



The Political Craft of Collective Action

Strategic Lessons from
Movilizadorio in Driving
Structural Transformation

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For more information about Movilizadorio, see <https://movilizadorio.org/en/about-us/>

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1. Introduction

This paper presents our reflections on collective action since founding Movilizadorio in 2016. Movilizadorio originally came to life as a platform for civic engagement in the context of the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) to end more than 50 years of armed conflict. Since then, its work has expanded to include a wide range of causes beyond peacebuilding and across geographies beyond Colombia including Latin America more broadly as well as countries in Africa and Asia, and as far afield as Australia. This experience has helped us to develop a more nuanced understanding of narrative change and strategic communication, civic capacity building, and collective action as interconnected dimensions of the change we seek to advance. Yet one certainty has remained and has only grown stronger: at its heart lies people's energy and motivation to engage and transform. What ultimately sustains collective action is trust – among people and in the process – and hope.

This paper presents frank and often personal reflections and related lessons alongside a closer examination of selected cases that illustrate how we have worked to galvanise collective action and pursue structural and scalable change through programmatic design. These cases show how principles drawn from thinking and working politically (TWP) have informed how we have read context, built relationships, and adapted our strategies in politically complex environments in order to contribute to structural and scalable transformations that affect interconnected dimensions such as narrative and culture, policy and regulation.

From these experiences, we then reflect on the strategic choices that have gradually shaped our approach – how we have navigated tensions, made decisions in the context of uncertainty, and sought to align participation with the longer arc of structural transformation. Our account is grounded in direct experience and committed to an honest assessment of both what has enabled change and where constraints and difficult dilemmas have surfaced along the way.

In capturing this journey, with all the various challenges and opportunities we have encountered, we aim to contribute to a broader community of practitioners who likewise see in collective action a vital response to today's interconnected challenges.

The task is urgent. The challenges are shared. And the responsibility for building more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures is collective.

2. Strategic Approaches to Collective Action: Examples from Practice

Movilizatorio has implemented dozens of programmes and projects since 2016. To illustrate our work and what collective action looks like in practice we present three case studies from different periods: when Movilizatorio was first established, five years later, and in 2025. This helps to contrast how the work of collective action has evolved over the decade, and to show what continues to be at its core. The three examples also show different circumstances where collective action has proven essential: a national juncture with the peace process, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing climate crisis.

2.1 How it all started: Movilizatorio as a civic platform for engagement in Colombia's peace process

Movilizatorio started in 2016 as a lab for social innovation and civic engagement. Colombia was then embarked on peace negotiations between the government and the FARC-EP, which were taking place in Cuba between 2012 and 2016 and culminated in the signing of the Final Agreement for the Termination of the Conflict and the Construction of a Stable and Lasting Peace in 2016. During these negotiations, while periodic press releases reported progress, many Colombians experienced the negotiations as remote – aware that fundamental decisions about the country's future were being shaped, but with no clear mechanisms to participate or co-construct the outcomes. We understood that the sustainability of any eventual agreement, particularly in a context where implementation would unfold across electoral cycles and changing administrations, would depend on broad social ownership. We also saw in digital technologies and social media an opportunity to connect people with the peace process in a way that would allow for participation, coordination, and reach at scale.

When we decided to act on this, we had an overall aim that still remains our purpose: to support people, communities, and movements in building the power to shape more inclusive, just, and sustainable futures for people and nature. Although we did not have all the answers, we saw an opportunity and knew that collective action and civic innovation had to be at the centre. So, from the outset we defined Movilizatorio as a lab with a nimble, experimental approach to test new routes to change. Our vision was that creating platforms to convene leaders, communities, and diverse constituencies could bring about change more effectively through collective action; and that participation itself could become a pathway to ownership and sustainability.

In our analysis of the Colombian landscape, we found that power was concentrated in the hands of a few decision-makers, while communities were excluded from conversations on the most pressing issues affecting them. We wanted to mobilise people and create platforms that would allow them to connect at a speed and scale not possible before and secure a seat at the table.

During the peace negotiations, we began shaping the strategy of the lab and building the partnerships necessary to bringing this vision to life with the initial purpose, that of a global organisation dedicated to public mobilisation through storytelling and campaigning.

In 2016, when the peace agreement between the government of Colombia and the FARC was signed, it was presented for the first time to Colombians in a national referendum asking the electorate to approve or reject it. Although partial agreements had been announced throughout the negotiation process, the consolidated final text was made public only 39 days before the referendum, just over five weeks for people to engage with a 300-page legal document and vote on the country's direction. It was in this context that El Avispero, Movilizadorio's first initiative, emerged: a civic platform that currently connects more than 180,000 change-makers across Colombia and has become a cornerstone of our work. More information on El Avispero can be found on the link provided in Box 1.

The referendum phase of the peace accords created a new opening for public engagement, and we moved quickly to seize it. We convened public debates between advocates of the 'Yes' and 'No' campaigns, using social media and live-streamed conversations to broaden access to information. We set up WhatsApp groups with experts on the subject to support public education on the accords, creating spaces where people could ask questions and receive direct, informed responses. While doing this work, we became acutely aware of the scale of misinformation circulating about the accords. In response, we launched our first national campaign in 2016 to clarify what was accurate and what was not in public discourse about the agreement. We also campaigned for and won the petitions asking for the Colombian diaspora to be able to register to vote in the referendum.

When the referendum resulted in a very narrow 'No' vote by 0.4%, with a 37.4% turnout and a margin of roughly 56,000 votes out of nearly 13 million cast, the same networks were activated to ask for a second chance for peace. This pressure called on political leaders to resume negotiations and revise the agreement into a version that could secure broader social endorsement. El Avispero played a central role in orchestrating the mobilisations that followed, and in supporting the *Campamento por la Paz* (Peace Camp) in Bogotá's Plaza de Bolívar. The platform helped explain the rationale for the camp with media outlets, supported its digital strategy, mobilised donations, and supported it with new marches and artistic and cultural expressions that sustained public momentum and kept alive the call to give peace a second chance. The WhatsApp groups created through the El Avispero platform are still active nine years later. After six weeks of mobilisations, a new Agreement was presented and passed through Congress. Despite this, Colombia remained deeply divided between the 'yes' and 'no'

supporters – and the peace agreement has continued to be the most polarising issue in the country ever since.

After the final peace accord was signed, we continued to shape Movilizadorio’s strategy as a lab and building the necessary partnerships to bring our vision to life in support of peace consolidation. We worked alongside young people in rural territories deeply affected by the armed conflict, strengthening civic capacities, and using civic tech to expand participation and mobilise institutions to respond to co-created agendas that reflected communities’ priorities. We quickly learned that, for young people, peace was not only about a legal agreement, but about the substantive exercise of their rights: having access to adequate food and health care, living in a healthy environment, being able to walk and live without fear, accessing quality information, and having opportunities for education and decent work. These insights from our work in the territories led us to expand our scope, adopting a broader and more integrated approach with citizen agendas at the centre. More information on some of the initiatives that we launched during Movilizadorio’s early days are presented in Box 1.

Box 1: Explore further

El Avispero brings together a large community of change agents to promote collective action and civic leadership in Colombia.

Diciendo y Haciendo strengthened youth civic participation in territories historically affected by armed conflict in Colombia.

Cita a ciegas fostered empathy and reconciliation by connecting people from different territories through unexpected, “blind date”-style encounters, challenging stereotypes, breaking down prejudices, and creating meaningful spaces for dialogue and peacebuilding across diverse communities.

2.2 The funeral of fossil fuels: opening political horizons for energy transition

Collective action can generate political possibility by reshaping the language through which futures are imagined. When there is institutional blockage, or mobilisation at the level of narrative and culture shifts what people can think or imagine, while this does not replace formal negotiations to enact policy or regulations it does open horizons, give direction, and create the conditions for new political pathways to emerge. By articulating a shared vision, movements can reposition contested agendas as being legitimate and collectively owned.

2.2.1 The Fossil Funeral as a collective intervention

This is what Movilizadorio and our partners achieved at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP30 in Belém do Pará in November 2025 through the Fossil Fuel Funeral (see Figure 1). The Fossil Fuel Funeral was an artistic and participatory performance carried out during

the Climate Strike by Alianza Potencia Energética, which began on Brazil's streets and established the narrative of the inevitability of energy transition. The Funeral became such a powerful success because it was genuinely collective: each civil society organisation (CSO) in the alliance brought distinct knowledge, networks, and expertise, and it was precisely that combination which made possible to achieve what no single organisation could have done alone. [Artyc Estudio](#)¹ contributed its creative vision and expertise in arts and communications; [Periodistas por el Planeta](#)² activated its collaborative journalism network – bringing together media outlets, journalists, non-government organisations (NGOs), and digital content creators to amplify climate stories across the region, Movilizadorio contributed with mobilisation, networks and advocacy strategy; and members such as [Fondo Emerger](#)³ and [Transforma](#)⁴ were instrumental in shaping the Alliance from the outset with policy and grassroots insights. What brought these diverse actors together was a shared purpose: protecting the planet while advancing an equitable and green development for Latin America.

2.2.2 Designing a narrative platform: strategy, co-creation, and cultural grounding

The Alianza Potencia Energética combines strategic communications, high-level advocacy, and grassroots capacity building to advance an equitable energy transition across Latin America. Within this framework, the Alliance identified UNFCCC COP30 as a political opportunity: as the first Conference of the Parties (COP) hosted in the Amazon, COP30 provided an opening for recognising communities' historical struggles and collective memory, and for framing the energy transition and climate debate from a just, community-centred, and inclusive perspective. The Climate march offered a concrete entry point, as it has historically been one of the most visible expressions of civil society demands within the UNFCCC process.

Movilizadorio and other stakeholders worked together for nearly a year to plan, design, and build trust with local actors in Belém in order to ensure that the action would function as an open platform where Indigenous communities, local organisations, artists, environmental activists, and the many actors convened by the [Cúpula dos Povos](#)⁵ (The Summit of People Living in Poverty) – could participate meaningfully. The strategic question guiding this process was precise: how could we generate visibility and resonance beyond our engaged constituencies, reaching diverse stakeholders and decision-makers?

¹ See <https://www.artyc.cl/>

² See <https://periodistasporelplaneta.com/>

³ See <https://emerger.org/>

⁴ See [Transforma](#)

⁵ See <https://cupuladospovoscop30.org/en/peoples-summit/>

Through a process of co-creation that engaged grassroots actors and drew on the history of Belém and the tradition of the [Auto do Círio](#)⁶ – a popular street theatre performance rooted in the cultural and religious celebrations of the Círio de Nazaré – the idea of the Fossil Fuel Funeral emerged as way to carry this narrative through art, creativity, memory, and collective storytelling. The strategy was to design the performance as a platform that constituencies within the Climate Strike could appropriate, which convened 70,000 people – creating a shared space to unite voices calling for climate justice and respect for all forms of life. At the same time, through this narrative strategy we also sought to project a powerful public image that could capture headlines, elevate demands to decision-makers, and shape the global discussion on climate and fossil fuel phase-out.

Building on the intangible cultural heritage of the city of Belém and on the territorial practices of Amazonian Indigenous peoples was essential to achieving this coherence. The creative direction of Auto do Círio and the School of Theatre and Dance at the Federal University of Pará anchored the process in its cultural and territorial context, ensuring that the performance resonated locally while also addressing a global debate. The Fossil Fuel Funeral unfolded as a collective visual ritual to bid farewell to fossil fuels: coffins, jaguars, and mourning women embodied the costs of extraction, while the sun signalled the transition towards a world sustained by clean energy and affirmed a narrative of hope.

Figure 1: An image from the Funeral of Fossil Fuels during COP30



Source: Photograph reproduced from *The Funeral of Fossil Fuels* image gallery (<https://fossilfuelfuneral.org>), accessed 22 February 2026

⁶ See <https://fossilfuelfuneral.org/auto-do-cirio/>

2.2.3 From cultural action to political impact

The performance generated over 500 headlines worldwide and became one of COP 30's defining images, featured across leading international media (see Figure 2). The narrative advanced by the Fossil Fuel Funeral conveyed the inevitability of the energy transition. The action did not wait for diplomatic consensus; it gave symbolic form to an existing consensus among social movements across the Global South, in particular affected communities and territories advocating for green development. In so doing, the Funeral translated that collective public demand into a visible and resonant public claim. Some of the headlines can be accessed through the links provided in Box 2.

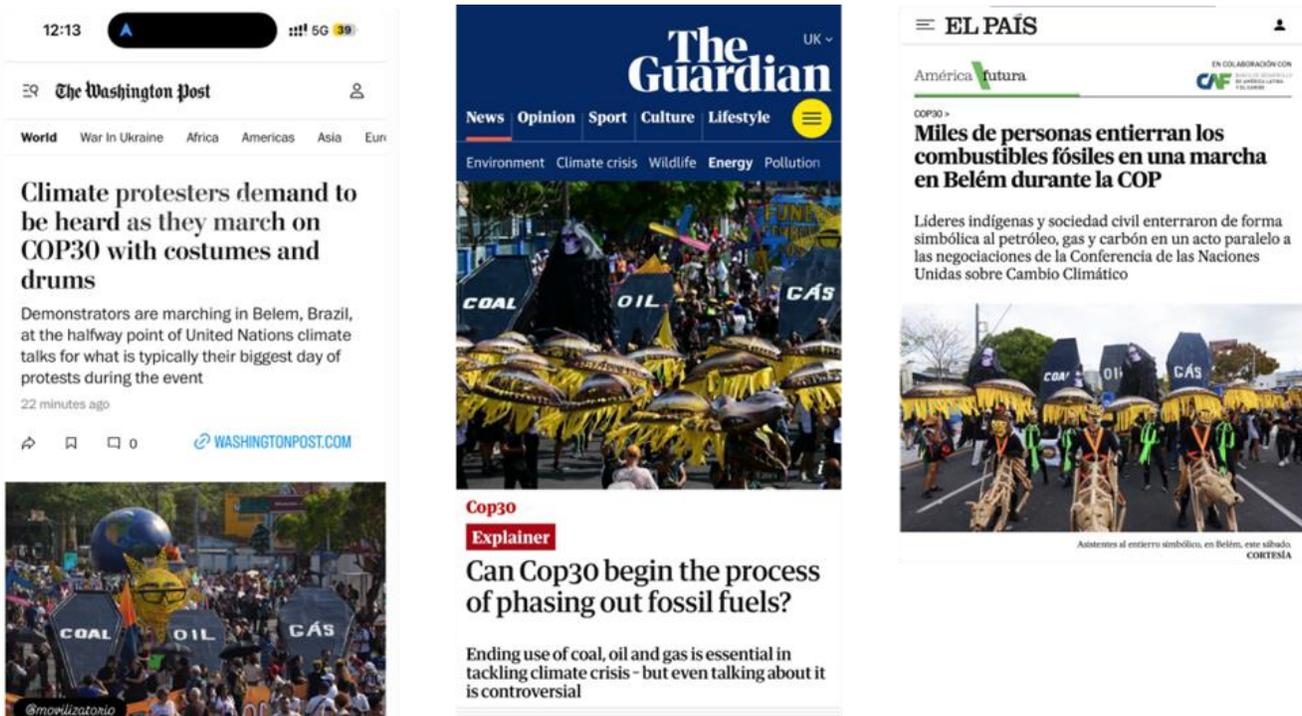
The Fossil Fuel Funeral was not an isolated intervention: it was the public face of a deeper strategic architecture with years in the making. The Alianza Potencia Energética – a regional coalition co-founded by Fondo Emerger, Transforma, Artyc, Periodistas por el Planeta, and Movilizadorio, operating across Colombia, Chile, and Brazil – combines strategic communications, high-level advocacy, and grassroots capacity building to advance an equitable energy transition across Latin America. It positions these three countries as laboratories of just green development: spaces where cultural action, community organising, and policy incidence reinforce one another, from local councils to international climate negotiations.

That multi-scaled logic found its clearest expression in the political outcomes that emerged from Belém alongside the performance. While COP30's final text fell short of a binding fossil-fuel roadmap, Colombia and Chile – two of the Alliance's founding countries, alongside Brazil as the summit's host – were central to launching the [Belém Declaration on the Just Transition Away from Fossil Fuels](#).⁷ The Declaration formally recognises oil, gas, and coal as the primary drivers of the climate crisis and calls for the reduction of their consumption, production, and subsidies, promoting an international cooperation mechanism – encompassing technology transfer and climate finance – to ensure that the phase-out is orderly, just, and attentive to the needs of countries in the Global South. Backed by 84 of the 194 countries participating in the formal negotiations, the Belém Declaration set the minimum political ambition at the international level and established the foundations for the [First International Conference on Fossil Fuel Phase-Out](#),⁸ to be co-hosted by Colombia in 2026, where signatories will start to design the Phase-Out Route of fossil fuels. Cultural action and institutional architecture, in this sense, moved together: the Funeral named what the Declaration began to formalise, and the Alliance held both results simultaneously – amplifying public demand from below while shaping the political agenda from within.

⁷ See <https://www.minambiente.gov.co/colombia-presenta-declaracion-de-belem-y-convoca-conferencia-global-sobre-combustibles-fosiles/>

⁸ See <https://www.cancilleria.gov.co/newsroom/news/colombia-acogera-primera-conferencia-internacional-transicion-alla-combustibles#:~:text=Combustibles%20F%C3%B3siles%20%7C%20Canciller%C3%ADa-.Colombia%20acoger%C3%A1%20la%20Primera%20Conferencia%20Internacional%20para%20la,all%C3%A1%20de%20los%20Combustibles%20F%C3%B3siles&text=Santa%20Marta%20ser%C3%A1%20sede%2C%20del,acelerar%20la%20transici%C3%B3n%20energ%C3%A9tica%20global.>

Figure 2: Headlines from the Funeral of Fossil Fuels in global media coverage of COP30



Note. Images from The Washington Post, The Guardian, and El País and compiled with campaign materials from Movilizadorio.

Box 2: Explore further

Below are some of the 500 global headlines that referenced the “Funeral of Fossil Fuels,” making it a defining image of the Climate Strike at COP30.

- [The Funeral of Fossil Fuels](#)
- [Un funeral despidió a los combustibles fósiles en COP30](#)
- [COP30 | Belém entierra a los combustibles fósiles en una marcha histórica por el clima](#)
- [Thousands hit streets of Belém to call for action during crucial Cop30 summit](#)

[50,000 March in Brazil to Celebrate Death of Fossil Fuel Industry at COP30](#)

2.3 Colombia Cares for Colombia: mobilising broad partnerships for scalable impact despite polarisation

When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Colombia in March 2020, a strict national lockdown was imposed overnight. What began as a public health emergency rapidly became a livelihood crisis, exposing the structural vulnerabilities of a country where nearly half of the labour force works in the informal economy – street vendors, domestic workers, and day labourers whose survival depends on

daily income. With mobility frozen and economic activity paralysed, millions of families faced immediate food insecurity. The scale and urgency of the crisis demanded a response that exceeded the capacities of any single institution – be it government, the private sector, or civil society.

2.3.1 Activation under uncertainty: mobilising without a playbook

Like the rest of the country, Movilizadorio was deeply affected by the pandemic. In the midst of the disruption wrought by COVID-19, we found ourselves reflecting on the nature of our work and its scope. We had built networks and alliances that could be activated for rapid coordination, and had accumulated experience with crowdfunding technologies that could channel resources at speed. We had never, however, responded to humanitarian emergencies and had no expertise in health or food-security issues. Despite this, we decided that we should act, without fully anticipating what that commitment would cost us in time, effort, and organisational capacity. Our chats with El Avispero were bursting with ideas and demands for help. With the urgency of using our knowledge and capacity to address this crisis, we joined a new WhatsApp group to articulate a response from civil society together with other organisations and groups with complementary expertise.

The country was still grappling with the political divisions that followed the referendum on the peace accords, and the social-impact sector was not immune to this polarisation. Building trust among new partners is typically a long-term process. However, the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis was so widely felt – among other things, we were all confined to our homes, regardless of status or economic level – that it created an unusual moment of shared vulnerability. Empathy began to flourish, allowing a broader network of collaboration to emerge across diverse regions and actors. United around a common purpose and narrative, the [Colombia Cares for Colombia](#)⁹ (Colombia Cuida Colombia) solidarity network took shape, aiming to reach and support the communities suffering the most.

2.3.2 Building the coalition: rapid coordination and collective infrastructure

Building on that initial WhatsApp group, and together with the co-founder group and initial Executive Committee comprising Fundación [TAAP](#),¹⁰ [ABACO](#),¹¹ [Fundación Saldarriaga Concha](#),¹² and María José Rubio and Jorge Bermúdez, among many others who joined the call, we built an extensive team and a strong and nimble network. The initial group combined deep expertise in health, food security, mobilisation, networks, strategic communications, partnerships, and territorial work. Many of us had never worked together before nor met in person. Within days, we built the brand, the campaign, media and influencer partnerships, a website and later a crowdfunding platform that channelled

⁹ For more information, visit <https://colombiacuidacolombia.com/movimiento-ccc/#que-somos>

¹⁰ See <https://fundaciontaap.org/>

¹¹ See <https://abaco.org.co/>

¹² See the following link <https://www.saldarriagaconcha.org/>

donations for food and health supplies. Many crops were at risk of being lost because no one could harvest them. Through our network, producers connected with us, and we activated partnerships with companies to provide trucks and fuel donations to transport food-to-food banks across the country.

Colombia Cares for Colombia understood that, through connection and collaboration, we could achieve what had seemed impossible: to sustain hope in the midst of a crisis, and to act on the conviction that every contribution counts. Six weeks into the strict lockdown, on 1 May 2020, Colombia Cares for Colombia, together with more than 80 media outlets, led a joint broadcast in which competing public and private TV channels and radio stations came together for the first time to air a live solidarity concert¹³ simultaneously nationwide (see Figure 3). Produced entirely from their homes, the concert brought together more than 300 artists, including some of Colombia's most prominent performers such as Shakira, Sofía Vergara, Maluma, and Carlos Vives, as well as leading national athletes. The National Orchestra recorded the national anthem remotely,¹⁴ with each musician performing from home, creating a powerful symbol of unity in isolation. [Detonante](#),¹⁵ [242](#),¹⁶ and [Lowe](#)¹⁷ – cultural platforms driving creative collaboration and social impact – were part of the team that, together with Movilizadorio, made it happen.

The crowdfunding response to deliver food and essential health supplies to vulnerable communities was unprecedented: demand was so high that both the Colombia Cares for Colombia campaign's technology platforms and national payment networks crashed temporarily. At the time, it became the largest crowdfunding effort in Colombia's history, raising over USD 4 million in cash and in-kind donations.¹⁸

2.3.3 Scaling solidarity

Beyond the extraordinary fundraising results, the campaign's greatest achievement was to lift national morale, send a message of hope and solidarity, and share real stories of resilience and possibility when families were hanging red cloths outside their homes to signal that they were going hungry during one of the world's strictest and longest lockdowns.

For the Movilizadorio team, the campaign was also an immense challenge. Among other things, we were also leading the social media response for Colombia Cares for Colombia without any humanitarian training, and it was extremely difficult to respond to the massive influx of messages from

¹³ For more information, see https://caracol.com.co/radio/2020/04/28/entretenimiento/1588029800_333242.html

¹⁴ See <https://www.radionacional.co/musica/hecho-en-casa-album-de-la-orquesta-sinfonica-de-colombia>

¹⁵ See <https://www.detonante.com/>

¹⁶ See <https://242.rocks/>

¹⁷ See <https://www.instagram.com/mullenlowessp3/>

¹⁸ <https://colombiacuidacolombia.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Reporte-anual-2020-v11.pdf>

families desperately asking for food while being confined to their homes. A targeting committee within Movilizadorio worked tirelessly, reviewing data and mapping where government aid was already available, to make the painful decisions about where to focus the limited resources. In some staff meetings, we connected with emergency response doctors to learn how they sustained resilience while responding to crises, drawing lessons to strengthen our own capacity. During the early months, we worked over many weekends without rest to build the platform, website, campaign, and digital infrastructure. We soon realised, however, that we needed to establish shifts to sustain our response, as the crisis continued to unfold and deepen across the country.

Looking back, what made that sustained response possible was not any single actor or resource but the architecture of the coalition itself. Colombia Cares for Colombia (Colombia Cuida a Colombia) was defined from the outset by its cross-sectoral nature. It brought together more than [400 allied organisations](#)¹⁹ that would not otherwise have converged: media outlets whose national reach proved essential for amplifying the call to action; business associations and private-sector companies that mobilised resources and logistics; foundations, NGOs, and international cooperation agencies that contributed expertise and networks; and thousands of individuals who volunteered their time and skills. This collaborative architecture was precisely what made action at scale possible. Leveraging collective networks, digital platforms, and coordinated mobilisation, the alliance activated donors and volunteers across the length and breadth of the country. Within months, it distributed more than 22 million kilos of food, reaching 1.7 million people in situations of vulnerability across 158 municipalities, and improving the lives of more than 3 million households.

2.3.4 Governance and ownership as enablers of collective action

In the first phase of Colombia Cuida a Colombia, Movilizadorio assumed the role of leading the alliance's mobilisation coordination and strategic communications direction, while also participating in its decision-making Executive Committee. The network's governance and structure evolved and adapted over time. Regional and thematic committees were created, and there were also efforts to decentralise coordination and develop strategies that any member organisation could take ownership of and lead. These committees were organised around key areas such as mobilisation and communications, health, food security, technology, and data-driven targeting for prioritisation. When funding began to be channelled into the network, the Executive Committee took responsibility for making budgetary decisions. Depending on expertise and capacity, different organisations were selected to lead and support specific areas of work.

This balance was made visible in a key decision: the approach to branding. One Sunday afternoon, Colombia Cuida a Colombia partners designed the logo, and the campaign name emerged from a

¹⁹ The full list of participating organisations can be consulted at <https://colombiacuidacolombia.com/ecosistema-ccc/#consejo-asesor>.

brainstorm in a WhatsApp group with hundreds of volunteers. From that starting point, the alliance established a baseline identity that any actor could adopt and adapt as their own. Soon after, major Colombian corporations, prominent artists, and sports figures incorporated the Colombia Cuida a Colombia identity into their own communications, while media outlets contributed pro bono spaces to amplify the campaign. This kind of co-creation and co-ownership helped to extend the alliance's visibility and impact at a pace that no isolated effort could have matched. For Movilizadorio and other partners involved, prioritising open adoption over brand control was a deliberate choice – and one that proved critical to rapid scaling while fostering collective ownership.

Figure 3: Campaign images from Colombia Cuida a Colombia



Source: © 2023 Movilizadorio



Source:

Semana (May 1, 2020). Detrás del telón del gran concierto Colombia Cuida a Colombia. Semana.



Source: AS Tikitakas (2020). Revive Colombia cuida a Colombia, el concierto solidario ante el Covid. AS Colombia.

What sustained this coalition through months of emergency response was not a formal hierarchy or external funding, but our shared purpose and the motivation to contribute during a moment of collective vulnerability. This experience revealed that, in contexts demanding radical agility, where conditions shift rapidly and local knowledge becomes decisive, decentralised collaboration can

generate large-scale impact that centralised approaches would struggle to achieve within the necessary timeframes. In such broad coalitions, it is co-creation and ownership rather than control or strict governance that drive scalability.

After the pandemic, Colombia Cuida a Colombia eventually became a project-based model with full-time staff and a governance structure consisting of an [Executive Committee and a broad Advisory Council of members](#).²⁰

Through our work in Colombia Cuida a Colombia, we at Movilizadorio learned that mobilisation capacity and system orchestration are transferable skills. We also learned that it is possible to achieve significant impact but often at a significant cost. We stepped in to respond to a major national crisis as a medium-sized organisation with limited resources. We had to reallocate 30% of our project team to the rapid-response effort, and funding to support this did not come until months later. This came at a considerable cost for our staff.

We learned by doing, and those lessons have fundamentally shaped how we have since approach multi-stakeholder coalitions. The experience confirmed that in complex collective-action efforts, shared purpose is the heart and governance the backbone. Structure should follow strategy. Yet navigating the tensions and demands that this level of work entails also requires something less visible: the capacity to make strategic decisions about how, and at what cost, an organisation chooses to show up.

3. Strategic Choices Behind Collective Action

The examples of our work set out in Section 2, as well as the dozens of projects we have implemented since 2016, have provided us with invaluable lessons to motivate, advance, and sustain collective action in times of uncertainty, crisis, and polarisation. After ten years, we have learned that collective action is anything but organic: it requires deliberate structures and rigour, courage and humility, concertation and negotiation, flexibility and adaptability, and trust building (above all) to ensure that the work is done when and where it's needed.

3.1 Strategic bets: investing before securing funding

As the three examples illustrate, seizing opportunities, building legitimacy, and responding to emergent civic demands have sometimes required us to make deliberate decisions about investing resources before funding is secured. These strategic bets have allowed us to articulate and sustain movement infrastructures that are able to respond to urgent political moments and emerging global

²⁰ To learn more about the organisational structure and governance bodies, see <https://colombiacuidacolombia.com/ecosistema-ccc/#equipo-ccc>.

challenges. In practice, this has meant investing our own resources to convene actors, consolidate networks, and advance advocacy and mobilisation efforts – maintaining momentum when formal funding cycles cannot move at the necessary speed. Supporting the continuity and effectiveness of collective action sometimes requires acting ahead of funding cycles, both to sustain the networks themselves and to keep priority lines of advocacy alive.

In the case of Colombia Cuida a Colombia, we mounted a rapid response to an acute and unprecedented national crisis while remaining accountable for ongoing projects, and with no designated budget to address the pandemic. And even when we did secure funding several months into launching the campaign, the magnitude of responding to a humanitarian crisis remained deeply daunting for an organisation founded only five years earlier.

3.2 Regenerating movements and sustaining the energy of leaders: balancing impact with wellbeing

As an impact-oriented organisation, Movilizadorio has pushed hard to respond to every opportunity, often at significant cost to the teams doing the work. And from this realisation emerged one of the most important lessons from Movilizadorio's efforts to harness collective action: that movements need to be continuously renewed. The conveners and orchestrators who drive forward collective action need to rotate, and new energy must be cultivated to carry on the work ahead. This understanding has a direct organisational dimension – and it connects to one of the deepest tensions Movilizadorio has sought to navigate since its founding: the trade-off between the scale of impact we seek to achieve and the people and resources that make it possible. Over time, colleagues and allies have consistently called for a better balance between delivery and the wellbeing of the people behind it.

We have learned to be much more intentional about structural responses, including staffing structures and workload distribution, as well as practices that reconnect us with nature and with spaces for rest. Above all, movements and organisations need to ensure that there are pipelines of emerging talent: people who grow within the organisation and can ultimately step into leadership roles, enabling generational renewal without losing institutional memory. In practice, this has translated into concrete commitments: compensatory rest days after periods of sustained intensity, and a deliberate effort to extend recovery time during quieter periods and vacations.

While we have become better at this in the context of planned work, an ongoing tension remains unresolved in rapid-response moments when every hour counts and the opportunity for action is narrow: the pace some allies legitimately prefer as opposed to Movilizadorio's organisational DNA. We act on a deep drive to seize every opportunity, to maximise impact in the shortest possible time, and above all to take decisive action in the political windows that spark mobilisation and make change possible. Learning to hold both – the urgency of the moment and the humanity of the people within it – remains one of our most important and unfinished lessons.

3.3 The invisible work: governance as coalition infrastructure

Working through broad, multistakeholder networks and coalitions demands significant resources – financial, human, and organisational. Collective architectures demand time, coordination, and sustained relationship-building: convening and aligning decision-making, managing resources, holding shared narratives, and maintaining trust under pressure. Much of this labour, which is resource-intensive and requires considerable commitment, remains invisible and under-recognised, yet it is precisely what enables collective action to move at speed, across geographies, and remain politically viable. Understanding who carries this work and how is one of the most consequential governance questions a coalition can face.

3.4 Holding the coalition together without holding power over it

Another of the most consequential – and least visible – dimensions of coalition governance relates to who plays the role of technical secretariat, and how that function is exercised in practice. Across Movilizadorio's experience, this function has proven to be far more than administrative coordination: it is the relational and political infrastructure that holds a coalition. The capacity of the secretariat team to build trust operates in two simultaneous directions – between the team and each individual member organisation, and among the organisations themselves. Without trust flowing in all directions, coordination becomes performative and cohesion fragile.

Equally critical is the negotiation capacity embedded in this role. The technical secretariat must be able to help actors reach agreements and navigate tensions without generating suspicion among the members of the coalition. Sustaining the coalition's coherence requires not only technical skill but also political acuity – the ability to hold space for disagreement while keeping collective action viable. This function can be performed effectively only when the secretariat is genuinely oriented towards the broad interests of the alliance and is not perceived as advancing its own political agenda. The moment it is seen as a partisan actor, its legitimacy as a neutral convener collapses – and with it, the trust that makes the coalition functional.

Power within a coalition, however, is never static. It shifts according to technical expertise, geographic relevance, resource capacity, and the political moment – and the secretariat must navigate those shifts without losing its orientation towards the collective. What our experience has consistently shown is that when organisations do not trust the leadership – whether of the secretariat or dominant actors – they remain formally present but disengage in practice. They stop feeling genuine agency over collective decisions, and the coalition loses not only its political coherence but also its will to act.

3.5 The difficult conversations, both internal and external: resources, visibility, ownership, and power

A critical realisation that has emerged through Movilizadorio's work is that broad coalitions are not spaces of total and permanent equity. Asymmetries of capacity, time, resources, and influence are

inevitable. The challenge is not to deny them but to manage them realistically and transparently. Who owns the brand? Who are the spokespeople? How are staffing and resources decisions made? What happens if you cannot sustain the same level of support, but the needs continue to expand?

In Movilizadorio, we have learnt, sometimes through friction and missteps, that addressing these governance tensions explicitly – early and often – is essential for cross-sector collaboration. What rapid-response contexts make clear is that negotiating governance frameworks in real time, under pressure, is costlier and more fragile than building them in advance. The experience has taught us to initiate governance conversations proactively, addressing how roles are distributed, how resources are managed, how credit and visibility circulate, and how coordination is sustained over time.

These conversations are uncomfortable and frequently postponed. But we have found that addressing them before pressure, resources, or visibility intensify reduces friction, prevents breakdowns, and makes collective action politically and operationally viable. This doesn't mean that agreements come easily – governance in multistakeholder contexts requires continuous negotiation – but we have learned how to view these agreements as living frameworks rather than rigid contracts.

3.6 The core trade-off: control versus reach

The fundamental trade-off in broad coalitions is relinquishing total control and rigid planning in exchange for scope and impact. This requires honesty about organisational capacities and willingness to let others lead where they have a comparative advantage. It means prioritising open adoption over technical perfection, valuing distributed agency over centralised execution. Trust, we have learned, is not incidental to governance – it is a core asset that must be actively built and maintained across coalitions. In practice, this means designing for generosity: ensuring that visibility circulates, that contributions are recognised beyond the organisations with the highest profile, and that no single actor accumulates credit at the expense of collective ownership. In the absence of this principle, collaboration tends to collapse into internal competition.

3.7 Long-term structural work and rapid response: knowing which battles to fight

Rapid response is central to the impact potential of any organisation working at the intersection of collective action and political change. The ability to read a political moment, mobilise quickly, and act while a window is open can generate some of the most significant results in movement infrastructure. At the same time, this capacity creates lasting change only when it operates alongside – and in the service of – long-term structural work. The real trade-off is not between speed and depth, but between maintaining both levels of work simultaneously, and knowing when each is called for.

This distinction has become especially urgent in the current political context. A recurring and deliberate strategy of anti-democratic actors is the manufactured permanent crisis – a relentless stream of provocations and emergencies designed to keep CSOs, journalists, coalitions, and

institutions in a constant state of reaction. The goal is not always to win any particular battle, but to exhaust us: to drain the energy and resources of those working for democratic change by ensuring they are always responding, never building. In some cases, the strategy goes further – anchoring organisations in spaces where, historically, nothing has moved, precisely to prevent them from investing their capacity where change is actually possible.

This reality has made strategic triage increasingly essential. Not every crisis warrants a response, and not every political moment is a genuine opportunity to achieve an impact. What we have learned is that sustaining effective collective action over the long term requires holding both levels of work with intention: protecting the long-term structural agenda even in moments of acute pressure, while remaining genuinely agile and selective about which conjunctural moments deserve the organisation's full energy and attention.

3.8 Being bold and staying safe: security as a strategic dimension of collective action

In Latin America, the risks of leadership and collective action are not only reputational or discursive – they also are physical. Working in territorial contexts and with local communities means operating in environments where the security of people's lives is a real and constant consideration. This reality shaped our work from the very beginning. During our first territorial project, designed to support the consolidation of Colombia's peace process, we were developing a technological solution to share information and early warnings about threats to social leaders. Two young people participating in the process were threatened, and we had to relocate them outside their city for an entire year for their own protection. That experience left a permanent mark on how we understand the stakes of this work.

A guiding insight that has stayed with us across the decade comes from Professor Ronald Heifetz at Harvard, who reminds us that to exercise leadership, you need to stay alive. This has been central to how we calibrate our work: being very deliberate about weighing risks against the pace at which pressure for change is applied. Collective action is itself a security strategy – when no single leader is personally visible as the face of an entire process, risk is distributed, and no individual becomes an isolated target.

Movilizatorio's organisational identity is deliberately distinct from the brands and names of the campaigns and coalitions it supports – this separation provides a layer of protection for both the organisation and its partners. We have also invested in the capacity to amplify many voices simultaneously, all at a meaningful volume, rather than launching a single, high-profile actor into challenging terrain alone. Beyond communications strategy, we have developed and supported self-protection and cybersecurity protocols for leaders and movements – though being up to date with evolving threats remains an ongoing challenge. A further risk that has emerged is that of legal action and strategic lawsuits. Here, our approach has been to favour narrative strategies and systemic

framing over tactics that directly target or name specific individuals. Maintaining relationships with pro bono legal allies with strong capacity in this area has proven equally essential.

Security, in this sense, is not a constraint on collective action – it is a condition for its sustainability.

3.9 Non-profit vs. for-profit: building a blended model for organisational sustainability

From the outset, Movilizadorio was conceived as a social enterprise rather than a conventional NGO. The aim was to build a modern organisational model capable of attracting talent and sustaining itself over the long term – one that did not depend entirely on the cycles and constraints of philanthropic funding. The Latin American market reality, however, revealed that significant resources flow to non-profit organisations, which led us to develop a blended model that deliberately combines both logics.

This combination has been broadly positive. In purely non-profit funding structures, resources are typically tied to specific projects and time-bound deliverables, requiring full expenditure of funds with no ability to generate savings or working capital. The for-profit consulting and partnership line we developed alongside our non-profit work has altered that dynamic. Through this line, we partner with organisations and companies that want to advance social and environmental causes – supporting them with research, narrative strategy, communications, and survey design – and the revenue generated has allowed us, over the years, to build savings and a working capital reserve that provides genuine organisational stability. That financial cushion has allowed us to move quickly and make strategic bets even without a confirmed funder, and to invest in internal team development and external positioning with greater autonomy than a purely grant-dependent model would allow.

At the same time, this approach generates its own permanent tensions. Questions about how much profit to pursue, how to invest it, and how to distribute it are genuinely difficult. Beyond the financial questions, there is an ongoing internal tension about resource allocation: a finite team must constantly navigate how many non-profit projects to take on alongside for-profit engagements, and that balance is never straightforward. Some donors, deeply committed to community impact, sometimes question the value of investing organisational resources in institutional strengthening or positioning, preferring that everything should flow directly to communities. These are real and legitimate tensions – and they reflect the values at stake in the model itself.

What this model has reinforced, above all, is that institutional sustainability is not an end in itself – it is what makes sustained collective action possible over time, and what allows organisations to show up fully when the political moment demands it.

3.10 Technology and human trust: what can be rapidly scaled and what can only be slowly built over time

When Movilizadorio was founded, we placed considerable faith in the capacity of technology to enable people to organize at speeds and scales previously unimaginable. That belief was not wrong — but

over the course of our experience we have understood that it is incomplete. Very quickly, we encountered the other side of that reality: technology was also reshaping the public square in ways that divide rather than unite, mediated by algorithms and echo chambers that deepen polarisation. This led us to invest in understanding more fully what was fragmenting Colombian society, and simultaneously to experiment extensively with technology in territorial contexts — co-designing solutions that sometimes succeeded in aggregating data, generating early warning systems, or creating new communication mechanisms among communities, and sometimes did not.

Two lessons have proven enduring. The first is that nothing replaces the capacity to build genuine trust networks between people and organisations. Ten years later, we can still mobilize collective action rapidly across diverse issues - largely because we know the people we work with, have worked alongside them before, and have invested in those relationships over time. The second is that while technology and social media remain essential tools for achieving scale and speed, organizing through platforms does not replace the need to be deeply intentional about cultivating personal relationships and trust networks. Investing in in-person encounters, field visits, strategic planning retreats, and shared brainstorming continues to make a decisive difference in the depth and durability of collective action.

A related and equally important lesson is that the most effective technological solutions are not always the most sophisticated ones. WhatsApp groups, for instance, have been one of our most durable infrastructure assets: simple, familiar, and requiring almost no maintenance. Groups from our El Avispero community and from territorial communities we worked with such as Diciendo y Haciendo a decade ago are still active today — still sharing information, still reacting to emerging situations, still organizing collectively around specific causes. However, most of these relationships were built in person; the technology simply kept them alive. The COVID pandemic was an exception, since its conditions forced individuals to establish relationships through digital technology only. Some of these relationships successfully continued beyond the pandemic, but we are incrementally seeing how convening and shared physical spaces are what keep coalitions and movements together.

This insight carries particular weight at a moment when artificial intelligence is arriving at the doorstep of every organisation. AI will reintroduce this trade-off at greater scale: how much of our work do we incorporate into automated or AI-assisted processes, and how much must remain thought through, decided, and carried by the people in our team? We do not yet have a settled answer to this – but the question itself is one we believe every organisation working for collective action must address deliberately, as a strategic choice rather than an operational default.

3.11 Bridging rigour and resonance in narrative strategy

One of the recurring tensions in our narrative and storytelling work has been the pull between being technically rigorous and being emotionally compelling – between depth and appeal. Our answer has

been to refuse that choice entirely: learning to hold both simultaneously has become one of the defining features of how we approach communication and campaign strategy.

We build our strategies on academic research, empirical evidence, and data. But we are equally committed to translating those findings into actionable insights that can fuel large-scale campaign strategies and stories that do not merely inform, but also emotionally engage. A data point without emotion rarely moves people to act. An emotion without evidence rarely sustains credibility. The goal is both, simultaneously – and the path between them requires deliberate translation work that is neither obvious nor automatic.

In practice, this has meant developing a consistent methodology for moving from academic insight to accessible narrative – one that integrates research, strategy, and creative design as a single process rather than sequential steps. Building the internal capacity to hold those elements together, and cultivating creative and distribution partnerships that understand both registers, has been as important as the methodology itself.

Movilizatorio has also developed its own social design methodology, which allows us to adapt the visual language, tone, and format of our content to different audiences without losing the underlying substance. The same research finding can be expressed as a dense policy brief, a one-page visual summary, an illustrated social media piece, or a facilitated workshop tool – each designed for a different entry point, all anchored in the same evidence base.

In polarised environments, where many of the causes we work on have become politically coded, we have also learned that the same core message can reach across divides – provided it is carried by the right voice for each audience. We do not change the substance; we adapt the channel, the framing, and the messenger, appealing to shared values through different entry points. And before committing significant resources to amplification, we pilot at a small scale: measuring engagement and emotional response as people interact with our content, and investing in what already shows signs of resonance rather than what we assume will work.

The tension, however, does not disappear – it is managed. Building the capacity to move fluidly between rigorous analysis and compelling narrative, without sacrificing either, has become central to how we understand effective communication for social change.

3.12 Building your own audiences vs. reaching new ones through partners: distribution, trust, and the long game

A related tension concerns not what we communicate, but *how we reach people with it*. Every organisation working at the intersection of communications and social change must eventually confront this choice: do you invest in building your own platforms and channels, or do you work through partners that already have the audiences you want to reach? Our experience is that the right

answer depends heavily on the objective – and that the two approaches are not alternatives but complements that must be developed in parallel, even if they operate on very different timescales.

For reaching new audiences, working through partners is almost always the more effective path, although the logic is not transactional. The partnerships that have worked best for us are those built on shared values and complementary trust: organisations that have spent years cultivating genuine relationships with the audiences we want to reach, and that bring a credibility we could not replicate on our own. This includes formal institutional partners, but also content creators and influencers – trusted voices within specific communities whose audiences already believe them, and who can carry civic and policy conversations into everyday life in ways that formal communications rarely achieve.

At the same time, reaching new audiences through partners is not a substitute for building your own direct relationships. The key insight from our experience is that data infrastructure must be built from day one, even before it seems necessary, because it takes years to build a genuine audience of your own, and the organisations that can mobilise quickly when a political window opens are those that have been quietly cultivating that infrastructure all along.

Every activity Movilizadorio has carried since 2006 – workshops with youth groups, field work in territories, convening journalists, regional Latin American alliances, global partnerships, thematic coalitions – has been treated as an opportunity to build a contact. Those contacts have been organised into WhatsApp groups segmented by audience type and theme, email lists, and phone databases. Today we have the capacity to reach more than 750,000 people directly, without depending on any platform's algorithm.

In an era when nearly all relationships are mediated by algorithms designed for engagement rather than civic impact, this kind of direct infrastructure – the ability to reach your closest and most committed audiences on your own terms – is not a luxury. It is a strategic necessity.

Maintaining it is its own ongoing challenge. Keeping databases organised, current, and properly segmented; ensuring the technological infrastructure to use them effectively; and cultivating those relationships so they remain active rather than dormant – all of this requires institutional capacity that is easy to underestimate and difficult to sustain. It is not glamorous, but it is the work that makes rapid mobilisation possible when the political moment demands it.

Underlying both strategies is a consistent principle: communication is never an end in itself. Every channel, every partnership, every piece of content is designed with a call to action in mind – a concrete next step that moves people from awareness to participation. The audiences we build, whether through values-aligned partners or through our own direct infrastructure, are not passive consumers but potential participants in collective action. Building the capacity to activate them, when the moment calls for it, is the infrastructure that makes broader social change possible.

4. Concluding Reflections

Speaking about results is always difficult in coalition-building work because nothing is ever achieved by a single individual or organisation acting alone. As we have set out in this paper, there is a constant tension between giving full visibility to the movements, leaders, and institutions, and speaking about our own (in this case, Movilizadorio's) role sustaining and advancing the causes that bring us together. We have written this paper from our (personal) perspective as Movilizadorio's leaders – drawing on a decade of experience in weaving movement infrastructure, while fully recognising that hundreds of individuals and organisations have been part of every effort.

At the same time, collective action and movements – however organically they emerge – require organisational capacity and resources to endure over time. Networks, communities, and ecosystems for collective action are built on relationships: they take time, sustained effort, investment (including funding) and actors who care for them and nurture them until those relationships become infrastructure for civic participation. We have increasingly recognised and valued the importance of making visible the role played by organisations that carry out this work – variously described as field catalysts, system orchestrators, conveners, or movement supporters – and of supporting, strengthening, and investing in their capacity to sustain it.

These organisations, like Movilizadorio, pursue systemic transformation through collective action, reshaping policy, culture, narratives, and behaviour. As civic ecosystem shapers, they tackle the most complex and interconnected challenges we face, not in isolation, but by enabling the conditions for people to act collectively and reach civic power.

4.1 What it takes to sustain and scale such work

Supporting this kind of work means investing in the long-term conditions that make collective action possible. Building shared purpose, trust, and collective power requires sustained, flexible funding that allows networks and movements to develop, adapt, and consolidate beyond isolated campaigns or short-term political cycles. It also requires protecting time and resources for relationship-building, recognizing that trust is built through co-creation, sustained collaboration, and shared accountability. These relational foundations enable communities to coordinate effectively and advance agendas that drive structural change.

This labour is complex and often invisible. Strengthening civic participation and sustaining multistakeholder networks require ongoing facilitation, alignment, and capacity-building to ensure that communities can engage in decision-making processes and translate their priorities into political outcomes. While this work rarely produces immediate or easily measurable outputs, it is essential for building the collective capacity needed to influence systems over time.

Investing in collective infrastructures is also what makes change scalable. When communities strengthen their advocacy capacity and connect through networks, their agendas can move beyond local efforts to influence broader institutional and policy processes. This allows collective priorities to gain legitimacy, align diverse actors, and drive change at greater scale than isolated interventions could achieve.

Giving visibility to this work and building shared communities of practice around it is key as well. Ultimately, this approach is what makes change sustainable. Structural transformation occurs when communities retain the capacity, relationships, and agency to influence decisions over time. Supporting collective action, therefore, means strengthening the long-term ability of communities and networks to shape public agendas and hold decision-makers accountable, ensuring that communities and networks continue influencing institutional decisions beyond individual projects or funding cycles.

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