

Mahatma Gandhi's *Sarvodaya* (welfare for all) as an idea of the good life:
Convergences and contradictions with other paradigms

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Abstract

In this research we build on the *sarvodaya* concept proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, a Sanskrit word that can be translated as welfare for all. *Sarvodaya* is an ethical proposal, an alternative to development, and an idea of prosperity and the good life, focused on meeting human needs. We discuss the *sarvodaya* idea, aiming to explore its contradictions and convergences with other philosophies of life. This idea, which is inseparable from other Gandhian concepts, comes into direct conflict with mainstream economics and the development paradigm. Politically there is little chance of it being adopted as a feasible option unless it is fostered through a pacifist cultural revolution. It is aligned with several post-development theories and certain grassroots movements that share, to a greater or lesser extent, values such as equality, justice, and solidarity, and even some specific elements of western social justice ideas.

Keywords: Sarvodaya; peace; Gandhian thought; human needs; justice.

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“The economic constitution of India and for that matter the world should be such that no one under it should suffer from wants of food and clothing. In other words, everybody should be able to get sufficient work to enable him to make the two ends meet. And this ideal can be universally realized only if the means of production of the elementary necessities of life remain the control of the masses. These should be freely available to all as God's air and water are or ought to be, they should not be made a vehicle of traffic for the exploitation of others. This monopolization by any country, nation or group of persons would be unjust. The neglect of this simple principle is the cause of destitution that we witness today not only in this unhappy land but other parts of the world too”

Mahatma Gandhi (1968: 262)

1. Introduction

The words and deeds of Mahatma Gandhi have had a lasting influence not only in Indian culture, but in many others. Well-known followers of Gandhi's ideas who contributed to political and social change are Martin Luther King Jr. in the U.S., Petra Kelly in Germany, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Aung San Suu Kyi in Myanmar. In the world of academia, Gandhi was also a great inspiration to Johan Galtung, the founder of peace studies as an academic discipline, and Gene Sharp, the influential author of several books seeking to achieve democracy by non-violent means. It would be fair to say that the scientific understanding of peace and the building of a culture of peace are rooted in Gandhi's thoughts and actions.

In spite of the efforts to build peace and disseminate peaceful values in many cultures, and the scientific efforts to understand peace, we still live in a world afflicted by violence (UCDP 2021). Rising economic inequalities in many parts of the worlds and environmental problems are a threat to social cohesion (UNDP 2021). Racism, machismo, aporophobia and intolerance in general have not been eradicated, and some political parties in several countries are giving voice to those anti-values to gain votes. In order to do away with violence and build peace, we have to imagine cultures that recognize those conflicts and seek to resolve them to build peaceful societies. Therefore, we need right cultural understanding that move in the path of peace. To that end, we propose resurrecting the powerful concept from Mahatma Gandhi: *sarvodaya*, a Sanskrit word that can be translated as welfare for all. *Sarvodaya* is presented as an ethical proposal, an alternative to the capitalist development paradigm, and an idea of prosperity and the good life (i.e. a life worth living). Gandhi understood this concept to involve the setting up of public institutions to guarantee everyone's wellbeing and meet human needs, as well as to foster values such as equality, justice, and solidarity, through direct political participation (Gandhi 1968). Therefore, it is a needs-based concept that aims to alleviate suffering, as reflected in the words of Gandhi's quoted at the beginning of this paper.

The present research discusses the *sarvodaya* idea for a good life, aiming to explore its contradictions and convergences with other philosophies. It also contributes some empirical evidence based on primary data that enables a quantitative analysis of how the political essence of *sarvodaya* correlates with some key variables. We built a sample of 1094 university students in Granada, Spain, who were asked about their opinion

regarding a statement aimed at capturing this ethical concept.¹ Specifically, they were asked about the extent to which they agreed with the statement: “Institutions, built through democratic participation and peaceful means, should aim to ensure the welfare of all people, particularly the most disadvantaged”. This provides an indication of how *sarvodaya* is understood in a completely different cultural context from where it originated.

We structure the rest of the paper as follows: In the next Section we expand on the *sarvodaya* vision of development, along with other concepts used by Gandhi, such as *swaraj* (political self-rule), *swadeshi* (national economic independence), *satyagraha* (power of truth), and *ahimsa* (non-violence). Section 3 examines *sarvodaya* and how it diverges from the political and economic reality, characterized by a dominant capitalist culture. Then, in Section 4 we consider *sarvodaya* within the world of ideas, discussing how it aligns with other cultural worldviews, philosophies, and grassroots movements. Lastly, in Section 5, we make some final remarks and conclude.

¹ The field work was undertaken during the months of March and April 2019. A research team visited classrooms and provided a link to the questionnaire, which was accessible online via Qualtrics. The students did not receive any payment for filling in the questionnaire.

2. Welfare for all: The Gandhian conception of the good life

2.1. What is *Sarvodaya*?

Sarvodaya means *welfare for all*, which implies that every human being is entitled to enjoy wellbeing, in a life worth living. This is a concept proposed by Mahatma Gandhi, which is related to his spiritual and holistic understanding of the world. As mentioned in the introduction, it also entails establishing institutions in society that foster everyone's wellbeing, as well as values such as equality, justice and solidarity through collective direct participation. It also involves giving power to the powerless; that is, people who are poor and marginalized, and who face the greatest obstacles to achieving wellbeing and a life worth living.² In a nutshell, the idea is that society guarantees all its members the necessities for a good life (Gandhi 1968).

The art critic John Ruskin, author of the book "Unto This Last", had a huge influence on Gandhi's concept of *sarvodaya*. In fact, Gandhi translated several parts of this book into Gujarati and called the resulting book *Sarvodaya*. Ruskin's book was first published in 1860, and consists of a moral theory of economics that attempted to refute the interpretation of this discipline put forward by the classical authors in economics. Contrary to those authors, Ruskin considered economics as the art of living, just as some classical Greek philosophers did. He argued that the only wealth worth desiring is not material wealth, but the wealth brought by life (Ruskin 1985). In his memoirs,

² In the India of Gandhi's time, as in the present, the poorest and most marginalized were generally the untouchables, the lowest caste in India's caste system. Gandhi called them *harijans* (sons of God).

Gandhi stated that it was one of the books that had influenced him in his life, and that it had shaped his economic thinking (Gandhi 1957). One of the learnings that Gandhi took away from the book is that the good of the individual is contained in the good of the society, reflected in his holistic belief in the existential unity of everything in the world (Ghosh 2012; Weber 1999). Thus, *sarvodaya* is not a descriptive cultural conception of development in India, but rather Gandhi's normative proposal for what he called the "India of my dreams" (Gandhi 1968), closely linked with his strong spirituality.

2.2. The world of Gandhi's dreams

The holistic aspect of *sarvodaya* makes it difficult to analyse it separately from other aspects of Gandhian thought; rather, it is necessary to consider them all together in order to better understand *sarvodaya*. The India dreamed of by Gandhi, which was also his vision for the world, as reflected in the quotation at the beginning of this paper, was about building *sarvodaya* at a small scale, that is, in the villages. But to achieve *sarvodaya*, a psychological, economic, and cultural transformation was needed, along with non-violence and a strong commitment to the truth.

In brief, Gandhi's dream centred on self-sufficient villages where everyone could satisfy their needs, with cultural values such as frugality, avoiding the development of wants, attachment, and accumulation of riches. In those villages, the institutions would ensure needs satisfaction, through measures such as a minimum wage, and a production function that incorporates technology and machinery, but only up to the point that it is not a threat to human needs satisfaction for everyone. The army would be reduced to a minimum, and local culture would be protected from foreign influences. Equality and non-exploitation would be central, with no distinction between rich and poor. Need

satisfaction would be achieved with a strong commitment to the Truth (with a capital T, as Gandhi gave a spiritual meaning to truth), and with philosophy of non-violence (Gandhi 1957, 1968).

The Gandhian concept *swaraj* is important to the understanding of Gandhi's vision of a prosperous village where everyone can satisfy their needs and live lives worth living. The word *swaraj* is a sacred Vedic word meaning self-rule and self-restraint, thus referring to empowering people and giving them the possibility of being autonomous (Koshal and Koshal 1973). In Gandhi's times it had a political sense relating to the struggle for independence from the British, but also a meaning regarding Gandhi's idea of prosperity through self-determination and *sarvodaya*.

Another concept closely related to the Gandhian good life idea is *swadeshi*, which literally means "of one's own country". This proposal is related to self-sufficiency in people's own village, building institutions that protect and foster the local culture (in aspects such as religion, language, and economic activity). Gandhi defended local commerce, buying only things produced by his immediate neighbours in a non-violent way (Gandhi 1968). In fact, he declared that he would not buy anything, no matter how nice it was, if by doing so harm would come to others. Therefore, Gandhi believed that *sarvodaya* may be achieved by defending what is local.

The indigenous cultural institutions that Gandhi referred to involved the limitation of wants, non-attachment and non-possession (Gandhi 1932; Ghosh 2012), which also shape the notion of *sarvodaya*. Gandhi believed that when we take more than we need, it amounts to stealing, and that ownership is a form of violence. He felt that there is

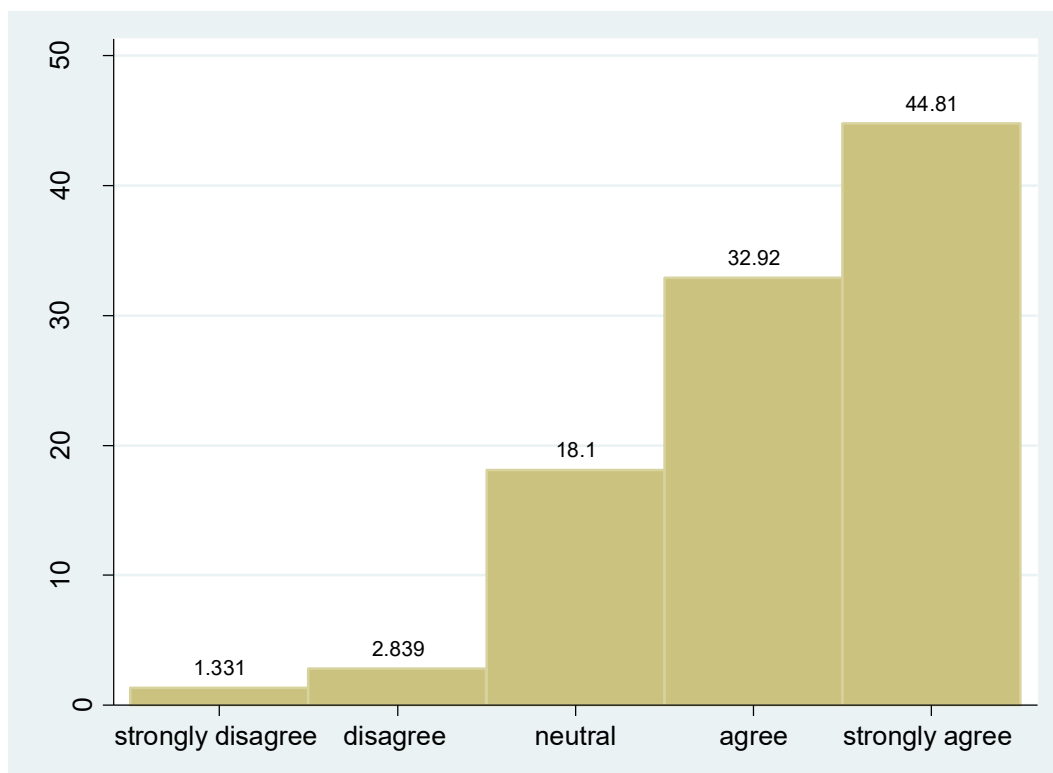
enough in nature for everyone and therefore there is no need for exploitation (Ghosh 2012). In his own words: “*We are not always aware of our real needs, and most of us improperly multiply our wants, and thus unconsciously make thieves of ourselves*” (Gandhi 1932: 16). He defended minimum wages to empower people to satisfy their needs. Gandhi also supported the notion of bread labour, that is, that every human being must contribute some necessary amount of physical labour for his or her own upkeep. Technology and machinery can be incorporated to the extent that it does not displace labour and serves his philosophical vision of the good life (Nayak 2017).

One of the key components of Gandhian vision, fundamental to an understanding of *sarvodaya*, is *ahimsa*, which can be translated as non-violence. It is not possible to separate *ahimsa*, Truth, and *sarvodaya*, as those concepts are interdependent (Ghosh 2012, Gandhi 1932). Gandhi believed that *sarvodaya* could only be achieved through direct and non-violent participation in public decisions, and democratic control of resources that are necessary for people to satisfy their human needs (Gandhi, 1968; López Martínez, 2017). As mentioned above, Gandhi had a holistic idea of living things, interpreting life as unity. For him, non-violence meant the non-injury of human life and all living things, as a way to Truth (Weber 1999). Related to Truth and *ahimsa* is *satyagraha*, which means holding onto Truth, and is also a particular form of non-violent resistance or civil resistance (Gandhi 1957).

Gandhi built a constructive programme for India to apply *sarvodaya*, but it was not applied after his death (López Martínez, 2017). Nevertheless, the Gandhian idea of *sarvodaya* is still present in India, albeit influenced by others, and has elements in common with other political philosophies. By way of example, Figure 1 shows that

almost 80% of the students in our sample agree with the principal political message of *sarvodaya*, that is, to take into account the needs of the most disadvantaged people in society. However, the idea is starkly opposed to predominant capitalist values. In the next section we explore the extent of this opposition, while in the following section we examine the ways in which other good life ideas in the world converge with *sarvodaya*.

Figure 1: Percentage of people's agreement with *sarvodaya*.



3. Contradictions of *sarvodaya* with the economic and political reality

3.1. *Sarvodaya* in a political context

The liberal revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th centuries were loosely based on the idea of representative democracy and free trade. Under this system, all people were supposed to enjoy the same amount of liberty and equality, and to endeavour to succeed in life, with their accomplishments depending only on their talent and hard work. Nevertheless, the system was always rigged by the overpromotion of individual rights (such as property inheritance rights), protectionist policies and an unlimited exploitation of both human workforce and the environment. Some of the consequences of such as interpretation and implementation of liberal values (in the economic sense) were, in the first place, a rising economic inequality during the 19th century that paved the way for the appearance of unprecedented political proposals demanding a higher degree of material equality, such as socialism, communism and anarchism; and second, colonialist and imperialist policies aimed at subduing and abusing entire nations in an overt violation of the rights of individuals and peoples proclaimed by the same liberals who carried out such expansionist policies, as Gandhi pointed out in his works. Hence, liberalism has not in practice care about human needs. Even the welfare states established during the 1950s have been severely weakened since the 1980s, when neoliberals and neoconservatives took over the world economic mainstreams. Not surprisingly, the 2000 US Presidential of Freedom Medal John Kenneth Galbraith stated in 1963 that “The modern conservative is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness.”

Even though views such as Gandhi's and Galbraith's have been ferociously contested by authors as acknowledged as Milton Friedman, Robert Solow and Thomas Sowell, the fact is that capitalism is far from a vision similar to *sarvodaya*, which focuses on human needs. For instance, the modern U.S. right is committed to the now popular motto *greed is good*, because we all are supposed to be better off when individuals engage in the untrammelled pursuit of self-interest. In their vision, unrestricted profit maximization by businesses and unregulated consumer choice is the recipe for a good society. Many on the right are even outraged at any suggestion that their actions should take other people's welfare into account (Krugman, 2020).

Socialism, communism and anarchism were mainly a reaction to neoliberalism, precisely seeking to provide everybody with all the material needs that capitalism distributed so unequally. Also daughters of the French revolution, socialism, communism and anarchism believed in *liberté* and *égalité*, with *fraternité* always being relegated to a lower position. This vision had some elements in common with *sarvodaya*, but also important discrepancies, such as the use of violence. Unfortunately, *real existing socialism* established single party authoritarian regimes that banned civil and political freedoms and rights; moreover, it failed to take into account that human needs go far beyond the material aspects of life (Kenez 2006). One century after the Soviet Revolution, the surviving communist enclaves of North Korea, Cuba and Venezuela have long shown increasing isolation and internal exhaustion, while the Chinese market communism dictatorship is hardly a model of human rights and environmental policies. On the other hand, anarchism was burdened both by its own internal contradictions and weaknesses and by the fierce repression it faced from both capitalism and socialism (Marshall 2008).

The demise of socialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s brought the so called *new world order* and prompted the theory of the end of history (Fukuyama 1992), which celebrated the undisputable and universal triumph of neoliberalism. We therefore entered an era of globalization where human needs were buried under stock markets, and a blind search for profits caused an increasing global economic gap (Piketty 2015) and financial crises. There have been various waves of reactions, materialized in alternatives that are uncompromisingly exclusive and discriminatory by nature, linking welfare with nativism and far removed from the Gandhian core elements of *swaraj*, *swadeshi* and *ahimsa*.³ There has been also well-grounded criticism towards neoliberalism from social movements such as 15-M in Spain and Occupy Wall Street in the U.S.; nongovernmental organizations such as Oxfam and Greenpeace; political parties such as Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece; and many intellectuals, who nonetheless have not considered the deep principles of Gandhi's *sarvodaya* in their works and proposals. However, despite all the criticism, we are yet to see the emergence of any comprehensive alternative, as socialism was in the two previous centuries. Instead, mainstream political conceptions are still linked to an idea of development which remains stubbornly tied to an economic paradigm that is starkly opposed to *sarvodaya*.

³ Examples are the neoconservative illiberal democratic regimes of Russia, Poland and Hungary or the increasingly successful extreme right parties of the Front National in France, Coalizione di centrodestra in Italy, Chrysí Avgí in Greece and Vox in Spain.

3.2. Sarvodaya and the development paradigm

Contrary to the Gandhian spiritual and holistic idea of prosperity, the capitalist idea of development has been dichotomous since Truman's speech in 1949 differentiating between developed (doing "good") and underdeveloped (doing "bad") countries (Rist 2008). During the second half of the century, the cultural dichotomous vision of development spread through cultural colonization of ideas. The aim of development translates into increasing production and consumption, while industrialization and assimilation of individualistic values was presented as the right path to follow. The development indicator used for this end is Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth.

According to Kryszewski et al. (2020, suppl. material), the origins of GDP are linked to warfare, despite important efforts to link it with welfare. Indeed, the first calculation of GDP was done in 1665 to determine potential sources of tax revenue to finance English military expenses. It rose to prominence after World War II as a measure to determine the production capacity of the Allied Forces. Today, it still relates to war, as military expenditure accounts for 2.2% of world GDP, and in the last 20 years it has risen 77.3% (in US constant prices) (SIPRI, 2021).

Establishing GDP growth as an objective for societies entails several economic and environmental problems, as pointed out by Bartolini (2014) and Jackson (2009). Most of those problems enter into direct conflict with the *sarvodaya* idea. In fact, the very notion of GDP as a measure of prosperity contradicts the philosophical values of *sarvodaya*. This is particularly true when it comes to the culture of production and the

creation of wants: GDP does not take into account what kind of goods are produced nor how they are produced. If weapons are made, or if goods are manufactured by exploiting others and the natural environment, the economic value enters equally into the computation of GDP. The culture of production embedded in GDP is in complete opposition to limitations of wants, and is based on an endless cycle of creating new economic goods and persuading people to buy them. This is nurtured by the practice of ensuring old objects are continually replaced with new purchases, either by designing them so they do not last long (planned obsolescence) or by making people believe they have become outdated (perceived obsolescence). In turn, this has given rise to the exploitation of people and natural resources, mainly in the South, through extractivist procedures inherited from colonialism, which created poverty in lands rich in nature. In the North, it has allowed many—but not all—people to satisfy their material needs. The time devoted to work to create those goods and consume them, in an attempt to satisfy material desires, may also undermine people's opportunity to pursue human needs that enable them to achieve their full potential.

The use of GDP growth as a measure of prosperity also reflects an inability to focus on quality of life: essential components of life are not taken into account because they are not transacted in markets. These include good relationships with others, domestic work and care, or collectively managed common goods. The indicator can grow even when there is exploitation or war, and the growth does not contribute to satisfying human needs. For instance, if a village grows at the expense of another, and the net contribution to GDP is positive, then prosperity is created, according to the development philosophy embedded in GDP. In sum, contrary to Gandhian thought, GDP growth is boosted by technological advancements (regardless of how they

influence people's wellbeing), and the expansion of desires that drives overconsumption and materialism.

The paradox created merits attention: on the one hand, the increase in GDP is “good” for development and society. Supposed benefits of GDP growth include the fact that it normally creates employment and generates more taxes that can be invested in infrastructure, education and health, which are “good” things under the present development idea based on industrialization. On the other hand, it is psychologically harmful to people, and consequently damaging to society, as overconsumption and materialism translates into lower subjective wellbeing, poorer health, lower social capital, and poor social and environmental behaviour (see Kasser 2002). These outcomes can be explained by the cultural idea, central to the development paradigm, that continual growth in material terms cultivates an extrinsic motivation in people; that is, the pursuit of external goals such as status, money, power, or fame. Conversely, intrinsic motivation is based on internal values that drive people to do things for the pleasure of doing them.

We can use our data collected from Spanish university students to check if intrinsic motivation relates to the *sarvodaya* idea. To do so, we relate the *sarvodaya* indicator with the aspiration index (Kasser and Ryan 1996), controlling for other variables (see Table A1 in the Appendix). Results reveal that the correlation between agreement with *sarvodaya* and having intrinsic values is positive and highly significant. The aspiration index has a mean of 17.6, standard deviation of 5.1 and a median of 18, with a maximum value (the highest level of intrinsic motivation) of 33 and minimum (the highest level of extrinsic motivation) of -2. The low average and standard deviation

suggests that being very intrinsically motivated is far from standard. This lends some support to the argument that the way in which the development paradigm shapes culture makes it difficult to lead lives driven by intrinsic goals. Rather, in order to fit in and succeed in society, it is better to have extrinsic goals. This is in direct contradiction with Gandhi's vision.

As a final remark, the idea of development captured by GDP is in no way holistic and does not involve any spirituality. For centuries, people have lived in harmony with community and nature, but industrialized development has threatened this harmony (Polanyi 2001). We must learn from other paradigms such as *sarvodaya* in order to overcome the economic, social and environmental problems we are facing. Although *sarvodaya* could be seen as a rather localistic and outdated term, the truth is that it converges with several other cultural paradigms. We explore these other alternatives to the development paradigm in the next section.

4. *Sarvodaya* and its connection with other ideas and worldviews

4.1. *Sarvodaya* and a pluriverse of alternatives to development

The book *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* deserves special attention when it comes to assessing convergences with *sarvodaya*, as it brings together different approaches that go beyond the concept of development (Kothari et al. 2019). The central tenet of this dictionary is that the development concept needs to be deconstructed as it does not respect life. It includes a series of definitions in a section named "Universalizing the earth: Reformist solutions", which details innovations

proposed, mainly from the North. According to the editors, these solutions would be, at best, wasteful and profit-driven distractions. In that section, they include concepts such as sustainable development, ecomodernism, neoextractivism, the green economy or the circular economy. The following Section “A people’s pluriverse: Transformative initiatives”, contains proposals presented as transformative alternatives, including cultural approaches such as *Buen Vivir* (from the Andes in Latin America), *Ubuntu* (South Africa), and other definitions related to Gandhian *swaraj*. Other concepts such as Buddhism and Wisdom-based Compassion, Christian Eco-Theology, Hinduism and Social Transformation, and Islamic Ethics, are related to global religions. Those views are in most cases ancestral ways of living in harmony with the earth. Dating back centuries, they still influence different cultures to certain degrees, in spite of the cultural influence of the mainstream development idea (Inglehart and Baker 2000).

Although *sarvodaya* is not explicitly dealt with in the Pluriverse book, most of the cultural and religious⁴ approaches share common ground with it. According to the authors, there are several universal or general considerations linking these post-development (alternatives to the mainstream idea of development) cultural ideas: specifically, i) they aim to ground human activities in the rhythms and frames of nature, under a holistic idea of the interconnection of all forms of life, ii) this indispensable knowledge is part of the commons, and cannot be privatized, iii) these approaches put the idea of a good life before material accumulation and highlight values such as cooperation rather than competitiveness, vi) they consider that work should be a

⁴ In relation to *sarvodaya*, it is worth highlighting that Gandhi was greatly influenced by his Hindu education (particularly by the Bhagavad Gita and the story of Arjuna, a warrior that did not want to participate in a war, but was duty-bound to do so), and later by Christianity (the New Testament idea of universal love and Jesus’ non-violence). In addition, Ruskin was a devote Christian, as was Leo Tolstoy, who also strongly influenced Gandhi.

pleasurable way of earning enough to live on without destroying others' lives. We believe these universalities are also present in sarvodaya to a great extent.

4.2. *Sarvodaya* and social and philosophical sciences

In the social and philosophical sciences, there are approaches that, in our view, are closely aligned with *sarvodaya*: for instance, all the research that puts the accent on human needs as an indicator of prosperity. The 20th century was very fruitful in terms of the delineation of human needs, from Abraham Maslow's (1943) model in psychology to Kate Raworth's (2013) interpretation of doughnut economics. Between these, important contributions were made by Doyal and Gough (1991) and Max-Neef (1991), who proposed models to understand needs. This research provides an important rebuttal to the capitalist idea of endless needs to satisfy with the unlimited production of economic goods. Firstly, it holds that human needs are universal and limited, although researchers do not agree on the particular needs contained in this limited subset (see Alkire 2002 for review and discussion). Desires, on the contrary, are unlimited. Secondly, it shows that the many ways to satisfy those needs do not come exclusively from economic goods. In fact, those different ways are normally outside the markets (Guillen-Royo, Guardiola, and Garcia-Quero 2017). These approaches are in agreement with the Gandhian vision. Indeed, a famous quote attributed to Gandhi is “*we have sufficient for everybody's need but not for everyone's greed*”. As we have seen in the previous section, as an indicator of prosperity, GDP assigns a crucial role to economic goods, but for the basic needs approaches, including *sarvodaya*, economic goods are not crucial.

The environmental problems we are facing necessitates the imposition of limits on satisfying needs. The doughnut economics model (Raworth 2013) provides a framework for how to satisfy needs while still leaving enough for future generations to satisfy their needs. That is, it demarcates a safe and just space in which humanity can live lives worth living, without transgressing planetary boundaries. Gandhi did not pay much attention to environmental boundaries. His approach was spiritual rather than ecological, but he warned against environmental degradation. He saw all spheres of human life in an integrated manner, and did not recognize separate rules for separate spheres, which exemplifies the human ecological perspective. Nevertheless, the idea of limitations of wants and austerity can be directly linked with ecological sustainability (Nayak 2017). Later on, one of his followers, J. C. Kumarappa, when shaping Gandhian ideas into the so-called Gandhian Economics and the Economics of Permanence, emphasized the importance of the environment. By so doing, he became a pioneer of modern environmentalism in India (Kumarappa 1951). Our sample data allows us to empirically assess the extent to which the *sarvodaya* indicator relates to Spanish university students' connectedness to nature, controlling for other variables. In Table A1 in the Appendix we relate *sarvodaya* with an index of nature connectedness (Mayer and Frantz 2004), finding that the two are positively related, thus lending support to the direct relationship between *sarvodaya* and nature.

It is particularly interesting to note that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which draw inspiration from the basic needs approaches, also have similarities with *sarvodaya*. SDGs comprise 17 objectives that put people and the environment at the centre. They include objectives such as ending poverty and hunger, or guaranteeing the health and wellbeing of everyone (not just a few), which is clearly in line with the idea

of welfare for all. They thus have a strong component of universalism. The same cannot be said of their predecessors, the Millennium Development Goals, which, for instance, aimed to reduce hunger by half.

It is also worth comparing *sarvodaya* with philosophical ideas in the western world. With respect to the ideas of justice, we focus on Kantian, utilitarian, Marxist, and Rawlsian ideas. Concerning Kant, some claim that *sarvodaya* is anti-Kantian (e.g. Ghosh 2012). The argument is that the focus is on the results and consequences (welfare for all), as in utilitarianism, and no emphasis is placed on the intention of the moral action. However, we must disagree on this vision, as in our view *sarvodaya* is very much linked with intentions. In fact, in Section 2 we argued that it is inseparable from non-violence (*ahimsa*) and holding onto Truth (*satyagraha*). Therefore *sarvodaya* involves an imperative of achieving consequences in an ethical way, just as in Kantian philosophy. *Sarvodaya* also differs from utilitarianism in that it implies welfare for all, not for the greatest possible number of people (as in the utilitarian perspective proposed by Jeremy Bentham). In addition, utilitarianism puts the accent merely on the consequences of actions, but as we have argued in relation to Kantian philosophy, *sarvodaya* does not focus only on results.

At first glance, *sarvodaya* may appear to be related to Marxism, as both refer to people's needs and dignity, while placing importance on equality and freedom from oppression (from English imperialism for Gandhi and from the holders of capital for Marx). But the ideas of Gandhi and Marx are quite disparate in terms of the way to achieve their ends, as Gandhi defended non-violence as a means and as an end, unlike Marx. Besides, Gandhi never considered an authoritarian regime as a prerequisite to

achieve his idea of autonomy (*swaraj*) and self-sufficiency (*swadeshi*). Finally, it is worth highlighting the parallels between the Gandhian idea of focusing on human needs and paying particular attention to the poorest members of society, and the Rawlsian theory of justice. Rawls considered that people should enjoy basic liberties with equal rights. He also argued that social and economic inequalities should be arranged to be of the greatest benefit to the least advantaged. However, contrary to Gandhi, Rawls assigns greater importance to access to equally distributed basic liberties than to ensuring the greatest benefit to the least advantaged, whereas Gandhi did not subordinate one idea to another. Furthermore, Rawls did not explicitly defend non-violence as a way of bringing about the transformation to achieve desired changes in society.

In sum, we could say that Gandhi's idea of justice has some points in common with western ideas of justice, but also many points of disagreement. We do not have enough space to go into some of the arguments presented here in great detail, nor to focus on other schools of philosophical thought. Within the scope of this paper, it seems more interesting to focus on the practical implications of *sarvodaya*, looking to famous grassroots movements that align with this philosophy to some extent.

4.3. Well-known grassroots movements in line with *sarvodaya*

In recent years, there have been many grassroots movements that are in broad agreement with the implications of *sarvodaya*. They are aware of global challenges such as inequality, climate change, or militarism, and aim to contribute to peace by following very different strategies. Their struggles are rooted in the same guiding principles that Mahatma Gandhi conceived: empowerment (*swaraj*), self-sufficiency (*swadeshi*), and

non-violence (*ahimsa*). These movements share similar concerns with *sarvodaya* in terms of putting the accent on the most disadvantaged people in society, and to some extent, seeking to guarantee wellbeing for everyone. They also promote values of equality, inclusion, justice, and solidarity, as well as levelling criticism at the capitalist system.

Some of the most significant examples of these processes have been implemented by indigenous people in the Global South, suffering the effects of colonial violence. First, they resisted colonial conquest and the establishment of subordination and appropriation dynamics. Then, their movements reacted to Western modernity, development, and progress, looking to their own indigenous traditions to stop violence against their communities. The post-World War II period witnessed a radical repositioning of indigenous peoples around the world and the emergence of an influential global protest movement (Coates, 2004). Indigenous mobilization became particularly visible in the 1970s. Indigenous people secured some recognition of their rights, fostering empowerment and self-governance in their communities. Their activism achieved significant successes in introducing indigenous proposals into government agendas. This is the case of the idea of *Buen Vivir* in South America, presented as an alternative model to the coloniality of power (Quijano 2011). *Buen Vivir* is a concept found in many indigenous traditions, albeit referred to by different terms. It has a common core that understands life as a harmonious collective development linking human beings, and also human beings and nature, where violence is excluded. It promotes ethical perspectives that are grounded in values and, similarly to *sarvodaya*, it stands against the conventional domination of utilitarian values. It strongly supports decolonization, respects internal plurality, promotes the dissolution of the Society–Nature dualism,

includes a non-material dimension, and moves away from the prevalence of instrumental and manipulative rationality (Gudynas 2011). Indigenous movements achieved the inclusion of this concept into government programmes and the Constitutions of Ecuador (2008) and Bolivia (2009).

More recently, Extinction Rebellion was founded as a grassroots movement concerned with ecological crisis. It aims to force governments all around the world to take action to protect the planet and prevent climate change, biodiversity loss, and the risk of social and ecological collapse. It was established in the United Kingdom in 2018. Since then, hundreds of Extinction Rebellion groups have arisen in countries across the globe (Farrell et al. 2019). Extinction Rebellion is applying findings from civil resistance literature to social movements in the Global North. It is building a movement committed to non-violence in order to contest the forces that drive climate change, and to fight for environmental justice through direct action and mass civil disobedience, marking a substantial shift from previous approaches to environmental activism (Gunningham 2019, 5 and 6). This movement explicitly critiques a violent global system connecting capitalism, colonialism, power and inequality (Knights 2019, 12), in a transnational struggle for global justice from the Global North where activists protest as global citizens (Ogunye 2015). Extinction Rebellion has greatly contributed to the increasing attention paid to climate change by citizens, policymakers and other actors. It has pushed climate change towards the top of the political agenda and increased people's awareness, concern and engagement (Berglund and Schmidt 2020, 104).

Other grassroots movements involve certain social groups that are simultaneously the actors in and the focus of their campaigns. However, these movements go beyond their

boundaries to build inclusive societies providing welfare for all. They aim to create *sarvodaya* not only for a particular vulnerable group facing obstacles to achieving well-being; they also reach out to vulnerable people elsewhere by tackling the kinds of violence they suffer.

Examples of these are Black Lives Matter and the #MeToo movement. Black Lives Matter emerged in 2013 in response to the numerous killings of unarmed African Americans in the U. S. However, its vision is more ambitious and promotes new social, economic, and political relations free from violence. It evolved out of the need to continue the Black liberation struggle for freedom, as a reaction to deeply entrenched problems of racism in the country (Clayton 2018, 449). Black Lives Matter has a complete agenda aiming to expand social inclusion, equality, political participation, and environmental justice for the whole society. Some of its demands include the elimination of mass surveillance, criminalization, and killing of black people; the creation of federal and state job programmes for the most economically marginalized black Americans; democratic control over how resources are preserved, used, and distributed; and election protection, electoral expansion, and the right to vote for all people (The Movement for Black Lives 2020). Recent data suggest that this new movement has already had a significant impact: the U.S. Municipalities where Black Live Matters protests have been held experienced a 15% to 20% decrease in police homicides from 2014 to 2019 (Campbell 2021). Apparently, this trend is growing over time and becomes more prominent when protests are large or frequent, offering promising prospects for the near future.

Finally, the #MeToo movement shows a similar pattern. #MeToo went viral on social media to raise awareness of the scale of the sexual harassment against women and showed that women's sexual assault is a pan-cultural phenomenon. The popularity of hashtag activism dates back to 2017 (MeToo, 2021). In the case of #MeToo, hashtag activism fostered empowerment through the creation of a network of acknowledgment, connecting individual stories of trauma and recovery, and #MeToo subsequently expanded into many other domains (Suk et al. 2019, 277). Responding to initial criticism over the movement's narrow focus on cisgendered issues in the workplace, it is now more inclusive, paying more attention to intersectional identities and the way that gender interacts with factors such as race, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation to reinforce patterns of subordination. #MeToo aims to empower survivors of sexual violence and to create space for relations based on respect, empathy, and wellness for all (MeToo, 2021). Beyond raising social awareness of gender-related issues and feminism in the public sphere, the #MeToo movement has shifted the norms surrounding sexual harassment in workplaces. One of them is the agreement that sexual harassment (not just sexual assault) constitutes a threat and is unacceptable in the workplace. It has also prompted structural reforms needed to end violence and harassment at work. One of the first steps in this direction was the 2019 Convention on Violence and Harassment at Work adopted by the International Labour Organization. It sets out minimum obligations for how governments should address harassment and violence at work with national laws, preventive measures and taking into consideration the needs of victims (Begum 2019).

5. Conclusions

There are diverse approaches to building a good life, with different values and paradigms involved in this process. In this research we presented *sarvodaya* as one of those ideas aimed at promoting peaceful and inclusive societies that more fully satisfy human needs. It is not an old-fashioned idea conceived of by Gandhi for a utopian world. On the contrary, its core elements were already present in many cultural and philosophical traditions beyond Western culture, and many current social movements and grassroots organizations promote initiatives sharing similar visions to *sarvodaya* in an effort to make it a reality.

Gandhi's *sarvodaya* is an alternative to mainstream economics and development paradigms, based on values such as equality, justice, and solidarity. It aims to create a fairer and more prosperous society, diverging from capitalist liberalist, socialist or anarchist proposals, which have proven unable to fulfil human needs in the way they once promised. *Sarvodaya* has the potential to make a valuable contribution to building the new kind of alternative that has been missing from political and economic criticisms in recent years, which focus on the *negative*, without putting forward *positive*, constructive proposals. Consequently, *sarvodaya* could be a key part of a new *revolution*: a non-violent change emphasizing dignity and human needs above material aspects, promoting freedom and participation instead of authoritarianism, and preserving local cultural roots against the tide of selfishness, exploitation and appalling economic gaps that the current development paradigms are not able to overcome.

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Appendix

Table A1: Quantitative estimations of *sarvodaya*.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>age</i>	0.00571 (0.010)	0.0026 (0.009)	0.00228 (0.010)
<i>gender</i>	0.0742 (0.057)	0.121** (0.060)	0.0559 (0.057)
<i>single</i>	-0.0164 (0.056)	-0.0528 (0.056)	-0.0197 (0.055)
<i>hasjob</i>	-0.107 (0.066)	-0.0639 (0.066)	-0.0818 (0.065)
<i>income</i>	-8.03E-06 (0.000)	-1.99E-05 (0.000)	-7.44E-06 (0.000)
<i>aspiration</i>	0.0471*** (0.006)		0.0394*** (0.006)
<i>connectnaturescale</i>		0.283*** (0.048)	0.177*** (0.050)
<i>Constant</i>	3.390*** (0.307)	3.295*** (0.303)	2.981*** (0.309)
Observations	1,094	1,094	1,094
R-squared	0.082	0.055	0.095
Prob > F	0.000	0.000	0.000

Robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Legend of the variables:

Age. The age in years specified by respondents.

Gender. Respondents indicated their gender by selecting male (1), female (2) or other (3). We include a dummy variable equalling 1 if female and 0 otherwise.

Single. Equals 1 if the respondent is single and 0 otherwise.

Hasjob. A dichotomous variable that indicates whether the respondent works (1) or not (0) while studying.

Income. The students indicated their parents' monthly income by selecting one of the eight intervals given as an option, with the lowest category being less than €499 and the highest €5000 or more. We estimated the income for each category using the midpoint of the interval (except in the case of the top category, where we estimated it at €6000). We calculate per capita income dividing by the number of people living in the household. In the analysis we include the natural logarithm of these incomes.

aspiration: This index comprises a set of 14 questions on personal goals aimed at capturing the intrinsic or extrinsic nature of the individual's goals (Kasser and Ryan 1996). People indicated how important these goals were to them, using a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Items such as "to have fashionable clothes and hairstyle", or "people commenting how attractive I am" were considered extrinsic goals, while intrinsic goals were of the kind "to help those who need it, without asking anything in return" or "to help make the world a better place". The intrinsic goals are associated with personal growth, affiliation, community involvement, and physical fitness, while the extrinsic goals are associated with fame, wealth and image (Kasser and Ryan 1996). The aspiration index was calculated by subtracting the average of the extrinsic goals questions from the average of the intrinsic ones.

Connectnaturescale: We capture the connectedness to nature through the connectedness to nature scale (CNS, Mayer & Frantz, 2004). CNS is a sound, well-

established measure that assesses an individual's affective, experiential connection to nature through 14 items, such as “I often feel a sense of oneness with the natural world around me” or “I think of the natural world as a community to which I belong”. Participants responded to these items on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree”. CNS was calculated as the mean of all items, with reverse scoring where appropriate, so that higher scores denote a greater connection with nature.

Methodological note: The method applied is ordinary least squares (OLS) with errors robust to heteroskedasticity. The ideal estimation method would have been probabilistic models such as ordered logit or probit. However, those methods and OLS have been found to give similar results (Ferrer-i-Carbonell and Frijters 2004), and replications of the estimations in this research using probabilistic models also give the same results. We report OLS because the results are easier to interpret.