



The Buen Vivir (“good life“)

An alternative developmental concept
from Latin America

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Green Economy – Is there no alternative?



The Buen Vivir: an alternative proposal from South America





The Buen Vivir: a holistic indigenous Andean philosophy

- Living a 'good life' instead of just 'living well' / well-being
- Roots: Sumak Kawsay (Quechua)
- Key values: the community, pachamama (nature), Solidarity, decent work,
- indigenous cultures (Pachamama), Karl Marx (Socialism), Karl Polanyi (decommodification), liberation theology (empowerment of the poor), Amarty Sen (capability approach)
- Not a straight jacket of developmental 'tools'

“We do and we must not have recipes, that is, an undisputable list of actions to follow. The resounding failure of a world that tried to organize itself around the market using recipes inspired by the Washington Consensus is fresh in our memories.”

(Alberto Acosta)

The Buen Vivir: a holistic indigenous Andean philosophy



“An integrating holistic vision of the human being, immersed in the great earthly community”
(Leonardo Boff)

“The concept of the buen vivir draws on the idea of ‘us’ because the world cannot be understood from the occidental perspective of ‘I.’”
(National Plan for the Buen vivir, Ecuador)



The Buen Vivir: Challenging the neoliberal green economy agenda

- Bolivia: civil society develops a „universal declaration of the rights of nature“; 2009: constitution includes Buen Vivir
- Ecuador: change of government in 2006 (Rafael Correa)
 - new Ecuadorian constitution 2008: buen vivir and rights of nature
 - Rio+20: Universal Declaration of the rights of nature

“If we achieve a Universal Declaration of the Rights of Nature (...) that were binding with an International Court of Climate Justice that would force countries to comply with these Rights of Nature, just as we compel states to comply with Human Rights, than we would achieve a great change, towards the good life and for the sustainability of our planet.” (Rafael Correa)



The Buen Vivir: Challenging „classical“ socialism

- The concept also challenges socialist approaches as it “breaks with the anthropocentric logic” that is underlying “capitalism as the dominant civilization” as well as “various forms of socialism displayed so far”
- “(W)e will be forced to move from the current anthropocentrism to biocentrism; perhaps we should speak more of a socio-biocentrism that should be translated into a new kind of socialism.”

(Alberto Acosta 2012)



Resistance against the Buen Vivir

- Ecuador: export-led national economic strategy („extractivism“)
“Ultimately, extractivism is not compatible with the Buen Vivir – not only because it leads to the depredation of Nature but also because it retains an exploitative labour structure in the workforce, which, moreover, does not even guarantee adequate jobs.” (Alberto Acosta 2012)
- Rio+20: ignorance towards ideas from Ecuador and Bolivia
- Why: Policies that take progressive steps towards a biocentric solidarity economy will eventually lead away from capitalism as a system that does not take into account the natural functioning of the earthly bio-system.

Conclusion:

Why should labour care about the „Buen Vivir“?

- Thomas Palley: „Ideas matter.“
- „shared prosperity agenda“ (re-embedding the market in society) as a starting point
- Biosocialism/ eco-socialism as the „utopian“ end goal
- Utopia as „realizable dreams“ (José Feijoo, UNAM)
- If the labour movement wants to win the „war of ideas“, there is a need to debate alternatives to the growth-ideology („planetary boundaries“, Birgit Mahnkopf)
- „It is not enough to resist – we have to develop alternatives“ (Pepe Robles, UNI Argentina)
- „generate answer/alternatives on the regional level“ (Alvaro Padrón, FES Uruguay)
- Movement of movements: South-South learning process



THANK YOU

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