

## **Symposium: Towards a good life society: when interdependencies confront atomism**

### **Topic: Interdependencies between individuals and collectives**

### **Paper proposal: Implementing Buen Vivir: an Andean proposal for transformative change**

*Dr Natasha Chassagne, Adjunct Research Fellow, Swinburne University of Technology, Centre for Social Impact, [nchassagne@swin.edu.au](mailto:nchassagne@swin.edu.au)*

#### **Abstract**

Buen Vivir (the Good Life) is a complex social and ecological vision for wellbeing that originates from indigenous worldviews in the Andes. It has evolved to include academic, non-Indigenous, and political interpretations, but it is founded on the idea of living in harmony with nature, collectively. Community is at the heart of Buen Vivir, as is a biocentric vision of wellbeing which values environmental and human wellbeing equally.

Through ethnographic fieldwork in Ecuador, I identified a framework of principles for Buen Vivir that is measured qualitatively, and at the local level. Because Buen Vivir rejects linear processes of neoliberal development which value economic growth above all else, the identification and measurement of what a Good Life looks like should not be quantitatively driven, but qualitatively understood. It decolonises the idea of one Western-led, universal idea for social and ecological wellbeing and prioritises local knowledge and needs.

Implementing an endogenous-led Buen Vivir framework can help achieve practical and transformative socio-ecological change which also dialogues with the global discourse. Yet cooperation between actors is vital to because if communities do not exist in isolation of themselves. There is often an imbalance of power that is not in favour of community-led development processes. Support from government is necessary, in terms of actively putting in place the structures and spaces to allow for community-led identification and measurement of Buen Vivir, as well supporting the promotion of its principles at grassroots through education and awareness. Participatory democratic approaches are therefore vital preconditions to implementing and measuring the Good Life, whereby citizens are empowered to lead the processes, local governments create the structural conditions to allow Buen Vivir to flourish, and local organisations can act as mediators to prevent the co-optation of an endogenous approach.

This paper will discuss the ways in which key actors can cooperate in the achievement of Buen Vivir, continuing on the trajectory of wider political commitments to ecological sustainability and wellbeing. Buen Vivir is a contested concept, though, that is tailorable to specific context, unlike other more universal frameworks for measurement such as the Human Development Index. Human-Scale Development focuses on human needs, whereas fundamental needs in Buen Vivir include both human and environmental needs. Buen Vivir requires rethinking sustainability as an endogenous approach with the support of governments and organisations for its full realisation at the community level and the attainment of Socio-Eco Wellbeing.