

## Converging Migrations in School: Social Cartography as a Transformative Element of Territorial Identity in Soacha, Colombia

Angelica Muñoz Prada<sup>1</sup>, Jaime Duván Reyes R.<sup>2</sup>, Edier Hernan Bustos V.<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

*This paper presents the results of implementing a learning experience derived from research to determine the contributions of school environmental and social practices to constructing territorial identity among a group of students, including migrant populations. The methodology employed was grounded in the qualitative paradigm through social cartography. Key findings revealed that territorial identity emerged through emotional expression and its connection to the children's territorial experiences. Additionally, the transformative nature of this identity was evident through collective dialogue and emotional expressiveness. The study emphasizes the importance of promoting research exercises on the reconstitution of territorial identity, enriched by the perspectives of migrant, foreign, and local populations.*

**Keywords:** *Territorial identity, emotional cartography, real territory, school environment, social practices, migrant populations.*

### Introduction

The current situation in the country reflects social, environmental, and economic needs, where human-environment interactions occur disjointedly with the territory through environmental practices that can be detrimental. The educational scenario demands practices that generate micro-social transformations towards harmonious relationships between humans and the territory, especially in educational institutions where migrant students attend and interact with their local peers.

This paper presents the results of implementing a learning experience developed in a context where a significant portion of the population is undergoing migration. Given this territory's proximity to Colombia's capital city, the context becomes a strategic focus for migration. Therefore, we address constructing territorial identity related to school environmental and social practices.

We conceptualize migration, territory, territorial identity, and school environmental social practices. Human migration is a process that responds to various situations in territories related to internal social issues, climate change, violence, and the search for a life project, among others. We comprehend population migration as the movement of people from one location to another, driven by diverse motives.

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<sup>1</sup> Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Maestría en educación, énfasis en ciencias de la naturaleza y la tecnología, Bogotá, Colombia amunozp@udistrital.edu.co, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1147-6202>

<sup>2</sup> Professor Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Maestría en educación, Bogotá, Colombia, [jdreyesr@udistrital.edu.co](mailto:jdreyesr@udistrital.edu.co), <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9229-1196>

<sup>3</sup> Professor Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas, Maestría en educación, Bogotá, Colombia, [ehbustosv@udistrital.edu.co](mailto:ehbustosv@udistrital.edu.co), <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0072-8598>

## Territory

Bustos research (2015, 2017) frames an approach to the notion of territory, understanding it as a social construction that acquires meaning through diverse interactions between individuals and the context. In other words, the territory possesses characteristics and dynamics constantly reinterpreted by its communities, constructing new meanings and ways of relating that impart significance and importance.

Bozzano (2009) asserts that humans construct territory more socially than geographical space, shaping it as a specific place where numerous changing and constant relationships between humans and nature persist, attributing the character of territory to it. In line with Bozzano's perspective, grounded in the Territorii method, we comprehend the territory through three categories: lived territory, real territory, and dreamed territory.

In this regard, Bustos (2015) mentions that the relationships and interactions of individuals, their practices, and traditions in a scenario of economic globalization lead to population mobility that weakens territorial appropriation. In this sense, Nates (2011) states that these and other concurrent signs in the territory require "re-territorialization" as forms of territorial relationships, whether new or old, that enable the production of symbols, networks, and new relations toward the territory.

The territory as an environmental field (Bustos & Molina, 2023) involves relationships between communities, available natural resources, and practices executed, with communities utilizing environmental characteristics as resources for human development. These human activities become ingrained as everyday social practices. From this perspective, it is crucial to interpret the territory with a sustainable development outlook, reconsidering human-environment relationships to enable conscious use and the persistence of existing environmental resources (Leff, 2011).

## Territorial Identity

According to Banini (2021), it is a collective and individual construction of relational attachment traits to the territory, involving individuals who interact in an inhabited or distant territory, forming identity bonds through interactions with it. It also conceives itself as multidimensional, able to construct, transform, re-symbolize, and gain significance through micro-transformations executed in each dimension and their respective interrelations.

## Environmental School Social Practices

They are collective actions that become habitual, allowing humans to confirm, think, value, take ownership, and express their connections with the territory (Banini, 2021). They represent alternative ways of relating to the territory, where communities express their territorial identity. On the other hand, environmental school social practices are actions carried out by a collective linked to the school environment about their interpretations and assessments of the territory.

Regarding the research territory, it is Comuna Uno of the Municipality of Soacha, where human processes such as migration, in response to the dynamics and problems faced by societies, generate constant population mobility that weakens territorial appropriation. Here, two migrant populations converge: the first is a population originating from various territories within the country, i.e., internal migrations. The second individuals originated from neighboring countries, mainly Venezuela and other countries in South America, i.e., external migrations.

These populations have moved there due to its proximity to the country's center. Therefore, as a space for the collective construction of knowledge, the school needs to address and adopt educational practices that respond to these situations and promote the reconstruction of territorial identities through environmental practices that meet the territory's needs.

Moreover, various environmental school social practices occur in this context, which may happen disjointedly with the territory and its needs. However, their re-signification and redirection can stimulate the educational community to select distinctive features of the territory, under which they can shape shared values, solutions, actions, and objectives that underpin their territorial identity (Banini, 2021). Thus, we conducted this research to determine the contributions of environmental school social practices in constructing the territorial identity of fourth-grade students at the Ciudad Latina Educational Institution in the Municipality of Soacha.

## Methodology

We based our research on the qualitative paradigm, with an action research perspective in the educational field, assuming the role of a participant observer as a researcher. Consequently, we analyzed the meanings attributed to students from an interpretative approach. The research consisted of three stages: inquiry, development of learning experiences, and final analysis. In this communication, we present the results of an experience called "territory's real cartography" to explore children's territorial perceptions regarding their territory's primary emotions, practices, needs, and problems captured in maps. The information collection technique was social cartography. The productions' analysis process was carried out under content analysis, in theoretical dialogue with the categories of territory, territorial identity, and school environmental social practices, using the Maxqda® qualitative analysis software. Significantly, the maps utilized in the cartography exercises are from the Agustín Codazzi Geographic Institute research group in Bogotá, Colombia.

## Results and Analysis

### Origins and Trajectories Converge in the Real Territory

The students carried out a cartographic exercise, tracing the daily routes from their residence to school. This activity started with individual and group approaches that allowed students to discuss their daily trajectories, identifying common points, frequent sites, distances, and proximities to school and coincidental sites.

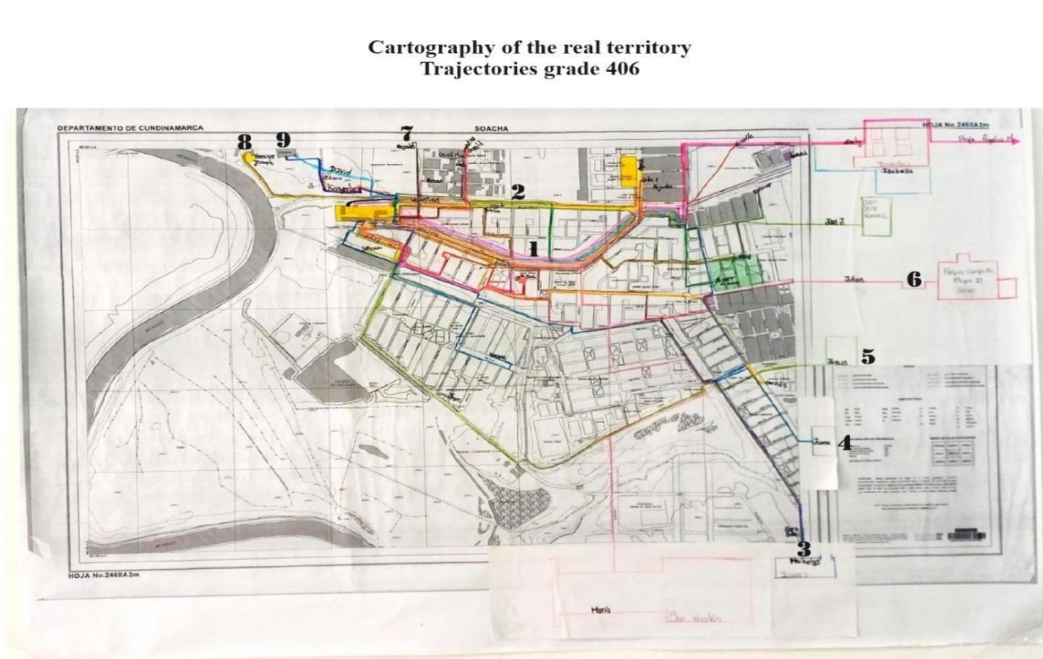


Figure 1. Cartography of daily routes from home to school.

The collective map identified several routes the students took, revealing the diversity of trajectories from different origins to the school, as shown in Figure 1. It also allowed them to identify the convergent points that different trajectories share.

Participants guided this collective knowledge-building experience through reflection and territorial recognition. Given that we included exploring the cohabited territory, students identified existing issues and needs while simultaneously constructing knowledge associated with the possibilities of changing the territory to which they can contribute.

This research experience can connect diverse populations where migrant individuals find a space of connection with the real territory and lived territories (Bozzano, 2009), with which they maintain relational bonds evoked in a cartography of trajectories. According to Nates (2000), we understand that this is a mechanism of reterritorialization, where the production of territory through a dialogical process of representing trajectories generates a sense of ownership and territorial belonging. In this case, it occurs not only in native territories but also in migration and population mobility circumstances.

In Figure 1, we observe the paths of the students and the researcher, with common transit points where they routinely intersect (1 and 2). The prompted discussions about territorial dynamics ("...we live nearby...we always meet at the corner tree...when it rains, that street floods...this street is dark, we go to the park before going home"). The figure also shows dispersion and distance, such as points 3, 4, 5, and 6, which are the residences of some students who undertake daily long journeys and points 7, 8, and 9, where students live nearby ("...we always meet by the stream and go to school together...I live near the bridge over the Bogotá River, and I do not like it because it smells bad...my house is in front of the potato chip factory; from here, you can see the smoke when they are processing them").

### Migration Origin

Regarding the students' origins (Figure 2), we identified that students from various regions of Colombia coexist in the classroom, particularly from cities like Bogotá D.C. and municipalities like Girardot, Mesitas del Colegio, and La Mesa. There are also Valle del Cauca, Cesar, Magdalena, Tolima, Sucre, and Bolívar departments students. Additionally, there are students from neighboring countries such as Venezuela and Ecuador, all sharing the classroom with students native to the Municipality of Soacha.

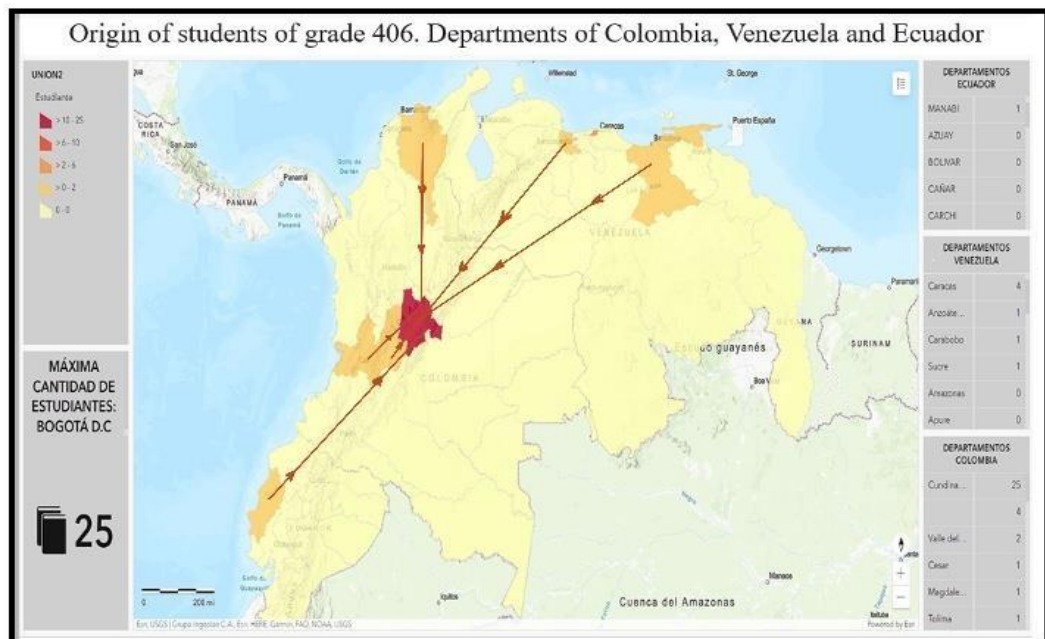


Figure 2. Migration origin of the students in the study classroom.

### Diversity and Concentration: Characteristics of Emotional Cartography

Continuing with the analysis, in the emotional cartography, children identified in their territory the spaces that evoke some emotion in them, where their residences, the most frequented places, the school and its surroundings, and the water sources were associated with the following emotions: joy, sadness, fear, surprise, anger, or disgust. The map shows an uneven distribution of emotional responses; however, certain areas of the territory exhibit a specific concentration of emotions.

Cartography of real territory  
Associated emotions in grade 406

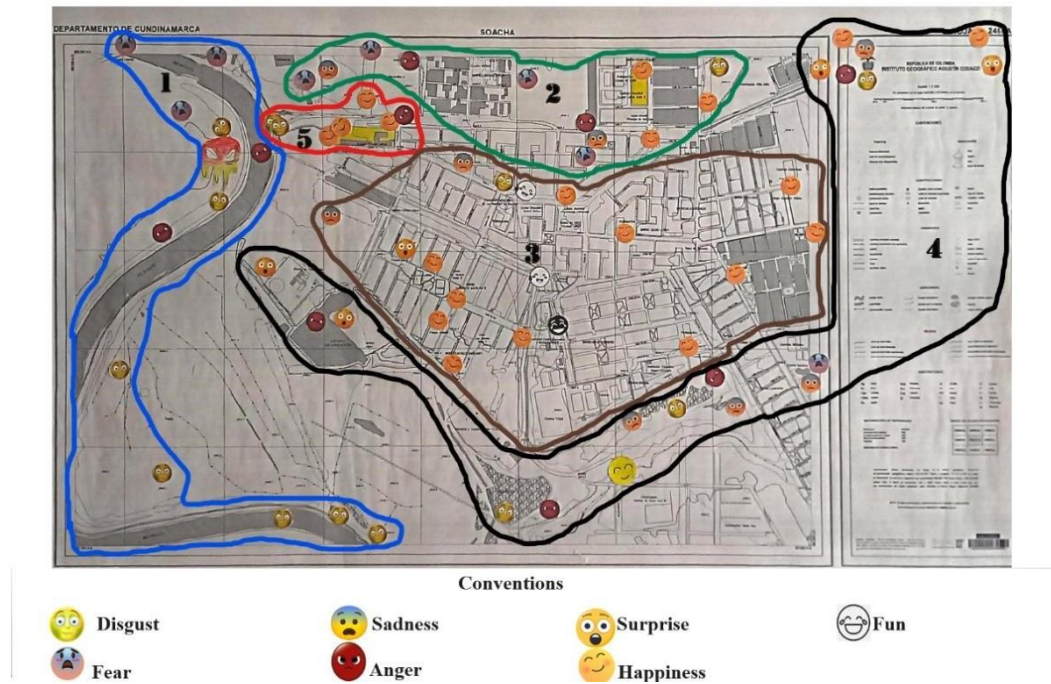


Figure 3. Emotional expressions related to lived experiences in the territory.

#### The Bogotá River: Between the Foreign and the Undesirable

Analyzing emotions linked to the Bogotá River (section one of the map - Figure 3) reveals that students' interactions with it have generated emotional perceptions of fear, anger, and disgust.

Disgust predominates as the primary emotion. Given its current conditions, the Bogotá River is not a place in the territory where students would like to be, neither for enjoyment, transit, or interaction. The river's odors, colors, and sounds leave emotional imprints. Disgust, linked to the need to protect oneself from potential harm, emerges for students about the river primarily due to its unpleasant odors ("...the smell makes me want to vomit") and the concern that ingestion could be harmful. This emotion is predominant in students based on the interactions, dialogues, and experiences they have developed regarding this space.

Fear, emerging to favor organism survival, is depicted as a place of risk and threat ("...those who steal go over there...they run and go to the side of the river when they are about to do something wrong").

Anger, arising unconsciously from infuriating situations, for students is related to an aesthetic idea and a sense of injustice regarding what is happening with the river ("...it would be beautiful if they had not contaminated it...We do not understand why we cannot have a river with clean water and animals...They started polluting the river before we were born, and now they do not know what to do...The river is my territory"), where

being a participants and experiencing its current situation has generated this emotional expression.

#### Near the school: Emotional Diversity

The first set of locations near the institution (section two of the map - Figure 2) is associated with various emotions; this is a space where some children from the area live, so emotions such as anger converge here, related to a sense of injustice due to factors such as pollution and social inequality (...the power goes out all the time...sometimes there is no water... someone damaged the streets. They throw waste anywhere).

A predominant emotion in this space is fear, related to feelings of insecurity and social inequality (...there is much theft in that neighborhood...some act as they consume, and I am afraid to pass by...they smoke at night). However, note that joy also prevails in this space, as the house, the park, the school's Branch B, the set's court, and the well-maintained street elicit this emotion in children (...after church, we go to the neighborhood park...we go down that block because there is a place to throw waste and it smells good).

Next, a second set of locations near the institution (section three of the map - Figure 2) is associated with various emotions, where joy predominates, mainly related to enjoyable spaces such as parks, game courts, and living areas. It is also noteworthy that children associate fun emoticons with this space; here, we also observe the coexistence of sadness related to sensations of poor appearance, deterioration, pollution, and bad smells (...the bad smell comes from the river...some take care, and others spoil).

#### The wetlands: Between surprise and indignation

Section four of the map (Figure 2) refers to the wetlands children identify in the area and a wastewater treatment plant. They base their statements about these spaces and their association with anger, disgust, and sadness on the following aspects: lack of conservation, pollution, the use of wetland ecosystems for dumping debris and waste, and construction of houses, among other daily situations in the territory. Also, on the western side of this space, there is a connection to surprise linked to misinformation (...I did not know that was for treating water) and the emission of foul odors. Note also the surprise and joy associated with two nearby wetlands (northeastern side of the map - Figure 2), one in the process of conservation and the other in a state of contamination (...in the Neuta wetland, the Salomé

Forest is located...in the Tierrablanca wetland, people throw waste, and it is unsafe, but when they clean it, it flourishes, and we can see birds ).

#### The school: Experiences and possibilities

Finally, it is interesting to see how the school (section five of the map - Figure 2) is a space in the territory mainly associated with joy. It is a crucial place where students build diverse relationships, experiences, life stories, and learning (...I like that we talk about our territory because we recognize it and take care of it...I like to see my friends...I want to educate myself to be able to protect my territory). We highlight that there are also emotions such as anger and disgust, mainly due to the proximity to strategic places that have become a focus of pollution, debris dumping, waste, etc. (water channel "canoas," where it flows into the Bogotá River).

In summary, the real territory is a space of emotional recognition, where the experiences, life stories, and dynamics of students' lives become threads of connection with their territory. In the context of building and reconstructing territorial identity, these become triggers for actions and decisions by students as direct inhabitants of their real territory. Therefore, our cartographic exercise of trajectories and emotions connected, situated, and externalized their feelings and emotions, making them more acquainted with their territory. We agree with Nates (2011), who mentions that emotional recognition is a

reterritorialization dynamic that elicits the production of symbols and new relationships with the territory.

Maturana (1992) suggests that humans do not have a predetermined existence but rather constitute it through relationships, where identity consolidates through actions entwined with emotions and dialogue. In other words, the connection between emotions and collective dialogue about the situations that generate them mobilizes identity bonds that can help students rethink and define more sustainable practices within their territory.

Similarly, for Bozzano (2017), a human being who is more knowledgeable about their territory, its difficulties, and possibilities allows the activation of love, power, and strength to make decisions and joint actions towards more just territories. Therefore, for our research, this cartographic exercise that associated emotions and trajectories becomes a factor of empowerment and territorial knowledge, enabling students to reconstruct and create identity ties towards their territories.

## Conclusions

In this cartographic exercise, students form their territorial identity by expressing both positive and negative emotions and depicting and relating emotions associated with real and lived territories. For the students, the territorial identity towards the cohabited territory shifts between the surrounding territories of each individual and their territorial experiences. Thus, identity transforms and reconstructs through the dialogues developed, allowing the evocation of the lived territory and its translation to the real territory.

An emotional polyphony is discernible in the cartographic exercise. Firstly, there is a concentration of negative emotions, mainly associated with unfavorable environmental practices, and secondly, we identified positive emotions linked to environmental social practices that benefit the territory. Territorial identity transforms the possibilities of learning, expressing, deciding, and acting individually and collectively, enhancing the territory and forming new identity bonds framed in more sustainable behaviors.

There are environmental challenges, especially concerning the Bogotá River and wetlands. These results highlight the need to address pollution and conservation issues and how students can become change agents in protecting the real territory through collective emotional discussion.

The recognition of territorial dynamics through cartography is a mechanism of reterritorialization. In this research, there is evidence for future investigative work to delve into the reconstruction of a sense of territorial belonging, the production of convergent territories, and the promotion of threads of connection with the territory. Including migrant, local, and foreign populations generates new perspectives on the territory.

Implementing learning experiences based on social cartography in the context of the Ciudad Latina Educational Institution revealed valuable insights into the contributions of school environmental and social practices in constructing a territorial identity for fourth-grade students. The analysis of cartographic exercises highlighted the interconnectedness of students from diverse origins, the emotional nuances associated with the lived territory, and the collective aspirations for a transformed territory.

The findings suggest that school environmental social practices, such as social cartography, can effectively promote the reconstruction of territorial identity. Emphasizing emotional expression, fostering transformative dialogue, and encouraging collective envisioning of a dreamed territory contribute to forming a cohesive territorial identity.

The implications of this research extend to educational practices that aim to address the needs of migrant populations and promote positive human-environment relationships. By incorporating participatory and reflective approaches, schools can play a vital role in empowering students to actively engage with their territory actively, fostering a sense of belonging, and contributing to the sustainable development of their communities.

Additionally, the study advocates for integrating diverse perspectives, including those of migrant, foreign, and local populations, in exploring and reconstructing territorial identity. Recognizing and valuing the diversity of experiences within the school community enriches the understanding of the territory and promotes inclusive practices that enhance social cohesion.

In conclusion, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of education, migration, and territorial identity. By acknowledging the role of school environmental social practices in shaping students' perceptions and connections to the territory, educators and policymakers can design interventions that foster positive environmental attitudes, community collaboration, and the construction of resilient and inclusive territorial identities.

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