

# *360° Amateur Creativities: I survived.* Resignifications of stories of the Colombian Armed Conflict<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

*360° Amateur Creativities* is conceived as a project to reflect through digital art, on the various topics of the public and media agenda. This article gives an account of the first investigative stage of the project that resulted in the collective creation of a multimedia virtual reality based on 360° photography, that addressed as a topic the stories of victims of the Colombian armed conflict. The stories collected by *Rutas del Conflicto* within the framework of the project *I survived*, were taken as a starting point. Process that involved conceptualizing, exploring and creating around what it means to narrate (oneself) through unconventional ways in front of critical issues such as the painful line of time of the Colombian armed conflict. It is concluded that, although the mediated experience does not fully enhance creativity, it does allow for the construction of immersive hypertexts about the armed conflict, evidencing alternative ways of connecting with the story of the other.

**Keywords:** Multimedia communication; Virtual reality; Digital art; Amateur creativities; Peace; Conflict.

## 1. Introduction

The word peace is used by the naive who confuse the absence of direct violence with peace and do not understand that the work of making and building peace

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- 1 The *360° Amateur Creativities* Project, was born from the classroom experience of the course called Communication and participation in digital media offered to students of Social Communication and Journalism at Universidad - Uniminuto (Main Office). The article gives an account of the first immersive product generated from this research experience. It is a multimedia called *Creatividades Amateurs 360 °: I survived* available at: <https://roundme.com/tour/218931/view/609914/>
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is about to begin as the least naive who know that and do not want that work to begin. Thus, the word peace becomes a very effective instrument for blocking peace (Galtung, 1998, p. 13).

The contemporary society is in the times of the abduction of the image, in scenarios of resignification of symbolic forms in the digital network in which any citizen, as a prosumer, can generate infinite multimedia expressions to communicate personal or collective stories, many of them ignored for the media agenda of the mass media.

This panorama outlines a potential opportunity for citizens, who now have greater possibilities of access, creation and circulation on behalf of the current digital networks, since they have important volumes of information, they are with few clicks and intuitive pressures with buds on interactive mobile screens. Every day more technified and integrated devices that invite the user not only to have access, but also to have the possibility to create and share with others their representations of the world. Yes, plurality scenarios, as recognized by the International Telecommunication Union (2015), still far from the desired ideal, product of socio-economic gaps in many geographies<sup>3</sup> and the growing vigilance of those who regulate the environment.

In this way, the objective of this article aims to describe the main elements of a first experience called *I survived*, carried out within the framework of the project called *360° Amateur Creativities*, which aims to explore how amateur creativity, supported by art digital, can contribute to the citizen to reflect and build other narratives in front of topics present in the public and media agenda of their territory. In this case, focused on stories of survivors of massacres occurred in that dark line of terror that generated the Colombian armed conflict. The project by its same casuistry, invites to investigate how the reinterpretation and digitalization of immaculate images coming from traditional art can diversify the ways of the citizen to narrate (himself). It also poses additional challenges such as analyzing the amateur creatives built by the citizens participating in the project to identify their degrees of correspondence with the topics that circulate in the public and media agenda. Some theoretical aspects that underlie the experience, the context of the chosen theme, and the crucial role of social communicators in training who officiated as citizens participated in the realization of a first immersive multimedia product, will be some of the aspects in which the text will stop along the way to, at least, enunciate crucial items in the amateur creativities generated in this cybercultural experience.

## 2. Some theoretical considerations

*360° Amateur Creativities* project, is based on three key theoretical aspects: digital media and cyberculture as a setting for creation, digital art as a catalyst for social change processes and alternative communication as those resonances different from those coming from the mass media of information.

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3 “The Connect 2020 Agenda aims to ensure that at least 55% of households around the world have access to the Internet by 2020, compared to 46.4% estimated in 2015” (ITU, 2015, p.3).

In the first instance, the project reflects the Cyberculture from the integrating perspective that Pierre Lévy exhibits, who defines it as that "(...) set of techniques (material and intellectual), of practices, of attitudes, of ways of thinking and of the values that are developed jointly in the growth of cyberspace" (2007, p. 1). It is an approach that assumes the arrival of technologies related to the Internet and telecommunications as a platform that promotes three principles in contemporary societies: "(...) interconnection, the creation of virtual communities and collective intelligence" (Lévy, 2007, p. 99). However, with an especially strong emphasis on the fact that new techniques should not generate opacity in human processes, in the socio-cultural tissues that ultimately give life to the rhizome of offline and online social networks.

Therefore, Cyberculture has to do with "(...) generate, increase, improve, and share the skills to lead, direct and pilot social relationships, in an exercise of collective, horizontal and participatory self-management" (González, 2011, p. 13). A premise that reinforces the idea that a cybercultural phenomenon does not mean that digital technologies are used intensively and uncritically (González, 2004, p. 36). From the creation or resignification of the existing symbolic forms will reside, to a large extent, the possibility of going from a mere act of transmission to scenarios more focused on the construction of true intelligences united and energized by the technologies of the moment. Hence, virtuality must become a node of encounter, confluence and a hypertext where there is full communication among its participants (Lévy, 2007). In this way, the Cyberculture can be considered as a platform for creativity, empowerment and the construction of online communities (Bonilla, cited in Rueda, 2008).

This is how the emergence of virtual communities and the work of collective intelligences, very much in the style of the adhocrate smart mobs described by Howard Rheingold (2004), have covered various fields of action. One of the most interesting, due to its robust presence in cyberspace, has been art, where the digitized image has put an infinite raw material for diverse users that artists do or experience every day with the possibilities of creation that makes internet possible.

In this way digital<sup>4</sup> art stands as a crystallization of the heritage of outstanding movements such as the surrealist of the early twentieth century, which led to the emblematic popularized by the Romanian Tristan Tzara through the Dada manifesto of 1918.

They create from objects of daily use, strange elements for the world of art, new technologies such as film and photography and new materials to create works of art giving them great relevance to the bourgeois class dominant at that time (Potau de la Muela, 2010, p. 1).

What years later would be added to the break generated by the pop art of Andy Warhol to close gaps between the popular and the artistic, as well as cracking the classical idea of art as a set of unique pieces and carriers of that unique and enduring aura exposed by Walter Benjamin (1989)<sup>5</sup>.

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4 "All those works for which the technologies based on telecommunication networks (not only internet) with sufficient and necessary condition for their existence, being essential to access any of these networks to be able to experience them" (Martín-Prada, 2015, p.14).

5 "The aura was Benjamin's way of referring to how the history to which a work of art has been subjected, in the course of its survival is what determines its full authority. Hence the exacerbated effort of man to trace

From digital art, the most remembered facet may be that of the first wave of artists that, under the label of *net.art*<sup>6</sup>, a few years after the creation of the internet, began experimenting with essentially instrumental elements of computing (programming codes), demonstrating quickly that they could generate artistic productions, that could bring the quotidian, the popular and the massive with many of the meta stories that the most traditional art has carried for centuries. They are no longer immaculate and cultured images but rather raw materials that can contribute to the reflection of contemporary sociocultural problems.

With *net.art*, a new form of political and critical art was created that reflects the most burning issues and changes of our time, and concentrates with special intensity on the social and communicative transformations that are taking place today (Wolf, 2009, p. 131).

Beyond the term that is preferred to refer to the phenomenon<sup>7</sup>, what is interesting about net art is that in its bet, it privileges communicative benefits over aesthetics more frequently.

Here any citizen has potential to be part of an artistic production in the digital. There is no need for specific studies in any branch of art, it may matter rather, the communicative, creative and reflexive capacity of the creator to advocate the available multimedia resources as the articulating axis of the narratives and representations concentrated there (Alvarado, 2017, p. 148).

This is how net art has become one of the revulsives keys, that together, with social mobilizations supported by digital media, have demonstrated the reach of virtual communities (15M, #YoSoy132, Arab Spring), where one of the recurring features it has, has been the search for collective intelligences based on the use of unconventional ways to communicate, to narrate, to share ideas, reflections and criticisms about different topics with others. Social emergency that has driven the popularization of amateur creatives, as an amateur production, artisanal, in other terms, that enhanced by internet and new techniques, evidence the abduction of images of all kinds (even the most immaculate) for a range of poetics visuals (remixes, mashup) that users share daily and put into tension various socio-cultural aspects related to their territory, with their events (Alvarado, 2017; Martín-Prada, 2015). Perhaps it is for many productions exacerbated in repetition and imitation, but it is also symbolic productions that show the transit of contemporary<sup>8</sup> cultural goods, of those mainstream cultures reflected by Martel (2011).

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the history of a work and submit it to chemical tests that support its authenticity” (Alvarado, 2018, p. 39).

6 “Digital art has become a discipline that brings together all those artistic manifestations carried out with a computer (...). However, not all digital representation is art. The border is imprecise, especially because digital art combines art, science and technology to a large extent” (Wolf, 2009, p. 11).

7 The conceptualization of digital art is still open to debates about the search for a definition of reference. Given the growing visibility of artistic practices on the Internet, several terms emerged in the nineties to try to group them: web art, net art .and net art, to name just a few (Alvarado, 2017; Martín-Prada, 2015).

8 It is inevitable to recognize that the creative amateur production is full of repetition and imitation, that the samples of singularity in it are always statistically insignificant in relation to the number of the participants, something that, on the other hand, many of the professional artistic creations that have made of the web 2.0 its main context of reference and research insist again and again to emphasize (Martín-Prada, 2015, p. 48).

It is these scenarios of production and resignification of the image that give space for alternative communication to be erected as a way to react against the canons of the mass media. Confluence for common, local needs, but also generate participatory media productions that may eventually impact the public agenda.

The fundamental aspect in alternative communication is the appropriation of the media (...). The sense of 'appropriation' should be understood as a way of developing one's own community and collective capacity to adopt communication and its means as a coadjutant process of social struggles (Gumucio, 2011, p. 36).

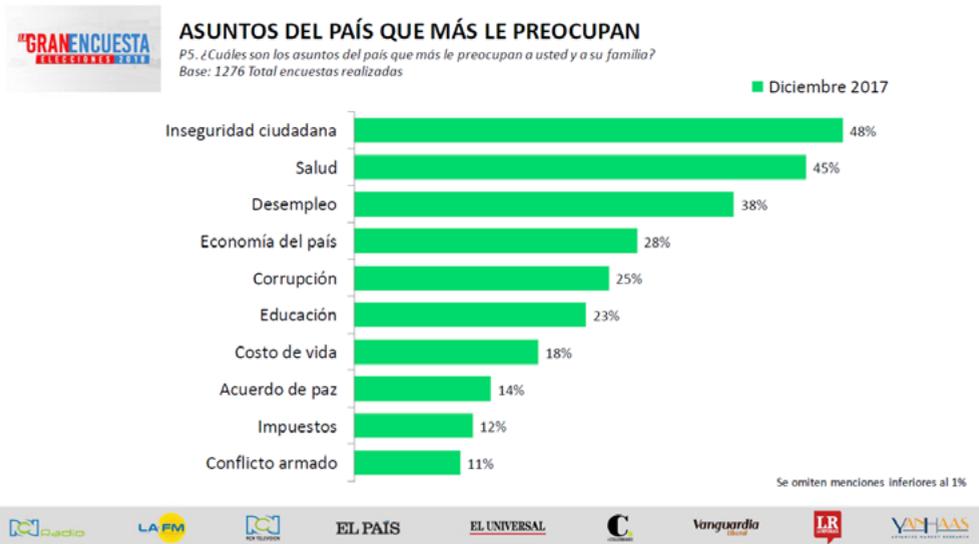
For this search of appropriation of the media (in this case the internet), the *Amateur Creativities 360°* project, finds in the evolution of the media and public agenda of the Colombian territory, a series of aspects that are worth exploring, reflecting on and discuss, not only because of their social relevance, but also because of the disparagement (informative lightness) that many mass media do about issues, for example, the Colombian armed conflict. Hence, it is pertinent to create a context.

Negotiations between the Colombian government and the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - People's Army), and seeking to reach peace agreements culminated in August 2016. However, that date would be ignored by the public after the attack of the armed group on October 2, only 8 weeks after the signing of the agreements and on the day of the plebiscite, which aimed to ensure that the Colombian population had the possibility of endorsing the agreements reached at the negotiating table in Havana. Does it support the final agreement for the termination of the conflict and the construction of a stable and lasting peace? asks the one that would be answered in said plebiscite. However, as if it were a Greek tragedy, that day of joy that was expected more as a festive vote full of joy and reconciliation, it turned into a polarized and uncertain day. And yes, to the surprise of many, the votes cast a dramatic finish vote, where the No with 50.21% would win by a small margin over the Yes (49.79%), which added to an abstention of more than 60 %, would leave a disappointing scenario in the face of the implementation of peace agreements.

Faced with an evident polarization and disinterest in a good portion of the Colombian population, the year 2017 passed under a blanket of unknowns, symptoms that have been evidenced in measurements of public opinion. Regarding the issues that most concern Colombians, hardly appear in the eighth place peace agreement (14%) and in the tenth armed conflict, with a scant 11% (YanHaas, 2017) (see Figure 1). Similarly, in another measurement carried out by the firm Invamer (2017), Colombians consider that they will implement the agreements with the FARC (2.5%) and sign the peace agreements with the ELN (National Liberation Army), (2, 4%) turn out to be issues that should not be a priority for the next elected president (see Figure 2).

*Citizen insecurity: 48%, Unemployment: 45%, Economy of the country: 38%, Corruption: 25%, Education: 23%, cost of living: 18%, Peace agreement: 14%, Taxes: 12%, Armed conflict: 11%* (see Figure 1)

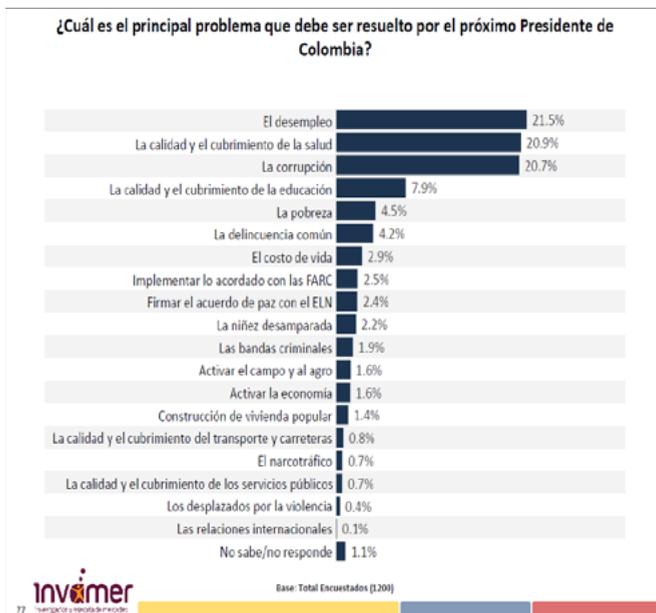
**Figure 1**  
**The big poll elections 2018**



TN: *Matters of the country that most concern you.*

(Source: YanHaas, 2017)

**Figure 2**  
**Measurement financed by Blu Radio, Semana and Caracol Magazine. 2018 Elections**



TN: *What is the main problem that must be resolved by the next president of Colombia?*

(Source: Invamer, 2017)

*Unemployment: 21.5%- Quality and coverage of health: 20.9%- Corruption: 20.7%- Quality and coverage of education: 7.9%- Poverty: 4.5%- Common crime: 4.2%- The cost of living: 2.9%- Implement agreements with the FARC: 2.5%- Sign the peace agreement with the ELN: 2.4%- The neglected child: 2.2%- The criminal gangs: 1.9%- Activation of the field and agriculture: 1.6%- Activation of the economy: 1.6%- Building of popular housing: 1.4%- Quality and coverage of road transport: 0.8%- Quality and coverage of public services: 0.7%- Those displaced by violence: 0.4%- International relations: 0.1%- Do not know not answer* Citizen insecurity: 48%, Unemployment: 45%, Economy of the country: 38%, Corruption: 25%, Education: 23%, cost of living: 18%, Peace agreement: 14%, Taxes: 12%, Armed conflict: 11% (see Figure 2).

### 3. Methodology

In a context of apathy and disinterest on the part of large Colombian population against the peace processes advanced with the guerrilla groups, the question also arises about how up-to-date citizens are (particularly those who inhabit geographies less affected by violence, for example, Bogotá) about the stories of many of the victims of the conflict as an indelible memory of the horrors that have left the war. Question that becomes more critical if a quick glance is given to the panorama of the Colombian mass media, where the media concentration and polarization that only contributes to generate disinformation processes that mask political interests or preferences, instead of an authentic desire to responsibly inform the audience. "People not only receive information through the media on certain issues that occur in the world and are considered a priority, but also learn from them the importance and the emphasis they must give them" (Rodríguez, 2004, p. 15).

In this way, the *Amateur Creatives 360°* project, asks a problematizing question articulating the desire to investigate and find alternative communication in less conventional symbolic productions to, at least, contribute to the construction of memory and the fact of feeling much closer to the armed conflict in the territory, present for decades.

Before the research question, how can amateur creatives, supported by digital art, contribute to the citizen's reflection and construction of other narratives in the face of issues inherent to the public and media agenda of their territory?, several challenges are posed to which aim, such as exploring amateur creativities, supported by digital art, as well as investigating how the reinterpretation and digitalization of immaculate images from traditional art can diversify the ways of the citizen to narrate (himself) in front of themes, in this case, inherent in the Colombian armed conflict. Scenarios that a posteriori, allow to analyze the amateur creatives built by citizens participating in the project to identify their degrees of correspondence with the issues that circulate in the public and media agenda.

Thus, the qualitative methodology of the project, focused its efforts on working together with students of the Social Communication - Journalism program of Uniminuto<sup>9</sup>, who carried out four phases:

- a. *Reflection phase and case studies.* Time in which an approach was given to the concepts and to different experiences that are susceptible to be reflected under the sieve of the cybercultural, putting in tension the social mobilizations supported in the digital social networks, the digital art as another way of narrating and the alternative communication (in digital environments), as that alternative way to traditional and hierarchical ways of communicating. The context given through this first stage contributed to explore and reflect different cases where the participation of multiple social actors dynamizes in digital environments, and outside them, diverse possibilities of participation, as well as encouraging the exploration of other stories that circulate through cyberspace.
- b. *Exploratory phase of the stories I survived.* It was here that the participants had the opportunity to approach stories of survivors of massacres that occurred in the context of the Colombian armed conflict. Thanks to the remarkable research work, carried out by the *Rutas del Conflicto* project<sup>10</sup>, where young people approached more than 30 stories that through the I survived sign, give a much closer perspective of several of the massacres where the civilian population was involved. In this way, *Rutas del Conflicto*, offers free access to web content that allows reading, listening and in some cases to see those who narrate their feelings about how those critical moments where lived. This cartography of the events of the war in Colombia, covers events between 1986 and 2004, an existence that allowed the participants of the *360° Creativies Amateurs* project to know in detail the testimonies of several victims, all this in order to have a sufficient perspective of the massacre issue told by their survivors.
- c. *Phase of problematization and group creation.* In this stage the participants divided into small groups and chose an image corresponding to a painting of the artist of their preference, only under the condition of justifying the relationship between the assigned massacre and the painting. Next, they had to print the chosen painting and, depending on what they considered appropriate, they could color, give relief or add elements to the work, always having as their north, the story that would have corresponded to them. All this, inspired by the collage practice of the Dada movement, a technique that consisted in the mixture of pieces of photographs (many of them images of works of art) and drawings; they (the dadaists) found in the use of photography separated from its context a way of attacking the more traditional forms of art (Freund, 2005, p. 172).

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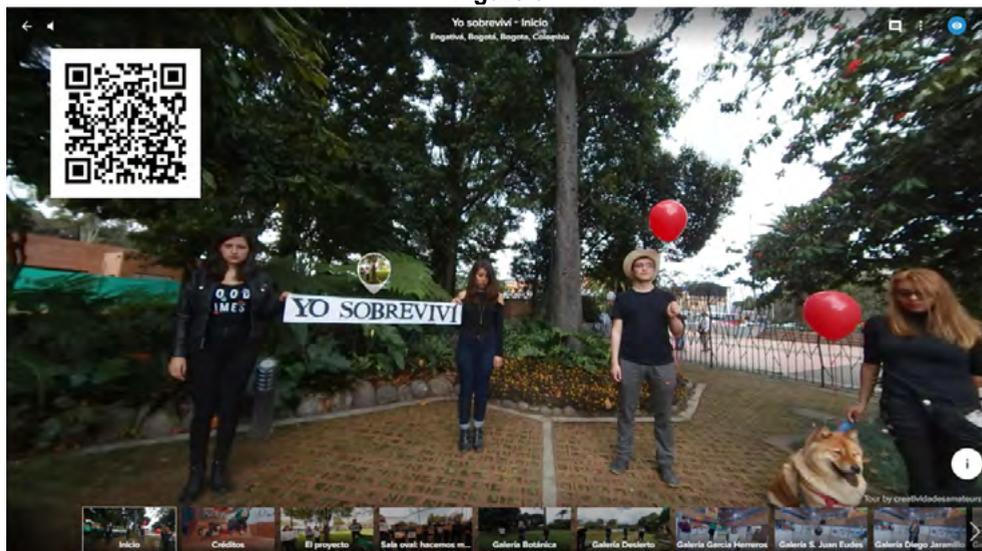
9 In this first pilot test carried out in the second semester of 2017, it counted with the participation of just over a hundred students of Social Communication - Uniminuto Journalism (Main Office, Bogotá, Colombia). The chosen participants then attended the subject Communication and participation in digital media, which served as the starting point to bring the communicators in training to several of the theoretical reflections enunciated in this paper.

10 "The I Survived project has sought to involve survivors in the construction of memory. In a new stage, *Rutas del Conflicto* also seeks to connect Internet users, most of them in large cities, with the dynamics of war that were most intense in the most remote regions of the country" (*Rutas del Conflicto*, s.f.).

After that activity, they had, as an additional challenge, to build an audiovisual piece of their own production, with three minutes in length, where they would tell about the massacre in the first person. Using the narrative and visual resources that they considered necessary, trying to give an account of how they would feel the story in their own flesh, relying on the relationship established between the painting and the testimony of *I survived* from *Routes of the Conflict* Project.

d. *Creation phase 360° interface*. This is where all the amateur creatives produced by the students, were added to articulate the multimedia. In the first instance it was necessary that the participants chose the locations and settings for the 360° photographs, each one of the images designed to be constituted screens where the users would have the possibility of interacting with the contents and each one of the massacres reinterpreted. There, the participants discussed and organized aesthetic, visual and narrative aspects of each of the shots, always thinking about how to highlight the relationships made between art, memory and visual narratives regarding the massacres told throughout each of the screens. "The framing and the focus, the accent that the photographer gives to the details of an object, can completely change its appearance" (Freund, 2005, p.87). In this way, several screens were constructed that, from 360° photographs and made a hypertext of open access of virtual reality on the Roundme platform (see Figure 3).

Figure 3



Virtual reality multimedia home screen *Amateur Creativities 360°: I survived*. The QR code of the image leads to the final product.

Source: Prepared by the authors.

## 4. Results

The result was the construction of a virtual reality multimedia on the Roundme platform<sup>11</sup>, which consists of 17 360° screens captured and thought entirely by the group of participating students. The final product contains 30 massacres that have been recounted and reinterpreted by the young, but without distorting the facts and their consequences. Hence, it is possible to find in each of the stories an explanatory text, a photograph of the reinterpreted painting and an audiovisual telling of what happened in the massacre that corresponded to them. The proposed navigation, offers several possibilities of itineraries to avoid falling into linear structures, thus helping to give the user freedom to navigate with many more possibilities of choice (see Figure 4).

If the new language of the images were used differently, they would acquire, through their use, a new power. We could begin to define more accurately our experiences in fields where words are inadequate. And not only personal experiences, but also the essential historical experience of our relationship with the past; that is, the experience of looking for meaning in our lives, of trying to understand a history from which we can become active agents (Berger, 2000, p. 33).

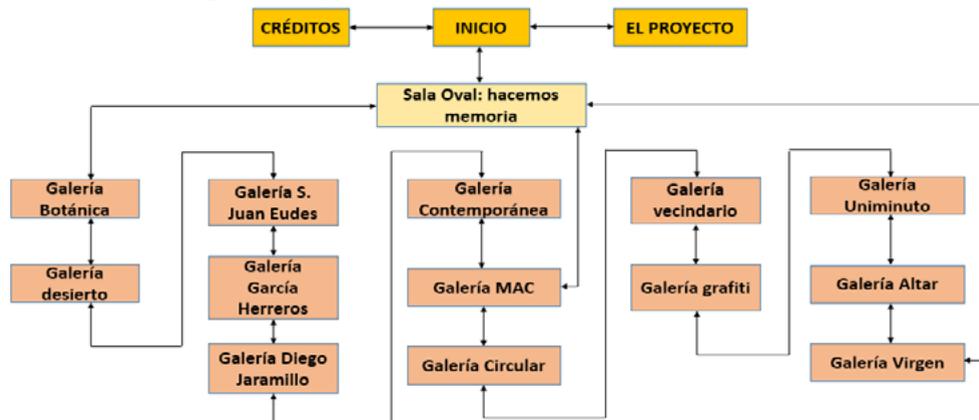
However, despite achieving quite significant results in this first multimedia product of the project, it is also worth pointing out several difficulties presented in the reinterpretation phases of the stories and the visual proposals of the 360° environments. It turned out for several of the participants a great difficulty to put themselves in the place of the other (in that of the victim), more when dealing with tragic events, which as many of them expressed, were far from their daily life, despite being massacres that occurred in the Colombian territory. In some of the reasons, there was some fear of talking about death, of staying in the number, on the date and not on the feeling of what a canvas crossing could suggest with what happened in a massacre. Similarly, some of the visual bets for 360° photographs were somewhat chaotic given that it took several groups to think of other ways of telling, telling and communicating, in this case, being vitiated by the visual routines of the frame and only capture a portion of reality. Being a 360° image, it caused many difficulties to try to think about the role of the user and the active zones that could be found there.

Beyond the immersion inherent in technologies such as virtual reality and the immersive capacity of the digital story through the screen, there are two fundamental pillars: graphic interface and action with content. If we were to synthesize the maximum degree of immersion related to each of them, the interface would offer the sensation of presence in the place of events, of “being there”, while the action with the content would allow an experience of substitution and performance in the story (Domínguez-Martín, 2015, p. 417).

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11 Final multimedia link: <https://roundme.com/tour/218931/view/609914/>

**Figure 4**  
**Navigation map of the 17 built / survived multimedia screens**



Source: Prepared by the authors.

## 5. Conclusions

By way of closure, amateur creatives united in pursuit of common objectives, can contribute to multimedia productions of virtual reality (VR) of free access, which in this first experience, are built as immersive hypertexts where there is a living memory of how Colombian citizens, away from the red zones of the conflict, try to make an alternative process of putting themselves in the place of the other. There is also evidence of how digital natives have a significant use of tools. However, this is not the case with the creative process, where many times their proposals are vitiated by mediated constructions regarding how to expose topics such as violence, death or sadness.

Although, with difficulties, the Amateur Creatives 360° project is an evidence of the various efforts that are required to contribute to the construction of memory taking real advantage of digital environments. The prevailing need is to explore less conventional ways to relate and engage relationship with the other, even more so, if it is about critical issues such as the painful line of time of the Colombian armed conflict.

The best way to build creativity is by practicing it, which is only possible if many people are encouraged, and not only overloaded elites - and not always very creative - to accept the challenge of finding solutions to deeply entrenched conflicts, and practice reconstruction and reconciliation (Galtung, 1998, p. 113).

Likewise, additional challenges are posed by identifying sociocultural problems that are overlooked or minimized by the media agenda, such as gender violence or forced migrations, in order to trace invisible or little-known stories and carry out similar amateur productions, vindicating the possibility of interlocution through material and intellectual techniques that help to establish bases of resistance to forge social transformations that do not depend ex-

clusively on the decisions of media conglomerates but, rather, on citizen actions in networks (not only digital ones). Scenarios where it is even possible to reuse immaculate images from art assigning completely different feelings. “The art of the past no longer exists as in the past. It has lost its authority. An image language has taken its place. What matters now is who uses that language and for what” (Berger, 2000, p. 33).

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