

# Good living for the next generation: between subjectivity and common good from the perspective of eco-socio-economy<sup>1</sup>

Bem viver para a próxima geração: entre subjetividade e bem comum a partir da perspectiva da ecossocioeconomia

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## Abstract

Good Living (GL) is an intriguing theme when apart from the consumer society. It is purposeless to discuss GL subjectively in the face of climate change, without associating it with the meaning of common good. The aim is to discuss GL, taking the interest of future generations into account, from the dialectic relationship between subjectivity and common good and the complementarity between human beings and nature. This is an essay. The discussion refers to the ecocentric perspective, which suggests that the social system is interconnected with the ecological system, especially when one considers the creation of GL for future generations. GL, more than just material, health and socio-educational conditions, is a particular state of happiness, in which different cultural patterns prevail. One does not deny abstracting economic logic - in which the subject calculates individual consequences, but territorially ignores the common good - and it does not prevail over or even determine production processes and human reproduction, from which arises the emptied subject. Finally, GL cannot be relegated to achievements of other generations, or else to a “cool” way of life, without responsibilities and decontextualized from future generations. Subjectivity and common good can be reconciled in a societal dimension that is not reduced to mere calculation and where human beings do not put aside, nor to others (politics) nor to themselves (psyche), in the production of the eco-socio-economical path, what makes an associated human

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life that does not systemically relegate its own process of socialization.

**Keywords:** Good Living; Social And Environmental Dynamics; Subjectivity; Common Good.

## Resumo

Bem Viver (BV) é tema intrigante quando se distancia da chamada sociedade de consumo. Diante do fenômeno das mudanças climáticas, não faz sentido discutir BV subjetivamente, sem correlacioná-lo ao significado de bem comum. O objetivo é dialogar sobre o tema do BV, relevando o interesse das gerações futuras, a partir da relação dialética entre subjetividade e bem comum e da complementaridade entre a dinâmica entre ser humano e natureza. Trata-se de um ensaio. A discussão remete à visão ecocêntrica, em que sugere que o sistema social está interconectado ao ecológico, sobretudo na ocasião em que se considera a produção do BV para gerações futuras. O BV, mais do que condição material, socioeducacional e de saúde, é estado particular de felicidade, no qual vigoram padrões culturais distintos. Não se nega abstrair a lógica econômica - na qual o sujeito calcula consequências individuais, mas releva territorialmente o bem comum -, e não é ela hegemônica ou mesmo determinante nos processos de produção e reprodução humana, dos quais resulta o sujeito esvaziado. Por fim, o BV não pode ficar relegado a conquistas de outras gerações ou ainda a um modo de vida "cool", desresponsabilizado e descontextualizado em relação a gerações futuras. Subjetividade e bem comum podem se reconciliar no plano de uma esfera societária que não seja reduzida a mero cálculo e em que o ser humano não deponha, nem ao outro (política) nem a si (psique), na produção de caminho ecossocioeconômico, o que constitui uma vida humana associada que não relegue sistemicamente o seu próprio processo de socialização.

**Palavras-chave:** Bem Viver; Dinâmica Socioambiental; Subjetividade; Bem Comum.

## Introduction

The consumer society reminds what might be mistakenly taken by Good Living (GL), as if it were the direct result of the purchasing power (goods or services) which, until then, was considered essential to meet individual needs.

Complexifying the issue, in the face of climate change - didactically understood as global climate warming, which puts at risk, in a relatively short period of time (until the 22nd century), what is conventionally called sustainable development, implying not only achieving individual GL, but also the common good - it is necessary to foresee the consequences of how individual satisfaction is associated with common good, as states the theory of utilitarianism (Bentham, 2007; Mill, 2010).

Efforts called here urban eco-socio-economy are believed to help understanding the cause of the global environmental crisis, and its premise is based on the same asymmetries between human beings and nature derived from anthropocentrism, governing the relationship human being x human being that leads to social inequality (Laville, 2003). It is believed that the solution to this problem relies on the comprehension that the prevailing economic, individual and collective rationality must be criticized in the face of the effects of climate change.

We emphasize, so as not to run the risk of eco-socio-economy experiences be idealized as a way out to the crisis, that they are still incipient and bear contradictions, limits to the advancement in understanding the difficulty of conciliating economic interests of development of individuals and of the community that are socially aggravated, since social systems are imbricated with the ecological dynamics, inseparable aspects in the socio-environmental approach to data.

Eco-socio-economy, however, is a fertile field of research to make contact and deepen experiences that may create knowledge regarding the relationship between individual interests and the common good - such as the contribution of Parks, Joireman and Lange (2013) in building the state of art on such a dilemma - and still add to the discussion the conciliation of ecological, social and economic factors when one thinks about sustainable develop-

ment. It is worth mentioning Ostrom (2012), 2009 Nobel Prize in economics winner, when she suggests that the future of the common good consolidates itself as a stage that pervades the incompleteness of the market economy and State regulations.

This study aims to discuss GL, taking the interest of future generations into account, from the dialectic relationship between subjectivity and common good and the complementarity between human beings and nature, understood here as a false pair of concepts.

## Method

Methodology comprised exploratory bibliographical research through narrative review, describing the state of the art of the themes “good living,” “subjectivity” and “common good” in the face of the dynamic between human beings and nature. Under the contextual and theoretical point of view, it analyzed the literature, with interpretation and critical analysis, which characterizes an essay, from the inter-university and international scientific cooperation established when the Fulbright Visiting Scholar scholarship was granted, held mostly at Washington State University, Pullman (WA) campus, and at DePaul University (IL), Chicago. We should also mention the participation of the Centers for Eco-socio-economy and Public Policies, especially by courses offered and research projects in postgraduate programs that bring together Brazilian researchers and students on Regional Development (Furb), Environment and Development (UFPR), Environmental Management (UP) and Urban Management (PUCPR), and the partnership with Chilean universities, Magíster en Desarrollo a Escala Humana y Economía Ecológica and Centro de Estudios Ambientales (Universidad Austral de Chile) and North Americans, Personality and Decision Making Studies Laboratory, Department of Psychology (Washington State University, Pullman campus) and Chaddick Institute for Metropolitan Development (DePaul University, Chicago).

## Socio-environmental dynamics: a condition for Good Living

Global climate change derives directly from the asymmetry in ecological dynamics, called socio-environmental dynamics (IPCC, 2013), which are basically originated from two statements: *do not remove from ecosystems more than their regeneration capacity; do not throw in the ecosystems more than their absorption capacity*, which means *that nature does not have problems, and if it has, they are inherent to its dynamics, and resolved by it* (Fernandes; Sampaio, 2008, p. 89. Our translation).

In other words, social systems prevail or pass over ecological systems - as if anthropocentrism would justify itself, as if it were an axiom. Such dissymmetry also reproduces itself in social and ethnic groups and in social classes, as if some, according to the design of the consumer society, should deserve achieve GL rather than others.

Under this argument, there is a doubt whether the democratic society is an indispensable condition for sustainability; as suggested by welfare policy, no. We propose to ponder on what makes a democracy today: a democracy that overlook the imbalance of political spheres - between urban and traditional ways of life - or else that take into consideration the mechanisms that prioritize the interests of future generations (Sampaio, 2010).

Guided by its rejection of central elements of bourgeois-liberal utopia and of the capitalist system (individualism, rationalism, liberalism, anthropocentrism, consumerism, etc.), the Andean concept of GL emerges as a “utopian function” of criticism and a confrontation with this reality (Santamaría, 2015). In this context, regarding the subjection of indigenous people to the colonialism of national governments’ plans in the past few decades, many (non)colonial<sup>2</sup> expressions gained visibility (Mignolo, 2008; Quijano, 2014; Walsh, 2009).

The main concept comes from indigenous peoples living in the Andes, who seek through the concept and principles of GL the possibility of

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2 Decoloniality is not necessarily different from decolonization; it represents a strategy that goes beyond transformation – implies to be not colonized anymore –, pointing out construction and creation (Walsh, 2009, p. 55).

living outside the parameters of welfare<sup>3</sup> proclaimed by Western Eurocentric modernity, capitalist and colonial. In the past few years, GL has been mentioned in several texts and publications as a synonym for healthy life, associated with Ecuador and Bolivia economic development projects and, despite its polysemic nature, it is susceptible to different interpretations, maintained as its basis the guarantee of quality of life for the poorest (Lacerda; Feitosa, 2015). These peoples have their own way of living and preserving nature ensured by constitutional laws.

Worldwide, the Programa Interdisciplinario de Población y Desarrollo Local Sustentable de la Universidad de Cuenca (Pydlos), from Ecuador, brings together professors and researchers activities, led by the economist Alejandro Guillén, since it was created in 1983, in shaping the thought on GL, in partnership with the Universidad de Alicante da España, Centro Andino de Acción Popular, Fundación Rosa Luxemburgo, Universidad de Santa María, Universidad del País Vasco, Centro Latinoamericano de Ecología Social, Universidad Central de Venezuela, Universidad de Huelva e outros (Hidalgo Capitán, 2012).

The concept of GL, although it may refer at first to fine gastronomy (Mason; O'Mahony, 2007) or to good working conditions (Chalofsky; Cavallaro, 2013), it is not restricted to the egocentric perspective or to the current generation, as if nature could be reduced to a mere resource serving a supreme being, the human being.

On the one hand, if GL is represented by policies associated with the use of biodiversity and the ethno-knowledge<sup>4</sup> for medicinal purposes, on the other hand, actions were strengthened on indigenous peoples land rights, integration, preservation of culture, traditions and integrity.

Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (OIT, 2003) on indigenous and tribal peoples, adopted at the 76th International Labor Conference in 1989, was the first international instrument that specifically addressed the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples (Palazuelos; Balli-

vián, 2013). In September, 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including property and protection of their lands and territories, access to natural resources and preservation of their traditional knowledge (ONU, 2008).

Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices [...] Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right. (ONU, 2008, art. 24).

In Brazil, the National Policy for the Health of Indigenous Peoples is part of the National Health Policy, aligning the determinations of the Health Organic Laws with the Federal Constitution, which acknowledges indigenous peoples ethnic and cultural specificities and their territorial rights. Among these policies there are those related to the use of biodiversity and ethno-knowledge for medicinal purposes, granting

indigenous peoples autonomy regarding the execution or authorization of surveys and dissemination of indigenous traditional pharmacopoeia, its uses, therapeutic knowledge and practices, to promote respect for the guidelines, national policies and legislation related to genetic resources, bioethics and immaterial goods of traditional societies. [...] Health practices of indigenous peoples must also be part of these actions, which comprises knowledge and use of medicinal plants and other products from the traditional pharmacopoeia in the treatment of diseases and other health hazards (Brasil, 2002, p. 18. Our translation).

GL relates to ethical constraints and human emancipation, i.e., to social dynamics, but at the same time it is associated with its environment, with the environmental dynamics. It is pointless,

3 Welfare: it results from a modernity construction and thus is based on an essentially individualistic perspective (Nogueira, 2002).

4 Ethno-knowledge: traditional knowledge that regulates understanding, practices and the use regarding an object or an event (Dansac, 2012).

then, to sacrifice ecological systems to promote GL exclusively to one generation, inasmuch as they, for being connected, when one does not have a qualified state, ends up punishing the other, and this characterizes ecocentrism (Merchant, 1999). In this regard, human impacts on biodiversity have inspired specific research themes on ethnobiology<sup>5</sup> of agricultural diversity, cultural ecology of plant genetic resources, participatory conservation, genetic resources policies and resource management, among others (Nazarea, 2006).

Under such point of view, it is pointless to tackle human emancipation without, however, associate it with the intrinsic value of nature as an ethical constraint to ponder about future generations, which means withdrawal from classical utilitarianism and excelling at common good whenever possible, but, above all, approximating the unconditionality of human GL to the non-human (Merchant, 1999). It is also pointless to sacrifice emancipation of some (current generation) at the expense of others (future generation), as if there could be different classes of citizens - or, worse, as in ancient Greece, where women, children and foreigners were not even considered citizens (Aristotle, 1946). As suggested by ethnoecology derived from indigenous wisdom and traditional knowledge, what happens to a human being successively brings consequences for his descendant, for others and consequently for the planet (Lyons, 2008).

## Good Living and Quality of Life

GL is an expression full of subjective meaning, however, it is not free from objective connotations of quality of life (QoL). QoL can be quantified by average income indicators, even if it is not certain that someone who has a higher standard of living than others, recognize in himself what is considered GL. In the same way that years of schooling can provide and analytically determine QoL, such a designation does not necessarily suggest that an individual

can be fully-realized just by the knowledge he acquired through formal education, guaranteeing GL. Although the access to free public health may denote QoL, it does not guarantee that a person has GL, because one can have unhealthy living habits or can put one's life at risk by taking medication or consuming narcotics, chemical additives in his food, etc. (Antonioni; Gemini; Mazzoli, 2010; Sirgy; Phillips; Rahtz, 2009).

A classic example of symbolic indicators that distorts the information it contains is Gross Domestic Product (GDP), which suggests the measurement of a given territory wealth. According to Smith and Max-Neef (2011), GDP takes into consideration both negative impacts such as costs of traffic accidents, and positive such as investments in education. It does not include, however, unpaid work, domestic work, which reproduces life itself, neither the potential of ecosystem services to produce wealth.

There are, however, qualified initiatives for measuring aggregate indicators, such as the OECD Better Life Index (OECD, 2014), based on the Bellagio principles<sup>6</sup> (Pintér et al., 2012), which brings together information about housing, income, employment, community, education, environment, civic engagement, health, personal satisfaction, security and life/work, and the Human Development Index from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2014), which brings together information about longevity, education and income.

GL, more than a material, socio-educational and health condition, as previously mentioned, is a particular state of happiness, in which different cultural patterns prevail, in which enjoying a glass of wine can be morally acceptable or not. It is fallacious to suppose, regarding public policies, that not having formal education implies necessarily in an obstacle to the pursuit of happiness, if learning opportunities from non-formal and informal education are not appreciated, or from traditional knowledge or site-specific technologies (Tuan, 1974). Family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, traditional forest product

5 Ethnobiology is the science that focuses on understanding how traditional communities (indigenous, quilombolas, fishing, agriculture and others) perceive, classify and construct the environment (Begossi, 1993).

6 The Bellagio principles refer to four parameters that sustainable development indicators should have: definition and goals; priority and practicality; assessment; and feedback (Pintér et al., 2012).

extractor communities, originating communities, quilombo communities and others not associated with the consumer society can and sometimes historically lead a lifestyle to one's heart's content (Berkes, 1999).

What approximates GL and QoL, even with subjective and objective differences of concept, is the fact that both require a collective parameter (understood as common good), in order to associate them with studies and comparative analyses, which the sustainability indicators do not need. If indicators do not help decision making, they run the risk of being discontinued (Gabrielsen; Bosch, 2003; Quiroga, 2001; Wackernagel; Rees, 1996).

Europe, known for promoting social welfare policies - as in the case of cities that implement good practices of urban mobility, such as Copenhagen, Denmark (Silva et al., 2015), Maastricht, the Netherlands (Zacharias; Castro, 2014), and Hersbruck, Germany (Ceccato; Strapasson, 2014) - when it gives priority to bikeways, it uses inclusive development strategies (providing more equitable conditions of mobility and encouraging healthy habits), economically justified (since bicycles have affordable prices) and ecologically sustainable (bicycles are considered to have low environmental impact), which favors GL for both current and future generations (Gudmundsson; Höjer, 1996).

Noteworthy is, in this sense, the ecovillage. From the experience in Findhorn (Scotland), comprising settlements or sustainable communities that maintain ecosystem dynamics on a human scale (transdisciplinary<sup>7</sup>), towards a GL. Ecovillages such as Findhorn incubate a sustainable lifestyle that conciliates housing projects, organic food, treatment for drinking water, renewable energy (wind power) and businesses (bakery, publishing houses, various shops) in a community regime, benefiting the residents of the settlements (Dawson, 2006; Mollison; Holmgren, 1978).

## Subjectivity and common good

“Common good” or “community” refers to the concept of place, a real space where people meet, talk, live (Bauman, 2013). In the face of social networks and their devices of information and communications technology, real space does not refer only to physical geographic space, but also to the network of virtual social relationships built upon a common good: climate and its transformations, i.e., when there is identity in the established dialogue, which can be called cooperative subjectivity or intersubjectivity (Azkarraga, 2010). This is called by Polanyi (2000) the “tacit dimension of knowledge”, a knowledge hardly visualized by those who do not recognize the meanings of a given territory, but not by those living in the territory. Intersubjectivity exists in its fullness in the territorial sphere.

Under this perspective it is pointless to dichotomize subjectivity and common good, as if they were different realities, because the human being exists while a social and political being. Intersubjectivity in the consumer society, under such perspective, is emptied and deterritorialized (Pecqueur, 2014; Smith; Max-Neef, 2011); it evokes the concept of non-place (Augé, 2002), referring to places not occupied, empty or of social transience, with too little vitality to be called a place. It is the case of the guy who bought a Ferrari, but who throughout his life could not create a place with identity, up to the point of not having a friend who he could invite or, worse, to tell what he has achieved.

The place, in a way, represents to the cognizing subject his own world (Santos, 1997). There people are born, crawl, walk, grow up, love, live and die. The place with identity is the community. Although “community” may have different meanings and possibilities of understanding, Bauman (2013) admits the challenges of life in the community today, in what is called modern society or what is called here the consumer society. Community becomes

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7 The transdisciplinary vision suggests that the most significant contemporary problems will not be solved through a disciplinary way, mainly by the fact that they have become issues exactly by the lack of a complex view of reality. The challenge proposed by the transdisciplinary method is to break the “enchantment” regarding specialization. It is a method of knowledge building that pass through the known sciences, starting from a problematic/complexity that one wants to understand and solve - and for this it is even possible to create new knowledge fields that were not necessary or that emerged from connections among disciplines or unfoldings that did not exist until now (Nicolescu, 2002).

the paradise lost, hard to find in big urban areas. As if condominiums, schools and neighborhood associations could not be reterritorialized or express conviviality and interest for each other. Identity is established between visitor and host when in search for the meaning of life, called GL (Illich, 1973).

That subjectivity is no longer synonym for individualism. Individualism is a self-centered attitude, personalist, different from individuality, which despite suggesting the existence of an essence, it is complemented and changed in the community and in the territory (Maturana; Varela, 1987). Human individuality cannot be nullified, nor must be denied in community. Community experiences strive against individualism. Community members understand that GL of the individual depends on GL of the others. Individuality itself is conceived collectively, it is the principle of conviviality (Illich, 1973).

The understanding of use of time itself can be used as an example of proximity between subjectivity and common good, or even as a counterexample of how far apart they are. Sachs (1974) suggests that the way a society establishes its use of time also determines its lifestyle. The slow cities Levanto (Mendonça; Macoppi, 2014) and Bolzano, both in Italy, have adopted GL as a government policy, which evokes a lifestyle associated with a substantive use of time, associated with the common good, referring to the recovery of the use of time of previous generations. These slow cities, however, do it without abstracting the economic logic so needed and greedy, in which the subject calculates the individual consequences, which suggests subjectivity, as long as it is not hegemonic nor even decisive in the production processes and human reproduction, which creates the emptied subject (Sampaio et al., 2014).

Slow living means to live in a balanced pace of body and mind, as in the saying *Mens sana in corpore sano*, “mind” is understood as the sphere of intrasubjective human relations, in which more doubts are raised than there are rational certainties, which often is restricted to the esoteric field of existence, in the counter-science pejorative sense. Balance is required to GL, suggesting slowness not as stagnation, but as a slowdown in life’s pace, disassociating the economic productive time, not the only one deserving happiness (Sampaio et al., 2014).

## Final remarks

It is evident that one can experience more slowly the same process that urges us to believe that the path treaded is another one, which makes the debate proposed here almost as an ode to challenge, first, of resistance and, secondly, of overcoming through mechanisms able to suspend - and a more phenomenological approach is assumed here - the loose wires of the social tissue that repeatedly claims its loom with the same and already worn-out needles. It is impossible to talk about GL and QoL without considering the fundamental tension between ethics of conviction and responsibility within contemporary society as a fundamental contradiction. The individual is a fundamental issue therein and must be resolved in the context of the debate on eco-socio-economy.

In other words, the big dilemma experienced in the work of many great authors, e.g., Polanyi (2000), Ramos (1981) and, more recently, Bauman (2013) is the consequences of unrestricted market, from which derives the market society, and with it the prevalence of a way to make the individual see and position himself in the world, alienated from himself. Commodity and technique fetishism pervaded thus the associated human life to such an extent that the contemporary human being deals schizophrenically with the real and the other, struggling to rebuild his condition as a subject in the world and with the world.

This implies a subjection never experienced before of the human psyche to social imperatives, determined by instrumental rationality (Weber, 1978), governed by the ethics of responsibility. Authors who claim a new humanism, such as Paula (2015), and the recovery of subjectivity to overcome contemporary absolutes agree with Ramos (1981) when he says that the voice of the owner differs from the owner of the voice, as in Chico Buarque verses. Considering the limits of the artistic metaphor, Ramos created his work theorizing a life that could recover, in classical humanism, the sense of inseparability between thought and action, as a result of the struggle for reason centered on the subject.

This would imply recreating human capacity of being an individual and not, as today, being some-

one whose personality dissolves in the processes of social determination guided by the individualist and mercantile ethos. This is probably why Ramos (1981) did not tackle the social dimension of substantive rationality, understanding it as an open flank to alienation and to this issue, implying that any debate in the field such as eco-socio-economy must take heed to the distinction between individuality and individualism.

Appreciation of the environment is inextricably linked to the allocative dynamics of “another economy”; it is necessary a social ordainment able to discuss and offer a way of overcoming its structure, in which the human personality would not be absent. In this context, the ethno-knowledge, based on participatory approaches and on revisiting diverse knowledge, promotes the dialogue and interaction between the actors of traditional knowledge, protecting socio-cultural and biological diversity.

It is believed that talking about GL, QoL and measurement indices of these categories otherwise would just lead to naive findings on how much the state of subjection goes towards the process of alienation, implying a life without action, without discussing its actual quality and without an ethical judgment to inquire whether such path in fact implies an intelligence capable of distinguishing the meaning of good (living) and bad (living). In other words, in this connection there would be the classic revisiting of ethics of conviction next to the ethics of responsibility as an important element to the idea of human emancipation and to the capacity of human beings have it as a purpose in their lives. Emancipation and intention would be thus premises to GL. In this sphere, QoL implies overcoming ideological contingencies that subvert the human psyche and serve as alienating substrate in the absolutes of the market society.

GL can never be mistaken for the lowered and accommodated way of life of those who, now conservative, make use of the benefits achieved by other generations - this is what Bauman (2013, p. 51) calls the “cool” way of life. The subjectivity and the common good can only be reconciled in a society that is not just calculating and where human beings do not deprive nor the other (political), nor themselves (psyche) in the creation of an eco-

-socio-economical path engaged in the problematic character of an associated human life that cannot dismiss, as a structuring element, its own process of socialization.

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### **Authors' Contribution**

Sampaio was responsible for the first version of the text and final review. Parks and Quinlan contributed for the first version. Mantovaneli Jr also contributed and produced the second version. Alcântara was responsible for the third version.

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