

Reconsidering the Community: Discourses of Utopian Intentional Communities in Chile

Repensando lo comunitario: discursos de comunidades intencionales utópicas en Chile

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Abstract: This article aims at characterizing the discourse of intentional communities. To reach this goal, we deploy a qualitative approach based on case-studies to describe and contrast the phenomenon of intentional communities taking place in Chile. Through discourse analysis we describe three initiatives along the axes: the vision of themselves, vision of society and practices aimed at creating ideal forms of living in community. Our findings show that discourses articulate disciplinary knowledge and practices with traditional and spiritual views. We recognize social transformations based on personal change and the role played by mediated communication through the internet in revealing disputes among community initiatives that suggest alternatives to what the norm in neoliberal Chilean society is, promoting ways to reinvent the individual, the community and relationship with nature.

Key words: utopia, community, subject, discourses, sustainability, spirituality.

Resumen: Este artículo está dirigido a caracterizar el discurso de comunidades intencionales. Para cumplir con este objetivo, implementamos un enfoque cualitativo basado en estudios de casos para describir y contrastar el fenómeno de las comunidades intencionales utópicas que tienen lugar en Chile. A través del análisis del discurso, describimos tres iniciativas en torno a los ejes: visión de sí mismos, visión sobre la sociedad, y prácticas dirigidas a crear formas ideales de existencia en común. Nuestros hallazgos muestran que los discursos articulan el conocimiento disciplinario y las prácticas con puntos de vista tradicionales y espirituales. Reconocemos las transformaciones sociales centradas en el cambio personal y el papel desempeñado por la comunicación mediada por Internet, para revelar disputas entre iniciativas comunitarias que sugieren alternativas a lo que es la norma en el contexto social neoliberal de Chile, promoviendo formas de reinvención del individuo, la comunidad y la relación con la naturaleza.

Palabras clave: utopía, comunidad, sujeto, discursos, sustentabilidad, espiritualidad.

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Introduction¹

The transformations of contemporary society have evinced a series of negative consequences for the general population. A number of studies have displayed the consequences of the project of modernity and the capitalist economic rationality, for example, in detriment to the environment (Leff *et al.*, 2002), the material and cognitive exploitation in the world of labor (Blondeau *et al.*, 2004), the colonization of indigenous territories and the lack of recognition of their inhabitants (Rivera-Cusicanqui, 2010), wars and their psychological manifestations on the basis of (Benedicto, 2007), the decomposition of the place (Escobar, 2000), among other situations that make it clear the way economic development advances upon the preservation of the life on the planet (Gaona, 2000).

The awareness of the impact of the current economic model drives many an individual to react before the hegemonic notion with proposals oriented toward sustainability and solidarity (Gaona, 2000). From these critical stances, rethinking the ways of inhabiting the planet has acquired a central role and has enabled the emergence of empowering special initiatives to promote radical changes (Zibechi, 2007).

In this line, the existence of various social movements is recognized, which because of their trajectory, have a repertoire of actions based on collectivity. However, it is also recognized the existence of new initiatives that appear as a distinctive element regarding old movements: their focus on the individual in tension with their community endeavor. In these efforts, the territory holds a fundamental place to assay, at microsocial scale, new forms of life, which, in an organic community, intend to transform society (Salamanca and Silva, 2015).

Placing the community in the center of local responses is not new for social sciences, since there are extensive proposals to understand it. Albeit, centering the community to build territorial alternatives in the face of the homogenizing power of the capital has a more specific function and may be delimited under the notion of intentional utopian communities; this is, human groups whose members are voluntarily associated for the purpose of leaving beyond the common in the dominant society, adopting a social and cultural alternative is devised in a conscious and planned manner (Meijering, 2012).

1 The article presents results of a broader research, product of the doctoral work of the first author, sponsored by *Doctorado en Ciencias Sociales* of Universidad de la Frontera, Chile. Complementarily, he received funds from *Vicerrectoría de Investigación, Desarrollo y Creación Artística* of Universidad Austral de Chile by means of project DID S-2018-15.

Among the defining characteristics of intentional communities distinguishable is a collective character articulated by objectives and proposals in common, around the concretion of a utopia in a territorial site (Leafe, 2003). The utopia gathers a series of social worlds that tension the conventional ways of exercising power with capability to produce ruptures with the conceptions of the world and representations of the real. It is the same existing order the one that develops the stage for the emergence of utopias, which, in due time-space, break the conditions there are to concrete the scenarios of the following order. Utopias, therefore, develop and update in a determinate social, political and ideological context, being entailed in broad social actions scenarios (Facuse, 2010).

Owing to this, the various motivations which produce intentional communities depend on the historical moment in which they appear and the characteristics of societies which they respond to. They question and mark a counterpoint at ideological level and praxeological from the standpoint of their utopian project with the values that support the hegemonic lifestyles. It has been verified that orientations of intentional communities are supported on diverse values, among which the ecological, spiritual and religious stand out (Choi, 2008), and have been a relevant counterpoint along the history of occidental society.

We have recognized in the literature a temporality in the appearance of intentional utopian communities and we propose a general overview from empirical reports that various authors have carried out. At first, it associates the appearance of intentional communities in Jewish kibbutz, these experiences were agricultural communities that started to be established by the end of the XIX century by migrants, mainly Russian (Montoya and Dávila 2005).

The creation of Jewish kibbutz, as a communitarian experience, is supported on an advanced economy based on agriculture, which allowed accomplishing a high degree of equality among their members (Morales, 2000). The goal of kibbutz was to make the Zionist expectative compatible with the search for a new man, specifying economic and spiritual practices (Maestre, 2003; Achouch and Morvan, 2012). Their political impact was relevant, it is noticed that "these utopian communities were part of the Zionist effort to create a Jew state in Palestine and their members saw themselves as the ideological forefront of the movement" (Montoya and Dávila, 2005: 37).

A second moment of the appearance of intentional communities is established in Europe, at the second half of the XX century, and relates to a

series of economic and social crises which together with the consolidation of anti-systemic movements generated some instances of spatial organization and production alternative to the current hegemonic values within each specific stage of capitalist development; boosting, in various places in the world, multiple communitarian experiences based on anarchism and on various trends of utopian socialism (De Matheus, 2013).

In a third moment, as of 1945 and up to the end of 1960's decade, the appearance of a new wave of intentional communities linked to the hippie movement is noticed (Salamanca and Silva, 2015). It is then when the name "intentional communities" appeared from a network of communities in the United States. A number of them followed the model proposed by behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner, in his novel *Walden Two*, published for the first time in 1948 (Skinner, 1968)² and which presents a utopian vision of society based on applied behavioral analysis (Altus and Morris, 2009). At this point, it is distinguished that most of the modern utopias were critiques to the structure of occidental society, and looked for personal values, authenticity and individuality (Ardila, 2004).

A fourth moment is after the 1990's decade, when a new increase is noticed in the creation and dissemination of intentional communities oriented to sustainability, by means of agroecological practices such as permaculture. These new practices comprise hybrid techniques, in which traditional know-hows and technologies proper to modernity articulate around agriculture (De Matheus, 2013). These communities have been called ecovillages and mainly respond to the concern on sustainable development and promotion of environmentally friendly values, behaviors and practices (Wang *et al.*, 2015).

As of 1995, some of these initiatives articulated in a network called: global ecovillage network (GEN), grouping more than 14,000 active initiatives at international level with presence in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. Such network has had a wide scope by virtue of the Internet, which is noticed in a large number of web sites, blogs, printed publications, and their presence in social media (Pereira, 2013). Workshops, visits, courses, products and services are offered to an audience increasingly interested in their proposals and they even articulate with local networks.

Owing to an increase in these initiatives at global level, we recognized a fifth moment in literature, which considers ecovillages communities part

2 Three books have used the word "Walden" as a main title to refer to a conception of life based on a psychologic utopia to rethink society and human nature: Thoreau in 1854, Skinner, 1948, and Ardila, 1979.

of a global social movement, verified in a repertoire of actions and at various participation levels in their collective action.

It is noticed that the modes of participation depend on “the sort of link and the degree at which participants involve in the movement” (Pereira, 2013: 405). Roles are diverse and the range may involve the founder residents, partners, students, volunteers, visitors and clients. In this way, the various roles, adding to describing the link of participants with the ecovillage, speak of their relationship with their environment (Pereira, 2013).

Furthermore, practices that allow, from a symbolic standpoint, strengthening cooperation regarding the shared project and developing collective identity, articulating networks and creating education spaces to transmit tools and establishing models of local and virtual work are noticed. Frequently, these networks have an international nature and the education spaces enable, at once, transmitting a discourse that has as an end to visualize, educate and show other ways of life (Pereira, 2013).

A sixth and final moment identified in the literature considers intentional communities as productive instances for sustainable development, since they have been recognized as sustainability practices by UN FAO and have become spaces for sustainable tourism (Rajović and Bulatovic, 2015), and other applications from the world of production (for example, production of clean energies, organic agriculture, use of water, etc.), even understanding it as an instance of rural tourism (Kiefferk, 2018).

In this regard, critiques have been expressed about the material limitations that such settlements deal with to accomplish social transformation, owing to its imbrication with capitalist society, which at once, is the object of criticism (Fotopoulos, 2000). In this way, a varied range of projects that include communities with forms of undercover trade, that is to say, attempts to make the modernity project more benevolent, especially its economic dimension. In other scenarios, they behave as rupture spaces with the surrounding normality, in which an alternative spatial order is expressed and diversity is practiced. Following Cenzatti (2008), intentional communities may be located in some changing position of a continuum between invisibility, marginalization, reaffirmation of the difference and co-opting, via a controlled insertion of bodies in the machinery of capitalist production.

According to the various moments of development of intentional communities, it is possible to notice that their historic function has changed. In all the cases, common elements are recognized: there is an interpellation to a hegemonic society into which they insert and respond to with new

society designs accomplished in daily territorial practices. It is worth distinguishing that a number of studies point at the important role such communities have in the utopian design of societies that intend to be fairer and more equitable between members, as well as the value boost from the utopia that drives them to consolidate their transformation proposals.

A central issue that marks a counterpoint between the community experiences of previous decades with contemporary intentional communities has to do with their attempts to make a better world, a series of communication tools has been deployed, a situation that is not exclusive to them, but which in other contexts their use is associated with the possibility to generate contents suitable to the interests and necessities, in an exercise of communicative citizenry (Cerbino and Belotti, 2016). These contents may be generated in various formats to be disseminated over the Internet (for example, texts, images and audiovisual materials) with a view to influencing, either from emotional contagion or congeniality, on the identity of other people (Serrano-Puche, 2016).

The above implies awareness of the use of media, and the influence of these on people, as well as the possibility to disseminate other forms of social organization, fairer and more democratic (Pérez-Latre, 2004). That is to say, the mediated communication has an educational purpose aimed at social change, expressing aspirations, needs and forms of organization to reach goals by means of a dialogic process that generates knowledge and action (Barranquero, 2007). Such expressions would configure a discourse as a social practice articulated with the ideologic configuration of society (Giménez, 1981).

In this context, utopian intentional communities use the Internet to project current alternatives that allow thinking, experimenting, and disseminating other forms of society, other forms of being individuals and other practices from the local to the whole of globality. From the above and verifying the use of mediated communication as a complement that enables us to access the everydayness of the people partaking of utopian intentional communities, the present study intends to find out the discourses of intentional communities in Chile. It is of interest to focus on Chilean cases, as this country is considered a paradigmatic case, which in the early 1980's experienced the setting up of one the most radical economic liberalizations in the world, as it freed all the power of the market (Borzutzky, 2005).

The rationalist science of technocratic orientation and individual autonomy are the core of this development model, which acquire a full

expression over the final quarter of the last century (Portes and Roberts, 2005). In a situation of a generated liberalization of the forces of the market, the individual expands their levels of autonomy and a particularly fragile, narcissistic, schizoid and uprooted I emerges (Dávila and Domínguez, 2012). In such context, it is where this work contributes with the study of discourses that prevail in communication, and which deliberately look for a different development and move toward more sustainable and humane ways of life.

These groups reassert the community as an instance of local empowering and resilience to channel social bonds, lifestyles, identity referents and social alternatives (Juffe, 2014; Lamana, 2013). The utopian experiments carried out by various communities are verified as instances of community life experimentation and education for the rest of society, an issue in which one finds the relevance to think of their discourses as instances that announce other possible worlds, but which at once coexist in tension with contemporary society.

Methodology

To examine the discourses of utopian intentional communities in Chile, we made a distinction between ecologic, spiritual and religious intentional communities. Authors such as Choi (2008) work with similar distinctions to account for the heterogeneity of the phenomenon and distinguish the main lines that guide community actions. The literature shows that religious and spiritual boost informs the utopian construction from the past, while the ecologic drive becomes particularly strong after the last quarter of the XX century. These three central boosts combine and recombine differently, and give rise to the existing diversity. Following a case design (Stake, 1999), the present study utilized two qualitative techniques to enquire on the discourses of intentional communities in Chile: a document revision (Vasilachis, 2006) and interviews with leaders of community initiatives.

The strategy of documental revision was oriented by search criteria that enabled assessing the dimension of the phenomenon of intentional communities in Chile to later focus our fieldwork on three study cases. The selection criteria were: primary documents (physical or on the web) that advertise and publicly present communities that define themselves as intentional, which articulate a discourse from ecologic, religious, and cooperation notions or beliefs as an alternative to contemporary society, and that are ongoing projects at least up to 2017. In this first step, 49 communities were identified at national level.

Secondly, by means of a theoretically intentional sampling (Valles, 1999), three communities that illustrate religious, spiritual and ecologic drives were chosen. The selected cases try to graph the diversity of intentional communities in Chile. To deepen into the nuances of each case under study, and given our interest in the respondents' discourse, three thematically-oriented open interviews were held, which had the format of a conversation and allowed deepening into the enquired topics (Valles, 1999).

Such interviews had a variable duration (two-three hours), as they were held at various moments during fieldwork with the leaders/spokespersons of the enquired initiatives. As an ethical consideration, the names of communities and participants have been changed so as to preserve their confidentiality (Noreña *et al.*, 2012). Table 1³ shows the characteristics of such communities.

The methodology to respond to our goal was discourse analysis. In this case, the discourse is conceived as an institutionalized social practice that not only remit to intersubjective situations and roles in the act of communication, but also to a preexisting cultural premise, related to a system of representation and values, whose articulation in society defines its ideological formation (Giménez, 1981). According to this, the words of the respondents from the researched communities are understood as the particular manifestation of the discourse, as a process of their linguistic activity; in this case, the contents of (physical and electronic) documents and the very words of the participants.

Operatively, the analysis pays attention to the textual information explicitly declared by the respondents, either in their documents (web sites) or in their declarations in the interviews, examining three discursive axes: the self, society and their practices. The analysis procedures at first identified central arguments by means of an open coding exercise of the discourses, with a view to textually describing "who is spoken about" and "what is said", obtaining a preliminary classification on the basis of document analysis.

Later, such analysis paid attention to the identification of axes in the discourse of the in-depth interviews, which focused on recognizing the arguments by means of the similarity criterion (Giménez, 1981) with a view to briefly revealing the global meaning in its extension and representativity regarding the topic under analysis in each of the cases.

3 All tables are at the end of the article, in the Annex (Editor's note).

Discourses of three intentional communities in Chile

The discourses of the selected communities in their documents (web) and in the interviews, depict the heterogeneity of the phenomenon under study and expose information of great relevance regarding the analysis axes: vision of society, of themselves and their practices. By vision of society, it is understood the sentences that the public discourse of each intentional community considers negative in current society and those that expose fundamental elements proposing a different social design, which configure their utopian proposal (see Table 2).

In all the cases, the communities' vision of society keeps a relation with nature as a central node of the proposals. However, there are variations in each of them. *Comunidad del Bosque* [Community of the Forest] understands the relation with nature as a stage that has to be respectfully intervened to create production spaces for the benefit of the communities. *Comunidad del Río* [Community of the River] understands the relationship with nature as a spiritual instance to connect with the natural and human potential.

For its part, *Comunidad del Valle* [Community of the Valley] assumes a relation with nature for a purpose of services associated with the spiritual connection with a deity, and health care by means of food, physical exercise and spirituality. There is also concurrence in the use of technical and traditional know-hows to make a diagnosis of society to articulate viable proposals. In the first case, there is a discourse associated with sustainability; in the second, a relation with ancestral spiritual knowledge, together with therapeutic discourse, where the self becomes a protagonist. In the third case, a discourse associated with sustainability, deep psychology and religion is noticed.

As regards the vision of themselves, the study cases enunciate in their discourse the distinctive characteristics of the participants of each community, expressing roles, motivations and purposes referring to the self (see Table 3). The vision of the self, presented by the studied communities, underscores the importance of links of familiarity. This is noticed in the descriptions of the community, which evince closeness among their members. In the case of *Comunidad del Bosque*, there are other roles differenced from the rest of experiences: the role of experts and examples of a good life are central for a characterization of themselves, as they validate their knowledge by means of certified technical specialization.

Comunidad del Río also presents a nuance, acquiring the role of "guardians of mother earth", taking a spiritual relationship with the

environment that has practical implications with its own ecological preservation. For its part, *Comunidad del Valle* presents itself as the facilitator of a process of ecologic and religious awareness by means of the care of the body, mind and spirit. In all of the cases, the attribution of roles that position the community members as agents of social transformation from their own experience and the transformation of the self is noticed.

As regards the practices expressed by the intentional communities, these exposed material concretions of their lifestyle as a social experiment, whose goal is to show evidence on the possibilities of realization. Not only is this textually expressed, also in the words of the respondents; a repertoire of local actions that try to display their initiative to other individuals is noticed (see Table 4). In the practices declared by the participants of the communities, there are some shared elements: a respectful link with nature is observed, nature is still the focus of attention and conservation for the three cases. The differentiation elements are noticed when what this community-nature relation allows in each case is revealed.

For *Comunidad del Bosque*, the various practices declared head toward education and the dissemination of a model of society oriented by productive sustainability, the community space is recognized as a place that allows collectively learning, and the web as a useful strategy to attract people interested in the transition to sustainability.

The practices expressed by *Comunidad del Río* are oriented to preserve nature, small cultivation initiatives, the discovery and evolution of the self by means of practices and rituals. For its part, *Comunidad del Valle* declares practices of devotion, service and respect for the other. To accomplish this, they see themselves as a temple that serves as well as a place for sightseeing; they promote vegetarian foods and the practice of yoga.

In each of the cases under study, there is a mediation of money for other people to partake of the activities carried out by these communities; an issue they explicitly declare. However, fair trade is promoted, also they set up some alternative forms of local economy. *Comunidad del Valle* practices a vision of austerity that places money second in the mediation of everyday relationships.

To sum up, the results make it evident that the ecological community (*Comunidad del Bosque*) strives for sustainability and community self-management. The proposal speaks of individuals responsible for initiating the transition toward sustainability in their surroundings. Their practices consist in producing the necessary resources to ensure autonomy in various spheres of everyday life such as food, energy, etcetera.

For its part, in the spiritual community (*Comunidad del Río*), the vision of society is based on support and care among its members, searching for spirituality and more sustainable forms of life. The proposal is an individual with selfcare duties, concern for their health and the evolution of their consciousness. Practices articulate in function of various therapies they seldom perform in scheduled events to entertain the members and friends of the community.

Finally, the religious community (*Comunidad del Valle*) is based on a lifestyle inspired by a mystical-transcendental relationship with nature and ancestors; the participants follow a purpose superior to that of individuals. The distinguished practices take place in function of devotion, rituals and symbolisms of dissemination and continuation of spirituality.

Conclusions

The main finding of this study is the communicative intention of the different communities to publicly expose the meaning they provide the community with and by doing so, their proposal of utopian society. Despite the literature has pointed it out (Pereira, 2013), their discourses serve to introduce their values and disseminate their practices. For this purpose, the daily experiences offered by community initiatives complemented with virtual environments that intend to show their activities to people interested in the relationship with nature and the positive transformation of society. In each case, there is clear information that allows, by and large, understanding the proposal of each community. This information has an educational role for the visitor, *in situ* or online, which in addition to informing, provides guidance for those interested in involving and making the access of visitors and volunteers who want to become part of the social design they propose easy.

The discourse of the three intentional communities under study seems to transversally respond to the environmental crisis, whose inception is attributed to capitalist society and foresees devastating consequences for the sustainability of new generations (Gaona, 2000; Leff *et al.*, 2002). This reaction is not isolated, for during the history of Latin America, in particular in Chile, the existence of various social movements standing out as collective projects that strive for the wellbeing of popular majorities has been verified (Zibechi, 2007).

Such movements have been complemented by new forms of response devised in intentional communities reduced in number. However, in the cases presented, the fact that, apart from nuances, the goal stated in

the discourses of these initiatives is to create a new lifestyle in community, try new models of society and build a space where personal projects materialize, replacing, with all the political implications that this may entail, the old Latin Americanist utopias with others that search for individual reinvention amidst community life.

From the discourse of intentional communities, it is verified that they introduce themselves as heterotopic spaces, that is to say, different but integrated into the society which they respond to (De Matheus, 2013). They show hybridity regarding the characteristics of contemporary society, articulating discursive elements opposed to its hegemonic organization, based on the project of modernity, in interaction with discourses and practices of great importance for its functioning; a hybrid exercise of resistance and functionality with capitalist society.

This is noticed in the interdiscursive practices they articulate in the various visions exposed in the study cases. An element that is transversal to the initial distinction of the communities is the use of scientific-technical discourses, understood as disciplinary knowledge proper to science with technocratic orientation. These are utilized to support the various analyzed dimensions, and depending on the case, they are contradictorily articulated with traditional or ancestral know-hows and are utilized for the purposes of the community.

In the case of the ecologic community (*Comunidad del Bosque*), the technical discourse of sustainability and agroecology persists, which, at once, is transversal in the three cases. In the spiritual community (*Comunidad del Río*), distinguishable are the therapeutic discourses of expansion of consciousness, friendship and familiarity; while in the religious community (*Comunidad del Valle*), the traditional know-hows of religion take relevance as guidance for the truth.

Another important aspect is the territorial setting and the permeability of these communities regarding their contexts. This is noticed in their practices that specifically support by the discourse of a cooperative education model, oriented to the dispute on the design of the ideal society. This is further complicated by adding the virtual space, where mediated communication on the Internet is a central point in the visibility and promotion of the proposals of each community. With the use of Internet, the articulation of networks and the internationalization of proposals in a heterogeneous discourse projected at global scale are distinguished.

In this sense, it has been noticed that mediated communication, used by this sort of communities, has enabled distinguishing the potential

change in society by means of carrying out collaborative projects in various latitudes in the world (Pereira, 2013). At once, however, they account for a connection with dynamics proper to the neoliberal society to which they respond. The various experiences reveal proposals for being in the world that tension the dominant rationality of Chilean society. Alternative visions for a consumption society, of competence and individualism, are proposed. Practices that intend to tension modern rationality and demonstrate the viability of living differently and, above all, of relating to nature in other forms.

However, these intentional initiatives also show a reconfiguration of the community, in which the individual becomes central in a collective project aimed for the development and/or evolution of personal capabilities, which, in spite of nuances, contribute with an idealist project of societal transformation. Without a doubt, these communities offer the possibility of analyzing the ways of being an individual in a fissured societal project, which, founded upon modern rationality, displays symptoms of depletion and propitiates breakages in the being and in coexistence.

On this point, we agree with Rogel and Aguado (2000) on the impossibility of the discourse of sustainable development, for example to attack the suppositions of the process of capital valorization and with this, the impossibility of sustainable development to overcome the project of modernity. An issue that resonates in this sort of communities, in spite of “reincorporating the role of the subject as a producer of meaning in the process of interaction with nature from an ethical and aesthetical standpoint” (Rogel and Aguado, 2000: 189).

Concurring with the above, the literature has started to point at the emergence of community spaces that, paradoxically, enable the development of a utopian project focused on the individual (Zunino and Huliñir, 2017). The discourses of the three communities described account for a proposal of a new, empowered, reinvented subject capable of producing social transformations from individual change. This sort of personal empowerment is possible due to the knowledge and care of the self in a hybrid movement that allows transiting to other society models in the security of capitalist society. This is noticed in the practices declared by the communities, acting as critical individuals before the demands of production and consumption from contemporary society, as well as forms of relating to nature that ensure conservation.

However, these experiences are mediated by practices proper to the privatization of nature, which also make it a spectacle (De Matheus *et al.*,

2017), while they disregard variables such as social class as a condition for materialization. Finally, we notice the relevance of starting new studies on the characteristics of the subjects involved in such community initiatives and their hybrid practices in the production/reproduction of the project of modernity and its neoliberal everydayness.

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Annex

Table 1

Selected intentional communities

Name	Sort	Stated perspective
Comunidad del Bosque	Ecologic	Pragmatic, transition to sustainability and permaculture.
Comunidad del Río	Spiritual	Friendship, expansion of consciousness and sustainability.
Comunidad del Valle	Religious	Consciousness, service, ecology and tourism.

Source: own elaboration.

Table 2

Vision of society

Community	Public discourses (documents)	Respondents' discourses (interviews)
Comunidad del Bosque	Criticism: society as an industrial machine that harms the environment and people. Proposal: it should be transformed into resilient, productive and sustainable human settlements.	"Being friendly toward the environment, generating health with our own work with the earth and the production of healthful foods and producing social health, I would say, with a good relationship with our neighbors, with our communities. Valuing the work people do in the field and valuing such rural life" (CdB, P1).
Comunidad del Río	Criticism: society supported on conditions of life that make people sick, driving them away from their own awareness. Proposal: a society articulated by a harmonious link between people willing to support one another in order to evolve.	"It is a consumerist society that makes us compete and develop shallow relationships [...] we should be aware of the damage to the environment, of the damage to our ancestors and look for respectful forms of coexisting in order to evolve..." (CdR, P2).
Comunidad del Valle	Criticism: Society supported on materialistic relations that prevent awareness and harmonious coexistence. Proposal: a society oriented by a superior-being consciousness, spiritual values around serving others and harmonious coexistence with nature without animal suffering.	"We live in a material world based on consumption and idolatry of material possessions; it is world of exploitation. Instead, leave all that behind and base on service, not exploitation, respecting every living creature and... the planet" (CdV, P3).

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3

Vision of themselves

Community	Public discourses (documents)	Respondents' discourses (interviews)
Comunidad del Bosque	They defined themselves in function of the familiarity bonds recognized as an instance of good living and sustainability. Supported on professional and technical knowledge to appear as experts.	"We are a family, a community that wants to live well in the rural zone [...] we consider ourselves a live learning community, a demonstrative center [...]... be the change" (CdB, P1).
Comunidad del Río	They defined themselves as members of a group of friends living in contact with nature and offering a space for personal and spiritual development.	"We are a group of friends that gathers to share and express love in this world that is running out of places to meet and care for the one beside me" (CdR, P2).
Comunidad del Valle	They defined themselves as devotees and willing to serve. They attribute themselves the role of protectors of the environment and facilitators of spiritual awareness.	"A temple and an ecologic community that intends to serve by means of spiritual life and care for the environment" (CdV, P3).

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4

Practices

Community	Public discourses (documents)	Respondents' discourses (interviews)
Comunidad del Bosque	Technical advice on sustainable design and permaculture, as well as learning experiences: courses, internships, diploma courses, and a link with an international university. The training instances are charged according to the market, there are payment options for those who need them or as voluntary work.	"Many different things are made, all at a petty scale to be managed by people not machines [...]. There is a mission that goes beyond producing [foods], we see the challenge of the time, many people are looking for new ways and here we have the resources and possibility to experience and share such learning" (CdB, P1).
Comunidad del Río	The members have reunions to foster friendship and experience various therapies for personal evolution and of the place: family constellations, Buddhist meditation, permaculture, etc.	"We gather from time to time, I look after and protect this place, cultivate the land; now, the soil is resting [...]. We make a number of things, in the past we had a Buddhist meditation group, now we are making a nice work with family constellations [...]" (CdR, P2).
Comunidad del Valle	Celebrations are held for visitors with a view to transmitting their vision of society. They base the meetings on spiritual ceremonies to worship a superior being and giving away vegetarian food.	"Every Sunday we throw a party that is a ceremony with chants and mantras. We serve vegetarian food when there are visitors [...] sometimes there is a yoga workshop and other activities. People know and come to share" (CdV, P3).

Source: own elaboration.

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