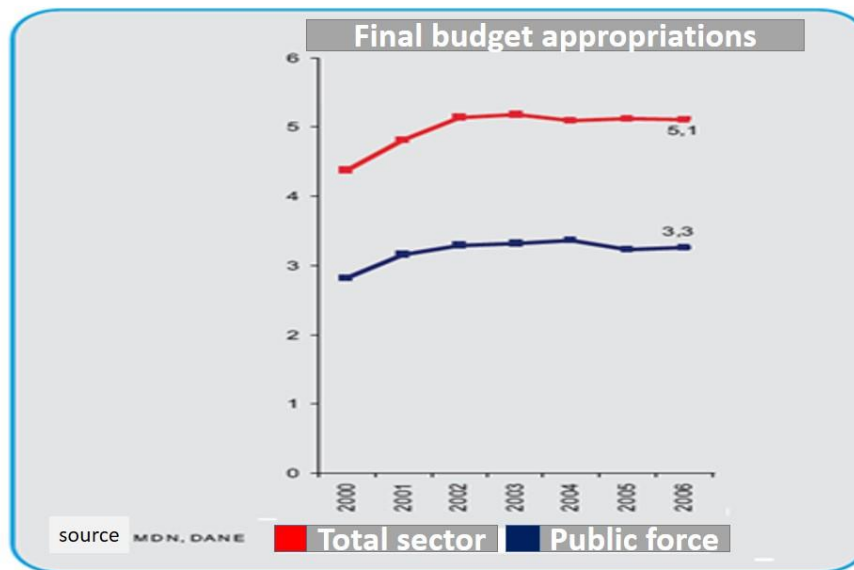
4. Military service. When the Army has 100,000 professional soldiers, compulsory military service will be eliminated. From that figure, enrollment will become a teaching service, which will require educational institutions to create places for new teachers, who will receive a remuneration.

The incentive of this measure cannot be clearer: No one is going to go to war against his will. This objection of popular consciousness is aimed at the less privileged sectors of society, in it's a unjust condition as the main human source of compulsory service.

The military offensive that Uribe planed to promote with the favor of the respondents had to be done with Colombian soldiers. The main instrument of recruitment is not the professional service, but the obligatory one by two universal principles: First, the defense of the sovereignty is a constitutional duty; and second, it is a mechanism of equality, because it involves all the members of the different layers of society, if it is efficient, with the purpose of avoiding the rupture of national solidarity, especially in times of war. (What is democratic security? Taken from Semana,26, Febrero, 2002)).

Statistical Data in Relation to the Public and Military Forces in Colombia

Graph 2: Budget for Defense & Security as GDP % 2000-2006



(Ministerio de defensa de Colombia, 2009).

As mentioned above, even if the percentage devoted to defense and security was maintained in similar proportions over time, the amount of money devoted to the security of the country increased because the GDP of Colombia in these years always increased.

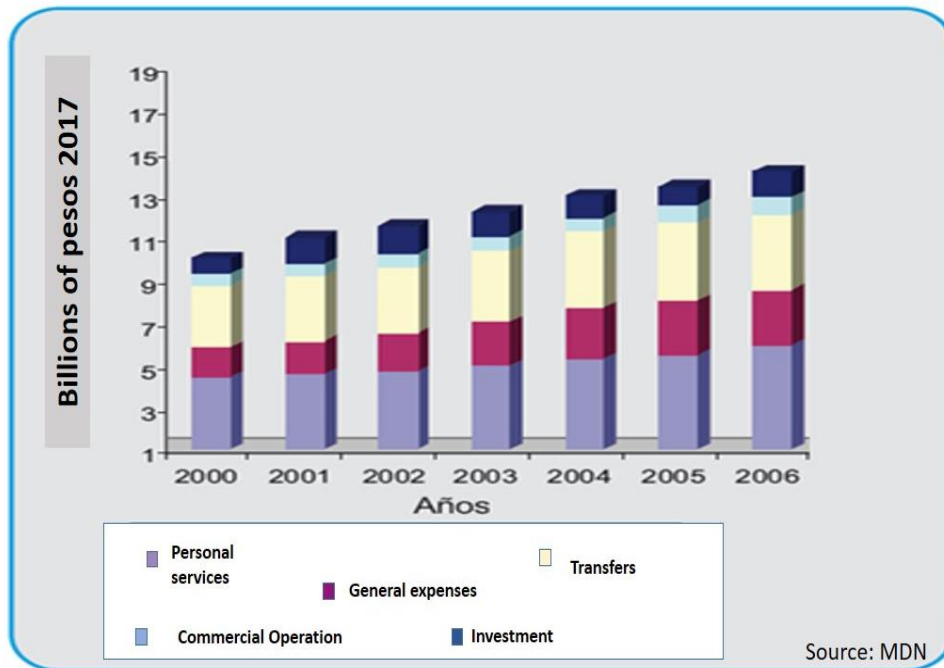
Table 1: Defense expenditure as a percentage of public expenditure Colombia

Year	defense expenditure (% Pub. Expenditure)
2000	17,90%
2001	16,66%
2002	19,35%
2003	12,54%
2004	15,55%
2005	12,54%
2006	13,64%

(datosmacro.com, 2018)

Defense expenditure as a percentage of public spending did not have a constant behavior since it presented increase and decreases over the years, being its maximum in 2002 and its minimum in 2003 and 2005.

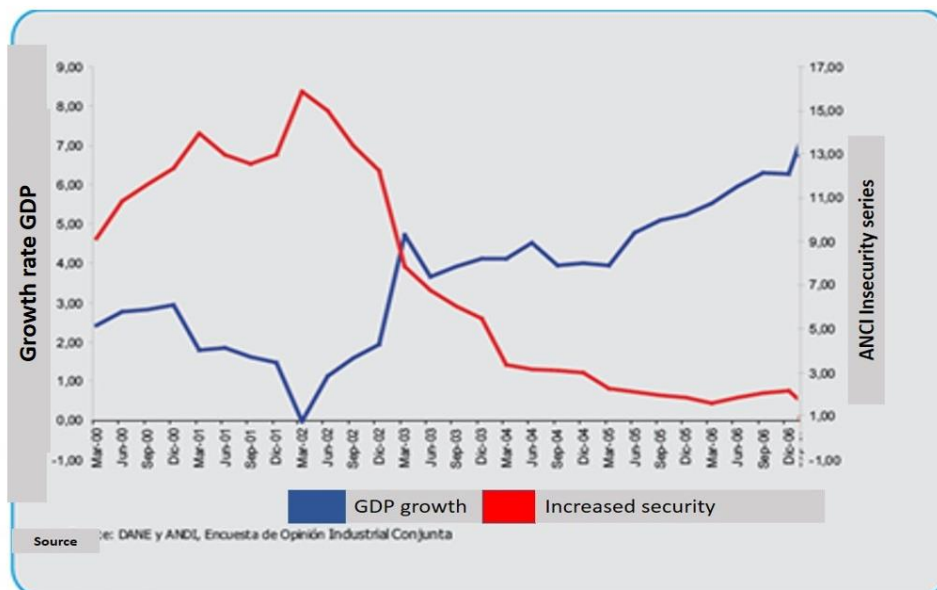
Graph 3: Distribution of the Budget of the Public and Decentralized Force 2000-2006.



(Ministerio de defensa de Colombia, 2009).

As can be seen in the table above, the budget for the public and decentralized forces maintained an upward trend, data that demonstrated the government's commitment to combat illegal groups, as mentioned previously in the document.

Graph 4: Economic Growth and Insecurity in Colombia. 2000-2006



(Ministerio de defensa de Colombia, 2009).

As can be seen in the figure, it can be said that economic growth had an inverse behavior to insecurity, so while the economic growth was observed from the beginning of 2002 until the end of 2006, insecurity declined.



These historical and crucial moments referred to the context faced by Lucelia made her think whether to formalize her farm as a natural reserve or not. Formalizing it as a natural reserve made the farm more visible to the public but it could attract the attention of all kinds of people, including illegal armed groups and delinquency. For this reason, visitor's security and herself were under risk because, as we mentioned above, her farm was located in a conflict zone.

Resnatur

Pedro Gomez was Lucelia's friend. He studied Biology at the University of Tolima and had an internship at the town of Anaimé where he met Jorge Rubiano from the National Association of Natural Reserves of the Civil Society (Resnatur). He explained what ResNatur was about to Lucelia, and that was an important factor to Lucelia's decision of inviting Jorge Rubiano to visit her farm. She did not want to make any important decision of applying to formalize in ResNatur.

ResNatur was a non-profit organization created by non-governmental organizations and by people who owned places that contained an environmental landscape. ResNatur also worked for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in Colombia and was endorsed by the Colombian Biodiversity Information System.

Those who applied to formalize with ResNatur wanted to become natural reserves. Once they formalized with ResNatur, they obtained legal ownership of the land and registered internally on the Runap (Single National Registry of Protected Areas).

The registration gave each farm the denomination as RNSC (Natural Reserve of the Civil Society), and was defined by the article 109 of the law 99 of 1993 as part of a total of a property that preserved a part of an ecosystem and was managed under the principles of sustainability in the use of natural resources. When a place becomes a RNSC, they had to make a work plan to accomplish the goals set by the law.

The RNSC had the main objective of potentiate habitats for endangered species of flora and fauna, increase the number of ecosystems in danger and preserve seeds to secure the feeding of the present and future. That is why the work of the RNSC focused on the knowledge and preservation of the biological diversity, the water sources and their influence zones (Peñuela, Castro & Ocampo, 2011).

To sum up, to become a legal natural reserve, the owner of the land had to register on the Runap (Single National Registry of Protected Areas). ResNatur only offered the owner a certification that the reserve was part of ResNatur. However, the main objective of being part of ResNatur was to share a place where everybody had the same goal: the preservation of the natural ecosystem of their region.

Land owners started to group up in 1992. In May of 2006 ResNatur had 234 natural reserves associated around Colombia, with more than 59.000 hectares in 24 states from Colombia in



24 States dedicated to preserve the beauty and the biodiversity of different environments in Colombia.

RUNAP

According to the website of RUNAP (2018), the Unique National Registry of Protected Areas (RUNAP) was a platform that served as a tool for environmental authorities to register their protected areas. The purpose was to know how many and which are the protected areas, where the areas are located, what areas to protect and their regime of land use. Likewise, these areas constituted the National System of Protected Areas (SINAP).

The environmental authorities are the entities in charge of entering and updating the information of the protected areas, the authorities will also be able to enter additional information that they consider adequate about their protected areas. All this information can be consulted through the reports that are generated in the platform.

A protected area is a geographically defined area that has as its goal to reach conservation goals. There are several types of protected areas and, according to this, they correspond to a category of management, a category that indicates their form of governance, management scale and the activities that may or may not be carried out in their territory. The name given to the set of protected areas, their actors and strategies for preservation is SINAP.

Tourism in Colombia

In Colombia, tourism had been well received and it had been an economic possibility for the country since it had very special geographical features, variety of fauna and flora and unique cultural conditions. We observed that tourism had been a fundamental income field for the national economy, but this was also strongly affected by all the events and acts of war that were taking place in almost all of Colombia.

Statistical studies mentioned the increase that had been presented in relation to the number of tourists who visited Colombian landscapes. These figures were confirmed by a study of Proexport Colombia:

Table 2: Tourist Arrivals 2002-2005

	2002	2003	Dif %	2004	Dif %	2005	Dif %
DAS Aerial	507.389	550.654	8,53	700.891	27,28	833.550	18,93
DAS land	57.897	72.596	25,39	88.092	21,35	97.260	10,41
Bank of the Republic land	455.754	386.436	-15,21	689.262	78,36	357.021	-48,20
Cruise ships	94.360	42.609	-54,84	49.284	15,67	48.115	-2,37
TOTAL	1.115.400	1.052.295	-5,66	1.527.529	45,16	1.335.946	-12,54

(Ministerio de Comercio, Industria y Turismo. 2006).

"Visits were concentrated in 10 cities; in the others, the influx of visitors has been reduced, according to figures from Proexport based on DAS data on the arrival of visitors to the country. 85 percent of travelers were concentrated in Bogotá, Cartagena, Medellín, Cali and San Andrés, according to DAS accounts. They were followed in preference by Barranquilla, Cúcuta, Pereira, Bucaramanga and Santa Marta.

Fifty percent of international travelers had Bogotá as their final destination, a figure that triples the influx of tourists to cities with a tourist vocation, such as Cartagena. The capital received 416,895 travelers in 2005 to 517,642 in 2006, a 24.2% growth.

The city in which the flow of foreigners grew the most was Santa Marta, with a 56.9% increase in the number of visitors (from 7,601 tourists in 2005 to 11,923 in 2006). San Andres was stagnated with an increase of only 5.3%, from 58,046 to 61,103 foreign tourists.

Cartagena, the other city with sea and beach, had an increase of foreign travelers of 12.3% from 105,037 visitors in 2005 to 128,972 in 2006. Medellín went from 71,213 passengers in 2005 to 95,026 foreign passengers in 2006, Medellín tourism grew 33,8%. Cali increased 8.3% (travelers went from 69,229 to 86,979). Barranquilla went from 38,901 passengers to 44,602, which represented an increase of 4.2%.

In intermediate cities like Cúcuta, Pereira and Bucaramanga, travelers also increased. While these destinations grew, the rest of the Colombian cities, among them Armenia, tourist head of the Coffee Axis, fell 51.7%. That is, they went from 129,814 tourists to 62,707.

Trends in National Tourism

According to the main newspaper of the country at the time, El Tiempo, national tourists preferred to travel to Antioquia, Bogotá, Boyacá, Cartagena, Caldas, Cauca, Cundinamarca, Cesar, Huila, Magdalena, Meta, Tolima, San Andrés, Santander, Valle del Cauca and Eje Cafetero, among other destinations. According to Cotelco, the end of the year-season was the one that most Colombians took advantage of to go on vacation, thanks to promotions and safety on national roads.



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