

EXPLORING GOOD LIVING AND SUSTAINABILITY: NARRATIVES OF AN EXTENSION COURSE AT THE FEDERAL INSTITUTE OF TOCANTINS



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Ana Karolina de Araújo¹, Carlos Eduardo Panosso² and Beatriz Sena Coelho³.

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION: The Extension Course "A Cartography of Good Living" proposed an in-depth analysis of the intersection between "good living", sustainable development, voluntary simplicity and serene degrowth as foundations for a more holistic and conscious approach to human development. In this way, we seek to critically explore the intersections and complementarities between these concepts, aiming to contribute to an informed and enriching dialogue about the directions of human development in a world in constant transformation.

Keywords: Good Living. Sustainability. Extension Course.

¹ Technician of the Sociology Curriculum at SEDUC/TO, Postdoctoral Fellow at CNPq/FAPT/IFTO
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/7524264999053100>
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7554-1627>

² Dr. in Development, Society and International Cooperation and Professor of Sociology at the Federal Institute of Tocantins
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/2166135207163629>
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0226-9364>

³ Student of the Public Management Course – IFTO and Pibic Fapt/Sefaz Scholarship
LATTES: <http://lattes.cnpq.br/4915279512263802>

INTRODUCTION

The Extension Course "A Cartography of Good Living" proposed an in-depth analysis of the intersection between "good living", sustainable development, voluntary simplicity and serene degrowth as foundations for a more holistic and conscious approach to human development. In this way, we seek to critically explore the intersections and complementarities between these concepts, aiming to contribute to an informed and enriching dialogue about the directions of human development in a world in constant transformation.

This course is part of a larger project, a Junior Post-Doctorate, which is underway and which also aims to reflect on Good Living and Happiness in the contemporaneity of work and the economy and to think about alternative proposals (ideas) for sustainable development aimed at Good Living. Postdoctoral research, which in turn is the result of previous doctoral research, is in the initial phase, in the stage of bibliographic research and theoretical understanding. However, we think it was of great relevance to take the debate to the scope of an extension project, as it allowed the understanding of the themes and concepts to be broadened, since the course made it possible not only to read the bibliography, but also to debate and exchange ideas, between people from different areas and levels of training, which will subsidize, in a much more grounded way, our future trip to the field. In addition, the extension course also allowed us to experience, in practice, through the organization and production of a solidarity exchange fair, examples of how we can integrate the practice of Good Living into our daily lives.

In fact, reflecting and debating, within the extension course, the concept of Good Living, as well as other concepts such as "Serene Degrowth" and "Voluntary Simplicity", was a very rewarding experience. Therefore, we intend, through this experience report, to share some aspects of this experience, which we consider to have been significant for our teaching and research practice. Initially, we will talk a little about the course, its objectives, methodology, structure and organization. Then, we will report the experiences lived throughout the meetings, which culminated in the holding of a solidarity exchange fair, presenting the positive aspects of the course and also the difficulties identified. Finally, we will bring, by way of conclusion, the results achieved, seeking to reflect on how the activities carried out in the extension course added to our educational and research work and also aiming to contribute to future work, as the presentation and description of the course script and a critical and reflective view of the reported experience can serve as a

basis for other researchers, expanding the result of our experience as a potential example for other studies and experiences.

AN EXTENSION COURSE ON BUEN VIVIR AND SUSTAINABILITY

The activities of the Extension Course "A Cartography of Good Living", with a total workload of 40 hours, began on September 8 and ended on November 17, with classes of the directed study type, with 28 hours of face-to-face meetings and 12 hours of readings in home office. The meetings were always held on Fridays from 2:30 pm to 4:30 pm at the Federal Institute of Tocantins - Palmas Campus. The coordination of the course was carried out by the effective professor of IFTO, Carlos Eduardo Panosso and also had the collaboration of me, as a postdoctoral researcher and the extension scholarship student of the higher education course of Public Management at IFTO, Karen Machado. We had a satisfactory number of students enrolled in the course, 15 students, of both sexes, 3 high school students, 4 undergraduate students, 4 teachers, 1 administrative technician and 3 from the external public.

The general objective of the course was to think and reflect on Good Living and happiness in the contemporaneity of work and economy and to work on alternative proposals (ideas) for sustainable development aimed at good living. The specific objectives were divided into three: 1) To theoretically understand, question and reflect on what alternative economies are (creative economy, solidarity economy, green economy), cooperativism, local productive arrangements, local development, etc.; 2) To understand if in fact such alternative economies are focused on and/or in tune with good living, voluntary happiness and serene degrowth; and 3) To develop development proposals aimed at Good Living based on local development.

The methodology used in the course was directed study. Our goal was for students to develop critical skills along the way, not only absorbing knowledge but also cultivating a reflective and proactive mindset. According to Libâneo (2017), directed study is a strategic part of the so-called active study methodologies. In this sense, the course was divided into moments of reading the bibliography, which were carried out at home, and face-to-face meetings, where reflections and debates of the texts were carried out. In these moments, students could share their doubts, express their opinions, criticize theories and suggest new themes and authors for the debates. It should be noted that the course had a very flexible structure, which allowed the incorporation of new topics or changes in dates and

bibliography, adapting to the suggestions and skills of the class, as long as they were accepted by the majority of students. We also used other methodological tools, in addition to theoretical texts, such as film indication and projection of videos and documentaries, which enriched the debates. At the end of each meeting, we held a collective snack, where everyone had the opportunity to socialize and talk about the topics in a more informal way.

EXPERIENCING GOOD LIVING IN PRACTICE

It was very interesting to realize that, intuitively, each of the students had a critical perception of Buen Vivir, even those who were having contact with the concept for the first time. This perception became even clearer when we suggested that everyone reflect on how good living is experienced, or not, in our daily lives. Most students pointed out that it is noticeable that our society faces major problems related to capitalism and its numerous challenges, which impact the lives of individuals in various dimensions, economic, social, political, cultural, environmental and psychological, and that we often live without reflecting on how we can contribute or implement changes in mentalities and daily practices that can go in the direction of building good living. Some students reported the discomfort of living in a society that values and incites unbridled consumerism, superficial relationships and the lack of time to experience a life more connected with nature and community. One of the students reported that he had the opportunity to experience good living more intensely, during the pandemic, when he needed to stay at home longer and produced a vegetable garden in his home and also when he started to attend, every morning, the organic products fair in his neighborhood, where at these times, he had the opportunity to talk to the stallholders and neighbors, to get to know them better and to experience community life more deeply. Another student said that she always tries to prioritize buying handmade and solidarity economy products, especially encouraging the purchase of products produced by women, such as the "Feira das Manas" which is a solidarity economy group in the city of Palmas, formed by women artisans. However, we realized that part of the students, especially those younger, did not have such a clear understanding of how good living can be integrated into practice, into our daily lives.

In one of the face-to-face meetings, we were able to enter into the theme of serene degrowth. The text and the documentary watched, "The History of Things", anchored the reflection on the impacts of the economic growth of productivist societies and

consumerism on the planet and on the possibility of building a new model of degrowth society, more equitable and environmentally balanced. Rethinking our habits and consumption patterns is not always an easy task, and the discomfort of realizing that we often reproduce, even if unconsciously, behaviors that are harmful to the environment and our own well-being, was present during the debate. Some argued that the increase in consumerism is driven by planned obsolescence, and that often, even unintentionally, we are forced to buy new products, since they already leave the factory with a useful life, needing to be promptly replaced. Others confessed that they identify themselves as consumerist people, but that they are trying to change this behavior, as they are looking to buy better quality and more durable products, thus replacing quantity with quality, or even buying used pieces in thrift stores, for example, that is. Seeking to develop a more conscious consumption.

As we delved deeper into the readings and studies of the concepts, we increasingly sought to connect the theories with our daily practices, seeking to give them a clearer meaning. In one of the meetings, in which we discussed the concept of "voluntary simplicity", this connection was immediate. The idea of "voluntary simplicity", which is present in the degrowth paradigm, focuses on the individual choice to live in a simpler way, however, within a broader movement, which proposes structural changes in society to achieve an overall decrease in production and consumption. This debate instigated an interesting reflection in the group, on how our local practices impact global changes, and vice versa. Asked to what extent they seek to adopt this philosophy in their lives, some students pointed out that they seek to adopt more sustainable consumption practices, reduce waste, value experiences to the detriment of material goods and seek alternative forms of happiness that do not depend on the accumulation of possessions. Others argued that despite having good intentions, they still encounter difficulties, such as the fact that products that are more ecologically sustainable tend to be more expensive and unattainable. For others, there is a glimpse of this philosophy as something to be sought, as a kind of utopia, as they argue that the rush and demands of everyday life, at work, study or family, does not allow them to have more time for themselves, as they would like. For one of the students, it would be important if "everyone could work a daily quantity that does not harm health, have time for other activities in a way that is harmonious with nature" (Lima, 2023). Let us also see an excerpt from one of the experience reports of a student:

As a student and professional in the technology area for almost two decades, it is easy to normalize this way of life that we have today - in all its ills and problems - and it is very difficult to have contact with alternative ways of life, which have as a priority not extreme productivity, subservience and consumption, but connection with the community and nature and well-being independent of unbridled consumption. Often, inserted in the current context of our lives, it is difficult to think of alternatives, and when we do, we soon dismiss it - it is complicated to think about what a completely different society would be like. In this context, projects like this extension course are fundamental to open our eyes, make us see that instead of being a silly utopia, an alternative to our modern life is possible, and has been thought of for a long time by people of all experiences. Participating in this course was a very revealing and enlightening experience, and I believe even an exercise in hope (Anjos, 2023).

The next debates were organized with the aim of preparing them to experience in practice, in a simple way, how we can experience good living in our daily lives, for example, through a solidarity exchange fair. For this, in one of the meetings, we read some texts about solidarity economy and its relationship with good living and serene degrowth, we also recommended videos, and watched documentaries on the subject. The suggestion of the course closing activity was well received by all students, who were very excited about the idea of organizing an exchange fair, mainly due to the fact that many of them had never participated in one, therefore, they saw it as a learning opportunity, which they could take to other moments of their lives. The exchange fair is a common practice within the context of the solidarity economy, representing a form of exchange of goods and services without the need for the use of conventional currency. This approach is based on the principles of cooperation, solidarity, and valuing local skills and resources. At the fairs, the participants have the opportunity to directly exchange goods and services with each other. This can include food, clothing, crafts, professional skills, among others. The absence of money in this process facilitates the participation of people who may have limited resources.

The Solidarity Exchange Fair took place on November 17, at IFTO. It was open to the general public and was attended by students of the course, guests from the IFTO community and the general public. All the participants of the fair had a moment to organize their objects in the room, each in their specific places. We also organized a place for coffee breaks and for handicraft workshops. We started the fair with a Conversation Circle given by eco-activist Fernando Amazônia, representative of Ecoterra, a non-profit association, very active in the State of Tocantins, especially in issues related to environmental preservation and appreciation of the culture of native and traditional peoples. On the occasion, the students of the course had the opportunity to learn a little

more about what a solidarity exchange fair is, how it is organized, what its principles and main characteristics are, and what is its relationship with good living.

Figure I – Moment of the exchanges made by the participants of the fair



Source: image bank of the course "Cartographies of Good Living" (2023).

Figure II – Planting of fruit tree seedlings at IFTO, Palmas campus, carried out by the students of the course.



Source: image bank of the course "Cartographies of Good Living" (2023).

The debate allowed us to understand that trade fairs are associated with a broader understanding of economics, sustainability and cultural values. This system is often observed in indigenous communities, where transactions are not only based on profit maximization, but on cooperation and meeting the needs of the community. The exchange of goods at fairs is rooted in sustainable, locally produced practices that strengthen community ties, as it provides not only access to goods and services, but also promotes interpersonal relationships, solidarity, and cooperation.

After the lecture, we began the presentation by the participants of the objects brought and services offered for exchange (Figure II). This moment was very interesting, as each participant was able to tell the story of the objects, weaving a relationship of value that goes far beyond monetary values. Then, we started making the exchanges. It was a very gratifying moment, of many sharings, in which everyone had the opportunity to experience Good Living through a moment of integration, solidarity exchanges, reciprocity and solidarity. In the second moment, there was a raffle of books on the theme of good

living, the realization of the handicraft workshop and the planting of fruit seedlings on campus (Figure III).

For the students, the exchange fair was able to stimulate "solidarity and detachment, certainly, one of the greatest learnings is to give a little of yourself and receive a little from the other, stimulating life without so many vanities and more realities, stimulation of union and exchange" (Sena, 2023) or "a great opportunity to put into practice new models of being and existing" (Castilho, 2023). In addition, they reported that:

"In these meetings, in addition to learning theories, it was spectacular to be able to experience it in practice. For the first time I participated in an Exchange Fair and it was incredible, a simple moment with a lot of joy, where people share stories experienced with each object. And after these learnings, I will continue to put the teachings into practice, in relation to consumption, sharing and much more" (Machado, 2023).

In fact, the experience, not only of the fair, but of the course as a whole, brought many learnings, even with all the challenges, for example, with the issue of technology and infrastructure, as sometimes we had difficulties in ensuring adequate infrastructure, such as rooms equipped with audiovisual resources and stable internet access, needing to adapt to unexpected changes, and logistical unforeseen events, such as changing the location of the meetings. But, even with all these inclement weather, the results were extremely positive, including instigating future research in the area of good living, such as the project "Good Living and Afforestation in Palmas-TO: a diagnosis of public policies for tree planting", which will be developed by one of the students of the course, guided by the coordinator of the extension course, who will continue the discussions on good living at the level of the Pibic project. In addition, we are already planning a new edition of the extension course for the next semester, with new ideas and in a new format.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The experiences reported in this work demonstrated the relevance and positive impacts of an extension course focused on good living, voluntary simplicity and serene degrowth. The results showed that the promotion of an approach that values quality of life, sustainability and connection with essential values can generate significant transformations in the lives of participants.

Through the activities proposed in the course, individuals had the opportunity to rethink their priorities, reevaluate their lifestyles and develop a greater awareness of consumption and environmental impacts, as said by one of the students "in these meetings I was able to learn and reflect a lot on the issue of "Good Living", from my thoughts as well as my attitudes". In addition, the emphasis on the search for voluntary simplicity provided participants with a deeper understanding of the sources of happiness and well-being that go beyond material accumulation, "Expectations were met: Discovering ways of living that increase health, happiness, physical and mental well-being, and quality of life" (Lima, 2023). Therefore, this experience report suggests that educational initiatives aimed at good living can play an important role in the formation of individuals who are more aware, responsible and committed to a lifestyle that promotes not only their own well-being, but also collective well-being and environmental balance. These reflections and practices, when disseminated and incorporated into broader communities, have the potential to contribute to a more sustainable, just, and harmonious society.

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