Introduction

In this document we will share our stories of how we developed the idea of UBUNTU that has given us the frame to develop the T-lab on Islas del Rosario.

How we have we been inspired to get to this point of our lives? What was been difficult? What has inspired us?

To begin with it is important to say that there are many people, communities, processes, organizations, and experiences that are part of this initiative; it is really a network of inspiration and mutual support.
Islas del Rosario Context
The Islas del Rosario T-Lab is focussed on the development of the UBUNTU initiative, located in the heart of Big Island (the main island of the Islas del Rosario archipelago). On this island is the home of the afro colombian community of Islas del Rosario with a population of around 180 families that have been in a long process of demonstrating that an ancestral community, considered very “poor”, can preserve the natural environment at the same time as increasing their quality of life. With no basic services and a lack of education, health and opportunities, they have been able to show that with perseverance, a community can accomplish the recognition of its rights: the community now have collective land tenure in the buffer zone of a National Natural Park Corales del Rosario y San Bernardo. Ever de la Rosa has been one of the main leaders of this process for more than 20 years.
Since Margarita Zethelius visited Islas del Rosario in 2001, she was inspired by the people and the amazing biodiversity. This community is now an inspiration for other communities in the region and the country. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=whyLfmgxK3E
Each of us, Margarita and Ever, come from very different backgrounds, but we find that there is such a big power combining our worlds. Normally these worlds are so distant, but we put them in collaboration, a dialog, a dance to learn and co-create.

Ever, with his experience as a grassroots community leader, fishermen, and pioneer in creating opportunities of sustainable development for his people, is working to fight for the recognition of his community’s rights in a very special territory that has been declared as a Natural National park because of its coral reefs, its mangroves and dry forests. Ever is an inspiration for many communities that know the community processes of las Islas del Rosario.

Margarita comes from an academic background. She studied biology and has always felt a calling to work with grassroots communities in places where the biodiversity is significant. In a process of exploring how humans can develop as societies and take care of their territories, she discovered the ecovillage movement, with whom she has been actively involved since 2003. Margarita has also co-created several organizations which work with conservation and communities. Many of the experiences she has been harvesting are connected with teaching and learning processes, from courses on ecovillages and permaculture, to participating in COPs. Margarita supports and is part of an exploration of how ecovillages are contributing to, for example, the mitigation and adaptation to climate change.
Current regional context

Several communities in the Colombian Caribbean have suffered in terms of displacement, deaths, loss of cultural legacies and their ancestral knowledge. This is not just because of armed actors, but also because of an excluding economic model. Added to these challenges is the lack of opportunities and support to develop autonomously, according to their practices and customs. This has deeply affected their possibilities of creating individual and collective wellbeing, hand in hand with the care of their territorial biodiversity.

An important part of this process is the recognition that the effects of different types of violence are not only individual but are also collective, whereby the territory is also a victim (as it has been recognized in the Law of Victims of Colombia).
UBUNTU AND TERANGA

In the context of the signed Peace Agreement in Colombia, we offer UBUNTU as a pilot Community Based Training Center for Peace Building and Conservation. Ubuntu presents a holistic and integral approach with practical examples of how to create sustainable solutions with social, environmental, economic and cultural dimensions.

After many years working with communities in Colombia, we have identified the main objectives of UBUNTU to be helping the aim of several communities to acquire tools to recuperate and revitalize their ancestral wisdom, to rebuild trust and to co-create their own path to the future, where there is care for people and for their biocultural diversity. The articulation of ancestral wisdom with new technologies and techniques is a crucial component of the proposal, not just to overcome the challenges of a post-conflict Colombia, but to respond to emerging threats such as climate change, that need innovative solutions.
With the support of different organizations, people, and communities, we are developing different activities, gatherings, trainings, and field trips to walk our territories so as to create a well consolidated Program of Design of Sustainable Settlements for Peace (PDASP).

This process itself a T-Lab
UBUNTU and the PDASP is a hub, a concentrated, intercultural experience of expansion and contraction to reflect, sistematize and synthesize our learning processes.
- UBUNTU: Solidarity in community. I am because you are "The spirit of Ubuntu". From South Africa.

- TERANGA: Sharing abundance. Our well-being, wealth and happiness "Living the Teranga" Teranga = Unconditional hospitality in Wolof (language of Senegal, one of the countries from which the largest number of slaves were sent to the Colombian coast)
The first gathering for this T-LAb took place with local and external experts, with combined experience and knowledge in: ancestral wisdom, agroecology, bioconstruction, participatory processes, restoration, conservation, conflict resolution, and human rights. With this team we collectively constructed the training program and started the design of the space/center of experimentation for sustainability.
The methodology for this first gathering was principally based on:
- Recognition of the territory, and respectful ways of approaching and being part of it
- Getting to know the practical experiences of the team
- Understanding the dynamics of the community of Islas del Rosario
- Exploring different places/spaces to develop the practical and theoretical sessions for the next gathering (alternative classrooms)
- Flexibility and intuition for the adaptation of the proposed agenda
Following the cultural traditions of the Sierra Nevada region, we carried out a ‘pagamento ceremony,’ and offering to our ancestors, to the territory and to Mother earth. We gave thanks with our words, our thoughts and different materials (such as stones, fruits, cotton, water, and earth). This was an expression of gratitude. We also requested support for our collective purpose and for our well-being. “With the 'pagamento' we align our work with the protection of Mother Earth”.
Youth artesian showing some of the educational material made on the island, to be used with young children in Teranga house.

Visit to one of the water storage systems that will be fixed so as to store good water for the community, the Teranga house and the nursery for reforestation.
One of the workshops we held was on conflict resolution using the tools of non violent communication. The community of Islas del Rosario has highlighted that this subject is one of the most important ones they to strengthen. Carlos Rojas and Camila Olarte facilitated two workshops with the active participation of the community in Isla Grande and Isleta. With this workshop we also shared with the other facilitators this methodology, and welcomed as part of the emergent program.
During a visit to one of the elders and traditional knowledge keepers of the island, we shared of seeds from Montes de Maria. We learnt one of the most effective and simple techniques to make compost

We learnt about local plants that can be used as a very good source of nutrients for animals. We can find these plants in the border of the roads where they grow wild.
Co-design of program sustainable settlements for peace

In a process of reflective feedback based on the experiences of this gathering - looking at the needs of the territory and the realities of several of the communities we have been working with - we designed a draft structure of the program and a broad curriculum. The main aim for participants was to “acquire tools that support the construction of alternatives to the following: increase quality of life; recovery of cultural legacies; support the reconstruction of social tissue; and the care of the ecosystems and communal spaces of the territories”. Besides this, a very important objective is to revitalize the traditional dynamics of mutual support, inspiration and generation of collective wisdom in the community.
It was important to have a first general section where the participants would receive an idea of the many tools and experiences that can be shared. This would be followed by feedback from them to decide the issues to be addressed in more detail in the following sessions. In the design there would be time for the participants to work in their communities, bringing more contextualized information and opportunities to other people of the communities to participate in sending information, ideas and materials.
Mapping the key elements to address with the communities in the region
The process

Where: UBUNTU in Rosario Islands (to start)

What? CDASP

Whom?

- comunidad x
- grupo organizado z
- proyecto y
- organización
With a vision of Multiplying the Implementation of the program in more territories
We continue with this dream that is becoming a reality thanks to your help!!!

Any questions, contributions or comments can be sent to margaritaozethelius@gmail.com
The participation in the "Llamado de la Montaña," as well as other ecovillage gatherings has been crucial for this process. To be able to meet organizations, initiatives, communities, and families - all on a path towards sustainability, towards a more balanced society - has been very important. Vital is the co creation of a family that supports each other, that inspires and also question each other. This in itself is a great learning journey. It was in the 'llamado' event of 2016, for example, where we met the organisation Fundación Mentes en Transición, and where our participation in the T-Learning project was consolidated.
Since 2013, together with 'Alianzas para la Abundancia' and 'CASA Colombia' we have had Ecovillage Design courses (EDEs) in different ports of Colombia that have given great experiences. We have also been able to participate in EDEs in other parts of the world, to learn about more tools for facilitating participatory processes.
The process of sharing with 12 communities (indigenous and afro) their experiences of constructing programs for small children has brought an understanding of how to accompany learning processes, for example: How children appropriate a knowledge as they share it with their parents and their extended family, and how daily activities bring about connection with ones territory.
The continuation of the formation of interdisciplinary groups.
Gatherings between communities in the Islote y Múcura islands.
One of the tools that we found in this process of creating the program for small children is the bio-cultural calendar. This will be an important tool for all the communities in the PDASP.
Close to the islands of Rosario is the community of Bocachica. A local fishermen told us about a big threat to their subsistence. Big ships are coming to Cartagena port and now there is a project to deepen the underwater channel that the ships use. That means destroying one of the most amazing coral reefs in the world. This coral reef has amazingly adapted to pollution, sedimentation, and an increase in sea temperature. Several communities depend on fish and tourism, and protecting the coral reef is one of their greatest priorities, as well as a world wide priority, as corrals are in danger all around the world!
Responding to an invitation of Agenda Caribe, Alliances for Abundance attended a gathering in Sierra Nevada, 7 hours form the Islands, with representatives of communities that have been victims of displacement. We were able to share some of the ecovillage and sustainable settlements approaches, and also get to know more of the traditional wisdom of the indigenous communities of this territory. We hope that some people from these communities will attend the training process on the Islands.
The community of Punta Canoa has suffered a long and steady process of displacement, principally because an economic model based on massive tourism, expensive condos and golf courses, that in many cases have pushed the natives to sell their lands, specially because of the economic pressure. Some leaders such as Maria continue working for their territorial rights and to preserve their ancestral wisdom to protect the land. Looking for alternatives, one of her initiatives was the Life museum of Punta Canoa, where visitors can get to know and use the traditional objects that the natives manage in their daily lives.