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# Building Sustainable Rural Communities through Indigenous Social Enterprises: A Humanistic Approach

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**Abstract:** This article follows a humanistic management approach to analyze how indigenous social enterprises contribute to building sustainable rural communities. To this end, I first explore the process of how these entities were formed and developed the necessary capabilities to generate such outcomes. Then, I examine the strategies indigenous social enterprises create to engage in value creation activities with the community and their main outcomes. Such outcomes are finally classified by the problems they addressed according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), since one of the gaps in the literature indicates a lack of studies that relate specific SDGs with the outcomes of social enterprises in developing countries. This article follows a qualitative approach, a case study research strategy, and uses semi-structured interviews as the main data collection instrument. Evidence from four cases of indigenous social enterprises in Latin America suggests that these entities originate as a result of a major crisis that affects the dignity of the individuals and compromises the socio-economic dynamics of the communities. Second, local leadership urges a response that takes the form of a social enterprise that follows local principles and governance and pursues dignity protection, sustainability, and cultural reaffirmation. As a result, the communities have increased their levels of well-being and sustainability, linked to SDGs such as good health, decent work, reduced inequalities, public infrastructure, sustainable communities, and partnerships for the goals. This article also sheds light on how a humanistic management approach can contribute to a better understanding of the dynamics of social enterprises, as these humanistic principles and practices seem to be naturally promoted by social entrepreneurs.

**Keywords:** social enterprises; social innovation; Latin America; sustainable communities; indigenous entrepreneurship; rural development; Sustainable Development Goals

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## 1. Introduction

The main dogma of capitalism is economic growth as the ultimate goal, and human well-being is secondary to this end [1]; this paradigm produces only a marginal regard for human values and virtues [2]. The economic prosperity produced by organizations has also brought negative impacts in the community, such as social inequality [3] and environmental degradation [4]. Therefore, some previously powerless stakeholders are now expressing their moral concerns and starting to build the necessary conditions to demand and create different systems and organizations that guarantee positive impacts for society [5]. Societies are also demanding different metrics of well-being, more related to happiness and protection of human rights than economic growth or financial performance [6]. In this sense, different types of productive organizations have emerged seeking more humane and life-conducive organizing that prioritize positive stakeholder impacts instead of profit maximization [7].

Perhaps social enterprises and social entrepreneurship are the most recognized efforts to find alternate, more sustainable management models.

Latin America hosts a particular social enterprise that is led by indigenous people. These indigenous social enterprises incorporate humanistic principles to generate greater positive impact on their stakeholders, particularly the community in which they are embedded [8]. These entities have gained attention because they have distinguishable elements [9] and often contradict mainstream entrepreneurial assumptions [10]. As a consequence, the study of these enterprises has the potential to challenge traditional managerial practices and unveil new forms of organization and stakeholder value creation. This article follows a humanistic management approach to analyze how indigenous social enterprises contribute to building sustainable rural communities. The answer to this question has two parts. First, I address the question of how indigenous social enterprises are created and managed under contexts of dignity violations and marginalization; then, I examine the strategies they design and implement to seek sustainability in the community and, at the same time, address particular Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This work addresses a research gap that points to the lack of studies that focus on strategies to achieve particular SDGs in developing countries. Empirical evidence from four indigenous social enterprises in Latin America suggests particular strategies to achieve specific SDGs and highlights the role of these entities in their quest to reach sustainability and well-being in the community. This article also addresses a humanistic management research gap by exploring how dignity violations arise in different communities, and how they respond by protecting human dignity through indigenous entrepreneurship. Finally, this article sheds light on how to better design human-centered organizations that prioritize dignity protection and value generation.

The next section reviews the link between humanistic management and social enterprises. After that, the methodology is explained, followed by the results derived from primary data obtained from indigenous social enterprises in Latin America. Finally, the conclusions summarize the main findings of this work and point out future lines of research that might improve current alternate management models in the region.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Humanistic Management

Humanistic management is rooted in humanism and humanistic thinkers, whose underlying beliefs can be traced back to ancient India, China, Greece, and Rome [11], and focuses on the capacity of humans to improve their own lives [12]. Erich Fromm defines humanism as a “system centered on man, his integrity, his development, his dignity, his liberty. On the principle that man is not a means to reach this or that end but that he is himself the bearer of his own end.” [13] (p. 147). Therefore, these elements have to be protected and promoted, since they express the fundamental human condition of our dignity [14].

Humanistic management is centrally concerned with improving the conditions of life on earth [15], the protection of dignity, human flourishing, and the promotion of well-being [2,7]. Dignity and freedom were initially vital principles in market-based and agency models. However, successive models of organizing through the Industrial Revolution and the twentieth century shifted away from assumptions of inherent human worth toward profit maximization and efficiency measures [7]. As a consequence, human worth started to be valued as an asset or resource defined by the price mechanism [16]. This change left a void in how human dignity is protected, how well-being is promoted, and how to better resolve issues related to social justice and social welfare [17].

In this sense, humanistic management seeks a change away from the current economic paradigm to focus on upholding the unconditional human dignity [5], by providing different frameworks that guide managerial practices towards this end. These frameworks also have the potential to remedy the injustices carried out on certain individuals and minorities, such as indigenous communities [18].

Different frameworks shape humanistic practices, but they are based on similar guiding principles. Rather than considering individuals as rational self-interested maximizers, Melé proposed that humanistic management entails considering a vision of the individual that has seven features: (1) wholeness (recognition without reducing the human being to a few aspects), (2) comprehensive knowledge of the human being, (3) human dignity (respects, protects, and promotes the constitutive dignity of every human being), (4) development (foster the conditions for human flourishing), (5) pursuing the common good, (6) transcendence (humans are self-transcendent beings, seeking meaning), and (7) stewardship–sustainability (promotes harmony between humans and nature and sustainable development) [19]. In this sense, humanistic management holds a vision of the business firm as a community of persons where they can flourish [19]. To this end, the Humanistic Management Center suggests a three-step approach in organizations: (1) unconditional respect for human dignity; (2) integration of ethical reflections in management decisions; and (3) active and ongoing engagement with stakeholders [20]. Thus, the legitimacy given to a decision by every stakeholder should be the ultimate decision-making criterion [5].

One of the main concerns of humanistic management is the vulnerability of human beings and their innate rights, and how management practices can remedy such negative outcomes. To this end, Michael Pirson established three dignity thresholds that should guide the efforts of human-centered organizations in their quest to improve the conditions of life [16]: dignity restoration (1) refers to remedying violations to human unconditional worth and universal rights; dignity protection (2) refers to safeguarding individuals' self-determination, autonomy, and identity; and dignity promotion (3) is geared towards well-being creation and human flourishing. The initial diagnosis of the stakeholder should guide the emphasis on pursuing one of these thresholds through humanistic practices, but little is known about the kind of practices that can target specific dignity thresholds. The 2019 International Labour Conference [21] connects dignity protection with providing basic income security and social security access, and it presents these practices in terms of individual rights associated with the United Nations' SDGs. Pirson et al. mention that scholars are still exploring how to better identify and prioritize dignity in organizing and value generation, which represent a promising research topic for humanistic management, one that will shed light on how to better design human-centered organizations [7].

## 2.2. Social Entrepreneurship

Social entrepreneurship holds the promise to identify humanistic business models and practices [5]. Santos defines social entrepreneurship as the pursuit of sustainable solutions to problems of neglected positive externalities [22]. In this sense, social entrepreneurs have attempted to fill a gap generated by government and market failure to provide “dignity-based products, services, and practices—for those goods and organising activities that contribute to the restoration, protection, or promotion of the inherent value of humans and the human condition, as well as the ecological well-being on which humanity depends” [7] (p. 134). Therefore, the hybrid organizations they usually create promote humanitarian principles [23]. Social entrepreneurs aim for value in the form of a large-scale, transformational benefit that targets an underserved, neglected, or highly disadvantaged population, but also benefits a segment of society or society at large [24]. To achieve this goal, social entrepreneurs are driven by values such as dignity, accountability, transparency, and equity [25], that are also part of the axiological dimension of humanistic management [26].

As social entrepreneurs contribute to the advancement of humane and life-conducive organizing [27], some scholars have prompted to argue that social entrepreneurs and social enterprises serve as a template for humanistic management [7,28]. Social enterprises are the most common venture built by social entrepreneurs. Megre, Martins, and Salvado define them as “initiatives having an innovative approach to solve societal problems, a clear social mission, sustainable, potential for replication, and capacity to produce impact at large scale” [29] (p. 99). Over the last 15 years, social enterprises' capacity to address structural social problems has driven the academic debate about the

role of business in society [30]. These companies seek to generate profit as a means to create social impact; therefore, all financial surplus must be reinvested in the company. Further, social enterprises usually seek social innovations for the permanent solution of a social problem, are scalable, and tend to generate sustainable operations [31]; besides, they promote the empowerment and emancipation of social sectors that face structural barriers [32]. To this end, they develop a logic of stakeholder empowerment and value creation that is opposed to the logic of control and value appropriation of profit-maximizing entities [22].

Social enterprises are created in different contexts; they arise in the places where society seeks a fairer income distribution and is willing to participate in designing a solution [33]. They typically seek to solve problems related to poverty, access to products or services, lack of decent employment opportunities, migration [34], and income inequality [35]. These problems are exacerbated in rural sectors, where social enterprises embedded in impoverished rural communities frequently assume roles that should have been assumed by the government or private initiative; Santos calls this phenomenon a market failure [22]. Under such context, the community becomes a primary stakeholder: a direct beneficiary and the main provider of resources [36]. In this sense, stakeholder engagement is also a priority of social enterprises [37] and a necessary dynamic in order to balance social and economic objectives [38], positively change the attitude and involvement of stakeholders toward the societal issues addressed by the social enterprise [39], and gain legitimation [40].

A subgroup of social enterprises is those with a strong indigenous component; those entities are getting increasing attention from scholars since they seem to have distinguishable elements [41]. Indigenous peoples are so-called because they “practice unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live . . . they are the descendants of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at the time when people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived. The new arrivals later became dominant through conquest, occupation, settlement or other means” [42] (p. 1). Indigenous social values and culture are often incompatible with the assumptions of mainstream entrepreneurial theories [10]. As a consequence, indigenous social enterprises often challenge Western economic paradigms of development [43] since they do not prioritize wealth generation [44]. Instead, they seek to achieve social and environmental goals [41], maintain cultural values [45], improve the well-being of economically disadvantaged groups [46], and promote social justice [47] and alternatives to forms of power that obstruct attempts to create a better world [48].

Just as social enterprises orientate decision making towards value creation and stakeholder empowerment so that every group can achieve its own idea of well-being, similarly, in humanistic management, the ultimate decision-making criterion is the legitimacy given to the decision by all stakeholders [5]. This legitimation process also ensures that the chosen course of conduct improves the life conduciveness of all parties involved [49].

As social enterprises focus on stakeholder engagement and value creation activities, some scholars have suggested that they may be strategic actors in society to achieve the SDGs. The SDGs are “a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030” [50] (p. 1). The SDGs also contain specific targets that are meant to provide guidance to organizations aiming to work towards their achievement. Eichler and Schwarz propose that the SDGs also function as a categorization system for the outcomes of social innovation since they represent the most urgent social needs [51]. The authors also found that most cases involving social innovations are documented in developed countries. Only one-third of the cases belong to developing countries and most of them focus on particular SDGs such as health, education, and poverty. Moreover, the vast majority of the social entrepreneurship literature is classified as conceptual research [52]. Therefore, there are research opportunities in regions such as Latin America to document cases that involve social innovation that is oriented to specific SDGs that have not been properly examined. Particularly, goal number eleven that focuses on sustainable communities is especially underexplored

in this context and invites seeking cases that have succeeded in creating conditions for the sustainability of communities.

### 3. Materials and Methods

This research followed a qualitative methodology and an interpretive approach for three factors. First, details about indigenous social enterprises embedded in impoverished rural communities are scarce and little is known about the strategies these entities adopt to involve the community in value creation activities. Second, cultural patterns and power differences among stakeholders and individuals might suggest that responses could be better managed through in-depth interviews and observation. Third, the exploratory stage of social entrepreneurship and its link with humanistic management might also require a qualitative approximation. The research strategy was a case study, which is the most common in social entrepreneurship research [39]. Purposeful sampling was employed to select successful social enterprises that have an indigenous component. The criteria to select the cases were threefold: performance, visibility, and size. Although there are successful cases of indigenous social enterprises in Latin America [53], limited economic resources, lack of knowledge, and the poor negotiation skills of local leaders usually prevent the creation and growth of these entities [54]. Therefore, they still represent a marginal number of the total business entities in these regions. Even if indigenous social enterprises survive the initial stages, they rarely reach the scale of the cases examined in this paper. In this sense, the exceptionality of the cases may provide insights of how these communities overthrow the structural barriers that often limit the development of indigenous people in rural areas; thus, these insights may lead entrepreneurs and policymakers to focus on particular strategies to increase the chances of success of these indigenous social enterprises in the region. Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of the cases.

**Table 1.** Description of the cases.

Name	Location	Purpose	Main Activities	Year of Creation	Size (Number of Employees/Members)	Number of Interviews
Chicza	Mayan jungle in Southern Mexico	To improve the well-being of gum producers, to protect the Mayan jungle.	Extraction, production, and trading of organic gum.	2002	~2000	10
Grupo Ixtlán	Oaxaca, Mexico	To provide decent work in the community, to stop migration to United States.	Extraction, production, and trading of FSC-certified furniture; ecotourism park; hardware store; microfinance institution; gas station.	1988	~220	25
Granja Porcón	Cajamarca, Peru	To provide decent work and increase community well-being.	Extraction and trading of wood; elaboration of dairy products; ecotourism park and activities (restaurants, zoo, cabins), cattle.	1975	~400	14
Wakami	16 rural communities in Guatemala	To empower indigenous rural women of Guatemala.	Design, manufacture, and trade of fashion accessories.	2006	~500	12

Source: self-elaboration with primary and secondary data [55–57].

Data collection instruments included observations (predominantly non-participative) and semi-structured interviews. The interviews included mostly managers and founders, the most

experienced workers, and people from the community whom local residents pointed out as the most knowledgeable in terms of the social enterprise and the community history. They were conducted in an informal, conversational style, in-office or in factory settings, and focused on social, economic, and environmental aspects of the social enterprise and life in the community. Reflections from these activities were noted in a field diary. Further, this research used secondary sources to substantiate the primary data, mainly internal publications, reporting formats, annual reports, and information from official websites. However, these indigenous communities are typically reluctant to offer internal information even for academic purposes. Although some enterprises agreed to provide some internal reports, the initial negotiation did not include access to historical reports, financial statements, or board meeting reports; therefore, this research heavily relied on primary data. As a consequence, the measurement of particular indicators (related to SDGs) became difficult. Moreover, local authorities lacked reports of particular indicators at a community level (e.g., health coverage, premature mortality). The data were manually coded and examined according to Spiggle's method of analysis and interpretation of qualitative data [58] which involves an iterative process of categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, and refutation of information. A second stage of analysis included framing the impacts generated by these entities into the Sustainable Development Goals.

The results describe the direct or indirect contribution of each mechanism in the community and also its impact on the SDGs. The results are categorized by SDGs; however, every mechanism has an integral influence on the achievement of more than one SDG. The concluding section analyzes the interrelation of the various mechanisms in the quest of each case to achieve sustainable development and higher community levels of well-being.

#### 4. Results

In order to analyze how indigenous social enterprises contribute to build sustainable rural communities, it is worth examining how these entities were formed and developed the necessary capacities to generate such contribution. To this end, the process of social innovation suggested by Vázquez-Maguirre and Islas [59] provides some guidance about the different stages that indigenous enterprises have to surpass in rural environments. Table 2 describes the actions of each case in every stage of the process.

**Table 2.** The process of building indigenous social enterprises and their impact in the local community.

Social Enterprise	The Origin Phase	The Mobilization Phase	The Execution Phase	The Integration Phase
Chicza	Synthetic chewing gum collapsed the demand for natural gum.	Mixed leadership starts coordinating different communities to work together.	Small, self-managed cooperatives coordinated by a supra body (social enterprise).	Fair price for the producers, loans, social security, attention to community needs, preservation of Mayan jungle.
Grupo Ixtlán	Indecent working conditions, poverty and unsustainable exploitation of the forest by a foreign corporation.	The local community organized boycotts until it regained control of its resources.	Community-based social enterprise that incorporates local governance and managerial practices.	Decent work, gender equality, building of public infrastructure, community engagement (involvement in reforestation campaigns, and cultural and religious celebration), cultural reaffirmation, ethical banking, women empowerment.

Table 2. Cont.

Social Enterprise	The Origin Phase	The Mobilization Phase	The Execution Phase	The Integration Phase
Granja Porcón	Extreme poverty caused by agrarian reform that ended governmental aid.	The local community starts foresting its territory; the pine trees will provide jobs, and timber for cooking and building homes.	Community-based social enterprise that incorporates local governance and cooperative principles.	Decent work, building of public infrastructure, transportation, new markets for local craftsmanship, free materials for building homes, sustainable forest exploitation.
Wakami	Extreme poverty, civil war, and gender discrimination.	External leadership starts designing projects that mobilize indigenous women.	Small, self-managed microenterprises coordinated social enterprise.	Decent and flexible work, attention to community needs, building of cultural centers, women empowerment, help to build decent and environmentally friendly homes, and scholarships for children.

Source: self-elaboration with primary data.

#### 4.1. The Origin Phase

Indigenous social enterprises are usually a local response to a major crisis that affects the dignity of the individuals and compromises the socio-economic dynamics of the communities. Evidence suggests that the four cases originated as a result of a major crisis. Chicza was created after the international demand for natural gum base collapsed due to the discovery of a synthetic substitute. The gum producers lost their main source of income and were forced to work on other primary activities that resemble a subsistence economy. The ancient Mayan activity of extracting the resin from the chicozapote tree and cooking it to obtain gum base almost disappeared. This also affected the Mayan jungle, since many individuals had to turn the forest into grazing areas for agriculture and cattle.

Grupo Ixtlán originated after the Mexican government granted a foreign company the right to exploit the forest of Zapotec communities in the Sierra Norte of Oaxaca. The company generated indecent jobs and undignified conditions where indigenous people had to exploit the same ecosystem that has sustained their community for generations. Many people were forced to migrate to cities, but those who stayed started searching for strategies to recover their land. In the case of Granja Porcón, an agrarian reform (1969) affected the dynamics of rural Peru. While the reform sought to adjudicate land to cooperatives and peasants, the transition left hundreds of communities unprotected and in complete misery and debt. The community of Granja Porcón, located in one of the two Peruvian states with the highest poverty rates, was one of them. Finally, Wakami's main goal is to empower indigenous women in rural Guatemala. Rural communities had faced extreme violence for over four decades of civil war (1960–1996). As a result, many communities lost their territory and were forced to search for new lands, and those who got to stay faced hunger and extreme poverty. Women were especially vulnerable since they often experienced double discrimination (gender and ethnic) and lack any empowerment within their male-dominated communities. Dignity violations in the form of extreme poverty, violence, menial jobs, and lack of opportunities originated a crisis that motivated individuals to mobilize to mend the situation.

#### 4.2. The Mobilization Phase

This phase is characterized by the organizing process in which local or external leadership mobilizes people and resources to design a solution that creates new equilibriums [59]. In the case of Chicza, a mixed leadership constituted by local gum producers from different communities and two experts that systematically analyzed the problem started visiting other communities and building consensus about new ways of organizing and exploring a long-term solution. The mobilization phase in Ixtlán took the form of organized boycotts that affected the operations of the foreign company.

Surrounded communities also joined the boycotts until the government finally agreed to end the concession of the corporation and restore the land rights to the indigenous communities. Thus, Ixtlán and other communities finally achieved self-determination to explore local solutions to the current situation. Similarly, the agrarian reform in Peru reinstated land rights to indigenous communities, but local leaders had to start building consensus about the type of community and productive activities they have to develop in order to achieve better levels of well-being. They finally agreed to start foresting their territory with the pine trees (through community work) and start designing productive entities that will provide jobs and prosperity to the entire community. Finally, Wakami relied on external leadership to mobilize indigenous women. Its founder, Maria Pacheco, started visiting communities to diagnose how she can better help rural women to overcome the dignity violation they have permanently suffered. She found a group of enthusiastic indigenous women that helped her find a solution.

In this stage, the policy context is especially important since it often provides part of the resources and expertise these initiatives need to develop. However, the narrative of the interviewed emphasized precisely the lack of such a policy context that would have facilitated the creation and development of these social enterprises. One of the managers in Granja Porcón recalls the difficulties to start this venture: “In the beginning we did not have anything to eat, because the Ministry of Agriculture left us alone, like a father abandoned her son, it just left us, and we didn’t know how to do anything”. In the case of Grupo Ixtlán, former workers that founded the enterprise recall that the first government programs (focused on forest enterprises) that reached the region arrived in the late 1990s (approximately a decade after the creation of Grupo Ixtlán), but they did not provide substantial help. The lack of a sound policy context that promotes the creation of social enterprises in these countries may also partially explain why they represent the exception rather than the rule in indigenous communities.

#### 4.3. *The Execution Phase*

This phase refers to the different kinds of social entities that individuals and communities design to remedy dignity violations. These entities usually relied on mixed governance mechanisms that combine local values and governance with traditional management practices [40]. In the Chicza case, gum producers organized themselves in small, self-managed cooperatives that are coordinated by a supra body (social enterprise) that manufactures and distributes organic gum. This supra body is formed by representatives of more than 50 small cooperatives under a democratic scheme based on production. Hence, those cooperatives that produce more gum base are those who have more votes in the assemblies. The most experienced gum producers are also part of the board that supervises Chicza; however, each cooperative has self-determination and can invest its gains into its own projects in the community.

In the case of Grupo Ixtlán, local leaders decided to create a community-based enterprise with the explicit mission of providing the community with decent jobs and well-being. This enterprise is managed by one of the political authorities that also rules the community: the Commissariat of Common Goods. This body is democratically elected every three years, and is also supervised by a general assembly and supervisory board. During the assemblies, the community can propose and examine different productive projects that benefit the community. In this sense, Grupo Ixtlán is a social enterprise that adopted a local governance mechanism but is managed as a holding, with a CEO that supervises up to eight enterprises from different industries.

Similarly, the community of Granja Porcón decided to create a community-based enterprise that is also supervised by a general assembly that appoints a CEO every five years. The community work that helped to forest 6500 hectares of former grassland provided the means to create a forest and tourism activities that currently generate 400 jobs and public infrastructure to the 1200 inhabitants of Granja Porcón. Finally, Wakami mobilized groups of indigenous women into forming micro-enterprises that manufacture fashion accessories that are later commercialized worldwide by this social enterprise. Each group of women exercised its own policies, structure, governance, and practices according to



local values and culture. Meanwhile, Wakami chose a hybrid model where two different entities contribute to achieve the mission of empowering indigenous women: a profit maximizing entity that designs and commercializes fashion accessories, and a social-driven organization that mobilizes, trains, and helps women and the community to achieve higher levels of well-being. Once these four social enterprises designed the most convenient structure and governance to achieve their mission, they started to implement specific strategies and dignity-based social innovations to achieve sustainability.

As these cases grew in size, they took advantage of governmental programs and international aid projects that provided resources and demand for their products. The Secretariat of Education became one of the main clients of Grupo Ixtlán in the late 2000s; Granja Porcón forested their territory with the aid of the Participatory Forest Development Project in the Andes (Proyecto Desarrollo Forestal Participativo en los Andes), executed by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Besides, it has long-term partnerships with Nestlé and Yanacocha (the fourth largest gold mine in the world) to develop dairy products and eco-tourism facilities, respectively. Further, Wakami has partnered with The Inter-American Development Bank and local corporations to finance diverse projects in the rural communities where it has operations. Finally, Chicza participates in government programs from The Secretariat of Economy, The National Forestry Commission (CONAFOR), and also national development banks to finance new projects and expand its operations worldwide. Although these cases initially lacked the policy context that supported their development, when they reached a certain business scale, they got access to these programs and partnerships to consolidate their growth and increase their impact and sustainability.

#### 4.4. The Integration Phase

This phase corresponds to the efforts conducted by the social enterprise to achieve sustainability by means of specific empowering mechanisms and dignity-based social innovations. Vazquez-Maguirre and Islas suggest that two attributes are fundamental in this process of achieving sustainability: indigenous cosmovision of oneness with the environment, and the reconfiguration of the relationship between people and place which seeks to reconnect people with local knowledge, customs, and values [59]. The strategies implemented by each case are grouped according to the specific SDGs they addressed (see Table 3). In this sense, the SDGs constitute a categorization system for the outcomes of these social enterprises and represent evidence of how developing countries (specifically rural areas) can contribute to addressing humanity's most urgent social needs. This also constitutes a research gap that invites scholars to focus on strategies to address particular SDGs in these regions [51].

**Table 3.** Strategies designed by indigenous social enterprises to achieve sustainable communities (categorized by Sustainable Development Goal) and the specific target addressed.

SDG 3 Good Health	SDG 8 Decent Work	SDG 10 Reduced Inequalities	SDG 11 Sustainable Communities
Co-organize preventive health campaigns. Promote employees' well-being. Build health infrastructure. Promote the well-being of the employees' families.	Work stability. Training and promotions. Benefits additional to those by law.	Low CEO pay ratio and flat structure. Equal opportunities. Gender equality.	Investments in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions. Stakeholder engagement. Promoting new ventures that satisfy previously unattended needs.
Specific Targets: 3.2, 3.4, 3.8, 3.9, 3.d	Specific Targets: 8.5, 8.6, 8.8	Specific Targets: 10.1, 10.2, 10.3	Specific Targets: 11.1, 11.3, 11.4

Source: self-elaboration with primary data.

#### 4.4.1. Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3)

The documented cases seek to promote the well-being and health of the community through four strategies: co-organize preventive health campaigns in the community, promote the well-being of employees, build health infrastructure, and promote the well-being of the employees' families, particularly children. Grupo Ixtlán co-organizes periodic campaigns to prevent diseases, promote vaccination, and raise health awareness in the community. Since local governments often lack resources, Grupo Ixtlán partners with the local government to build public infrastructure to improve community health services. The most common mechanism to promote health and well-being in the community is through the employees. In this sense, Granja Porcón and Grupo Ixtlán have internal policies that not only focus on their health, but on their integral well-being. Policies such as a strict 8-h workday, two days of rest per week (for most employees), emergency loans, medical insurance, job stability, vacations, and flexible work hours that allow employees to enjoy higher levels of welfare compared to employees of other local organizations where these benefits do not usually exist. For example, an employee of Grupo Ixtlán remembers his stage in a commercial company: "They only wanted production, they brought us industrial physiologists so we gave everything we had, to kill ourselves at work . . . it was very hard, they exploited the worker to the maximum, but here managers are more conscious". Chicza also provides social security and private health insurance to the gum producers. The last strategy focuses on the families of employees. Wakami has a nutrition and welfare department that monitors not only women that collaborate in the entity, but particularly their children. A nutrition specialist visits each community monthly and registers the size and weight of each child, recommending specific actions to take care of their health. Further, Wakami organizes healthy cooking workshops, promotes organic farming, provides natural water filters and solar panels, grants scholarships so that children do not leave school, etc.

As well-being is affected by multiple factors, ensuring a long-term impact in this goal requires organizations with a multi-purpose (economic, cultural, ecologic, social) orientation that are constantly engaging with their stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement is also a principle of humanistic management that aims to protect the dignity of each group affected by the organization. The four cases are constantly engaging and validating these four strategies with the community and exploring other dimensions that can have an impact on this SGD. One example is promoting and recovering ancestral methods of healing, pain relief, and herbal medicine made from local flora. These communities usually have different approaches to healing and well-being, and they often combine allopathic medicine with traditional healing methods. Promoting the latter may also have an impact on the cultural reaffirmation of these indigenous communities.

#### 4.4.2. Decent Work (SDG 8)

Every case analyzed has designed a social business model that seeks to generate decent work as a means to improve community well-being. In this sense, the social purpose directly targets employees and the local community. Therefore, every social enterprise has created strategies that protect and promote the dignity of the employees. These strategies can be grouped into work stability, training and promotions, and benefits additional to those by law.

The four documented cases have policies aimed at creating job stability. Most of the informants had at least a decade working in the company. For female employees, most of them mentioned that this was their first job and they were grateful the social enterprise gave them the opportunity and flexibility to work while they can still care for their children. There is no evidence of any dismissal in the documented cases (except for temporary workers, who are hired on a cyclical basis), and the few cases described by informants were related to ethical misconduct or behavior that was not aligned with community values. In the case of Grupo Ixtlán, there is an explicit policy of not dismissing any worker from the community. One of the managers explains that, if the company's mission is to create decent jobs for the community, firing an employee would contradict the purpose of the enterprise. The informants also describe that job stability brings certainty and tranquility to workers and their

families. Income stability also encourages some workers to start new businesses in the community, or to participate more actively in community committees in order to improve their neighborhood. Chicza guarantees a fair price for the gum base that is acquired from the producers. Even though the chewing gum base market price fluctuates like any other commodity, Chicza has managed to increase the price it pays to the producers (mainly by adding value to the final product). The managers believe that this policy contributes to income stability and better planning (infrastructure in the community, home improvements, acquiring assets, child education).

There is evidence of labor mobility towards managerial positions within the company in each documented case. First, these entities have implicit policies to hire traditionally excluded groups from the labor market such as young people and women. Moreover, there are training and development policies that promote employees to learn different skills and fill managerial vacancies when needed. In Wakami, indigenous women have been promoted to positions in the corporate headquarters located in Guatemala City. One of the coordinators said she was happy to be able to train new groups of indigenous women, just as Wakami once did with her. Chicza also encourages family members of chewing gum producers to work in the factory and headquarters, which are located in the city of Chetumal, the capital of the state.

Furthermore, employees in the four cases receive benefits additional to those by law. Informality is common in rural areas of the region; therefore, employees often do not have any other benefit additional to their salary, not even vacations. The four social enterprises examined in this work changed that dynamic and provided their employees with benefits (Christmas bonus, vacations, social security, loans). In the case of Chicza, the producers have private health insurance and a death benefit in addition to those benefits provided by the Mexican law. Grupo Ixtlán provides interest-free loans, so employees can start a venture or finance a celebration or an emergency.

Decent work also implies not seeing the community as a mere supplier of human capital and resources. In the paragraphs above and also in the previous section (SDG 3), evidence suggests that both the well-being of the workers and the community are the *raison d'être* of the social enterprise. This positions the human being at the center of the enterprise instead of being considered just another input to reach an economic objective. The results are also positive for the company in the economic dimension; some managers describe that the levels of employee motivation and productivity are higher than in other companies. Moreover, the social enterprise's legitimacy levels in the community are also higher when compared with other entities.

#### 4.4.3. Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10)

Enterprises can reduce or increase inequality in the communities where they operate depending on their strategies and incentives. The documented cases follow three strategies to target this goal: low CEO pay ratio and flat structure, equal opportunities, and gender equality. Social enterprises tend to adopt innovative organizational structures to deal with the tensions that are often caused by conflicting social and economic objectives [60]. The four cases have designed flat organizational structures, with a maximum of four levels of hierarchy, that favor dialogue and participation. This flat structure also causes a low CEO pay ratio when compared to commercial companies. According to the informants, this ratio is around 5 to 1, while in corporations in the United States, the CEO earns on average 271 times the annual pay of the typical worker [61]. The informants agree with this salary policy since everyone works 8 h and it would not be fair that salaries differ substantially among employees. A job and a decent payment are fundamental instruments to dignify and empower individuals.

Inequalities are also reduced when everyone has access to growth opportunities. In the documented cases, there are schemes to finance productive projects at low cost. In Grupo Ixtlán, employees take advantage of interest-free loans to start businesses that generate more jobs in the community: hotels, restaurants, coffee shops, internet cafes, taxis, rent of equipment and machinery, etc. Some of the beneficiaries of these loans resign to devote fully to their businesses, also contributing to meet the needs of the community. The manager of one of the social enterprises believes that, even if employees

leave their job, it is a sign of a community moving forward: “it’s good that now other companies are generating jobs in the community.”

Social enterprises have the potential of reducing structural discrimination against indigenous women in terms of decision making and access to employment. These entities “can sustain the empowerment of the weakest social sectors like indigenous women, who suffer from a condition of double discrimination” [62] (p. 292). In the particular cases of Granja Porcón and Grupo Ixtlán, both have gender equality policies and flexible work arrangements to encourage the incorporation of women to work, allowing women to access social programs and taking care of their children. In the case of Wakami, it works directly on the dignification of indigenous women and the reduction of gender inequality through decent employment and training. As a result, women participate more actively in the public affairs of their communities and are also empowered to make decisions at home.

These strategies seem to be generated by ethical decision-making processes that are geared by principles such as justice, equality, and inclusion. Altogether, these strategies seek a more humane and life-conducive form of organizing, one that reduces inequalities in the workplace and also in the community. Evidence from the cases suggests that the three strategies have prompted social change and empowered those members of the community that might be subject to cultural and economic barriers.

#### 4.4.4. Sustainable Communities (SDG 11)

Social enterprises have assumed a proactive role in generating sustainable communities. These companies tend to have a sustainable approach, with a dual purpose: economic and social-environmental [31]. The four cases show investments in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions, and stakeholder engagement that contributes to the sustainable development of the communities where they operate.

For example, Chicza is a profitable social enterprise that transfers more than 85 percent of the income it generates to the local gum producers that live in rural communities in the Mayan jungle. As they have more income to improve their homes, they buy better equipment and send their children to school. Chicza is also reforesting the jungle, by promoting farmers to change the use of their land from agriculture (mostly corn crops) to reforesting with trees whose fruits have more market value (chicozapote, ramón tree, and wild pepper). These trees also provide habitat and food for a large array of species. Chicza has reconverted 4000 hectares of grasslands into jungle. Further, Chicza has promoted groups of women in these communities to create micro-enterprises to commercialize ramón flour and wild pepper. In this process, Chicza generates positive impacts in each dimension (economic, social, and environmental) and contributes to build sustainable communities in the Mayan jungle.

Wakami has started building community centers for the integral development of the community. Within these centers, the social enterprise seeks to build self-governance mechanisms so that community members can work together towards sustainable development. Wakami also promotes families to equip their homes with eco-friendly heaters, stoves, water filters, and construction materials. It wants these groups of women and their families to be the change that the community needs towards self-determination and sustainability. Wakami’s ultimate purpose is that these groups of women pursue other business opportunities and mobilize the community towards creating more decent jobs and self-manage the infrastructure projects they need to increase their well-being.

Similarly, Grupo Ixtlán is constantly engaging with the community (assemblies, direct dialogue with employees from the community) to diagnose those issues that may be deterring a better quality of life. The social enterprises have responded by creating new ventures that satisfy previously unattended needs (e.g., access to credit, construction materials, and gas). It has also invested in the environment dimension by building waste and water management plants, reforesting every hectare of pine trees that it exploits (Grupo Ixtlán has the Forest Stewardship Council certification for sustainable forest management), and it has a strict policy of avoiding the use of chemicals in any process regarding the forest. The indigenous cosmovision of oneness with the environment prevents Grupo Ixtlán from

using chemicals that may later harm the flora or fauna and also the community since they use water from nearby streams.

Finally, Granja Porcón is one of the most well-known cases of environmental achievement as the community forested over 6500 hectares of pine trees that now constitute a complex forest ecosystem that is managed sustainably to provide decent jobs and well-being to its inhabitants. The social enterprise has provided the community with the wood to build their homes and cook their meals, and with the means to build public infrastructure. It has also developed a picturesque community in the middle of the forest that receives thousands of visitors annually. Tourists can witness the sustainable development of the community, the different business units the social enterprise has promoted (pisciculture, dairy, eco-cabins, restaurants that cook only with local ingredients), and how a once deprived community with no jobs now has food self-sufficiency and more jobs than the community needs (Granja Porcón recruits workers from neighboring communities to fill this gap).

## 5. Discussion

The process of social innovation suggested by Vázquez-Maguirre and Islas [59] provides a framework to analyze how indigenous communities create and develop social enterprises to achieve social and environmental goals. In the origin phase, Peredo and Chrisman found that economic or social stress influence the emergence of indigenous social enterprises, which are usually a local response to a major crisis that affects the dignity of the individuals and compromises the socio-economic dynamics of the communities [45]. In this sense, the four cases offer evidence of a social stress that prompted a market-oriented solution. The aim of the solution, in most of the cases, is to offer potential relief [41] and power shifts in the dynamics of indigenous communities [63], promote social justice [47], and regain control of their territories [62].

In the mobilization phase, local or external leadership is needed to organize the community towards a common goal. Although both types of leadership seem to mobilize the community, authors such as Wheatley and Frieze argue that effective change does not result from preconceived plans by a single individual but rather local actions that spring up simultaneously in many different areas [64]. In this sense, collective local leadership, as in the case of Granja Porcón and Grupo Ixtlán, may find more easily the legitimacy and urgency to build a social enterprise. This perspective assumes that local people are competent interpreters and solvers of their own problems [65] and have the capacity to build sustainable solutions. However, Wakami and Chicza have also relied on external leadership that has designed innovative business models based on market opportunities located in other countries. Such opportunities may be difficult to be discovered by local communities. As a consequence, both Wakami and Chicza export most of their production to different countries, while Granja Porcón and Grupo Ixtlán rely on local markets.

The execution phase relies on mixed governance mechanisms that combine local governance with traditional management practices to create social enterprises; this combination is needed to adapt organizational processes and structures that soundly allow the achievement of the organizational goals [66]. Although indigenous enterprises often rely on traditional knowledge [67] and local entrepreneurial behavior [68], national agrarian authorities often regulate and supervise how indigenous communities manage their enterprises [69,70]. The communal property of the land is legally recognized in México, Guatemala, and Perú and constitutes a strategy for the conservation and exercise of sustainable activities at the community level [71]. Communal property is regulated by agrarian laws and delineates community governance structures that are later adopted by indigenous enterprises [70]. Different publications have documented how to successfully combine these governance mechanisms to form indigenous social ventures [36,72,73].

In the integration phase, the indigenous social enterprises design and develop strategies to achieve sustainability by means of specific empowering mechanisms. The strategies are categorized by SDGs to contribute to a research gap that invites scholars to focus on specific strategies that better address particular SDGs in regions such as Latin America [51]. Table 3 resumes the strategies designed

by indigenous social enterprises to achieve sustainable communities. In this sense, a humanistic management approach requires that every strategy incorporates its principles and aims to protect the dignity of the individual and promote their flourishing [19]. The four cases analyzed in this work originated due to dignity affronts to people in these indigenous communities. Therefore, the strategies implemented by these entities have a profound respect for human dignity, which is also the guiding principle of humanistic management. These strategies also seek to protect human dignity and promote human flourishing, which is also a central objective of the humanistic management approach.

Regarding SDG 3 (good health), social ventures developed by indigenous people usually focus on health and well-being [47] and often include the community in their efforts toward this goal [73]. Two of the four strategies derived from the cases target the community directly: co-organize preventive health campaigns and build health infrastructure. Since indigenous rural communities in Latin America usually present high levels of poverty [74], social enterprises often have to assume the role that the government was supposed to have in terms of providing public health and community well-being [8]. The other two strategies (promote the well-being of employees and also their families) are somehow common strategies in some social enterprise models that consider the employee as the main beneficiary of the venture [75]. One of the preferred actions, as shown in three of the four cases, is providing private health insurance and other benefits additional to those by law, which also indicate the relationship between good health (SDG 3) and decent work (SDG 8).

Regarding SDG 8 (decent work), Melé mentions that humanistic management requires maximum respect for people and full consideration of their dignity [19]. The author suggests promoting the development of individuals within the organizational structure (training and promotions). The cases suggest two additional strategies: work stability and benefits additional to those by law. In this sense, previous studies confirm that social enterprises that focus on work integration effectively reduce limitations in work opportunities [76]. Other studies suggest that these benefits, such as interest-free loans, help to promote the entrepreneurial spirit that often characterizes indigenous communities since they are usually located in remote areas with difficult access and limited job opportunities [73]. However, these benefits along with fair wages have to be linked to productivity and economic performance to achieve sustainability in the long run [77]. These strategies reinforce the idea that social enterprises serve as a template for humanistic management [7,78]. Other empirical studies from Latin America (specifically in the tourism industry) also link a humanistic management approach with decent work, human dignity, justice, and the presence of social enterprises [18,79].

SDG 10 (reduced inequalities) is especially urgent and deeply rooted in the region. Inequality in Latin America is 30 percent higher than the world average, measured by the Gini coefficient [80]. Indigenous groups, which represent 42 million people, are one of the most vulnerable segments as they face structural discrimination in terms of education systems and access to employment [81]. Indigenous peoples constitute 14% of the poor and 17% of the extremely poor, although they represent only 8% of the population in the region [74]. Nearly half of Latin America's indigenous people have had to migrate to cities [82] in search of a life in dignity. Indigenous social enterprises can potentially reduce the inequalities that force communities to migrate to urban centers in search for job opportunities. The three strategies derived from the cases (low CEO pay ratio and flat structure, equal opportunities, and gender equality) help to avoid an instrumentalist use of the worker and contribute to protect and recognize their unconditional human dignity—which is one of the principles of humanistic management [7]. As a result, Peredo and Chrisman suggest these enterprises might be an instrument for maintaining cultural values and improving the well-being of disadvantaged segments [45] that face structural labor barriers, such as indigenous women [34]. Further, they can lead the process of self-determined development, which is premised on acknowledging indigenous ownership rights to lands and resources and respecting their right to self-determination and free prior informed consent [83]. Thus, indigenous social enterprises also challenge Western economic paradigms of development [43].

The three previous SDGs work on a smaller scale to achieve SDG 11: sustainable communities. In this sense, Berkes and Adhikari found that the objective of indigenous ventures is often related to community-based development [67]. Similarly, Walters and Takamura suggest that business strategies within indigenous communities are based on the combination of community, spirituality, sustainability, and entrepreneurship [84]. In this sense, the three strategies related to this SDG (investments in the social, economic, and environmental dimensions; stakeholder engagement; and promoting new ventures that satisfy previously unattended needs) have contributed to safeguarding ancient ecosystems that are the base of their traditional way of life. Colbourne and Anderson [85] and Spiller et al. [86] found similar results in indigenous communities. In this sense, one of the challenges of these enterprises is understanding how local people perceive the impacts of their livelihood activities on the environment in order to formulate appropriate tailored conservation policies [87]. These strategies also suggest that economic goals are not prioritized as in profit-maximizing entities, as suggested by Peredo et al. [45] and Morris [44]. Instead, stakeholder engagement results in a variety of investments in the social and environmental dimensions that generate the conditions for the sustainable development of the community, as also suggested by previous studies [37].

### *Public Policy Implications*

Social enterprises paying decent wages often compete with disadvantage against profit-maximizing entities, as the latter can reduce costs by paying the minimum wage the market will bear [88] and also reduce the social benefits of its workers. This compromises the financial viability of social enterprises. Insufficient public policies that support social ventures partially explain that, in Mexico, the life expectancy of a social enterprise is less than one year in 38.3% of the cases, and only 5.2% of them survive more than 10 years [89]. Given the impact that indigenous social enterprises have in achieving the SDGs, promoting public policy that supports them seems strategic and urgent.

Public policies that focus on providing sustainable finance for social enterprises are essential since they require capital at all stages of their life cycle (e.g., crowdfunding, venture philanthropy, business angels, institutional investors) [90]. Sustainable finance is just a component of a larger social entrepreneurial ecosystem that is just emerging in Latin America to promote social enterprises; public policy should also support social labs and accelerators, specialized government agencies, university labs [91], and training and research that increase the knowledge of the sector and its needs [90]. Social enterprises also need help to develop the managerial capacity to build effective strategies to enter the market [90]. Making social enterprises the favored providers of public services would also facilitate their growth.

Similarly, some actors of the social economy believe that policymakers should incorporate social economy principles into the wider economy (e.g., social justice, democratic participation, egalitarianism, and social goals) [88] in order to change the prevailing economic paradigm into a more humanistic, dignity-oriented model of organizing [7,11,92]. One of the first actions towards this goal requires embedding social enterprise courses in national curricula and greater rhetorical support for the social economy by policymakers [88].

The social economy is also seen as a provider of employment (especially reintegrating vulnerable groups into the mainstream labor market) at times of economic scarcity [88]. In particular, empirical evidence suggests that social enterprises contribute to subjective well-being [46]; therefore, public policy that promotes these entities' development can greatly contribute to reaching the SDGs' targets set by each country.

## **6. Conclusions**

Humanistic management can contribute to shape a new paradigm for organizations in Latin America that seeks primarily to create more humane and life-conducive organizing and generate common well-being. In this quest, the community becomes a major stakeholder in the search for sustainability and the accomplishment of the SDGs. Evidence from the cases suggests that the

indigenous social enterprises generate strategies that have a positive impact on the prosperity of the stakeholders and contribute to the community sustainability. Aligned with previous studies, indigenous social enterprises have the potential to transform communities, empower their individuals, and contribute positively to their quest for sustainability and prosperity.

The cases analyzed in this work describe an alternative model of interaction with the community: one that is based on cooperation and fair distribution of wealth among its stakeholders. Similarly, active stakeholder engagement also ends up limiting potential negative impacts of the social enterprises and setting legitimacy standards in environmental issues, labor rights, and transparency and accountability. As a consequence, this interaction generates positive synergies that establish new equilibriums of well-being in the community, which further prompts the social enterprise to be more competitive, generate greater positive impacts, and provide dignity protection and the possibility of human flourishing.

The lessons that derive from the cases constitute evidence of a more dignifying form of management which includes every stakeholder and recognizes their intrinsic value. The strategies described in this chapter generate positive synergies that establish new equilibriums of well-being in the community, which further prompts the social enterprise to be more competitive and generate greater positive impacts on society. Moreover, the cases suggest that working towards a particular SDG indirectly favors the attention of other goals, thus demonstrating the close interrelation of the 17 SDGs.

This chapter also suggests that the humanistic management approach contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics of indigenous social enterprises, as humanistic principles seem to guide these entities. These principles are, but are not limited to: unconditional respect for human dignity, humane and life-conducive organizing, multi-purpose (economic, cultural, ecologic, social) orientation that seeks stakeholder well-being, ethical decision making and accountability, and stakeholder engagement (e.g., the community). The cases described in this chapter suggest elements for new management models and forms of interaction with the community that further protect and promote the dignity of each individual, thus achieving one of the main objectives of humanistic management. Future lines of research should focus on how social enterprises initiate these processes of interaction with the community, and how to break the barriers generated by stakeholders that view any enterprise with suspicion. Latin America has presented itself as an ideal region to answer these questions and continue to explore new models of humanistic management.

This work addresses a research gap that points to the lack of studies that focus on strategies to address particular SDGs in developing countries [51], and also the need to understand social enterprises within different contexts [37]. By examining how business strategies target specific SDGs in such contexts, new empirical evidence may suggest more efficient forms to achieve particular goals. Further, this work shed light on the role indigenous social enterprises play in the quest for communities to achieve sustainability and well-being. The humanistic approach to indigenous social enterprises followed in this article and the process by which these entities are formed and developed also addresses a gap mentioned by Pirson et al. [7] by highlighting how and where issues of dignity arise in different communities, and how they respond by protecting human dignity through indigenous entrepreneurship. Similarly, the strategies that emerged in the examination of the cases also address a gap pointed out by Pirson et al. [7]; they invited scholars to perform empirical research that sheds light on how to better design human-centered organizations that prioritize dignity and value generation.

This study has limitations that suggest a cautious interpretation of the results. The cases respond to a particular socio-cultural and ethnic context that influences the strategies that these enterprises designed to achieve their goals and engage with the community. Moreover, the nature of indigenous social entrepreneurship in Latin America invites us to be prudent when extrapolating the results to other regions. Furthermore, critical perspectives on indigenous research suggest that indigenous communities participate in study designs and interpretation. However, indigenous communities did not participate in this work's study design, which was mostly based on traditional strategies (case study) and instruments of data gathering and data analysis. This can be interpreted as a



methodological limitation. Besides, the criteria to select the cases (performance, visibility, and size) pose a bias that indicates these are considered exceptional social enterprises within the context of each country. Additionally, the lack of historical and current data at the community level regarding some SDGs' targets made this research rely heavily on primary data, which made it difficult to establish, with certainty, when the community reached certain well-being and dignity thresholds. Finally, the exploratory and descriptive nature of this work suggests that the results should not be considered incontrovertible but rather part of a broader dialogue that draws on new empirical evidence to build a better understanding of the phenomena.

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