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The Territory and its Pedagogy: Spiritual and Emotional Dimensions of Territorial Care in Indigenous Higher Education at the UAIIN, Colombia

Short description / Abstract:

Land and territory are central to the life and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples; therefore, their care and defence are fundamental in Indigenous higher education. This presentation examines how the Autonomous Intercultural University of Indigenous Peoples (UAIIN) in Cauca, Colombia, develops pedagogical processes that foster the care of territories. The UAIIN brings together various Indigenous Peoples, both from within and beyond the state of Cauca, each with their own languages, worldviews, and conceptions of territory. This diversity raises a key question: how can Indigenous higher education articulate pedagogies for territorial care that reflect multiple Peoples' perspectives? Drawing on a study with four student cohorts from Indigenous territories in the departments of Cauca and Nariño, the research employed territorial visits, conversations with elders, students and counsellors, and participation in spiritual processes. Findings indicate that territorial care extends beyond physical spaces to include body, family, community, spirituality, and cultural life. On this basis, the paper proposes an "emotional pedagogy for territorial defence," conceptualized as an Indigenous pedagogical approach that centers lived experience, self-determination, and affective attunement to "spaces of life." This perspective highlights that defending the territory or Mother Earth involves not only strategies of protection but also processes of discernment, harmony, and character formation.