

Buen Vivir

Text analysis on the philosophy of good living





Overview

In this method, participants explore the philosophy of “Buen Vivir” (Good Living) of Bolivia and Ecuador by examining and discussing text excerpts. Working in small groups, they examine different aspects of the philosophy and practice of “Buen Vivir”, which they then present to the rest of the group.

Instructions

Background

In Latin America (and elsewhere), in the wake of the crisis which has shaken the Western model, a new philosophy is enjoying increasing popularity among people, social movements and even governments: in order to achieve a truly sustainable relationship with our environment, economic development can no longer take precedence over social and ecological sustainability. The sources drawn on by the proponents of this view include traditional indigenous concepts such as “Buen Vivir”. The “Good Living” approach provides the philosophical foundations for a sustainable way of life for all, in harmony with nature and the environment. It attaches greater importance to people and the interests of nature than to economic development and wealth for the few. Besides indigenous traditions, the approach has its roots in the recent departure from Western development models by a number of social movements in Latin America. The concept of “Good Living” has recently been adopted and reinterpreted by numerous key figures in society. In Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept has already been enshrined in the new constitutions, giving it a central role in policymaking. In Germany and the rest of Europe, the “Buen Vivir” approach has been met with great interest, prompting the question of what we can learn from this philosophy for our own societies, which have been built around prosperity and growth.

	15-25
	50 minutes
	Moderation cards/paper for posters Downloadable materials (www.endlich-wachstum.de): Texts
	Before this method, it makes sense for participants to think about their own ideas of what constitutes a good life. A suitable method for this purpose is “All we need – The components of a good life” (chapter 3, currently only available in German - see www.endlich-wachstum.de).

Preparation

Sufficient copies of the texts are prepared.

Execution

1. First of all, the concept of “Buen Vivir” should be briefly introduced, translated and explained in order to equip the participants with a basic understanding of the concept before they tackle the texts (for background information see the “tips for facilitators”).

The participants are then divided into small groups.

- > Group 1: What is meant by “Buen Vivir”?
- > Group 2: What are the indigenous traditions and roots of the concept of “Buen Vivir”?
- > Group 3: How does the concept of “Buen Vivir” view the environment and nature?
- > Group 4: How is “Buen Vivir” expressed in the constitutions of Bolivia and Ecuador?
- > Group 5: What criticism does the concept of “Buen Vivir” make of Western concepts of “development”?

2. Each group now receives sufficient copies of a worksheet with several excerpts taken from articles, interviews, texts and blog entries. The participants have around 20 minutes to explore the concept of “Buen Vivir” with the help of the worksheets, ask comprehension questions about the texts and summarise the key points on moderation cards in the form of keywords. Each group’s efforts are guided by the question addressed to it (see above).
3. The results are then collated into a mind map on the subject of “Buen Vivir”. The participants sit in a circle, in the middle of which a moderation card showing the words “Buen Vivir” is placed. The various groups now add their cards one by one, commenting on them.

Evaluation

Once all the cards have been presented, any open questions are addressed. The participants can then be encouraged to reflect further on the topic by means of the following questions:

- › What are your thoughts on the concept of “Buen Vivir”?
- › Do you think it is possible and appropriate to apply it to the situation in Germany and Europe?
- › What are the differences?

This method was adapted from the book of methods “Bildungslabor Lateinamerika” (Educational Laboratory for Latin America, <<http://www.informationsbuero-nicaragua.org>>) with kind permission from Informationsbüro Nicaragua e.V..

Variations	The excerpts for Group 5 are somewhat more demanding than those for the other groups – accordingly, if the group as a whole is less familiar with the topic, group 5 can be left out.
Tips for facilitators	<p>Like many texts on the subject of “Buen Vivir”, the working texts are of a highly conceptual and philosophical nature. For many groups, this provokes more questions – e.g. on concrete ways to implement “Buen Vivir” – than the answers available. It is therefore important to highlight the philosophical and theoretical nature of the texts and encourage the participants to take inspiration from the fundamental ideas, even if many questions remain unanswered.</p> <p>It is nonetheless a very good idea for facilitators to familiarise themselves with the topic in advance so as to be able to appropriately deal with the issues and questions that arise. The following texts can be useful for this purpose:</p> <p>http://www.boell.de/en/content/buen-vivir-latin-americas-new-concepts-good-life-and-rights-nature</p> <p>http://www.palgrave-journals.com/development/journal/v54/n4/full/dev201186a.html</p>