

Care for the Self as Government Strategy in Ecovillages

Luiz Guilherme Mafle Ferreira Duarte*  & João Leite Ferreira Neto 

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, MG, Brasil

ABSTRACT – Based on participant observations in two ecovillages the objective of this paper is to uncover the processes of subjectivation embedded in the care for the self in ecovillages that contribute to individual and community development. Our analysis led to the following conclusions: 1) even in different countries, care for the self and others is a government strategy of the ecovillages and had many similarities; 2) work individual issues are a crucial aspect to live in a community, and 3) the infrastructure and demography are important to understanding the processes of subjectivation in the communities. Our analysis also indicates that some level of government is crucial for helping people to take care of themselves.

KEYWORDS: Ecovillage, Community, Care for the self, Government, Michel Foucault

Cuidado de Si como Estratégia de Governo em Ecovilas

RESUMO – Com base nas observações participantes em duas ecovilas, o objetivo deste artigo é desvelar os processos de subjetivação presentes no cuidado de si e dos outros em ecovilas e como ele contribui para o desenvolvimento individual e comunitário. A análise que realizamos levou às seguintes conclusões: 1) mesmo em diferentes países, o cuidado de si e dos outros é uma estratégia de governo das ecovilas e têm diversas semelhanças; 2) trabalhar as questões individuais é um aspecto crucial para se viver em comunidade; e 3) a infraestrutura e a demografia são importantes para a compreensão dos processos de subjetivação nas comunidades. Nossa análise também indica que algum nível de governo é crucial para ajudar as pessoas a cuidarem de si.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Ecovila, Comunidade, Cuidado de si, Governo, Michel Foucault

The study of self-development is a growing field of inquiry about improving and consolidating communities. Designing, building, and living in ecovillages is a relevant field of study regarding this theme in social and community psychology because it implies the development and exercise of practices aimed to change the relationship of an individual with oneself and others conceived by Foucault (2000) as care for the self. However, it is important to understand these practices as part of government strategies that involve different processes of subjectivation (Ferreira Neto, 2019).

Ecovillage, as a model of intentional communities, attempt to reinvent the processes of subjectivation and the relationship between human beings in the direction of sustainability in four different and interrelated dimensions: social, cultural, ecological, and economic (Global Ecovillage Network-GEN, 2020). Sustainability is conceptualized by GEN (2020), as the capacity to support and regenerate the environment, embracing a holistic approach, integrating the four areas of

existence, as mentioned before. Ecovillages are fertile terrain for knowing individual and collective transformation and observing ongoing actions and their development.

Even though community psychology studied the link between individuals and communities (Kloos et al., 2012) and had studies around the notion of care for the self in the context of poverty (Stella, 2019), and mental health (Furtado & Szapiro, 2012), the discipline lacks studies about ecovillages, especially linking with this Foucault's concept. On the one hand, most of the studies on care for the self and others address governmental and economic goals, with less attention placed on exploring the processes of subjectivation in intentional communities. On the other hand, most community psychology studies focus on community outcomes and their empowerment but lack focus on the individual's self-improvement efforts that contribute to developing the community, a subject that we aim to contribute with this research.

* E-mail: lgmafle@yahoo.com.br

■ Submetido: 16/04/2021; Aceito: 28/04/2022.

The objective of this paper is to uncover the processes of subjectivation embedded in care for the self and others in ecovillages that contribute to individual and community development. We focused on individual reflections that took place during daily community life regarding interpersonal relationships and self-knowledge processes.

Research on processes of subjectivation in life in ecovillages has advanced in recent years. Some studies have analyzed the development of the inhabitants' autonomy (Burke & Arjona, 2013; Ergas, 2010; Vicdan & Hong, 2018), the development of their social abilities (Hong & Vicdan, 2015; Mychajluk, 2017), and their relearning process (Roysen, 2018; Whitaker et al., 2016). Others focus on the changes in cognitive attitude (Brombin, 2015; Gonzales & Dans, 2018), but no study has examined the process of subjectivation of ecovillages' inhabitants as a process of care for the self and others.

In the next section, we explain the theoretical framework, followed by the method used for this research. After that, we analyze the collected data and present our conclusions.

Processes of Subjectivation, Government, and Care for the Self

In this paper, we discuss Michel Foucault's notion of processes of subjectivation (Foucault, 2000). The author refuses a universal perspective of subjectivity. His concern was to understand how human beings become subjects within a unique culture. Foucault asserts that the subject is not a substance but a process that depends on the relationship that one has with oneself and others (Fornet-Batencourt et al., 1987). In each context, the subject establishes different relationship modes with him or herself.

The processes of subjectivation occur in the work that the subjects carry out on themselves, creating different forms of existence (ways of thinking, feeling, and acting) in a determined context from an agency of ideas, rules, space, and practices (Foucault, 2007; Prado Filho & Martins, 2007). Thinking about the context of ecovillages, it is important to remember that Foucault (2007) points out that this process occurs based on specific governmental strategies used to direct the subjects' conduct. He adds (Foucault, 2010) that this process of governing does not affect others exclusively.

It also concerns oneself as an exercise in the production of subjectivities.

The notion of government in Foucault points to processes that are, at the same time, collective and individual, because it shows how someone relates to oneself and others. The axis is the movement of conducting the behavior of others. These relationships simultaneously carry out practices of coercion, freedom, and care for the self (Fornet-Batencourt et al., 1987).

The first liberating effect that the care for self-produce is to recognize what governs our understanding of ourselves and the world (Han-Pile, 2016). According to Han-Pile (2016), with practices of the self, the knowledge of the intelligibility forms that govern us becomes more visible, opening space for personal and social changes.

Another form of freedom promoted by these practices is the prevention of identification with any aspect of the subject (Han-Pile, 2016). With the exercise of deidentification with a subjectivity form, each individual can build new subjectivities without identifying and stagnating in any of them.

For this paper, we must avoid understanding care for the self as an attitude centered exclusively on the subject. It is not about a subject who seeks personal pleasure in any circumstance but about people who set themselves to work to change both themselves and others (Foucault, 2000). For Candiotto (2008), care for the self means a different attitude toward oneself, others, and the world. It is a way to exercise surveillance of what happens in a person's thoughts. Care for the self needs a set of arduous and demanding actions that often incur personal costs (Ferreira Neto, 2017). The subjectivity policy is inseparable from the work that individual and collective subjects do on themselves in a specific context. As Foucault (Fornet-Batencourt et al., 1987) points out, taking care of oneself as an *ethos* presupposes complex relationships with others, in addition to being a way of taking care of them.

Ferreira Neto (2017) points out that the subjectivity in Foucault has three aspects: 1) It may present as submission and as a critical attitude or practice; 2) Practices of the self do not consist of intra-individual works but collective and institutional ones; 3) In both forms of subjectivity, there is a relationship with the norm extracted from culture. The entire process of subjectification occurs beyond individual intimacy, but it encompasses social relations and institutional contexts in which the subjects are inserted (Luxon, 2008).

METHOD

Data collection took place in two ecovillages, one situated in North Switzerland and the other in Southeast Brazil. The process involved eight weeks of immersion in each field (June/August 2019 and October/November 2019, respectively), participant observations, 13 interviews in the first ecovillage, and five interviews in the second one. This

variation in the number of interviews occurred because of the population of each place, which we will describe later.

We studied the physical and management structure, the interrelationships between the inhabitants, and the relationship of each individual with him/herself. All interviews were recorded and later translated into English. For analysis

purposes, we deductively encoded the selected data around two themes (Creswell, 2014): (1) structure, government, and demography; and (2) processes of subjectivation. The authors shared the research findings with the participants for their feedback.

In this research, we conducted participant observations. The method involves taking part in a group's daily activities to learn the explicit and implicit aspects of their routines and culture (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). As pointed out by Aagaard and Matthiesen (2015), this method goes beyond the exclusive use of language to analyze the data. Another tool is paying attention to the material world, human bodies, and other objects to learn the meanings embedded in group life. Jorgensen (2015) affirms that through participant observation, we can research the participants' experiences, thoughts, feelings, and activities, thus realizing their implications for the specific population.

Spredly (2016) shows that participant observation enables the comparison of the participants' subjectivity and their behavior, reporting their beliefs and actions. It helps us to understand the physical, social, cultural, and economic contexts in which they live. It is possible to testify to the

relationships between people and among contexts, ideas, norms, and events. People's behaviors and activities are other sources of data: what they do, how frequently, and with whom. However, Desmond (2014) points out the need to consider the object of study as "processes involving configurations of relations among different actors or institutions" (2014, p. 587). Furthermore, we also applied the method to verify personal changes in the relationship with the context.

Data analysis was carried out from an ethnographic perspective, in which interpretations were carried out based on each community's routine and key events, presenting different perspectives of the participants about each event. To make the intercultural comparison between ecovillages, we applied the case study approach to analyze the ethnographic perspective, studying the cases' similarities and differences (Becker, 2014; Creswell, 2014).

We invited all ecovillage residents to participate in the research. Those who accepted the invitation signed the Free and Informed Consent Term, submitted and accepted by the Ethics Committee of the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, under the code CAAE: 89152318.5.0000.5137.

RESULTS

Structure, government, and demography

In this section, we analyze how each ecovillage organizes itself to govern each individual, considering their physical structure, the population who lives there, and the governance strategies they used (Table 1).

The first ecovillage, located in northern Switzerland, is in an 18th-century castle, 3 km from the city center in northern Switzerland. The founders were from five distinct spiritual groups who gathered intending to create a community that promoted "Encounters and Awareness," as presented in its entry. They also have a Seminar Center where they promote workshops related to the theme of self-development.

The structure of the ecovillage consists of five large buildings and two smaller ones. In them are the apartments of the inhabitants (which have both private and shared bathrooms and kitchens); an inn; the Seminar Center, with three salons, toilets, and showers, as well as a kitchen and dining room (located in the main building of the castle); a school (also structured in its legal entity) for children from all over the city; several art studios used by the residents; a community meeting room; the "house of silence" for meditation; a community laundry; and a place for teenagers in the basement. In addition, they have a permaculture garden, a camping area, a private beach, a bistro, a forest behind the castle, and several gardens and ritual spaces throughout the land. To manage the land and buildings, the residents created a joint-stock company. A board made up of four residents of

the community and two external members leads the company. They are elected annually to the positions.

The ecovillage population was multi-generational (ranging from 1 to 65 years old) and multicultural. At that time, there were 57 residents: 34 adults and 23 children. Residents estimated that they received approximately 6,000 visitors throughout the year, either because of the Seminar Center or because of the people's desire to know the community.

The community has rules, but no one monitors them. They are responsible for their self-assessment. One rule regards the process of becoming a member and another is the volunteer work in the community. They had an agreement that all adult residents should dedicate nine hours of volunteer work monthly to the community, but no one controlled it. These working hours could vary between maintenance work, ecovillage management, or interpersonal relationship support.

Community meetings are considered a crucial part of the ecovillage's social organization. There are several types of meetings, including reunions only for members as well as for outsiders. No resident must participate in these meetings. Nevertheless, the community expects the participation of most of the inhabitants.

There are three internal meetings. The first is the weekly meeting that takes place on Tuesday nights, dedicated to self-reflection and discussions about interpersonal relationships. The second is a meeting held once a month to discuss practical and management issues of the ecovillage. The last

meeting of the members is the so-called *intensive period*. Throughout the year, they hold three sessions lasting four days each. During this period, they usually invite someone outside the community to train them in some new technique for self-reflection. Moreover, every morning at 10 a.m., they have an exchange group called Morning Circle. All the people present in the community could join it, according to their will.

The government in the Swiss ecovillage aims to direct the conduct of each inhabitant toward his or her self-government (Foucault, 2010) and to improve interpersonal relationships. The strategy to maintain the ecovillage is self-knowledge and the control of individuals over themselves. As stated by Maton (2008), there is a reciprocal relationship between community empowerment and its members' empowerment. To invest in those empowerments, they do not focus on surveillance over others but on their surveillance and the quality of the interactions between the dwellers. The meeting groups have a crucial role in these processes. They wagered that self-improvement was the key to improving the whole community.

The second ecovillage, located in southeastern Brazil, was created by a group of friends. Before doing so, they already carried out many community activities such as sharing rooms and meals and creating a bazaar. At a certain point in their stories, they decided to study the ecovillage model of life, which had been expanding worldwide.

The original idea was to create a community and produce several events. These events would be both inside and outside the community, facilitating dialogue with the surrounding society. The members wanted to create a model in which they could live in the ecovillage and support themselves through community work. This work would have the function of sensitizing people to a new worldview. As we observed, they did not reach this objective, and each one had to work as a freelancer, which brought some difficulties to living in the ecovillage.

The ecovillage is in an environmental preservation area of 46 hectares. It is 16 km from the city center. The only access to the ecovillage is by car since there is no paved street. The path is full of virgin forest, and the community has a spring on its land. Legally, most of the land, 31 hectares, belongs to the non-governmental organization (NGO) that governs the community, and the group of residents is entitled to 15 hectares each. Every resident is responsible for the housing space where he or she lives (900 m²).

The inhabitants divided the land into three circles. The lower one is considered the common part, with the entrance, the communal kitchen, the inn, and the plantations. In the middle one, higher in the mountains, are the houses. In the upper one, the residents cannot make any changes. It is a mountaintop that, according to the law, cannot suffer any human interference.

The community has seven residence houses (one specifically for guests). In the guest house, there are two external composting bathrooms. One building has a

community kitchen and a community food pantry. Above the inn is a meeting room. Next to it is the sauna. In one of the buildings, there was a school, disabled due to the absence of children. Only the first house of the communal kitchen was not built based on the principles of bio-construction. All the others were.

During the participant observation, the ecovillage had eight members and 11 people who considered themselves residents. Ten were Brazilian and one was a foreigner. Most of them were over the age of 40, and one was a child. In the year before the research, they had 23 residents, nine of them children, and 14 adults. For particular reasons, such as health or work problems, some of them decided to move out of the ecovillage.

The ecovillage received several visits throughout the year. Every month they held at least one event that could host from 10 to 60 people. They also received visits from people who just wanted to visit the place.

Within the community, there is a division between members and residents. The membership process is: 1) keep in touch with the community for at least two years and 2) live there for at least six months. Only members have the right to take care of part of the land, to build a house on it, and to participate in community decisions. However, if a resident is in charge of a project, he could participate in the arrangements.

Regarding the rules, the group that created the ecovillage established that all decisions would be made by agreements, avoiding the structure of a contract. Everything that they are going to do and interferes in some way with the collective needs a prior agreement. To organize the ecovillage in a horizontal leadership, they elect a president every two years from among the members, divide the tasks into Working Groups (WG), and use a decision-making process based on *consensus minus one*. A person who wants to veto a project would need to have at least one more person supporting the veto for it to be accepted.

Social processes were aimed not only at the practical aspects of the community's daily life but also at developing individual and interpersonal relationships. When there were more residents or when an event was held, residents promoted regular meetings aimed at their self-development.

The group of residents realized that they were not able to deal with all the issues that arose. In addition to the techniques they practiced, from time to time, they invited an external specialist to assist in group processes. They also realized that some questions were very individual. Each one had to choose a procedure to treat their issues, e.g., therapy, yoga, spiritual meetings, and others.

Finally, they used eating as a social process. When there were more residents in the ecovillage, they promoted collective lunches and shared activities such as cooking and organizing the kitchen. Thus, each resident would cook and organize the kitchen once every 15 days. It was also a time of exchange and reflection for the residents.

Unlike the previous ecovillage, the government strategies (Foucault, 2010) of the Brazilian one focused more on the autonomy of the community than the self-development of the individuals. Ecology had a predominant role, and residents sought to improve their economic and social interactions. To achieve this, they promoted contact between the inhabitants regarding decision-making, self-knowledge, and eating.

We can affirm that in both ecovillages, care for the self (Foucault, 2005) was part of the government of the self (Foucault, 2010) but in different ways. In the Swiss one, the government strategies focus on individual development. Community stability was a consequence of this work of each person over oneself. At the Brazilian ecovillage, the focus was on ecology and the collectivity. Care for the self was a strategy to support the main objective.

Care for the self and processes of subjectivation in the ecovillage

In this section, we analyze the processes of subjectivation in the ecovillages on two levels: 1) the process of working on oneself and 2) interpersonal relationship transformation.

Regarding the process of working on oneself, life in the Swiss ecovillage induced people to deal with their issues. Many sought out the community intending to have more interpersonal relationships, but they ended up facing loneliness. One of the workers at the Seminar Center said, “Many people felt deluded with life in the community. They think they will get here and will never feel alone. It is not true. I’ve seen people feel lonely within the community.” (U.D., 28, June 2019)

When dealing with their moments of loneliness, people needed to deal with their psychological issues. One of the oldest ladies of the community pointed out, “There are two

different things, my conscious motivation—what do I want now, and my unconscious motivation that is my last light, which is ultimately urgent. There is also an expectation that someone can solve unsolved childhood stories” (K.F., 01, July 2019). Other inhabitants described the three phases that the newcomers passed through: euphoria, depression, and regaining energy. The woman who took care of the permaculture garden said:

Many are looking for new directions. They arrive in the community and have a moment of euphoria, then they fall into a depressive moment, and then they have energy again. They get excited about the first moments, but then they face their loneliness and their questions, and when they manage to work on them, they feel better again. But not everyone succeeds. (A.G., 06, July 2019)

Self-knowledge was also experienced in the relationship with others. In this relationship, the most profound intimacy of those involved emerged. One of the management board members said, “I think I have learned to talk about my inner world a lot. This also helps in relationships. I accept Shadows better than I had before. Shadow means qualities that I have difficulties with myself and other people” (F.A., 09, July 2019). It occurs through the process that they call mirroring when they learn from their projections of the unknown personal contents that they throw on others. As another member of the management board said:

So, for every quality of a person that I don’t like, I’m sure I will find one or two in myself. Of 40 people, I have my favorite enemy. It brings me a lot, but I work with him a lot. What are the qualities that I’m annoyed with? What has it to do with me? Have I the same qualities? Why do I have problems with this guy? (M.R., 14, July 2019).

Table 1
Ecovillages’ structures

Characteristics	Ecovillage 1	Ecovillage 2
Localization	Northern Switzerland	Southeast Brazil
Urban centers access	Private transportation, but it is nearby	Private transportation, but it is distant
Construction	18 th -century castle	Individual houses built along the 46 hectares of land
Population	57	8
Spoken language	German	Portuguese
Original group	Spiritual groups (Osho Tantra followers, Contact improvisation, Buddhist, Sufi-Islam, spiritualists without a specific guide)	Group of friends who lived in the community and studied about ecovillages
Existence time	16 years	12 years
Research period	From June to August 2019	From October to November 2019
Number of interviews	13	5
Respondents’ age	Between 35 and 65 years	Between 40 and 55 years
Role exercised by the researcher in the ecovillages during the research	Volunteer - general services of the Seminar Center	Visitor

Source: research data

The weekly meetings and intensive periods were the privileged space to work on the own issues which emerged from interpersonal relationships. During the intensive periods, the participants learned new tools that improved their social skills, and during weekly meetings, they put their learning into practice. Both periods aroused the feelings of those present, demanding energy and courage from them to deal with the personal issues that emerged during the meetings. The person who took care of the permaculture garden stated, “We have these coaches every year. We have different tools with different coaches. And some of these coaches can really bring you to the point” (A.G., 06, July 2019)

Community life imposed on the inhabitants the need to govern and care for themselves (2010, 2005). The organization of the ecovillage promoted spaces and learning for these processes. Life in the community prompted loneliness, requiring that individuals deal with their personal questions. However, all participants mentioned that they needed to create limits to not lose themselves in the community. As one said, “Community is creating borders” (I.G., 05, August 2019). They had to work on their subjectivity to handle community life.

Living in the community requires the inhabitants to share spaces. Some needed to share the kitchen and bathroom, which was new to them. They also share common areas such as the garden. For some, it changed their notion of mine to ours. One psychologist who lived there said, “You know, to live with other people you’re not able to stick with your ego. You need to reset your mind into a ‘we’ instead of ‘I.’ And if it happens, it influences everything. It is not ‘my.’ It is ‘our’ garden. It is ‘our’ place. It is ‘our’ community. It is ‘our’ life here. It is ‘our’ responsibility” (E.S., 10, July 2019).

Through the interviews, we could observe that community life creates ambiguity around individuality and collectivity. While it can create a notion of commoning for some, it seems to happen just for part of the group. As they exposed, even though they must share the space, some of the inhabitants did not join the meetings, sharing their subjective life, like feelings or personal experiences.

However, not everyone could dedicate themselves exclusively to community life. The adults who had family and worked outside found it challenging to be present in the collective moments of the community. One of the interviewees said, “It can also be quite overwhelming. If you now have a family with three to four children, you still must work, then the community, and then maybe some kind of interpersonal difficulties” (F.A., 09, July 2019).

Over time and with the stability of the project, some residents felt discouraged from continuing to invest energy in the project and began to invest more in themselves. One of the co-founders assumed, “On the one hand, I’m all trustful that I don’t have to control what’s happening. On the other hand, my interest or my intentions are not focused on the project because my enthusiasm is not really there so much

anymore, so I’m also putting my attention on my stuff” (R.S., 05, August 2019).

Care for the self and others (Foucault 2005) is as necessary for the ecovillage as it is for each person. When one creates a project, one could feel fulfilled because of the activities while the project helps to improve the community. Yet, as pointed out by Ferreira Neto (2017), care for the self and others means carrying out arduous and demanding actions and incurring personal costs. For some inhabitants, this energy investment was not possible to bear or was no longer a desire.

Regarding interpersonal relationship transformation, the interviewees pointed out that the fact that they lived close together was a facilitator for spontaneous meetings. They reported that many conversations happened spontaneously when they met each other on the street. One of the newcomers said, “I realized it. Always, when I come back from holidays this is like, ‘Oh hi!’ And everybody says, ‘How was it?’ So, it’s like ‘wow,’ many people here know where I was, and we’re happy” (M.H., 11, July 2019).

The main author observed that the ecovillage’s residents promoted several events. Some were parties, such as those for the arrival or departure of someone or the completion of processes, e.g., at the end of the Intensive Week, when a group came to the community to share its way of life. There were events open to external audiences, such as concerts. Sometimes they gathered in their small groups to have more restricted parties, such as the confraternization of a workgroup or baptisms. Moreover, they promoted small activities for entertainment, such as football games for young people and adults or visits to the mountains or waterfalls.

Because of the Seminar Center, the movement of people in the community was intense. Some residents felt that welcoming so many people in the summer could be exhausting, but it brought new energy and more life to the ecovillage. One interviewee said, “Many people might not see that, but I believe that for this community, it is very inspiring to have all the seminar groups coming. Sometimes it is exhausting in summer, but they bring a lot of fresh energy” (S.G., 27, July 2019).

Kirby (2003) found a similar process of subjectivation at the Ecovillage at Ithaca. The author concluded that the face-to-face relationships created by the ecovillage architecture promoted social capital among the inhabitants. Thus, in both ecovillages, inhabitants could create several events together with mutual help. Furthermore, at the Swiss ecovillage, they felt rewarded and invigorated because of the intense circulation of visitors inside the community, even though it demanded much energy.

During interviews, events, and informal conversations in the ecovillage, people reported that conflict was an ever-present issue in community life. The main source of conflicts was interpersonal relationships. Almost all participants reported that they had conflicts with someone else. For some, these conflicts persisted throughout their stay in the community. One of them said:

It's not always easy to take the whole responsibility in the conflict. I still have conflicts here with people. I already had seven years ago the same conflicts. I don't get out of it. There are people here who really trigger me. There are two or three people who trigger me inside (A.G., 06, July 2019).

For the interviewees, the inhabitants' ability to resolve conflicts improved over time. They credit this change both to the maturity of the community and to the learning of new communication tools and strategies for resolving conflicts. One interviewee said:

A lot of people have been still in this mood, 'It is mine, or you did it not right.' 'Talks to each other wishing for hurting.' And I think in the last five years, we as a community learned how to give feedback to each other without hurting each other. How to find solutions without fighting. Yeah, this non-violent communication took place (E.S. 10, July 2019).

However, throughout its history, the ecovillage has been able to reinvent itself. The self-reflection process that occurred at the individual level was also present at the collective level. When the first crisis happened, the community members decided to separate the community from the Seminar Center. They opened up more to families, creating a new environment that they considered to have brought more stability to their daily lives. As for the children, even though a lot of preliminary work was needed, they began to be better accepted and participate more in the community. In addition, during the research period, people who became elderly in the community began to express their needs. The community needed to create strategies to make the place socially sustainable for the elderly, either by modifying the physical structure or by creating consistent social support.

The more intense relationship enhanced the conflicts, which also fostered processes of subjectivation. Throughout the self-government, the dwellers had to work out their issues in the battle to find solutions. Sometimes it did not work out, and they had to bear the situation and develop new skills in favor of community balance. This exercise enabled community transformation in difficult times. As stated by Chavis (2001), community coalitions can transform conflict into social change.

The processes of subjectivation in the Swiss ecovillage intertwined care for the self and government of the self. Individuals worked on their subjectivity to empower themselves and, as a consequence, it empowered the collective at the same time. Daily life enhanced contact between the inhabitants and self-knowledge. However, it also triggered conflicts and loneliness. These idiosyncrasies transformed both individuals and the community, creating collective moments of prosperity and constraint based on the decisions of the individuals to work on their issues or leave the community.

In the Brazilian ecovillage, the process of working on oneself had many similarities with the Swiss one but some

differences. Participant observation showed that during the daily meetings, there were moments of conversation on several subjects, from practical and routine questions to the most subjective and relational issues. There were exchanges about food, natural medicine, bio-construction, dreams, life projects, and relationships, among others.

More than the spontaneous meetings, self-knowledge activities were other moments of relearning. Techniques such as the Forum, therapeutic processes, mirroring, and working with contradictions helped them to become aware of their behavior patterns. They got to know how others saw them, thus opening their wounds, revisiting their stories, and understanding their negative aspects. As one habitant said "It is to be open to experiencing all the challenges that it is to live in the community. It is not easy, and it is not simple. It is necessary to open many wounds that we need to heal" (J.P., 13, November 2019).

The practices also aimed at wildlife. It revealed other perceptions of reality. They affirmed no longer see the human being as the end of the food chain but as part of a larger nature cycle. The former teacher of the community stated:

It is essential to teach the children that they are part of the life cycle of something bigger than the Earth. When I came across this idea, it brought me a feeling of belonging. When I think that my mother eats the food from the land to which she will return when she dies, it gives me an idea of continuity that has existed for millions of years and of connection between all beings (F. L., 04, November 2019).

However, the residents pointed out that the new inhabitants had difficulties experiencing this new subjectivation. As they did not take part in the ecovillage building process, they felt more keenly the impact of changing an urban and more isolated subjectivity to more intense community contact. Moreover, others sought to escape their problems by going to live in the ecovillage. However, they needed to realize that the problem was not the world but how they saw the world. One inhabitant said:

Moreover, many people go to ecovillage, thinking they are running away from something. So, if the person arrived like that, one would continue to run away in one's life until one learns that one doesn't need to run away from anything. What is wrong is not the world. What is wrong is how you look at the world. You have to work things inside. Have a clash with yourself (N.G., 24, October 2019).

Like the Swiss ecovillage, the process of care for the self in the Brazilian community boosted several transformations for the participants. They resignified their relationship with the environment, learned new practices, and improved their self-knowledge. Nevertheless, as affirmed by Ferreira Neto (2017), it had some personal costs that not everyone was capable of bearing.

Regarding the interpersonal relationship, it varied widely throughout the ecovillage's history and daily life. The interpersonal contact depended on the occurrence or absence of events and the number of residents. When they had more residents, the respondents reported that they had regular meetings to carry out activities and to eat. These meetings were more frequent when events took place on-site than on regular days. However, during the period of participant observation, residents said they were not very active. The meetings during non-event periods took place more sporadically. There was even no one in the ecovillage for up to a week.

Architecture also influenced the interactions of residents. On the one hand, reserving the lower circle of the land as a common area helped in terms of contact between residents and visitors. On the other hand, the houses at the average height of the mountains made communication among inhabitants uneven. For those who lived nearby, contact was more intense. However, the meetings became more sporadic among residents who lived on opposite sides of the valley. One of the participants who had a house alone on one side of the valley stated:

The physical and conceptual structure guides a lot of what will happen. We have the challenge of making the houses a little far from each other. It accentuated an isolation issue when we knew we had to walk ten minutes to get to the other's house (N.G., 24, October 2019).

This limitation of social contact in daily life was painful for some. In general, people who had companions and family were able to establish themselves more easily. However, when residents were absent, or in seasons when access to neighbors became difficult, some respondents felt alone, even with their family members close to them.

Even though the government strategies aimed at social contact, the last strategy depended on the number of people and the physical structure. Interpersonal relationships were part of care for the self (Fornet-Batencourt et al., 1987) since it was one of the motivations for deciding to live in the ecovillage. As pointed out by Renzaho et al. (2012), life satisfaction had a positive relationship with community connections. When the community was full of people, they felt well-being because they could meet frequently. However, when there were fewer people, the distance between the houses and the lack of meetings led to loneliness for some of them.

Learning about group processes was another phenomenon of ecovillage life. The participants discovered that they did not share the same idea. They tried to understand that trying to do this produced suffering for others. One of the co-founders "We idealized that we were all the same. We were all one. Moreover, we stuck and didn't walk" (M.D., 13, October 2019).

When living in the community, the participants felt that individual opinions should be constantly confronted by the collective. They could not just do what they wanted, and they needed to learn to listen to others. One participant said:

This adaptation with the collective is the biggest challenge here, for me. To live with everyone and each one peculiarity, understanding the performance within the group and seeing how it reverberates in the other. Some agreements are important to living in a community. You have to tear yourself apart and open yourself up so that the other person knows what you are thinking because if you don't do that, things don't happen, and we keep reproducing what's out there (J.P., 13, November 2019).

Interpersonal relationships demanded new subjective positions. The inhabitants had to govern themselves to open up to new ideas. The government of themselves was a way to take care of others. They could not impose their opinions but had to discuss and share their points of view. Only after this work could everyone feel accepted in the group. However, it brought personal gains. On the one hand, they learned about group dynamics. On the other hand, they changed their relationship circles and improved their solidarity.

Structural challenges interfered with the decisions of some to live in the ecovillage. They wanted to create their ethics, breaking with some standards of the social system, but the structure impacted the choice of remaining in the ecovillage. The distance from urban centers and access only by a dirt road were difficulties that affected their decisions.

The distance hindered the residents in three areas: education, health, and finance. As pointed out by the inhabitants, the school did not have enough structure to deal with children who had learning disabilities, following their criteria. It was a similar situation concerning health. The difficult access to health facilities made some parents afraid of taking care of their children, and the use of health services in an emergency was not easy.

With fewer people present because of the three factors above, financial support was a challenge for those who lived there. Aside from the involvement with Gaia Education or with cultural projects, it was not easy to find another source that would generate income to allow people to settle there.

At least within the ecovillage, care for the self and others was not only an issue of personal will. Its structure was a determinant of the ethical exercise (Fornet-Batencourt et al., 1987) of the respondents. Care for the self was the aim of the governmental strategies of the ecovillage and the dwellers' ideal, but the lack of social structure constrained it. As stated by Buikstra et al. (2010), infrastructure and support services as well as a diverse and innovative economy were significant components of community and individual resilience. In the researched context, these components led to the decisions of some inhabitants to leave the community.

The processes of subjectivation of the Brazilian ecovillage aimed at community autonomy. It was the main focus, more

so than individual improvement, which was very present but as a side effect of the community strategy to empower itself. They aimed at the interpersonal relationship, which prompted the self-knowledge of each individual. However, the village's architecture hampered interpersonal contact, and the lack of community services was a deterrent for some people to live there.

Comparing the two ecovillages, we highlighted the importance of the practices of the self being part of the government of the communities to empower them. Even though they have a different main focus, the procedures are alike, achieving similar results. At least, the physical structure is also important to condition the processes of subjectivation of each place.

CONCLUSION

The analysis we conducted leads to the following conclusions: 1) even in different countries, care for the self and others is a government strategy of the ecovillages and had many similarities; 2) work individual issues are a crucial aspect to live in a community, and 3) the infrastructure and demography are important to understanding the processes of subjectivation in the communities.

This paper provided further evidence that care for the self can be used in a community government. Both ecovillages promoted spaces for self-development, aiming at the empowerment of the group. Care and government for the self were intertwined in both ecovillages. For them, personal self-knowledge was necessary to keep the balance of the group.

Our study elucidates the relationship between the concepts of care for the self and government. Depending on community governance, the use of care for the self had different meanings. In the Swiss one, it was the main focus of the inhabitants. The collective was essential to underpinning the individual's process, which kept the balance of the community even when they had conflicts. In the Brazilian ecovillage, community autonomy and relationship with nature were the main focuses. They promoted regular collective activities, and because of the disputes they fostered, they had to work on their issues. Although they had different objectives, both strategies required that the inhabitants govern themselves to keep the community alive.

Our case site analysis indicates that some level of government is crucial for helping people to take care of themselves. It is not a process that happens spontaneously but depends on the social structure of the communities and their meetings.

These findings also provide additional information about the controversial influence of the structure of the ecovillage

and demography in the processes of subjectivation. The organization and population density of the Swiss ecovillage intensified contact among its dwellers, while the organization of the Brazilian one limited interaction between its members. However, in both ecovillages, the interviewees affirmed that they improved their interpersonal abilities, although some participants mentioned the feeling of loneliness, even when they had much daily contact.

Our findings are important for community psychology, shedding new light on the community's need to invest in its members' care for the self. The fact of living close together was not enough for developing interpersonal skills and treating subjective issues. The inhabitants needed to do arduous work on themselves (in the group or individually) to achieve these objectives.

We also confirm the previous finding that the infrastructure and support services were crucial for the maintenance of an intentional community. When the inhabitants had their basic needs of housing, education, health, and work, they had more chances to stay in the community in comparison with the context in which they did not have these basic needs.

Given the scope of this paper, it was not possible to verify the interference of ecological and economic practices in the processes of subjectivation of ecovillages' inhabitants. Even though these aspects are intrinsic parts of ecovillage life, their analysis exceeds the objectives of this study. The methodology we used was useful for ascertaining the individual, interpersonal, and organizational contexts, and their interactions. However, based on ethnography, this result is not easily generalizable. Further studies should develop the studies on processes of subjectivation in ecovillages to see if they are replicable in other sites. Future research should also further develop the processes of subjectivation embedded in the economic and environmental practices of ecovillages.

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