

# Journal of Engineering Research

## A CARTOGRAPHY OF GOOD LIVING IN TOCANTINS: THINKING ABOUT WHAT DEVELOPMENT IS FROM INDIGENOUS COSMOVISIONS <sup>1</sup>

*Carlos Eduardo Panosso*

Professor at: `` Instituto Federal do Tocantins`` - IFTO, Campus Palmas. Graduated in Social Sciences, Specialist in Ethics and Political Philosophy - UFU, Master in Environmental Sciences - UFT and Doctor in Development Society and International Cooperation - UnB. panosso@ifto.edu.br and coordinator of the research project approved by FAPT and CNPq, A Cartography of Good Living: thinking about new public policies based on local development in Tocantins

*Ana Karolina de Araújo*

PDJ scholarship in the research project approved by FAPT and CNPq, A Cartography of Good Living: thinking about new public policies based on local development in Tocantins

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



1. This work is a preliminary result, still within the scope of the bibliographical discussion, of a research project entitled, **A Cartography of Good Living: thinking about new public policies based on local development in Tocantins** scheduled to last until July 2025 and its schedule includes field work to verify the hypotheses presented in this discussion. However, such fieldwork is expected to take place in the first half of 2024.

**Abstract:** With a thesis entitled “An ethnographic report on the mentalities of Good living in Ecuador and the Slow Movement in Italy: “Resistance Movements” and “Concrete Utopias” as alternatives to Development”, we sought to understand, through the ethnographic method, between other questions, whether Sumak Kawsay (worldview of the Andean peoples) is configured as a “resistance movement” to the ideals of progress and development, or even an alternative for development, reconciling, in this case, the ideas of local and global development. It was assumed that the “conventional development” that has guided Western societies has been strongly marked by crises. Therefore, it was necessary to review, for example, the political organization of communities, as well as the levels of production and consumption. Now, however, what is proposed, even at the stage of bibliographical research, but in the future, we will go into the field, and as a continuation of the studies initiated in the doctoral process, to understand whether there are elements in the indigenous communities of Tocantins cosmological movements that, when perceived and understood by anthropological study, could also be configured as “resistance movements” to “conventional” development models. It is in this sense, therefore, that we propose the construction of a cartography of good living, using the ethnographic method, to think about what development and public policies are for such communities.

**Keywords:** Good Living; Serene Growth, Indigenous Worldviews, Development.

## INTRODUCTION

### DEGROWTH AND GOOD LIVING: SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE WAY OF LIFE OF “INCOMPLETE” SOCIETIES

This article seeks to discuss the concepts, notions or categories of Development, Progress, Technology and Subsistence Economy, relativizing them based on indigenous worldviews. The first two will be discussed from a critical point of view, treating them as “founding myths” of a society without destiny. Regarding the last two, examples of societies that live in harmony with nature and their social projects will be used to understand them as relative to each society. This theoretical discussion and argumentation will use the texts of the French anthropologist Pierre Clastres, especially *Society against the State* and the theory of economic degrowth by the also French, but contemporary, Serge Latouche, as well as classic Economic texts that address the issues of Development and Technology.

Still in the 1960s, French anthropologist Pierre Clastres wrote a political anthropology essay entitled *Society against the State*, which became famous in which he dialogues with several disciplines, including Philosophy and Economics. In this essay, Clastres’ main objective is to relativize the existence or not of the State, as we conceive it in Western societies, especially after the advent of modernity, as something natural in any society and that, if it did not exist, this would be an indication of its incompleteness. Clastres uses his field experience among the Guarani Indians of Paraguay in order to show, through ethnographic data, that the fact that indigenous societies have the State as a structured political organization is not due to the fact that they are incomplete societies, but, rather, societies with projects for societies

in which the State would have no role. These would be societies without the State, yes, but above all, they would be “societies against the State”.

Such societies would not have formatted the State not because they could not or did not have time, but simply because they did not want its existence. Despite this being the main objective of his essay, Clastres discusses and questions other notions or concepts that are so important for Western and modern societies and that are linked to even larger categories for these societies (development and progress), for example the Economy of Subsistence and Technology. For Clastres, the idea of a subsistence economy does not fit with the idea, for example, of leisure societies or, to be more current, societies of good living. If this were so, such societies would live all their time for production, which is always insufficient, with nothing left of their subsistence but a lot of work. In the same sense, Clastres redefines or at least shuffles what is meant by technology, attributing to it the value of good coexistence or simply living in harmony with the environment, with nature.

In the book: *The Westernization of the World*, French sociologist Serge Latouche presents a “pessimistic-optimistic” vision of the economic-cultural process of advancing capitalism on a global scale, which he himself calls Westernization. I attribute a kind of value judgment here to the name of the author’s vision because reading his work provokes exactly that in us. If, on the one hand, the advancement of capitalism on a planetary scale is overwhelming societies and cultures, on the other, this same process, constantly in decline, opens up possibilities for resistance, new paths and new meanings of what already exists.

This kind of dialectic in the process of “westernization” of the world as an economic

phenomenon has repercussions that go beyond the economy. It is also a social, cultural and, why not, psychological process. That is, what is understood as Development and Progress within the scope of the “First World” [3] is highly dependent on what is understood as Underdevelopment and Delay or Decline in the “Third World”. Replacing the “emptiness” that Western societies face with the flourishing of the Capitalist World-System (WALLERSTEIN), such societies treat Development and Progress as true “founding myths” (FURTADO). The big issue is that non-Western societies do not have such a void. Therefore, the same thing must be invented so that they follow the same “path”. Let’s see what Serge Latouche says:

“The internalization of the Other’s gaze causes non-Western societies to need a development strategy. It is, in a way, a planned westernization. This venture began long before the word development itself became fashionable.

It dates back to the early days of the ideology of progress and the Enlightenment. It is also called modernization. It is known that modernity is a global project that reserves a large place for the economy, while development is not just an economic policy but a reform of the entire society. Progress is at the heart of all these synonymous projects. The objective is purely mimetic. Therefore, he is never hit. Developed countries are themselves touched by the obsession with modernization. Through a feedback effect, the race for development in Third World countries further reinforces the compulsive search for an impossible recovery in a generalized mimesis.

Since the West placed Progress as the cornerstone of modernity, all countries that were victims of its presence and also those in the immediate neighborhood found themselves affected by the incurable evil of backwardness. (...)” (LATOUCHE, 1994:78)

The ideas presented by Latouche coincide

with some presented by the Frenchman Pierre Clastres in *Society against the State* when he questions the Western view of indigenous societies as “incomplete” as they are because they do not have the State, the Market and Technology, as we understand. Clastres says regarding such issues:

“Behind modern formulations, the old evolutionism actually remains intact. More delicate to disguise itself in the language of anthropology, and no longer in that of philosophy, it nevertheless emerges at the level of categories that claim to be scientific. It has already been noticed that, almost always, archaic societies are determined in a negative way, under the criterion of lack: society without the State, societies without writing, societies without history. The determination of these societies on an economic level is shown to be of the same order: subsistence economy societies. If, by this, we want to mean that primitive societies are unaware of the market economy where production surpluses are disposed of, we are not saying anything strictly, and we are content with highlighting one more lack, always with reference to our own world: these societies who do not have the State, writing or history, also do not have a market. However, common sense may object, what is the point of a market if there is no surplus. Now, the idea of a subsistence economy contains within itself the implicit statement that, if primitive societies do not produce surpluses, it is because they are incapable of doing so, entirely occupied with producing the minimum necessary for survival, for subsistence. An ancient, always effective image of the misery of savages. And, in order to explain this inability of primitive societies to escape the stagnation of living the day, this permanent alienation in the search for food, technical under-equipment and technological inferiority are invoked. (CLASTRES, 2003:208)

*Society against the State*, by Pierre Clastres, brought to light a perspective of politics and power, and consequently of the State, of indigenous peoples that until that moment

had gone “unnoticed” to us. More than unnoticed, indigenous perspectives were, and have been throughout history, crushed by another civilization project: that of Western society. It is contextual, however, that this “grinding” of indigenous perspectives has an ideological meaning guided mainly by “ideas” or “founding myths” such as Development and Progress. By establishing an ontology, considering development and progress as the starting and ending references, as prerogatives for and by the West, a unique historical line was also established. Thus, on this path taken by Western society, the State, as a political and social formation, became a necessary passage for any society to acquire the status of civilization. From this, societies such as indigenous people, for example, “retake” their “primitive” condition, since they are “stateless societies” (Clastres, 2008) and become societies subjugated by the Western civilizational model.

Already at that time, Clastres, supported by his field research among the Guarani Amerindians present in 4 countries in South America (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay) and beyond what the very idea of the State confers as demarcation of territory, via that such a people was not a stateless society because it was incomplete, but rather because it had a socially constructed and conscious “society project” that, even before the existence of the State, a possibility of breaking such a project was perceived. It is good to remember that the history of this in the West is a history of winners and losers, dominant and dominated, which does not converge with their project for society for these peoples.

And Clastres makes this empirical demonstration by combating ideas propagated about these people, such as work being considered only as subsistence, what is understood as the political power of the

indigenous chiefdom, etc.

The resumption of Pierre Clastres' thought is justified because this work proposes a discussion, albeit very brief, on how to think about development and international cooperation, considering the perspectives of indigenous peoples as alternative models for thinking or rethinking the State, its formation and functions in a context of crises. Perhaps not exactly based on the specific thinking of the Guarani people, but rather the resumption of indigenous thinking in a broader way, since these people knew, throughout their history, how to live without the State, without their borders and, more than anything, without the illusion of development and progress. Thus, what is common between what Clastres says and what some contemporary anthropologists say, scholars of good living, a thought present among Andean peoples, is that indigenous peoples, subjugated by hegemonic models of State and Development, can now become models for Western society itself to resolve its crises. That is, by resolving indigenous issues related to land and the State, we will find new models.

### **TECHNOLOGY, WELL-BEING AND GOOD LIVING**

Underdevelopment is, in its essence, this look, this word of the West, this judgment on the Other, decreed miserable before being so, and becoming so because it was irrevocably judged. Underdevelopment is a Western term. Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World*.

Technology is commonly understood as something related to the Western view of Development. In other words, roughly speaking in Western terms, the development resulting from economic growth and dominance over nature, this in a disruptive sense, led to technological development. The materialization of such technology would

be the technical and machine society that Serge Latouche talks about. The meaning that development brings to Western societies through technology, and consequently the desired well-being, is a sense of pseudo completeness. The same occurs with the presence of the State as a sophisticated political organization. Its existence is asserted in relation to societies that do not belong to a complete and developed society. According to Pierre Clastres:

Primitive societies are societies without a State: this judgment of fact, in itself correct, actually disguises an opinion, a value judgment, which then undermines the possibility of constructing political anthropology as a rigorous science. What is in fact stated is that primitive societies are deprived of something – the State – that is necessary to them, just like any other society – ours for example –. These societies are therefore incomplete. (CLASTRES, 2003:207)

### **DEGROWTH AND GOOD LIVING SOCIETIES**

Under the steamroller of Westernization, everything seems to have already been destroyed, leveled, crushed; and yet at the same time the reefs are often just submerged, sometimes holding out, and ready to resurface.

Serge Latouche, *The Westernization of the World*.

Outside the West, in the languages of native peoples from other parts of the planet than Europe, the words “development” and “progress” find no translations. Also, borders and the ideal of a National State do not find similar terms. In other words, these are ideas or concepts elaborated

particularly by a specific society. In the indigenous cultures or languages of the pre-Columbian Andean peoples, however, we find *el sumak kawsay*, good living or good living.

For Ecuadorian Floremilo Simbañas:

“From a historical perspective, *sumak kawsay* has subsisted in the historical memory of the indigenous communities of the Andean region as a meaning of life, an ethic that orders the life of the community. But in the times of the original pre-Columbian States, it not only served to organize the community, but also the entire society, even the State itself.” (SIMBAÑAS, 2011:220)

The concept of Good living, present in indigenous societies in the Andes region, especially Bolivia and Ecuador, has been presented as a set of values that guide the practices of these peoples, practices that in turn have presented themselves as more sustainable than traditional practices. Western countries and have therefore become “alternative development models” and critical to the hegemonic development model.

To think of an, let’s say, “alternative model of development” based on *sumak kawsay*, good living, it is necessary, first of all, to keep in mind that the logic of thought regarding the conception of nature is radically different from that of the West. As Simbaña highlights, “The capital foundation of Western philosophy is conceiving of the human being as an entity separate from nature: a more civilized society even more crippled from the natural world; Having any perception or relationship with nature as an active bond was a test of barbarism” (Idem, 221).

For the perspective of good living, which is not unique among indigenous peoples, by the way, reaching more advanced levels of civilization cannot or must not lose connection with nature. And this connection must be manifested in all dimensions or spheres that make up life in society:

“*Sumak kawsay* is a concept historically constructed by the indigenous peoples of what we know today as the Andean area of South America, and which refers to the

achievement of a full life, living well. But for this to be possible, the life of nature and society must be governed by the principle of harmony and balance. (...) This involves several dimensions: social, cultural, economic, environmental, epistemological and political; as an interrelated and interdependent whole, where each of its elements depends on the others. Human life cannot survive without nature. That is why within the *sumak kawsay* lies the concept of Pachamama, which refers to the universe, as the mother who gives and organizes life. Therefore, guaranteeing the good life of society implies considering nature as a “subject.” (222).

A very important point in understanding the concept of ‘‘Good living’’ is considering that the conception of community life is central. While the State sees the community only as a form of social organization for a small and marginal segment of society, good living sees its reason for existing in the community. Thus, for some authors such as Luis Macas (MACAS apud SIMBAÑAS, 2011), good living follows principles such as reciprocity, collective property, relationship and coexistence with nature, social responsibility and consensus, principles that the State model, as well as that of development, the West has difficulties in achieving.

### **OTHER SOCIETY, STATE AND “DEVELOPMENT” PROJECTS**

The recognition of the existence of the crisis, or crises, of this civilizational model, based on the ideals of development and progress, the capitalist mode of production, the treatment of nature as an inexhaustible source of resources and unbridled consumption, among many other characteristics, is already, in itself an important phenomenon. However, we can go further, recognizing that there are also other models of civilization that present themselves as alternatives to the great hegemonic model (and in crisis).

Some models are proposed from within the West's own perspective and others from perspectives that pass or have passed, away from the ideals of development and progress. However, both with critical perspectives or alternatives to the great model.

Bruno Ayllón Pino and Michele Dolcetti (2014) reflect on the development crisis based on models they call "alternatives", starting from Latin America, especially "Good living" in Ecuador and its resonances in the construction of public policy of international cooperation that prioritizes the so-called South-South Cooperation.

According to the authors, the theme of Development gained greater attention in social sciences mainly from the mid-20th century onwards, with different approaches, criticisms and perspectives. This occurred basically due to two fundamental issues: 1) the fact that, precisely during this period, the first signs regarding a crisis of civilization were given or, at least, recognized and; 2) because since its appearance the idea of development has been presented and recognized as a concept or

polysemous idea, which, for social sciences, already makes it an important issue.

It is after the Second World War that the notion of development gains its status in the practices of international agents. The development was constituted as a "majestic lighthouse that guides sailors towards the coast (...) was the idea that guided the emerging nations on their journey through post-war history (Sachs 2001:13). anthropological sense, development represented the "founding myth", by which the narrative and the meanings associated with that idea represented an "imaginary solution to the tensions, conflicts and contradictions" present in many societies, such as Latin America, faced with the dilemmas and challenges of "modernization" in its multiple institutional, cultural, economic and political aspects (IVO 2012:187-210). (2011:29)

Thus, reflections that go beyond economic and developmental views begin to gain prominence. Thus, there is what the authors call a post-developmental approach, based on experiences centered on happiness and good living. These perspectives include subjective dimensions of development, as well as respect for cultural diversity and the worldviews of indigenous peoples. More than that, in a context of crises in all dimensions or spheres: social, environmental, political, etc., through indigenous peoples, and good living, is just one of the many lessons, we can rethink the paths of development, the organization of the State and its functions.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Therefore, Good Living, as a mentality, is not an alternative to Sustainable Development, but rather to Development and that is why, with the "help" of Serge Latouche, we call them "Resistance Movements".

Thus, the understanding of what good living means does not necessarily have a link with political issues that are talked about a lot. But rather, at what point do these existing mentalities in different contexts intersect and manifest themselves as alternatives to the ideals of development, even if sustainable.

Therefore, with this work, even though it is in the bibliographical discussion phase on the topics, we seek spaces to bring together the topics studied, these different perspectives, indigenous worldviews and local issues in Tocantins. An example of this is that we have a research project entitled: "Uma Cartografia do Bom Viver" ('A Cartography of Good Living): thinking about new public policies based on local development in Tocantins, as well as an ongoing extension course with the same name. Because it is, in fact, about seeking these perspectives of good living close to us.

## REFERENCES

CLASTRES, Pierre. **A Sociedade contra o Estado**. Pesquisas de Antropologia Política; Tradução de Theo Santiago. - São Paulo: Cosac Naify, 2003.

LATOUCHE, Serge. **A Ocidentalização do mundo: ensaio sobre a significação, o alcance e os limites da uniformização planetária**; Tradução de Celso Mauro Paciornik. - Petrópolis, RJ: Vozes, 1994.

GUDYNAS, Eduardo. **Sentidos, opciones y ámbitos de las transiciones al postextractivismo**. In: Más allá del desarrollo. Quito, Ecuador, 2011.

PINO, Bruno Ayllón e DOLCETTI, Michele. **El Good living del Ecuador: crisis del desarrollo y cooperación internacional**. Revista Mural Internacional. V. 5 N.1 jan-jun 2014.

RIBEIRO, Gustavo Lins. **Poder, Redes e Ideologia no campo do Desenvolvimento**

SIMBAÑA, Floresmilo. **El sumak Kawsay como um projeto político**. In: Más allá del desarrollo. Quito, Ecuador, 2011.