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Solidarity Territories for Capacity Development and Collective Action from the Local

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Abstract

This article explains the process of theoretical, methodological, and empirical construction of the concept of ‘solidarity territories’ as a kind of brand that identifies a series of experiences that promote local development where actors of diverse origin have been participating, in parallel, from the university, from the territories, and from the national government in Colombia. We identify the contexts, developments, and prospects that will eventually converge to the extent that they share a common purpose: contributing to sustainable development based on integrating solidarity in the territories.

Our study adopts a qualitative approach and uses the multi-case study method. The method facilitated the development of concepts based on the description, analysis, and establishment of relations between the experiences considered to enable knowledge-building regarding a topic that is still in the process of development.

Solidarity territories are an example of socio-territorial innovation that supports social and environmental justice, as long as they contribute to the development of capacities for collective action at the local level from the perspective of good living.

Being able to compare the experiences based on a document review and the approaches of the three researchers who were participant observers of the different research phases, a task that characterizes the process, turns out to be novel. The study is expected to serve as a reference point to continue contributing to the promotion of the solidarity culture and solidarity entrepreneurship, strengthening of public institutions, and citizen participation required to develop an ecosystem that enhances the associative solidarity model and its contributions to innovation and social transformation in the territories.

Keywords: Solidarity territories, solidarity economy, social economy, local development, public policies, higher education, solidarity integration, social innovation interest

Territoires solidaires pour le développement des capacités et l'action collective à partir du local

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Résumé

Cet article explique le processus de construction théorique, méthodologique et empirique du concept de « territoires solidaires » compris tel un label qui identifie une série d'expériences favorisant le développement local où participent en parallèle des acteurs universitaires, territoriaux et gouvernementaux en Colombie. Nous identifions les contextes, les évolutions et les perspectives qui finiront par converger à travers un objectif commun : celui de contribuer à un développement durable fondé sur l'intégration de la solidarité dans les territoires.

Notre étude adopte une approche qualitative et utilise la méthode des études multicas. La méthode a facilité le développement de concepts basés sur la description, l'analyse et l'établissement de relations entre les expériences considérées pour permettre la construction de connaissances sur un sujet qui est en cours de développement.

Les territoires solidaires sont un exemple d'innovation socioterritoriale au service de la justice sociale et environnementale, tant qu'ils contribuent au développement des capacités d'action collective au niveau local dans une perspective de bien-vivre.

Pouvoir comparer les expériences à partir d'une revue documentaire et des démarches de trois chercheurs ayant participé aux différentes phases de la recherche en qualité d'observateurs participants s'avère novateur. L'étude devrait pouvoir servir de point de référence pour la promotion de la culture et de l'entrepreneuriat solidaires, le renforcement des institutions publiques, et la participation citoyenne nécessaire au développement d'un écosystème qui valorise le modèle associatif solidaire et ses contributions à l'innovation, au développement social et à la transformation des territoires.

Mots clés : Territoires solidaires, économie solidaire, économie sociale, développement local, politiques publiques, enseignement supérieur, insertion solidaire, intérêt pour l'innovation sociale

1.0 Introduction

Associativity is a necessary condition to satisfy the vital needs of humanity. Human communities in situations of social exclusion or in conditions of poverty have found solidarity associations to offer a strategy to overcome such conditions. In the last two centuries, economic cooperation associations have emerged and have been developed at a global level: (a) cooperatives, (b) mutual societies, (c) productive associations, and (d) different forms of alternative economies compared to the capitalist development model centered on accumulating and concentrating capital. The impoverished communities of Colombia, with the support of some institutions, have developed organizational experiences in their territories under the general principles of solidarity economy, whose main objective is to seek quality of life for the associated people and their communities. In short, the solidarity economy works to establish equity and social justice. Common property, democratic self-management, participation, education, equitable distribution of benefits, contribution to the community, and respect for nature and its conservation are part of the ethical principles of solidarity organizations. The cases studied constitute significant experiences for the attainment of social justice and environmental justice in the territories.

This study analyzes three cases of solidarity organization management as fundamental actors of human development in communities from different territories in Colombia. The experiences analyzed in this case study are long-lasting: First, Cooperative University of Colombia, through the Institute of Social Economy and Cooperativism (Instituto de Economía Social y Cooperativismo [INDESCO]), has promoted the consolidation of solidarity territories through research, training, and social action in communities. Second, the experience of the solidarity territories of the southern provinces of Santander (Colombia), beginning in the early 1960s, are analyzed. Finally, the specific case of the “Unidad Administrativa Especial de Organizaciones Solidarias adscrita al Ministerio del Trabajo” Special Administrative Unit of Solidarity Organizations of the Ministry of Labor in Colombia (UAEOS) is presented, which has promoted research, training processes, and direct actions to strengthen solidarity territories.

Following Coraggio's (n.d.) classification of the levels of action and thought of the Social and Solidarity Economy, the three aforementioned experiences that share the same brand are being originated by different actors at the micro, meso, and macro levels of action and this leads us to the following questions: What do the experiences known in Colombia as “Territorios Solidarios” (‘territories of solidarity’) have in common? The fact that they are institutionalized in the respective organizations provides potential elements for achieving synergies?

After the cases are analyzed, the lessons learned and challenges faced through experiences in the current circumstances of the worsening global crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted, as well as its potential contribution to the construction of peace scenarios in Colombia.

Now, although there are numerous link experiences between territorial development and the SSE, in this article particular emphasis is placed on those that have a common denomination, such as the case of Solidarity Territories. Therefore, it is limited to the three cases mentioned and some that are emerging in the country. This may be a limitation of the study but is also an opportunity to continue other research that addresses in depth the evolution of this concept that is being institutionalized in

Colombia—with prospects of becoming a convening brand, which generates certifications that facilitate the construction of an ecosystem to strengthen the SSE in Colombia and in other territories .

2.0 Academic Context: Territories as a Social Co-construction

Territories are more than geography, and thus, interesting discussions have emerged today to understand their meaning. For some ancestral communities in Latin America, territories are everything, and everything that exists therein belongs to them. This has given rise to a basic concept of territory as a ‘socio-ecological system.’

In a study jointly conducted with other researchers, as a first approach, territory is regarded as a set of ‘fixed and flows’:

The fixed elements, attached to each place, allow actions that change the place itself—new or renewed flows that recreate environmental conditions and social conditions and redefine each place. Flows are the direct result of actions. They pass through or are installed in the fixed ones, changing their significance and their value, while they change too (Santos, 2012, p. 49).

In this sense, a territory is not just a portion of land defined by its biophysical complexity (relief, environmental conditions, biodiversity); it is, above all, a socially constructed space, that is, historically, economically, socially, culturally, and politically constructed (Sosa, 2012, p. 7). Human beings are necessarily linked to a certain territory. We live in it and develop a whole network of social relationships that make human existence possible. Territories are constantly transformed by the action of nature and our interventions.

History indicates that territories have been shaped or formed by the presence of society through the extraction of natural resources, the construction of industrial and housing infrastructure, and the constant modification of the aspect of the territories inhabited by the human population. Some deserts have been turned into productive land by humanity, while they have transformed highly productive land into deserts. As indicated by Bourdieu (1997), a place is a space of struggles between actors. It is precisely through the interaction with different actors and factors that territories emerge as a historical social construction. As already noted, there are multiple complex factors and actors. Today, the social configuration of territories is regarded as the result of the interaction between multiple actors. For simplification, some indicate that the social construction of territories is the product of actions by the state and civil society on the different dimensions of said territory: the biophysical, economic, political, social, and cultural. (Fajardo, 2016)

A vital issue arises from this interaction: the governance of territories, known as territorial management by other academics. In this regard, the role of territorial communities has gained relevance despite the current spirit of public policies that promote extractivism without considering justice in social and environmental terms. Therefore, increasingly specific proposals have emerged that challenge the capital-centered development to advance life-centered development processes. These new proposals are called ‘alternative economies,’ and their purpose is to transform the development paradigm based on continuous growth and wealth accumulation.

All nature, including human beings, is present in the territory. Thus, it is appropriate to consider de Sousa's (2017) approach, indicating that "as from the 16th century, human beings have had a structurally poor and unbalanced bond with nature, a relationship of exploitation based on a one-dimensional understanding of nature (p. 152). Precisely, this relationship creates the conditions for social and ecological injustice, a situation that is currently gaining strength through laws that establish and protect the rights of nature. Therefore, an essential requirement for the development of solidarity territories is the commitment to social and environmental justice that links collective organization and social participation to achieve sustainable communities, where one can interact with the confidence of being in a safe, secure, and well-protected environment (Ramirez, Galindo & Contreras, 2015)

Another vital aspect for the development and establishment of solidarity territories is related to the social articulation networks of the companies and organizations that constitute the solidarity economy system. Among the indicators of a territory's solidarity-based development is the existence of articulation networks. Social construction on a territorial scale is not possible without them (Castilla, 2014; Mance, 2007; Razeto, 2018).

3.0 Methodology

In our study we performed applied research of an exploratory descriptive–analytical–relational nature, which works with a qualitative methodology to expound on the knowledge and understanding of the theory and reality of the concept of solidarity territories in Colombia. This is used as an example of socio-territorial innovation that supports social and environmental justice to the extent that it contributes to the development of capacities for collective action at the local level from a good living perspective (Cediel & Pérez, 2019; Fajardo, 2012; Torres-Solis & Ramírez-Valverde, 2019).

We used the multi-case study method, approached through document analysis and subsequent triangulation, to verify and support the study by comparing and finding consensus among the three researchers who served as participating observers in each of the cases considered.

As this is an exploratory study, no research was conducted to date comparing the different cases of solidarity territories in Colombia. It is descriptive because it aims to describe the different conceptual approaches and realities of these solidarity territories and how they operate in different contexts.

Therefore, our study becomes analytical-relational, as we attempt to compare and relate phenomena to interpret a complex and temporal process, contributing to theory construction from three levels of social organization (Goodrick, 2016): the micro territory level of the province of Guantentá, the meso-level of the multi-campus proposal by the Cooperative University of Colombia, and the macro-level of public policies from the Special Administrative Unit of Solidarity Organizations at the Ministry of Labor in Colombia.

In turn, following Bhattacharjee (2012), multiple cases were designed to generalize inferences to enrich the interpretations and nuances of the object of study. This is aimed at replicating the process in additional future studies to address the new cases emerging in different territories across the country.

4.0 Analysis

4.1 Case 1 - Cooperative University of Colombia (UCC) Solidarity Territories

Since 2012, the Cooperative University of Colombia has been building a university ecosystem to position solidarity economy as one of the institutional attributes that permeate training, research, and social projection in its multi-campus system. The university has 18 campuses in the country, with diverse views and territorial constructions that call for a dialogue of knowledge, interdisciplinarity, and social innovation.

In this context, INDESCO has led the process based on knowledge management, which aids in the proposal, streamlining, and coordination of the activities and projects that give coherence to the institution's commitment mission to contribute to developing and strengthening the solidarity economy in the country as a specific way of generating shared value in society. In 2014, INDESCO first proposed the concept of UCC solidarity territories, as the explicit commitment of the campuses with the communities within their radius of action to co-construct scenarios for sustainable development and peace, based on the dialogue of knowledge and solidarity economy as a transversal tool that supports equity and social justice in harmony with the planet (Monroy & Pérez, 2020).

From that moment, awareness was raised on the subject in different institutional scenarios, and social projection actions were identified that already coincided with some of the characteristics proposed. Identifying that many practices were dispersed was also essential, in addition to the fact that the UCC solidarity territories proposal could contribute to the integration of the faculties, interdisciplinarity, achievement of synergies, thereby generating greater impacts on society. It was then proposed to jointly build 16 UCC solidarity territories by 2022 within the framework of the university's strategic plan.

In 2016, through dialogue with the Board of Directors for the Confederation of Colombian Cooperatives of the Antioquia region, there was an opportunity to learn about the experience of Granada. Granada was a municipality destroyed by the guerrillas a few years ago and that, thanks to the solidarity culture and cooperativism, had been rebuilt and moved forward in processes of solidarity integration with positive results at the social, economic, and environmental level. In the same year, a partnership among Confederation of Colombian Cooperatives, the Cooperative University of Colombia, and the Municipal Council officially declared Granada a solidarity territory in recognition of its resilience and culture of solidarity and cooperation of its population. That year, the Special Administrative Unit of Solidarity Organizations from the Ministry of Labor funded the first research project in this field at the university to strengthen solidarity integration in this municipality and two different populations in equally distinct geographic locations in El Llanito, Santander.

Thus, using the participatory action research methodology, the first results were obtained, which continue to accompany the projects established since then. The first is that researchers participate in the co-management of social knowledge, but it is the community that learns and builds from its own experience. It is also clear that each project is unique. It is built in context with the voice of its actors, having no formulas for automatically replicating or transferring previous exercises, although it

is possible to identify common goals of seeking good living in harmony with nature, in addition to identity requirements, a sense of relevance and trust to advance in the collective goals defined with stakeholders.

Perez & Uribe (2016), who considered a territory to be a system in continual improvement, when referring to the UCC solidarity territory led from the Medellín campus, confirmed the following: In our case, territories are the product of the correlation between social processes and the landscape as a natural fabric in transformation. To talk about territory, it is essential to touch on the issue of identity, which is defined as the relationship between an inhabitant and a place, with an incidence of nature, social processes, economic activities, technological development, culture, and lifestyle. (p. 8)

Conversely, the university's connection with territories varies according to their own dynamics. In some cases, the solidarity territory emerges with coordinated action between the different actors, whereas in others, the university supports the processes that the community already has improved. In both, the university is an additional actor, and the dialogue of knowledge will be one of the fundamental characteristics of the project: a university that knows what it contributes but also recognizes what it learns from others.

In this sense, solidarity territory projects are incorporated into the university's social responsibility strategy that links the university to society and the respective interest groups for social transformation and peace, justice, social, and environmental scenarios from its action radius appropriately and comprehensively. In addition, the study plans of all university programs have incorporated topics and practices related to the relation between (a) solidarity and development, (b) the social and solidarity economy, (c) solidarity entrepreneurship, and (d) social innovation with a territorial approach. This leads to a greater generational connection of students with this type of process (Pastore, 2015).

Pérez Muñoz & Hernández Arteagra (2020) document how this dynamic bond between university and society is based on the solidarity economy is already presented in several universities around the world, with documented experiences in several countries, including (a) Argentina, (b) Mexico, (c) Spain, (d) Brazil, (e) Nigeria, (f) France, and (g) Canada in an exploratory study that shows that both the universities and the organizations that participate in the processes have impacts from the dialogue of knowledge generated between the different actors. The Social and Solidarity Economy has impacted curriculum, didactics, research, and social projection at the universities, and communities have developed knowledge and social technologies to get better conditions of life. Given the potential of information and communication technologies during the pandemic generated by Covid 19 in 2020, it was possible to generate various networking spaces to promote synergies and collaborative tools to support and connect solidarity ventures, as well as influence the public agenda of local and national governments and multilateral organizations. It is worth noting that despite the fact that several common activities were appreciated, none of the universities studied used the expression Solidarity Territories to denominate their curricular experiences. It is an exclusive expression of the Cooperative University of Colombia at the moment.

Now, in the process of building knowledge, studies by authors such as Castilla (2014), Coraggio (2015), Guerra (2014), and Razeto (2013) have been mandatory references for researchers. These researchers agreed in proposing that applying

principles of solidarity to the economy is a great contribution to territories; to the extent that integrating the economic links can enhance local capacities to satisfy their needs, thereby influencing paradigm changes in producing, consuming, and interacting with neighboring and global territories to work together, with an explicit desire to achieve self-managed regional economic structures with locally created comparative advantages. In this sense, Fajardo (2012) highlighted the importance of considering the activity, cultural traditions, organizational forms, and productive processes that already exist to continue building territory as an emancipatory process that transforms the current logic based on exploiting and accumulating capital. For his part, Mance (2007) promoted solidarity collaboration networks as a process of expansion and movement of interactions and actors to build “a new society of mutual support and solidarity” (p. 7) where individual and collective interests are satisfied.

In this way, the concept of solidarity integration becomes one of the focal points for the solidarity territories. It is because it is a concept with several expressions since there are several models that associate networking, productive inclusion, and local development. Rúa Cataneda (2016) compared five different models of solidarity integration to identify common elements and differences. Based on this, they proposed an integrated model that served as a reference to evaluate and subsequently define the route toward constructing UCC solidarity territories in Antioquia and Santander. The following models were duly considered: (a) solidarity collaboration networks, (b) economic solidarity circuits, (c) fair trade and responsible consumption, (d) prosumers¹ in the solidarity economy, and (e) inter-cooperation between cooperatives.

Three common elements were identified in the models. First, the organization of consumers and producers in collaborative direct marketing strategies with various public, private, and social actors in the territory. Second, a previous study on the socio-economic, political, and cultural characteristics of the environment, conducted in a participatory way. And third, the emphasis on organizational network dynamics. Based on this, Rúa et al. (2016) developed a general methodological route that goes as far as defining a model adjusted to each territory based on aligning goals and creating trust between the various actors (see Figure 1).

They are related experiences, those that refer to the construction of solidarity circuits, which are groups where various civil, solidarity and public organizations participate to build economic, social, and political relationships based on the solidarity economy, responsible consumption and fair trade. García & Rendón (2009) and Jiménez (2016) show by systematizing experiences in Colombia and Ecuador that these circuits increase the community's capacity for negotiation, resistance and local development based on ties of solidarity.

Rúa et al.'s integrated model has been considered in the following UCC solidarity territories projects, with emphasis defined by their own actors, in each territory, as follows: in Bogotá (local circuits), in Cali (solidarity finance), and in Villavicencio (rural markets), with results in accordance with the dynamics of each group and different routes that are defined in the short, long, and medium terms.

¹ A prosumer is an individual who both consumes and produces.

Figure 1. Methodological route to create Solidarity Territories.



Note: Adapted from Rúa et al. (2016)

In this sense, the results to date are partial in the different territories, some examples are: (a) bonds of trust have been established with the communities and teams have been formed with the participation of solidarity organizations such as cooperatives, local markets, and local governments; (b) training processes have been carried out that have benefited more than 100 people, and more than 40 organizations; (c) through social cartography, maps of needs and consumption and production routes have been drawn up that will be articulated in 2022.

Cediel and Pérez (2019) confirmed that this economy based on affirming the value and practice of solidarity—which implies recognizing others and ensuring the collective good—activates citizenship; promotes dialogue of knowledge; and the construction of common visions on economic, political, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects. All this leads to collective action capacities at the local level, good living, and sustainable local development, as long there is a movement on the scale of solidarity from a micro-level—*intra-family/community solidarity*—to the meso-level that complements the process with cooperation and connections with community associations in the same territory that share responsibilities, style, responsibility for quality, and the macro-level where public policies are defined to finally reach the systemic level where all levels are connected to generate structural changes in the economy (Coraggio, 2015).

Based on the above considerations, solidarity integration and the construction of solidarity territories may be regarded as a source of social innovation. This is because it generates new ways of doing things, which allow for better results with respect to traditional models, and promotes community participation, turning them into “true actors of their own development and, therefore, strengthening citizen awareness and thus democracy in the region” (Marulanda et al., 2010, as cited in Duque et al., 2016, p. 8).

With these general references, new UCC territories are emerging in the cities of (a) Pereira, (b) Santa Marta, (c) Pasto, and (d) Neiva, where there is already a process promoted by the Association of Cooperatives and Solidarity Companies of Huila.

The process promotes changes in the productive base and in the culture of cooperation and consumption of their actors to jointly build territorial innovations in pursuit of social and environmental justice. In 2020, during the confinement generated by Covid 19, webinars, called Cátedras Libres, were held on topics of interest to the territories in 5 regions, achieving the attendance of more than 1,500 people. Attendees were able to learn good solidarity entrepreneurship practices across the different regions, the public policies available to promote associativity, and the proposals from universities to organize entrepreneurship ecosystems, all with the purpose of increasing the advocacy capacity of organized civil society in local development. In addition, virtual offices were launched on several university campuses, being part of the processes for three campuses and offering a course on solidarity circuits with the communities, in which 60 people participated. It strengthened the trust of its actors, their identity within the territory, and the knowledge of potential actions to continue growing the network.

The progress made on this institutional dynamic has already brought external recognition, such as that achieved by the National Council of Accreditation in a recent visit to the Bogotá, Bucaramanga, and Medellín campuses in the institutional identity factor, “the promotion of the solidarity economy and the development of the territories through processes of democratic self-management and alternative economies in the communities of its area of influence through the concepts of solidarity territories” stand out as a common strength. (Muñoz, 2021, p. 6)

With this high level of institutionalization, the process of constructing UCC territories continues. To do so, strengthening the researchers’ network, systematizing experiences, managing knowledge, and coordinating them with the other existent processes at both the government and organized civil society will be essential. In this manner, the university fulfills its mission of building and disseminating socially, economically, and environmentally useful knowledge. In addition, the institutional culture changes by its more effective connection with the territory and new services and projects are generated, including the creation of an incubator and an observatory as knowledge transfer scenarios.

4.2 Case 2 - Solidarity Territory in the Province of Guantá.

The second case refers to the process of social construction of a solidarity territory in the southern provinces of the Department of Santander in Colombia, located in the central-eastern part of the country. Since Spanish colonization, the department has preserved the socio-geographical organization of the provinces, which are socio-ecological units where its population keeps a sense of belonging due to geographical, socio-political, economic, and cultural conditions. This part of the article had background studies done by Miguel Fajardo, Samuel Gonzalez, Beatriz Toloza, and Marieta Buchelli during different times. The department is divided into seven provinces that have recently been recognized as administrative areas by the Departmental Assembly of Deputies.

Santander’s southern area constitutes three provinces that have historically preserved a special organization due to several factors: (a) the geography, (b) dynamics in the territorial occupation, (c) socio-economy, (d) socio-political dynamics, and (e) cultural processes among which the Catholic Church’s presence stands out. The current social and ecological configuration of these three provinces is the result of these factors. While there are only some traces of the Guane population that inhabited the territory before the Spanish invasion, there are

historical references about their organization and their social construction in the territory. In fact, Spaniards were settling in the small, conquered towns; thus, some names of towns are in the Guane language: Aratoca, Curití, Barichara, and Mogotes.

At the end of the 18th century, an insurgent movement emerged in the territory against the living conditions generated by colonial policies, known as the ‘communal insurrection.’ This communal movement spread from the southern provinces of Santander to the entire country and constituted the starting point for the libertarian struggles that would culminate with Colombia’s independence at the beginning of the 19th century. Researchers such as Carreño (2010), described and analyzed the historical significance of both the Guane tribe and the community movement of those times. Other researchers such as Raymond (1997; 2008) and Ricardo et al. (2005) provided research that systematizes the territory’s organizational experiences. Professors and students at the Rural Research Institute of the Pontifical Xavierian University, which has been an environmental and rural studies department for nearly 40 years, conducted case studies on cooperatives in the region. In addition, from the Solidarity Economy Studies Center at the San Gil University Foundation, different studies have been conducted which characterize the solidarity territory in Santander’s southern provinces.

Nowadays, according to the National Administrative Department of Statistics of Columbia (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, 2018), the provinces constitute 53 municipalities with a population of 317,000 inhabitants. The region’s economy is comprised of (a) small-scale agriculture and livestock, (b) tourism, (c) public services, and (d) commercial and financial activities. A perspective of this experience is constructed considering some notions required for better understanding. The social construction of a given territory forces us to wonder about what is understood by territory. The social construction of a territory supposes a long-term collective process and is normally associated with an idea of ‘human development’ that involves the formulation and development of principles and strategies to achieve it.

4.2.1 A territorial development process. At the beginning of the 1960s, an expectation of social change that occurred in the world significantly affected how the following decades played out. The Cuban revolution, Alliance for Progress, Second Vatican Council, and emergence of social movements heralded a new dawn for Latin America. Here, in the southern provinces of Santander, the Diocese of Socorro and San Gil began a process of changing strategies to develop the social pastoral ministry. Following the postulates of the Second Vatican Council and the directives of the Conference of Latin American Bishops, priest Ramón González, along with other priests and a significant group of lay people, began a process of community development.

4.2.2 Inspiring ideas and collective action strategies. Institutional documents of Social Pastoral Secretariat of the Diocese of Socorro and San Gil systematically present the inspiring ideas and strategies applied to foster sustainable and supportive human development in the territory of the southern provinces of Santander. In short, the movement set out to create communities of solidarity and peace. Table 1 presents a synthesis of the ideas and strategies in the process of social construction of the territory.

Table 1. *Ideas and Strategies for Collective Action*

Inspiring ideas	Collective action strategies
The poor are not an obstacle to human development: they are the protagonists.	Assuming a province is a development unit, based on the assessment of its potential and challenges.
Change is a rule of life.	Developing educational processes aimed at social transformation through leadership.
Human development must be supportive, sustainable, participatory, self-managed, comprehensive, and inclusive.	Generating organizational processes of cooperatives and other associative forms.
Working toward social justice is the Christian mission.	Establishing communication and social mobilization processes. Establishing processes of organization and cooperation with multiple actors.

4.2.3 Primary results. The process promoted by the social pastoral ministry, other social actors, and the leadership in the local communities resulted in multiple organizations that are factors of community development in the territory today. Networks of cooperatives, rural organizations, community radio stations, community aqueducts, women's communities, and productive associations that represent the social and economic capital of the territory have been successfully created. These results led governments and academics to refer to the experience as "a solidarity territory" from the outside.

In a research process developed in 2016, from the databases of the Bucaramanga Chamber of Commerce, it was found that the region had (a) 68 cooperatives, (b) 160 foundations, (c) 743 associations, (d) 151 corporations, (e) three employee funds, (f) five housing associations, and (g) two federations of organizations for 1,067 solidarity organizations. The following are the main bodies and networks for the coordination of solidarity organizations in the territory that contribute to the sustainable development and solidarity of the region.

- Network of cooperatives, especially with savings and credit services that are part of Banco COOPCENTRAL, founded in 1964 in San Gil. (<https://www.coopcentral.com.co/>)
- The network of REDSANDER community radio stations is a second-level cooperative that constitutes 37 community media organizations in the region. (<https://www.resander.com/>).
- Network of community aqueducts that coordinates more than 150 rural aqueducts from 13 municipalities in the provinces of Guantán and Comunera. (<https://www.facebook.com/Red-Regional-de-Acueductos-Comunitarios-Agua-para-la-Vida-691964474637398/>).
- EL COMUN network of rural organizations (<https://www.elcomun.org/>).
- Unisangil is a higher education institution created by the Catholic Church and cooperative and social organizations of the territory (<http://www.unisangil.edu.co/>).
- Trade union organizations in the rural sector: fique—a natural fibrous plant—and tobacco growers, sugar processors, and coffee growers have achieved a good level of association in the territory.

Solidarity organizations are part of the territory's social landscape, which is why it has become a place for both national organizations and international bodies and institutions to visit.

4.2.4 Some conclusions of the case. The social construction of the territories from a perspective of social and environmental justice is possible if agreements are established between the multiple private and public actors that inhabit or affect the territory.

The social construction of solidarity territories is coordinated through the creation of autonomous and self-managed organizations by grass-root communities.

Continual education, through educational institutions and the media, plays an essential role in the social construction of more supportive territories.

The solidarity organizations of these territories in the south of Santander face two challenges related to the improvement of the social and economic integration of the organizations: the inclusion of youth and the continual training in the principles and values of solidarity economy.

4.3 Case 3. Solidarity Territory. Ministry of Labor- UAEOS

The term solidarity territory was used for the first time in Colombian public institutions by the National Administrative Department of Solidarity Economy (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de la Economía Solidaria [DANSOCIAL]), a government institution that was in charge of developing policies, plans, programs, and projects for the solidarity economy sector from 1981 to 2011, known as, the National Administrative Department of Cooperative. At that time, it suffered an institutional setback, descending to the level of a Special Administrative Unit, remaining attached to Colombia's Ministry of Labor. From then on, this is the Ministry responsible for designing public policies for this sector.

It was precisely DANSOCIAL that introduced the term solidarity territory to government action during 2010–2012. As part of the ‘Culture of Solidarity and Associativity’ Strategic Plan, it became a priority focus for this government institution to promote research, since it was considered a strategy to generate public policies and alternative solutions to contribute to improved productivity, sustainability, and social competence of solidarity economy organizations in Colombia.

In addition, the development of research activities that facilitated the application of solidarity concepts and good associative practices in the country was important for DANSOCIAL. Therefore, it studied successful experiences that counteract problems such as violence, unemployment, and poverty, betting on the growth, expansion, and development of the Colombian solidarity sector. Along with territorial solidarity organizations and academia, it funded research on solidarity territory in the provinces of Guanentá and Comunera, in the south of the department of Santander, identified as a successful experience in the country.

At that time, a search was made through 17 municipalities of the Guanentina province and 13 of the Comunera province, finding a total of 310 organizations, mainly cooperatives. It should be noted that among these organizations there is a predominance of cooperative expressions, ratifying once again the high rate in this territory with the presence of these associative forms and corroborating the recognition that Santander has historically been given as a ‘solidarity territory.’

The important role played by savings and credit cooperatives is to be highlighted, since they have become a financial support for local development, with the presence of 16 cooperatives with financial activity. In short, for this first systematization and deconstruction of what would become the solidarity territory, the solidarity organizations played a definitive role in the new look and formation of the territory with logics and practices of cooperation and solidarity.

This research exercise was used to identify the social and business practices of the solidarity organizations of the southern provinces of Santander that turned this territory into solidarity. Some strategies used to identify this experience as representative of collective action based on solidarity economic practices around the solidarity territory included documenting the associative practices of solidarity in the municipalities, using training scenarios to share what the territory underwent, and designing strategies to improve the competitiveness of solidarity organizations in the region.

In 2016, after its establishment as the Special Administrative Unit of solidarity organizations (UAEOS), this governmental organization that underwent an administrative transformation decided to keep on teaching and shaping the experience of this Santander region. Thus, it designed the Methodological Guide of the Solidarity Territory as part of the 2014–2018 Solidarity Associativity for a New Country Institutional Strategic Plan with the qualification in the knowledge of the solidarity associative model strategy (UAEOS, 2016). Therefore, they decided to resume delving deeper in their knowledge of the solidarity territory and designing a route that would serve to replicate the successful local experience of Guanentá in other parts of the country.

In this regard, the southern provinces of the department of Santander are not the only territorial experiences recognized as territorial development with participation for solidarity economy models. Territories such as the municipality of Granada

(Antioquia), the region of Ocaña (North Santander), as well as the important number of local cooperatives in the department of Huila, have been identified. The said places have positioned it as an important sector in the local policy formulation, turning this department into a solidarity territory.

Notably, this institutional decision emerged at a very important historical moment for Colombia, since the conclusion and signing of the peace agreement between the government and the FARC-EP guerrillas was taking place at that time, with special emphasis on development with a territorial approach. Therefore, based on these agreements, one of the commitments was to create Programas de Desarrollo con Enfoque Territorial (Development Programs with a Territorial Approach).

From the public policy action perspective and based on the peace agreement, the territorial approach is understood as a recognition of the needs, characteristics, and specific factors at the economic, cultural, and social level of the territories and communities to ensure socio-environmental sustainability, seeking to implement measures that in a comprehensive and coordinated manner have participation from citizens in the regions and territories, the territorial authorities, and the various social sectors (*Acuerdo final*, 2016. p.6).

Accordingly, the view on the solidarity territory requires additional elements that theoretically allow us to understand the presence of the solidarity economy in the territorial area, the role of the actors that make it up, and their synergies, making this a socioeconomic development condition at the local level. To this end, the communities' involvement in the planning processes is essential to introduce the diverse perspectives that recognize the complexities, diversity, and pluralities of the territories to include the different dimensions of development.

It was previously announced that UAEOS made progress in modeling the solidarity territory experience by designing a 'methodological guide,' which introduced conceptual elements such as the definition of the solidarity territory, the social construction of the solidarity territory, and a methodological proposal that could be used to replicate the learning and knowledge of Guanentá's experience in Santander.

In turn, under a contract entered with the UCC for the same period, progress was made in a study on solidarity economy integration models in the territories of Granada (Antioquia) and El Llanito (Santander). Its findings were as follows: (a) a model can be a conceptual and methodological reference point for the local development plan, aimed at strengthening the solidarity economy to revitalize the economy; (b) the models studied call for self-management, the use of established capacities, and the knowledge present in the community; (c) the approach to production-consumption relations established from the creation of local markets and the potential of the network strategy used to coordinate various dynamics in the territory; and (d) the dimensions for methodological development are summarized as six major moments, namely: confidence building, socioeconomic development assessment, call to territorial actors, awareness raising training, the model adjustment to the context, and its implementation (Rúa et al., 2016, p. 89).

This aforementioned construction leads to some elements that are appropriate for the current analysis:

Solidarity territory is understood as a process whose objective is to establish social, economic, political, cultural, and environmental relationships and interactions, based (...) on the ethics of solidarity. Thus, a solidarity territory is the result of a

collective action in which the main social actors of the local community have intervened (Fajardo, 2016,). These conditions imply a commitment to transform the development model proposed by capitalism.

In agreement, Coraggio (2008) stated that “the solidarity territory summons the social actors (state authorities, companies and solidarity organizations, educational establishments at all levels, businesspeople, and the general population) to work hard to change the current production method, focused on the expanded reproduction of capital” (p. 2).

For this reason, a territory that intends to be supportive must be organized and coordinated so that its inhabitants care for their primary needs in an autonomous and participatory way. This first implies a social construction that takes time and perseverance to form, coordinate, and develop organizations-companies and networks that emphasize the principles and practices of a solidarity economy.

As a result, solidarity territories can be presented at different levels: ranging from what is known as ‘spontaneous natural solidarity’ by generating solidarity economy associations and companies; coordinating solidarity organizations in the territory in which experiences are based on solidarity; or coordinating territorial and national networks of companies in the social and solidarity economy (ESS) until a social movement is created (Fajardo, 2016, p. 20) that seeks to establish alternative economic models.

As for the methodological proposal designed to build a solidarity territory, it is important to highlight that this is a ‘roadmap’ that each actor can adapt from the collective social construction that has been agreed upon, divided into the following stages: (a) configuration of the coordination and production team; (b) social characterization of the territory; (c) understanding of the dynamics of the territory; (d) construction of a shared vision;(e) territorial strategic assessment; (f) design of collective action strategies for the social construction of the territory; (g) formulation of the annual operating plan; and (h) creation of a coordinating body (Fajardo, 2016, p. 24–30).

These stages or moments are intended to explicitly demonstrate the step-by-step process involved in creating solidarity territories, as well as the social agreements that this great socio-territorial agreement entails.

The institutional strategic plan *Building Solidarity Territories* by UAEOS (2019), has three objectives to promote an associative solidarity culture:

1. To promote an associative solidarity culture,
2. To encourage income generation, social and productive inclusion through solidarity entrepreneurship, and
3. To strengthen public institutions for the development of the associative solidarity model.

Hence, the already announced objectives will be developed through strategies that seek to contribute to the national objective of encouraging entrepreneurship in the solidarity sector as a mechanism for modern social policy that promotes empowerment and the economic, and social autonomy of communities within the 2018–2022 National Development Plan *Pact for Colombia, Pact for Equity* (Government of Colombia, 2018)

Given the above, it should be noted that the strategies of the aforementioned UAEOS strategic plan aim to (a) promote solidarity and cooperative education; (b) make associative solidarity visible as a mechanism for social and productive inclusion; (c) develop solidarity business models with social innovation; (d) encourage associative solidarity for business formalization, competitiveness, and commercialization; (e) establish synergies for the solidarity sector development; and (f) design public policy actions to promote associative solidarity ventures.

It should be noted that with the implementation of the National Development Plan 2018–2022, the National Plan for the Promotion of the Cooperative and Solidarity Rural Economy, 2020 (Plan Nacional de Fomento a la Economía Solidaria y Cooperativa Rural [PLANFES]), was also designed and launched as one of the strategies defined in the peace agreement of 2016. In 2021, the implementation of the PLANFES continued, reporting 37 processes for the creation of solidarity organizations in 31 municipalities through training processes and technical assistance in productive issues, solidarity associativity and short marketing circuits and local public purchases. This made it possible to directly benefit 900 people and indirectly 2,923 people. Of the beneficiaries, 674 are women and 267 belong to ethnic groups (Departamento Nacional de Planeación, 2021)

These strategies seek to contribute to building territories that support a better and greater redistribution of resources based on environmental and social justice views and include those who are in disadvantaged conditions, in terms of access to opportunities, such as that indicated by Towers and Wenz (as cited in Ramírez et al., 2015). The authors mentioned that environmental justice applies to the human scale; they related its conceptualization with distributive justice in the sense that the impacts should be equitably distributed, appealing to social participation around this distribution and the decision-making processes.

It is precisely redistributive justice that emerges as one of the common elements both in the solidarity economy, the foundation of the solidarity territory, as well as in environmental justice. Thus, both concepts share a common goal for which they strive, supporting them in their action.

5.0 Contrast and Discussion

A summary of the comparable aspects for the three cases can be seen in Table 2, followed by the analysis and discussion of the findings.

In general, it can be asserted that the role of solidarity economy practices is present. The confluence of these in the same territorial space generates changes in the cultural perspective and in the way inhabitants interact with the environment in conditions of greater equality and justice for all actors. At the same time, solidarity territories that emerge from the communities, with support not from universities or governments, as is the case of Santander, Antioquia, and Huila, account for a record of several generations where solidarity and associativity have been key to its processes of social mobility. Thus, a topic of future research would be to explore in greater depth how the culture of its actors, their identity, and power processes affect the particular conformation of this type of territory and if it is something typical of only some regions or can it become characteristic at the national level.

Table 2. *Comparative Aspects*

Variable	Academy - UCC	Social Actor - Territory	Public Actor - UAEOS
Time period	2014 to date	1964 to date	2010–2012, 2016 and 2019 to date
Geographic context	18 cities in Colombia	53 municipalities in Santander	National territory
Methodological approach	Research-action Qualitative approach	Qualitative approach Research-action	Qualitative and quantitative approaches
Theoretical benchmarks	Transformative and relevant higher education in the territories; solidarity economy as reality, theory, and social project	Sustainable solidarity human development from the social doctrine of the church and solidarity	Solidarity economy, social territory construction of the local development collective action
Products	Solidarity territory projects, systematization and publication of local development experiences, participatory action plans to achieve sustainable development goals, educational experiences and social appropriation of knowledge, multimedia teaching material	Networks of solidarity organizations in the territory, pedagogical publications, publications of research results, construction and implementation of territorial development plans	Research: Solidarity territory, youth savings (Unisangil, Fundación Coomuldesa-2010), Methodological Guide on Solidarity Territory (Unisangil-2016) and Economic Solidarity Integration in the Territory (UCC-2016), Public policy actions: Institutional strategic plans, Multimedia tool for the dissemination of the solidarity territory (2010)
Lessons Learned	Education is a key factor in the process of social transformation and territorial innovation;	The social construction of more supportive territories is possible	Recognition from the public policy actions of UAEOS, the solidarity territory as a local development strategy for institutional action.

territories are a social construct tailored to their actors; solidarity economy and its networks generate local development experiences; the partnership between solidarity organizations, local governments, and universities contributes to local development.

thanks to the participation of multiple actors. Transformative education, especially by leaders and communities, is an indispensable strategy. The processes must begin at the communities in a self-managed way. The State's role is vital to achieve objectives. There is no solidarity territory development without social coordination.

The importance of the role of the public actor when promoting solidarity territory initiatives from its institutional management. The construction of new solidarity territories requires a process where the efforts of actors from different origins (public, social, and private) converge.

Prospect

Educational model to activate citizenship and develop competencies in territorial actors, to innovate and advocate public policies; coordination of the university ecosystem for solidarity entrepreneurship; systematization of experiences; supporting the strengthening and creation of solidarity networks and circuits.

Greater coordination of organizations in the territory at both the local and national levels, connection with territorial governments, a transformative educational system, development of greater skills for ICT use, promotion of new organizations in the territory, development of citizen capacities for comprehensive territorial management.

Institutionalization of the Solidarity Territory strategy as a short, medium, and long-term process in public language, the Solidarity Territory strategy is a long-term process. Establishment of public-private partnerships for the strategy implementation. Formulation and implementation of territorial and national public policies to develop the solidarity economy and its networks across the country.

In any case, these are clearly long-term processes that could be accelerated by the joint action of academia and the local and national governments in a concerted exercise with common goals. These integration dynamics between the three types of actors have not been consistent over the years. However, over the last five years, public, private, and solidarity partnerships have generated best practices, products, and services that can continue to be further developed and shared with other territories to promote dialogue of knowledge and the construction of new knowledge and realities. In addition, the levels of institutionalization in this regard seem to indicate that a relevant line of action with a common perspective could be developing.

In the three cases analyzed, similar construction strategies emerge as follows: (a) accepting the territory and its socio-ecological realities as unrepeatable units of human development; (b) generating organizational processes from and for the communities; (c) coordinating public and private actors in the territory management with a solidarity approach; (d) promoting the coordination and collective action of solidarity organizations at the local, national, and international levels; (e) developing and implementing public policies to strengthen solidarity territories in the formation process; and (f) ensuring that solidarity education and entrepreneurship opens the path to building solidarity territories.

Furthermore, the three cases share a similar theoretical heritage, and Latin American researchers are connected within an academic network that supports synergies and collective learning.

Finally, the cases analyzed allow us to confirm that the social construction of solidarity territories is a social innovation in Colombia that is rooted in special territorial communities with support from universities (UCC and Unisangil), UAEOS, and other territorial social actors. The social construction of solidarity territories is, without a doubt, the way to establish peace in Colombia, as it is based on the ethical principles of social and environmental justice.

6.0 Conclusions

1. *The territory as a socio-ecological space.* The cases analyzed offer a comprehensive view of the territory as a space of multiple interactions—interdependencies—between local communities and natural systems. From the solidarity economy perspective, we work with the ethical principle of caring for nature as a basic condition of social and environmental justice. From the perspective of solidarity economy, the experiences analyzed work to recognize the rights of nature, basic principles of good living.

2. *Potential to socially build more supportive territories.* The social construction of territories in conditions of social and environmental justice is not only possible but necessary to achieve quality human development for human beings and nature. Growing unemployment, caused by the capitalist development model and aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, requires social and public policy innovations that provide answers to the situation experienced by millions of people all over the world.

3. *Collective action with the involvement of multiple social actors.* Constructing solidarity territories constitutes a long-term process that requires participation from the living forces in local communities: (a) social organizations, (b) government, (c) educational and communication systems. In this sense, the development of territorial

and national public policies is vital to improve the solidarity territories' social construction process. The role of universities is highlighted in the development of research and advisory projects that position the solidarity economy as a factor for national development. In addition, the media, especially community media, have a special role in making the processes of social construction of territories visible.

4. Public institutionalization of the solidarity territory. The recognition from public action to the experience built from local spaces implies decisions that go beyond a strategic plan, which should be the product of bottom-up collective action reflected in national public policy instruments.

In the Colombian case, it is noteworthy that the actors of the Social and Solidarity Economy from the micro, meso, and macro levels identified with the concept of solidarity territories, generates an important potential for synchrony in pursuit of the development of an ecosystem that promotes the formation of socioeconomic, cultural, and political subjects with the capacity to co-construct policies, organizations and processes that directly or indirectly preserve or reproduce life.

In fact, this initial harmony has generated the link between the Cooperative University of Colombia, the leaders of the solidarity territories in Santander and the public officials of the Ministry of Labor in activities to support the formulation, dissemination, and implementation of PLANFES based on educational activities, promotion of local markets, training in entrepreneurship and support for the new self-managed associative companies that emerged after the peace agreement. These processes are at an initial level of development and will be evaluated considering the contributions of the different actors, including academia, to ensure their impact.

5. Impacts on society: At the global level, there is evidence of the favorable impact that the generation of solidarity economy companies has had in the territories. The presence of cooperatives and other forms of solidarity economy has contributed effectively to the human development of many local communities throughout the planet. Here we mention a few examples: The development of cooperatives and popular savings banks in the province of Quebec is impressive due to the presence they make in different areas of the economy. In the extreme south of America is the city of Sunchales (Argentina), declared as the national capital of cooperativism.

6. Narvate (2015) describes the Mondragon experience in Spain, a conglomerate of cooperative companies was established, which not only have had a local impact, but have also extended their influence to the world. In Colombia, there are territorial cooperative developments that would be worth researching from the perspective of the social construction of solidarity territories. In this sense, cases in the departments of Huila and Antioquia could be examined. Above all, in local communities settled in rural territories, solidarity associations are more visible, perhaps because they must solve their problems through collective actions.

7. Continuity and progress toward the state's public policies. Despite the public institutional decisions, which are certainly not consecutive, to advance in recognizing the territory as a commitment to joint solidarity, greater political and institutional will is required to accompany and reinvent the experiences of social and environmental justice by developing and implementing state and not government policies that address the entire ecosystem of the solidarity territory.

8. *Digital transformation* in solidarity organizations and their networks is essential for information, communication, and the opening of local and global spaces for greater impact.

Finally, one of the limitations of the study is the fact that solidarity territories are processes in development, which do not yet have sufficient systematization and documentation to facilitate the contrasting processes. They are also complex and multidimensional, for which the study carried out opens the opportunity for future studies that integrate other individual and institutional actors interested in the subject.

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