

Comparative Study In Two Communities Of Antioquia Based On The Reconstruction Of The Social Fabric

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Abstract

The comparative analysis presented here stems from the synergy, coherence, and cohesion found in research on the reconstruction of the social fabric through physical activity, sport, and recreation in Vallejuelos and the Reposo district. These studies were conducted using a mixed-method approach using the Research Action Participation methodology. The results jointly demonstrated the importance of movement for social consolidation, teamwork, and leadership as a social articulation element. In both regions, the need for sports venues, the training of stakeholders, and the lack of public policies in the established areas of physical activity, recreation, and sport were evident.

The objective of the comparative study was focused on highlighting the differences and similarities in social interaction and how the three pillars of physical activity, recreation, and sport enable processes of social fabric and to inform the approach to interventions in the target populations.

Methodologically, a comparative study based on the Meta-synthesis technique was used, with an approach that integrates qualitative results, to achieve deep and meaningful understandings expressed by the communities of Reposo and Vallejuelos, recognizing collective voices and experiences that transcend the academic, as well as the challenges and commitments to social and community transformation.

The results are presented in three sections: the findings and significant manifestations in the community of Vallejuelos, the findings and definition of categories in the community of the Reposo district, and a comparison of the findings of the components of physical activity, recreation, and sport in each of the territories studied.

Keywords: Sport, Physical Activity, Recreation, Reconstruction, Social Fabric

INTRODUCTION

The reconstruction of the social fabric (RETESO) opened up to new community contexts that allowed the identification of the characteristics of the intervention process. As a central idea, it was proposed to carry out a comparative work between two experiences: the one developed in the community of the Vallejuelos sector of the Las Margaritas neighborhood

of Medellín, entitled "**Reconstruction of the Social Fabric from Physical Activity, Recreation and Sports in Vallejuelos**", and the research "**Reconstruction of the Social Fabric from Physical Activity, Recreation and Sports in the community of El Reposo in the Municipality of Apartadó-Antioquia**". Both studies were approached from a mixed approach and, in their qualitative component, they were supported by the Participatory Action (PAR) research methodology.

The analysis of both studies was developed through a comparative case study with a cross-sectional thematic analysis approach, combined with elements of meta-synthesis, based on the characterization and joint construction between community and academia in each context. These research processes show particularities of each community, which, despite their cultural, social, economic and contextual differences, reflected behaviors that are favorable to community restoration processes.

In this case, we sought to deepen the analysis of the particularities of each community and the way in which they aligned themselves with cultural concepts, as well as the way in which they experienced their processes of reconstruction of the social fabric through the three fundamental pillars of the RETESO model: physical activity, recreation and sport Rubio et al., (2022) and Gnette & Hernández-Peña, (2019).

Gutiérrez García (2025) and Vásquez Russi (2020) highlighted that sport, being a sociocultural practice with integrating potential, constituted a strategic instrument for peacebuilding in contexts marked by structural violence. Its transformative potential was manifested in the vindication of fundamental rights and in the reconstruction of the social fabric fractured by the armed conflict in Colombia.

It is important to highlight that the comparative analysis evidenced differences and similarities in social interaction and allowed us to understand how the three pillars – physical activity, recreation and sport – promoted processes of reconstruction of the social fabric. It also made it possible to distinguish the methodological approaches used to address community intervention in the populations under study. In this sense, recent literature highlighted that community sport was a key space for governance and peacebuilding in territories affected by conflict (Mejía & Ponciano, 2024).

To this end, in the case of El Reposo, the study made it possible to identify variables and potentialities in the sports pillar. Spontaneous and directed recreation was an opportunity to unite people through play, assuming this pillar as the possibility of weaving community. Physical activity, as the complementary pillar, contributed to community processes from the promotion of healthy lifestyles, integrating the population of all ages as a converging factor towards physical and mental health. In addition, it was aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically those of health and well-being (SDG 3) and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16). Recent research confirmed that physical activity programs with a community focus strengthened social sustainability and improved the perception of collective well-being (Paez et al., 2024; World Health Organization WHO, 2023).

For its part, the research in the Vallejuelos sector, Las Margaritas neighborhood of Medellín, focused on determining whether community leaders applied pedagogical methodologies that contributed to the reconstruction of the social fabric. An intervention proposal was designed that, from the three pillars, strengthened psychosocial values such as responsibility, respect and a sense of belonging, contributing to the reduction of risks and aggressions in children, adolescents and young people. This type of intervention responded to what was proposed by Vuković et al. (2024), who stressed that community initiatives must dialogue with peace policies and human rights frameworks to consolidate sustainable changes.

The research in Vallejuelos showed that it was vital for leaders to empower themselves in their community to achieve sustainable projects, while in El Reposo the urgency of using the sports pillar as a tool for social prevention in vulnerable contexts was highlighted. Therefore, the combination of both perspectives was strengthened from the understanding of the bilateral approach that the reconstruction of the social fabric required, supporting self-management and the design of specific interventions based on the particular needs of each territory.

In both investigations, dialogue was debated with ancestral, social and community knowledge, in order to build peace in their territories. In this sense, territorial and environmental peace approaches demonstrated that communities could rebuild their social relationships through collective projects that integrated sports, recreation, and sustainable management of the environment (Human Ecology, 2023).

It is necessary to take into account the context of both communities, which carried out their activities in conditions of social vulnerability, framed in problems of violence, trafficking and consumption of psychoactive substances and processes of educational exclusion. As a result, communities used the empirical practices and experience of their leaders to keep the practice of sport and recreation alive. The main difference lay in an interpretative nuance: while El Reposo perceived community construction from its socio-sporting principles, in Vallejuelos the focus was on intervention aimed at confronting and recognizing structural problems (Bernate et al., 2019).

METHODOLOGY

This research was based on a comparative study based on the Meta-synthesis technique, defined by Ferreira (2022) as an approach that integrates qualitative research results, not limited to comparative description, but aimed at achieving deeper and more significant understandings. In the context of the communities of El Reposo and Vallejuelos, this approach acquired a special value, as it allowed the recognition of collective voices and experiences as sources of knowledge that transcended the academic and became tools for social and community transformation.

This approach coincided with recent research that demonstrated how the reconstruction of the social fabric in vulnerable contexts was strengthened by integrating community experiences with perspectives of environmental and cultural peace (Human Ecology, 2023). Therefore, in this research, a systematic analysis of the information was carried out, based on the evidence collected through surveys applied to the communities, through which the contexts were characterized and the perceptions of the community actors about the learning achieved during the intervention process were identified. From a qualitative approach, they analyzed the data related to the consolidation of significant learning in the reconstruction of the social fabric and its impact on the development of strategies and themes specific to physical activity, sports and recreation.

It is necessary to understand that in both researches the participatory action research (PAR) methodology was proposed and constituted the articulating axis of the processes. Pérez-Van-Leenden (2019) defined it as:

An effective method to associate the problems of different types of groups through their own experiences and contributions, so that the transformation of the causes that originate the problems that affect the relationships of the actors in the social context in which they develop is achieved. In addition, it promotes strategic social integration, which links the community in its needs (p. 187).

This methodology fostered the significant participation of communities in decision-making, and facilitated the formulation of sociocultural and sports proposals adjusted to

each territory. Therefore, the processes of rapprochement and dynamization were developed with the purpose of consolidating the three fundamental pillars – sports, recreation and physical activity – as builders of peace and coexistence, and, consequently, as means for the reconstruction of the social fabric.

These results coincided with the contributions of Rubio et al. (2022) who underline the importance of participatory evaluation as a mechanism for community sustainability and the social appropriation of knowledge. It was also shown that PAR strengthened social cohesion, increased collective trust and promoted community leadership in social intervention processes.

RESULTS

The results were presented in three moments, first the findings in the Vallejuelos sector were described in the three pillars of the RETESO model: physical activity, recreation and sports; second, the findings of such pillars in the community of El Reposo were presented; and third, the findings of the three components in each of the territories studied were compared.

In the Vallejuelos sector, the needs in sports, recreation and physical activity were identified by identifying the importance that the community attributed to the social contribution to the improvement of psychophysical health, coexistence, peace and the reconstruction of the social fabric, where they acted as mediators based on specific experiences and learning. Likewise, the interest in academic training and the formation of clubs as organizational structures that convened, brought together and generated synergies of a social nature was highlighted. Finally, the importance of leadership in the groups was evidenced. The relevant problems and needs were highlighted as the lack of adequate scenarios and spaces for carrying out activities and movement, the lack of community awareness for respect for play and movement spaces, the importance of establishing training spaces that would allow coexistence, cultural promotion and social development. The absence of the state and professionals who promoted the proper use of free time and leisure time also prevailed. The young people expressed the importance of having alternatives to get out of the routine and with activities that would improve interaction with reality, to contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric, the consolidation of peace in the territory and the contribution to mental health in the community. In line with the findings of Van der Veken et al. (2020), recognized community sports programs acted not only on physical condition, but also on experiential learning processes, self-efficacy, and social cohesion.

To explore the elements of reconstruction of the social fabric in the focus groups, it is based on the fact that 98.2% of the community identified sports, physical activity and recreation as key and determining elements. Important elements such as fun, socialization, confidence, and enjoyment of life were established. Likewise, in the community meetings, cultural diversity, conflict, the need to improve the quality of life and the importance of training as a dynamic space and generator of actions for the reconstruction of the social fabric were made visible. The construction of public policies that made it possible to improve social processes and the social transformation of the territory also emerged from routes defined and designed for physical activity, recreation and sports, where play was presented as an instrument of dynamization and social articulation, with broad and decisive community participation.

Regarding the design of the intervention proposal from physical activity, recreation and sports for reconstruction, dialogue and meeting with children, young people, adults and older adults was established, achieving social cohesion, conflict resolution based on community participation and social interaction from sports. Massification was promoted

as a mechanism for collective and individual mitigation of needs, and physical activity to move with motivations such as improving health, weight loss, improving quality of life and social encounter. These interactions and findings were significant, as they allowed the consolidation of elements, contents and strategies defined in the model of reconstruction of the social fabric. In accordance with the active communities strategies proposed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2025), the designed environment favored social interconnection and the comprehensive improvement of the territory.

Overall, when analyzing and combining the findings, the community and each of its actors undoubtedly revealed that physical activity, recreation and sports not only contributed individually to the consolidation of the being, significant learning from movement and enjoyment as a fundamental characteristic of play, but they also allowed interaction and joint work to rebuild community, work in an articulated way and make it possible to measure the conflict, build territories in peace and rebuild the social fabric.

From the open coding process, in accordance with the perception of the community and the different actors, it was possible to identify categories such as physical activity and social interaction, from which subcategories such as quality of life, health, conflict mediation and social interaction were derived; community recreation with underlying subcategories such as communication, values and teamwork and sports in the territory where subcategories such as talents, training and peace were derived, which were articulated to consolidate the queen category defined as reconstruction of the social fabric, recognized for the study as RETESO.

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For the community of El Reposo, the establishment of the RETESO semantic network was highlighted, which became throughout the analysis the macro category, of which relevant words such as activities, community, social participation, development and leadership were highlighted, which allowed understanding and interpreting the appreciations from the different instruments, where three categories were highlighted, namely, relationships associated with sports, physical activity and recreation, sports and educational entities as part of leadership and sports scenarios and society that is part of limitations and reconstruction.

Specifically delving into each of the categories identified, the following aspects were highlighted:

In the Relationships category, the importance of these reverting to the represented community, in the interaction of the adult with the child, where together they rebuilt society, supported by the synergy between sports, physical activity and recreation, was highlighted. In this category, the power of recreation in communities was highlighted: the reconstruction of the social fabric was achieved through participation and comprehensive accompaniment, spontaneously and freely, with the articulation of values in a transversal way and play as a fundamental part of community formation. From play, sensations and emotions were transmitted and transmuted for a healthy competition. Physical activity was activated to improve health, take advantage of free time and socialize values such as respect, and as a fundamental route of community.

In the "Sport" category, it was found that this was the most extensive and relevant due to the number of links and social networks, the existing talent and the competition, being

more representative in the results of the female sex, harmonious participation, integration and inclusion, joint work and leadership of young people, inviting them to participate in different modalities.

In the category "Sports and educational entities", subcategories such as sports scenarios and leadership became visible and fundamental; The entities were those that provided support and opportunities to the community for the practice of sports, recreation and physical activity, developed within the territory. Educational institutions and community action boards were recognized by the community as fundamental actors, but at the same time the need to strengthen ties and assume greater co-responsibility for a consolidated social transformation in the territory was evident. The need to have more spaces, generate training programs and lead initiatives that would contribute to the reconstruction of the social fabric accompanied by a greater and better quality of life was raised.

Therefore, leadership emerged in a dynamic and articulated way to the semantic network, in what is directly related to sports and educational entities, where in addition to strengths from the internal dynamics of these organizations, gaps were also found in the internal exercise of the social context, requiring more effective and manifest figures in the community. Directly in the issue of sports scenarios, a critical knot emerged for the community and reconstruction, due to the limited access and the absence of adequate spaces for the practice of sports, the performance of physical activity and meetings through the recreation of the community, so public policies are required for the advancement of community infrastructure. of adequate conditions, equitable access and active participation of the community.

From the axial category "Society" it was identified that it is part of the central structure of Reteso in the semantic network, being a dynamic framework that integrates the limitations and the reconstruction of the social fabric. In it, a space for transformation was revealed and revealed, the ability to generate community fabric from ethnic and generational differences. Since the Reconstruction, the voices of the community and a living structure with difficulties and limitations were heard, but convinced of the ability to rebuild, reorganize, rethink and project itself from collective processes, with a perspective of social articulation, where social ties are strengthened through participation, cultural practice and interaction with sports, recreation and physical activity. as structured pretexts for encounter, community commitment and the resignification of the everyday.

From the comparative exercise, it was possible to say that Vallejuelos is a sector of the Las Margaritas neighborhood, which has a population hit by violence, displaced in high numbers and with precarious social and economic situations. The township of El Reposo in the Municipality of Apartado, is located in Urabá Antioquia in a large physical space, divided by the main road, with economic difficulties, few job opportunities and low presence of the state for educational, sports, physical activity and recreation matters.

Similar findings that draw attention are: the lack of sports scenarios for the development of sports, physical activity and recreation; little availability of the educational institution for the loan of the scenarios and the development of proposals for social impact, and the leadership exercised by young people and older adults with the interest and firm purpose of generating alternatives for social transformation, the generation of spaces for the mediation of conflict and a special interest in sports, physical activity and recreation as mechanisms for the improvement of health, healthy lifestyles and the resignification, construction and reconstruction of the social fabric.

DISCUSSION

To establish the comparative findings, it was relevant to highlight that both studies were carried out under the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. In this case, the analysis was developed under a comparative case study approach and cross-sectional thematic analysis, complemented with meta-synthesis elements. The purpose was to identify meeting points and significant differences that would allow generating theoretical interpretations and proposing lines of action aimed at strengthening the processes in the reconstruction of the social fabric through physical activity, recreation and sports. To this end, intergenerational relations, educational and sports entities, sports scenarios, community participation, structural limitations, impact on the reconstruction of the social fabric and projection and sustainability were chosen as analysis variables.

In **intergenerational relations**, it was observed that in Vallejuelos the protagonism was in the hands of young people, who promoted healthy habits and lifestyles, generating cohesion among peers, although there was little leadership from the elderly. In contrast, in El Reposo, a respectful and cooperative interaction prevailed between children, young people and older adults. The latter contributed their knowledge over the years, guiding social actions, and highlighting their leadership in sports and recreational activities. The cross-cutting meta-synthesis showed that generational exchange acted as a preponderant factor for the cohesion and articulation of the actors, highlighting sport as a symbolic generational bridge of social integration, in coherence with the perspective of sociocultural learning proposed by Vygotsky (1978).

Regarding **educational and sports entities**, in Vallejuelos a permanent demand for public policies and the search for institutional support was visible. However, the limited institutional and community management for collective benefit was evident. In El Reposo, the presence of the educational institution, the municipal sports entity and the Colombian Polytechnic Jaime Isaza Cadavid, with a weak institutional and social articulation, for the opening and provision of scenarios for the practice of sports, physical activity and community recreation. In a cross-cutting way, both contexts reflected the need to strengthen inter-institutional cooperation for the management of sustainable community programs. This coincided with those exposed by Pérez and Hernández (2018), who highlighted the importance of solid collaborative structures in social processes, where the strategic role of institutions is recognized, but a weak community institutional articulation for management and satisfaction of social needs stands out.

As for the **sports venues**, in Vallejuelos the lack of stages, the deterioration and insufficiency of adequate spaces became evident, being urgent the management, provision and generation of parks and courts for social gathering. In the Reposo the sports facilities and green areas are also limited, access is conditioned to the will of the institutions and there are restrictions for community use. The meta-synthesis showed the lack and precariousness of infrastructure, which requires planning, investment, and the presence of the state, and calls for equity in access to venues for enjoyment, as indicated by recent studies on sports infrastructure and territorial equity (Rojas & Patiño, 2022).

From community **participation**, Vallejuelos was characterized by the active participation of young people who show a strong interest in sports and physical activity, and are aware of the importance of recreation as a space for social integration with a perspective of improving the mental and physical health of the community. In El Reposo, community participation was broad, where the elderly are references, and in recreational activities they shared with children and young people, strengthening themselves in values and social cohesion. In the meta-synthesis, it was established that participation was a central axis for both territories, differentiating only by the predominant age groups in leadership. These

findings were aligned with what was proposed by Muñoz and Serrano (2021), who argued that intergenerational participation strengthens the sense of community and support networks.

In the **structural limitations**, it was evident that in Vallejuelos, the scarcity of spaces, the low motivation in some population sectors, the lack of clear public policies and state accompaniment. In El Reposo, violence, intolerance, the lack of adequate scenarios and the absence of institutional leadership prevail, which generates visible social instability and the fragmentation of the community. From the Metasynthesis, findings are evidenced from the limitations related to infrastructure, public order and leadership, but also, they showed strategies of union and community alliances in search of the mitigation of limitations and generating alliances for the solution of these. This behavior corresponded to what was proposed by Castellanos and Mora (2020), who pointed out that social resilience emerges from collective action in the face of structural deficiencies.

In relation to the **impact on the reconstruction of the social fabric**, in Vallejuelos physical activity, recreation and sports functioned as tools for social integration and strengthening coexistence, highlighting the need to institutionalize social and community practices. In El Reposo, the three pillars are perceived as means for cohesion, coexistence, inclusion and the health of the community. In both cases, reconstruction is understood as a dynamic and articulating process. The meta-synthesis demonstrates that sports, physical activity and recreation are mediators of conflict, social catalysts and mechanisms conducive to the generation of territories in peace, social reconstruction is understood as a continuous, sustained and permanent process. These results reaffirmed the view that sport acts as a mediator of conflict and catalyzed peace (Gómez et al., 2021).

In terms of **projection and sustainability**, in Vallejuelos the need for clear public policies in infrastructure and sustainability of programs for youth and the community in general was observed. For El Reposo, the need for strategic alliances with the institutions that are present in the territory was raised, to strengthen sustainable community processes. The meta-synthesis focused on the need to establish inter-institutional cooperation strategies, community training, and the continuity of social programs, which coincided with Hernández and López's (2023) approaches to social sustainability from participatory management.

The comparative analysis between these two territories allowed us to delve into the dynamics of reconstruction of the social fabric through physical activity, sport and recreation, in coherence with the principles of PAR, which was pertinent in integrating the voices of the community and recognizing the territories as active agents of social change (Fals Borda, 1987). In both contexts, the theses of Stake (1995) and Yin (2018) were confirmed by demonstrating that comparative case studies make it possible to find common patterns and particularities that enrich theoretical understanding. The categories analyzed – intergenerational relations, community participation, educational and sports entities, scenarios, structural constraints and sustainability – emerged as transversal axes.

From the perspective of social relations, in El Reposo the elderly led the community management, while in Vallejuelos young people predominate as determining social actors. This confirms Vygotsky's (1978) thesis, in which learning and the social construction of knowledge are generated in intergenerational interaction, where sport and recreation acted as mediators of interaction and cultural transmission. From the meta-synthesis, it is evident that intergenerationality is key in the reconstruction of the social fabric.

The findings agree that the role of educational and sports institutions is strategic. Weak institutional coordination was also observed, coinciding with Pérez and Hernández (2018), who argued that the absence of sound public policies limits the impact of community programs. The comparison shows that, although communities recognize institutions as

relevant actors, it is self-management and community leadership that reduces tension and compensates for shortcomings, to become an opportunity for the generation of response. The precariousness of sports venues is a recurring finding in both contexts. The structural limitation was found, regarding the need for meaningful educational experiences: without adequate spaces, the practice of sports and recreation loses continuity and sustainability. However, community resilience in both territories demonstrated that play, recreation and sports transcend infrastructure and become mechanisms of social cohesion, even in adverse conditions. This reinforces what Testa et al. (2023) have argued, where they state that the social impact of a sports centre in a community significantly influenced future intentions to use the building and community integration.

Regarding the common limitations, such as violence, intolerance and the scarcity of scenarios, they were compensated from the strengthening of the community social fabric, led by older adults in El Reposo and by young people in Vallejuelos. This finding reaffirmed what Zambrano (2018) expressed about the role of collective experiences in the transformation of social life.

Finally, both cases provided evidence of the role of sport, recreation and physical activity as mediators of conflict and catalysts for peace. This conclusion dialogues with the perspective of Greenwalt (2016), who highlights that the experiences lived in the community can be projected towards subsequent transformation processes. Thus, the reconstruction of the social fabric is not understood as a final result, but as a dynamic process sustained by community participation.

Although throughout research and academic production it is possible to identify publications related to topics such as peace, leadership, teamwork, conflict mediation and community building, the gaps in publications on the reconstruction of the social fabric, and the effects of sports, physical activity and recreation in different population contexts are evident.

CONCLUSIONS

As a result of the comparative analysis, the importance of research was evidenced, when developing metasynthesis processes, with studies whose object of knowledge is the same or similar. This approach allowed us to identify significant related and convergent findings, and others that make visible the differences at the level of the movement and the social component of the communities studied.

Throughout the research journey in the two territories addressed, Vallejuelos and El Reposo, phenomena presented as occurrences were powerfully striking, such as the lack of scenarios, the importance of leadership as the articulating axis of the community and the identification of the reconstruction of the social fabric through physical activity, recreation and sports. where conflict mediation, peacebuilding, social work and the consolidation of the social fabric are highlighted as factors of social transformation.

Likewise, the absence of state presence through different recognized strategies in the field of sports and physical activity was confirmed, as well as the lack of coordination and proposals of educational institutions, and the need for synergies in favor of the solution of community problems such as teamwork, the design of joint proposals and the generation of public policies that improve and transform the social environment.

It is necessary not only to continue interacting with the communities and different actors of Vallejuelos and El Reposo, but also to establish mechanisms for sports training, physical activity and recreation, which provide tools to the community to replicate the physical, mental and social benefits accompanied by healthy lifestyles, the use of free time and the improvement of quality of life.

As a result of the research in both territories, it was possible to define the Model of Reconstruction of the social fabric through physical activity, recreation and sports, which should be implemented, tested, adjusted and made available to the academic community and community managers for its contextual application. This model constitutes a methodological and conceptual contribution that guides future social interventions from sports and recreational praxis.

Finally, the research process reaffirmed the need to continue researching and generating academic production of a social and qualitative nature, aimed at generating tools for reflection, discussion, construction and design of proposals for the transformation and sustainability of the social fabric in diverse community contexts.

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