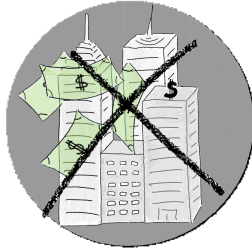


General concept



Alternative to Western Modernity

Buen vivir tries to give alternatives to development questions focusing on "the good life" in a broader sense and supporting the idea that the classical western development strategy determines and limits economic and social life.

Pluralism

Buen vivir puts strong attention to different ethical settings, is strongly intercultural and contributions of indigenous knowledge are key elements.

Community

Buen vivir includes a strong communitarian aspect which is understood in an expanded sense, to also include nature.



Spirituality

Buen vivir contains alternative valorization of things beyond monetary aspects which can be found in esthetical, cultural, historical and environmental characteristics.



Environmental justice

Buen vivir moves away from an anthropocentric to a biocentric world view. That includes nature becoming a subject, part of the social world and in some cases citizenship is widened to include non-human actors within environmental settings.

But

Buen vivir is not a static concept, but an idea that is continually being created. There are different ideas of Buen vivir and it is not possible to identify one as the best one. The different interpretations of Buen vivir vary depending on cultural, historical and ecological setting. Therefore, there is a plurality of conceptions existing without hierarchies among each other.

Open questions

- Can Buen vivir be realized in the context of a capitalist democracy?
- Can only a revolutionary break with the past lead towards it?
- Can an inclusion not only be rhetorical but effectively operative?

Buen vivir = The Good Life?

by Isa-Yael Roth

Sumak kawsay

Sumak kawsay is a central principle of the ideology of the indigenous people in the Andean area and can be seen as foundation of the Ecuadorian Buen vivir. It is described as a new form of coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature and others, to achieve good living.

Resource extraction

To fund the social goals set by Buen vivir the Ecuadorian government heavily expanded the extraction of natural resources through mining and deforestation even inside indigenous territory..

Politics

Buen vivir schedules a participatory form of democracy for Ecuador in which there is a social contract linking citizens, the government and the market. However, the state treats its citizens as passive social clients rather than active participants and strictly controls the media.

Rights

Buen vivir has been incorporated in Ecuador's new constitution since 2008 and is characterized there as a set of rights on the same hierarchy level with others, including freedom, participation, protection and granted rights to nature.

Social stability

Since the implementation of Buen vivir the country experienced a significant improvement in the Human Development Index (HDI), as well as the World Happiness Report (49th place) and the Happy Planet Index (23rd place).

Public services

In Ecuador Buen vivir grants everyone universal health care and education (including university), food, energy and economic sovereignty, a healthy environment, communication and participation.



Conclusion

At first glance Ecuador really seems to be benefitting socially from the realization of Buen vivir. But at second it also becomes apparent that there are deep contradictions between the constitutional prescriptions and spirit of Buen vivir - to name but two: the rights of nature and those of indigenous communities.

In addition, Buen vivir offers a common ground where critical perspectives of development, from different ontologies, meet and interact. Nevertheless, it remains a utopia in constant construction and reinvention.