

South-South Dialogues around Buen Vivir- Centric Design

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Diana Albarrán González

University of Auckland

Angus Donald Campbell

University of Auckland



Using a dialogic methodology, in this article we discuss our doctoral research experiences and positionalities in two different contexts from the Global South, working with historically marginalized communities. The first voice, originating in Mexico, explored decolonizing design and Mayan textile knowledges in collaboration with a women-led collective in the highlands of Chiapas. The second voice, which originated in South Africa, collaboratively explored technological innovation by small-scale urban farmers. The dialogue reflects on *uno con el todo*, *colectividad*, resource(ful), pluriversal, and equilibrium as Buen Vivir-Centric design guiding principles to reflect on our studies. We discuss the learnings and transformations in our design research from dominant approaches towards Indigenous and endogenous ways of knowing, being, and making.

Keywords

Conversations

Global South

Collective well-being

Duoethnography

Dialogic methodologies

Diana Albarrán González —Ph.D. in Māori and Indigenous Development, Auckland University of Technology. After graduating with a Bachelor of Industrial Design from Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, she earned a Master's degree in Design Management from Universitat Politècnica de València. She is a Native Latin American researcher from Mexico, a mestiza of Nahua and P'urhepecha descent seeking to decolonize her own subjectivities and (re)connect with Indigeneity. As a researcher and practitioner, she is interested in Buen Vivir-Centric design, dignity, collective well-being, textiles, crafts, embodiment, and creativity. She is the Director of Undergraduate Design from the Creative Arts and Industry faculty at the University of Auckland/*Waipapa Taumata Rau*. Some of her latest publications include 'Corazonar: Weaving Values into the Heart of Design Research' (PDC 2022, Vol. 2); 'Sjalel Lekil Kuxlejal: Mayan Weaving and Zapatismo in Design Research' (with Taller Malacate, In *Pivot Conference Proceedings 2021: Dismantling/Reassembling*); and 'Towards a Buen Vivir-Centric Design: Decolonising Artisanal Design with Mayan Weavers from the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico' (Ph.D. thesis, Auckland University of Technology).

Angus Donald Campbell —Ph.D. in Development Studies, University of Johannesburg. He holds a Master's degree in Industrial Design and a Bachelor of Technology degree from Technikon Witwatersrand. He is the Director of Design and Deputy Head of School at Elam School of Fine Arts & Design/*Te Waka Tūhura*, University of Auckland/*Waipapa Taumata Rau*. His university lecturing, practice-based research, and freelance design experience are focused on local and sustainable innovation at the complex nexus of social, technological, and ecological systems. Some of his latest publications include 'Designing Development: An Exploration of Technology Innovation by Small-Scale Urban Farmers in Johannesburg' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Johannesburg); 'A Potential Difference Model for Educating Critical Citizen Designers: The Case Study of the Beegin Appropriate Beekeeping Technology System' (with I. L. Brown; in *Educating Citizen Designers in Southern Africa*, Sunmedia, 2018); and 'Lay Designers: Grassroots Innovation for Appropriate Change' (*Design Issues*, Vol. 33, Issue 1).

South-South Dialogues around Buen Vivir-Centric Design

Diana Albarrán González

University of Auckland | *Waipapa Taumata Rau*
Elam School of Fine Arts & Design | *Te Waka Tūhura*
Auckland, New Zealand | *Aotearoa*
d.albarran@auckland.ac.nz

Angus Donald Campbell

University of Auckland | *Waipapa Taumata Rau*
Elam School of Fine Arts & Design | *Te Waka Tūhura*
Auckland, New Zealand | *Aotearoa*
angus.campbell@auckland.ac.nz

INTRODUCTION: FRAMING SOUTH-SOUTH DIALOGUES

This article is a dialogic exploration between two authors seeking to contribute to South-South dialogues about collaboration with historically marginalized communities — in our particular cases, in the contexts of Mexico and South Africa. As a methodological approach, duoethnography (Norris, 2008; Norris et al., 2016) allowed us to collectively reflect on our doctoral journeys and positionalities, where the process of seeing through the ‘other’ fostered the reconceptualization of ourselves and our cultural worlds, in turn impacting our research approaches. In this sense, we become the subjects of study focusing on the learnings and transformations through the constructed dialogue. In this first dialogue, we discuss our positionalities and use the guiding principles of the Buen Vivir-Centric design proposal from one of our theses, as the focus and conversation guidance.

In the last decades, the concept of *Buen Vivir* has grown in strength as a decolonial stance in Abya Yala (Benton Zavala, 2018; Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2016). Solón (2017) mentions this is a living practice linked to two specific Indigenous Andean cultures: Quechua, in which the concept is called *Sumaq Kawsay*, and Aymara, in which it is termed *Suma Qamaña*. Buen Vivir is a system of knowledge, practices, and organization from *pueblos originarios* (Indigenous peoples) in South America, integrated into the constitution of Ecuador in 2008, and in that of Bolivia in 2009. Nevertheless, Indigenous people from different parts of Abya Yala have life philosophies aligned to *Buen Vivir*, such as *Küme mongen* from Mapuche in Chile and Argentina, *Utz k'aslemal* from Mayan K'iche and Kaqchikel people in Guatemala, *Yeknemillis* from Nahua people, and *Lekil Kuxlejal* from Mayan Tsotsil and Tseltal people in Mexico. In Spanish, *Buen Vivir* serves as an overarching term referring to a simple but good communal quality of life, and in connection with the natural environment. Gudynas and Acosta (2011)

stated that *Buen Vivir* offers an opportunity to build a globally diverse society sustained on the harmonious co-existence of diverse human beings with nature.

INITIAL DIALOGUE

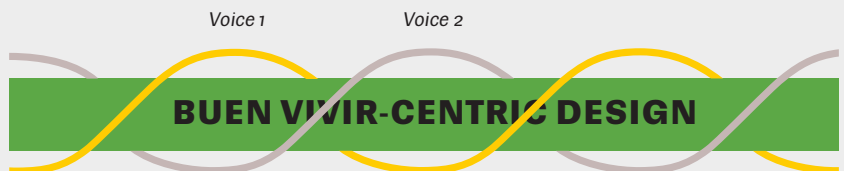
Our initial conversations on *Buen Vivir*, and our previous work on decolonizing design, made the connections between our design research experiences and communities in the Global South evident. At the same time, we identified the shared interest of steering away from dominant design paradigms and looking into alternatives (Akama, 2021; Albarrán González, 2020b; Botero et al., 2018; St John & Akama, 2021), in order to avoid paradigms that can be instrumental in perpetuating modern imperialism and the continued marginalization and oppression of people in developed and developing countries (Abdulla et al., 2019; Campbell, 2013). The dialogic methodology of duoethnography, as a participatory and emancipatory approach (Norris et al., 2016), allowed us to explore the connections between *Buen Vivir* and design in our doctoral design research journeys and the long-term impacts on our design approaches (Figure 1). It is important to note that we both had distinct positionalities in the approach to our studies, and hence our dialogue reflects a contrasting language — this may seem opposite to the consistency of academic writing. In this sense, it should be noted that by clearly positioning and contrasting ourselves, we “do not strive to impose conclusions on readers; rather (...) encourage readers to juxtapose their stories with the ones in the printed text” (Norris & Sawyer, 2016, p. 10). We invite the readers of this article to recall their own experiences, reconceptualize their research approaches and, hence, also contribute to this South-South dialogue towards a *Buen Vivir*-Centric design.

1 *Mestizo* is a classification from the caste system imposed by the Spaniards in their colonies, marking the person’s mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage. In Mexico, it became the dominant identity assimilating Indigenous and Afro-descendant populations (Navarrete, 2016).

Positioning Voice 1: Weaving Identities and Mayan Textiles

I am a designer, researcher, and craftivist from the Global South, born and raised in Chiapas, Mexico, and currently living in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Although I was raised as a *mestiza*,¹ I identify as Native Latin American in the diaspora to honor my Indigenous ancestry and heritage from Nahua and P’urhépecha people, seeking to break the homogenization of the Latin American identity. My mixed

Figure 4: Dialogic methodology around *Buen Vivir*-Centric design. Source: The authors.



Dialogic methodology

ancestry, identity, and ethnicity, together with my diasporic position, locate me in the in-between, the liminal, the borders, especially in academic spaces. I am an outsider-within as a person “caught between groups of unequal power” (Collins, 1999, p. 85), writing from the *Nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1993; Scott & Tuana, 2017) as a border space in transformation, where writing is about being in your body, not your head. This shifting in-between spaces of intersected identities has led to constant reflections on how my power, privilege, politics, and access (3P-A) (Albarrán González, 2020a) change in relation to my location and perceived identities, in particular, ethnicity and gender in academic spaces. Textiles have been an important conduit to make sense of my identity, not only by wearing my cultural heritage, but also, to understand the way our identities are transformed in our lifetime. Echoing ideas of Rivera Cusicanqui (2010), I perceive our identities as a woven textile formed by threads with distinct colors and materials, creating different patterns and textures. We integrate new threads and modify the patterns according to our life journeys, particularly as diasporic people of mixed heritage (Albarrán González, 2020a; Albarran Gonzalez & Taller Malacate, 2021).

Positioning Voice 2: Afrikan Lay Design

I am a designer, educator, and researcher from the Global South, born and raised in Johannesburg, South Africa, and currently living in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand. My mother was born in South Africa to British parents and grew up in Mozambique, where her father recruited migrant labor for the South African mines. My father was born in Glasgow, with clan genealogy back to Argyll — he spent much of his youth in the Isle of Skye from where his mother originated. He moved to South Africa in his 30s with little knowledge of the complexities of the world he was entering. I was brought up in a ‘colonial’ household, relatively sheltered from the horrors of apartheid taking place in the world beyond our car window, school, and garden fence. Through my education, I gained more insight into the world around me, and became a designer focused on exploring local approaches to design that were authentically interwoven into the complex post-apartheid South Africa. As a white male with colonial heritage, I had to educate myself and constantly remain self-reflexive in my position of privilege and power (Nelson & Wright, 1995). My design research bridges the discipline of design and the field of development studies: the critical history and practice of development towards post-development thinking became an important rudder in my reflexivity (Escobar, 2018; Rist, 2008), with design playing a practical role in supporting the actioning of positive change (Manzini, 2015).

OUR DOCTORAL RESEARCH EXPERIENCES

Voice 1:

My doctoral research echoed the notions of an outsider-within shifting positions of power in unequal spaces. While the field research and my family are located in the Mayan land of Chiapas, a place with a rich pre-colonial and contemporary textile tradition, I was a migrant on a scholarship hosted by the Māori and Indigenous faculty in a university in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, influencing my views on decolonization and Indigenous knowledge. The research was done in collaboration with Mayan Tsotsil and Tzeltal weavers from 'Malacate Taller Experimental Textil' (Malacate Experimental Textile Workshop, from now on, *mis compañeras*) aiming to contribute to the decolonization of artisanal textiles and the recognition of Indigenous design, where relationality surpasses academic constraints. An example of this is the integration of family and community, not only by *mis compañeras*, but also by bringing my family to the field research to present myself as a mother, a daughter, and a woman with family roots in Chiapas (Figure 2). Our relationships are still ongoing.

Figure 2: Field research by one of the authors with her family (mother and daughter), doing textile tasks. Photography: D. Albarrán González, 2018. Source: Albarrán González, 2020b.



Voice 2:

My doctoral study emerged from my active relationship with marginalized urban farming communities in Johannesburg, in a social action project called iZindaba Zokudla, isiZulu for ‘conversations about the food we eat together’ (iZindaba Zokudla, 2022) (Figure 3). My study challenged Eurocentric conceptions of expert design, through an exploration of technology innovation by local small-scale urban farmers (Campbell, 2021). It focused on supporting approaches to design that were decolonial, endogenous, indigenous, and authentically situated in the complex contextual realities of local lay designers (Campbell, 2017). The intention was to highlight more appropriate approaches to innovation management in the current National System of Innovation in South Africa. The choice of terminology, therefore, drew from the norms of development and innovation, to join the conversation in a way that was not foreign to the norms. Most of the farmers who participated were marginalized Black urban farmers; I, therefore, had to be hyper-aware of the benefits I might gain from a doctorate versus the benefits the farmers might accrue from participating in it (Smith, 2012). Although the long-term goal is policy change, in the aftermath of apartheid, all the farmers noted that the connections that they had fostered through the project led to significant positive gains in their social capital (Malan, 2015; Malan & Campbell, 2014). The deep relationships developed through this study continue today, despite my physical disconnection from Afrika.

Figure 3: One of the authors at an iZindaba Zokudla Farmers Lab, demonstrating a basic DIY hail shelter, University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus. Photography: Peter Harrison, 2015. Courtesy of Peter Harrison.



MAYAN TEXTILES AND THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF BUEN VIVIR-CENTRIC DESIGN: OUR DIALOGUE

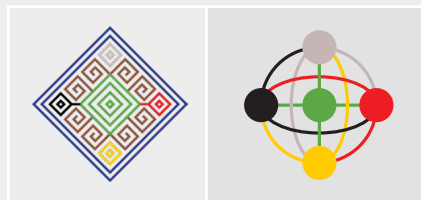
Mayan textiles are a reflection of their cosmology and knowledge, directly linked to their *Lekil Kuxlejal* (good life), the *Buen Vivir* from the Mayan Tsotsil and Tseltal people (Paoli, 2003; Schlittler, 2012). The *Me Luch*, a diamond-shaped pattern in the huipil² of Magdalenas/Aldama, represents the universe and the cardinal points of the Earth with a seed in the center (Quiroz Flores, 2018). From the seed, the sacred tree grows connecting the three realms: the world of the deceased, the world of the living, and the world of the deities. The symbolic value of *Me Luch* is a pivotal source for the conceptualization of Buen Vivir-Centric design, as shown in Table 1. Buen Vivir-Centric design emerges as an alternative to dominant design, an approach by and for the Global South based on Mayan textile knowledges (Figure 4). It provides guiding principles that respect the *autonomía*, self-determination, and dignity of communities, not as a set toolkit to be reproduced and reinterpreted by dominant design.³

The following sections introduce the guiding principles of Buen Vivir-Centric design, as a starting point for each voice to reflect on how the principles were manifested by the community we collaborated with during our doctoral journeys, and how this influenced our design approaches as design academics and beyond.

² The *huipil* (*huipilli* in Nahuatl) is a traditional garment worn by Indigenous women from central Mexico to Central America. There are many variations of this garment based on the origin of the Indigenous community.

³ For more information about the development of Buen Vivir-Centric design, see Albarrán González, 2020b.

Table 1: The Mayan cosmology in the *Me Luch* symbol as a metaphor for the Buen Vivir-Centric Design Framework.



Earth	Color	<i>Me Luch</i>	Buen Vivir-Centric Design	Characteristics	Focus
Centre	Green	Seed, Sacred tree	Uno con el todo	Mother Earth	Grounding
East	Red	Sunrise	Colectividad	Enlightenment, Warmth	Relationships
West	Black	Sunset	Resource(ful)	Bring darkness, potential conflict	
South	Yellow		Pluriversal	Diverse, many worlds	Balancing
North	White		Equilibrium	Dynamic movement	

Source: Albarrán González, 2020b.

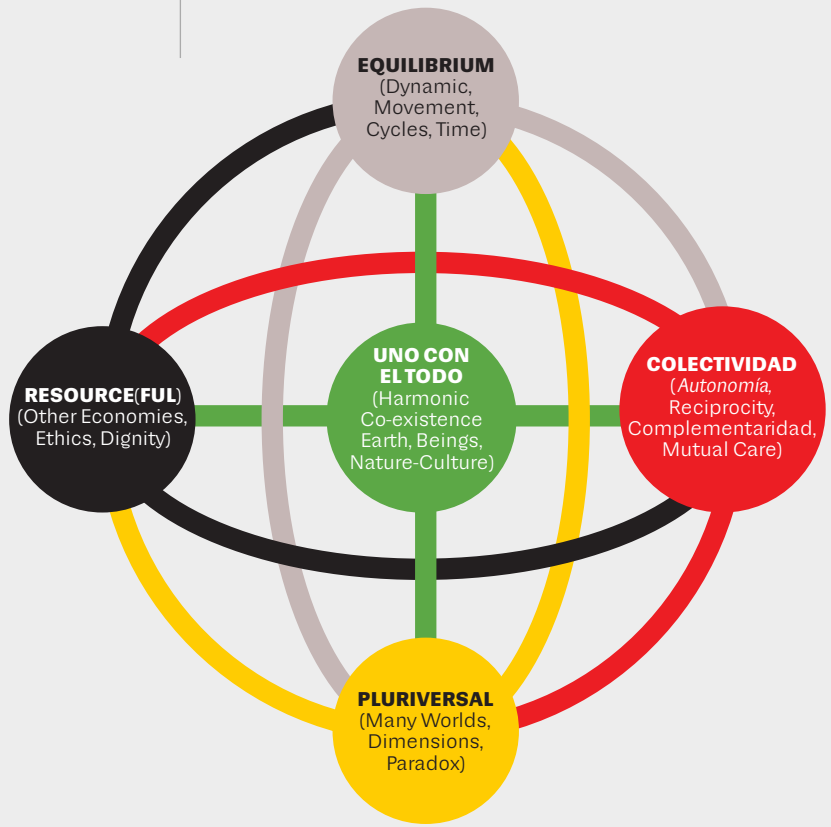


Figure 4: Buen Vivir-centric Design Guiding Principles. Source: Albarrán González, 2020b.

BUEN VIVIR-CENTRIC DESIGN

***Uno con el todo:* The Harmonious Co-existence of Diverse Beings, Nature-culture with Mother Earth**

Uno con el todo (One with the Whole) refers to the interconnection of beings, humans and non-humans, living and spiritual/intangible, with nature-culture as Mother Earth. This harmonious co-existence is directly linked to the collective and individual well-being of all beings, marking the strong interrelation of all the elements, where change in one area causes an effect in the complete system. Based on Indigenous worldviews, nature and culture are not conceptualized as separate entities, but as a unity in constant movement, contrasting notions from the Global North that establish divisive dichotomies, as Latour explains:

We [moderns] are the only ones who differentiate absolutely between Nature and Culture, between Science and Society, whereas in our eyes all the others — whether they are Chinese or Amerindians, Azande or Barouya — cannot really separate what is knowledge from what is society, what is sign from what is thing, what comes from Nature: as it is from what their cultures require. (1993, p. 99)

This nature and culture divide disconnects human beings from the natural environment, alienating us from our responsibilities of environmental protection and, consequently, affecting our well-being. Therefore, *uno con el todo* centers Mother Earth as a critical aspect for our survival, challenging capitalist, patriarchal, and white supremacist racial logics that undermine nature-culture.

Voice 1 on *uno con el todo*:

Malacate's foundation is strongly linked to artisanal textiles. While the main focus of their activities is related to the preservation, reactivation, protection, and dissemination of textiles, *mis compañeras* have a holistic approach to individual and collective well-being, towards a fair-dignified life. They organize different activities such as knowledge exchanges with other Indigenous groups from Abya Yala, workshops, and collective reflections on Indigenous peoples' rights, collective intellectual property, and legal protection against family violence, among others. At the same time, their close connection to their different territories gives another dimension to preservation in relation to nature. For example, they are reactivating the plantation of pre-colonial cotton called *coyuche*, and use traditional tools and techniques for spinning, like the *malacate*. During the field research, I could experience *uno con el todo* as an embodied experience during a backstrap loom apprenticeship session with a *compañera* and our families (Figure 5). I consider this experience a glimpse of the collective-wellbeing of *Lekil Kuxlejal*.

Figure 5: One of the authors during backstrap loom apprenticeship, glimpses of *Lekil Kuxlejal*. Photography: Master weaver's nephew, 2018. Courtesy of Master weaver's nephew.



Voice 2 on *uno con el todo*:

Most of the urban farmers I worked with were completely in awe of their ability to plant a seed and see the results of their labor a few months later. They loved their work, which most of them did not consider as hard labor, but rather a privilege for spending every day in nature. Due to their limited resources, many of them had regenerative agroecological approaches to their farming, using natural plant concoctions and co-planting as means of pest control. Some of the farmers were quite happy to allow birds and other animals to eat their produce as a form of 'giving back'. This give-and-take relationship with nature, despite their tenuous circumstances, provided a strongly differing perspective to traditional Western approaches to farming, which tend toward the idea of human domination and control of nature. Such an interconnected and holistic worldview is something that I constantly draw on in my own research, practice, and teaching, as I actively push back against many problematic patriarchal and individualistic norms we find in contemporary societies.

***Colectividad*: Autonomía, reciprocidad, complementariedad, mutual care**

Colectividad (collectivity) integrates concepts that are pivotal for harmonious relationships, like *autonomía*, reciprocity, *complementariedad* (complementarity), and mutual care. In Latin America, *autonomía* recognizes communal and relational dimensions as a "cultural, ecological, and political process that involves autonomous forms of existence and decision making" (Escobar, 2016, p. 198). For Mayan Tseltal people, there are five levels of *autonomía*: individual, family, community, community inside communities, and as Indigenous people, all of which are present in their *Lekil Kuxlejal* (Paoli, 2003). Based on these ideas, communities are capable of making decisions and customarily transforming their norms and traditions, (re)generating spaces and cultures and reclaiming the commons (Esteva, 2005, 2015).

Reciprocity is a bond of giving and receiving, a mutual exchange transcending notions of capitalist transactions. This concept is fundamental for Indigenous people, signaling gratitude, interdependence, and long-term relationships, not only between humans but also in connection to the environment. Gratitude is manifested by honoring relationships, actions, and places through acts of gift giving, offerings, and prayers to people, communities, and the environment.

Complementariedad established the integration of the parts as a whole complementing each other, which are not opposed nor exclusive. This is linked to reciprocity, where acts and events have a reciprocal action to complement the whole in constant balance with the cosmos, nature-culture, and beings (Walsh, 2017). This is fundamental for *Buen Vivir* as "to complement is to combine forces and optimize the potentialities of each one of us towards embracing the whole in

its multiple dimensions” (Solón, 2017, p. 189). In this sense, it recognizes that every individual has something to contribute toward the benefit of all.

Mutual care corresponds to relational-affective actions where individuals and communities care for each other. This goes beyond simply functional support based on personal interest and short-term goals, but is based on heartfelt connections and for the common good.

Voice 1 on *colectividad*:

Colectividad is evident in Malacate’s approach, considering their organization as a collective. They have created networks between weavers from different Indigenous groups like Tsotsil, Tseltal, and Tojolabal, located in different municipalities. During a co-design workshop with *mis compañeras*, the exploration of *Lekil Kuxlejal* reflected aspects of family-like teamwork as well as the affective dimension of the work, where weavers put their hearts and care into their creations. I integrate *colectividad* teachings from *mis compañeras* in different ways. For example, I actively seek to challenge the power imbalance between Indigenous knowledge and academic knowledge, considering that they complement each other horizontally. At the same time, I prioritize relational-affective actions, not only during the research but beyond.

Voice 2 on *colectividad*:

A significant capability limitation of many of the urban farmers was the impact that apartheid had on their social world. Many of them had family members who were farmers in the past, but the cycle of familial knowledge transfer had broken for all of them through apartheid land redistribution. This trauma of separation seemed to have forced most of the farmers into more individualistic approaches to their farming. However, when given the opportunity to connect with other farmers through iZindaba Zokudla, an upswell of reconnection took place. This led to local *colectividad* and communal action, way beyond our initial expectations for the project (Figure 6). Knowledge was freely shared among those who had learned through their own experiences, to support those who were just starting their urban farming journeys — this seemed to rekindle the Afrikan relational philosophy of *ubuntu*, where “a person is a person through other people” (Tutu, 2012, pp. 34–35). As the study played out, this conception of *colectividad* also extended into my connection with the farmers — what might have begun as a problematic unequal power relationship, was now one where I was no longer the expert, and in which the farmers’ abilities to thrive were intricately tied to my own.

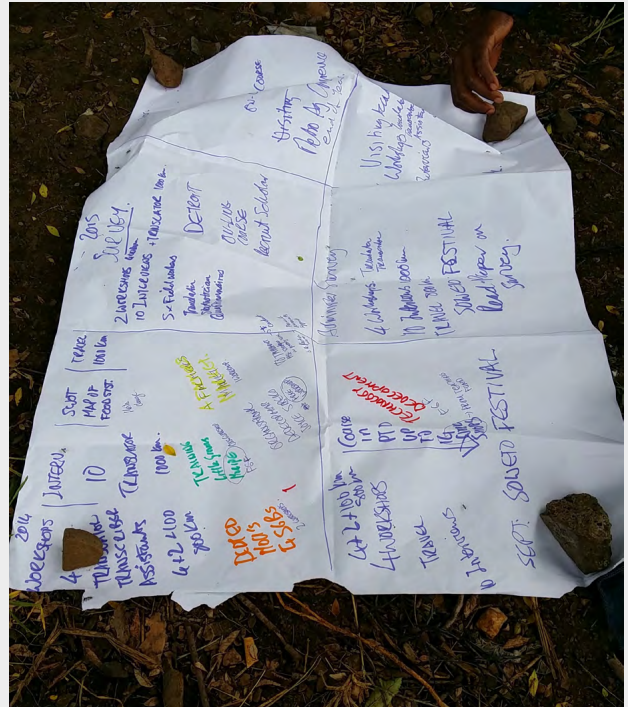


Figure 6: Collaborative discussion about urban farmers' needs in Soweto, Johannesburg. Photography: A. D. Campbell, 2013.

Resource(ful): Other Economies, Ethics, Dignity

Resource(ful) refers to having or creating resources as well as the act of being resourceful; in other words, being full of resources. As mentioned earlier, resources, or the lack of them, have the potential to create conflicts within communities. This aspect is strongly linked to *autonomía*, allowing communities self-determination to create and manage their own resources and capacities in *colectividad*. At the same time, it requires operating under other economies that do not follow the logic of the capital that depredates nature-culture, human-being, and life in general; in other words, against the 'capitalist hydra' (EZLN, 2017; Ríos Gordillo, 2017). Therefore, it is fundamental to prioritize the ethics and dignity of humans and nature-culture before the creation and distribution of resources.

Voice 1 on resource(ful):

Resource(ful) entails trading under alternative economies that do not follow the logic of the capital and market. In the case of Malacate, *mis compañeras* operate under a social and solidary economy, where trading textiles is a way to achieve a fair-dignified life. In this sense, solidarity is manifested through a reciprocal exchange, where the artisanal pieces are valued holistically and purchased to support the collective and the labor-intensive skill of the artisans, going beyond monetary transactions. As a doctoral student with a lack of sufficient

research funding, being resource(ful) became imperative to fulfill the research commitments with *mis compañeras*. During the first field trip, I bought textile pieces from Malacate to organize raffles and events in *Aotearoa*/New Zealand, and fundraise for my second field trip.

Voice 2 on resource(ful):

Due to the farmers' financial limitations, much of their lay design activities made extensive use of available resources. Whilst I expected that most of the farmer resourcefulness would make use of physical resources, the majority of their resourcefulness was based on social innovations, since these could be undertaken with limited money. One of the farmers was particularly innovative in making use of social networking as a means of accessing funding, and receiving gifted labor for her farm. In terms of local food security, the farmers were also considered important resources for their local communities, and I saw many of them happily giving food to those in need without any expectation for remuneration.

As a full-time academic, I was hugely privileged and did not have the resource limitations of the farmers I was working with, nor the ones of the first author of this article. As a small gesture to acknowledge this, I supported all the farmers by purchasing food for my family whenever I met with them. This only offered small financial support; however, a more significant relational exchange was me being available for the farmers — for them, this evidenced an important additional dedication of my time.

Pluriversal: Many worlds, Dimensions, Paradoxes

The pluriverse considers the interconnection between humans and non-humans and the connection to nature, embracing diverse onto-epistemologies and ways of perceiving the world that are in constant transformation and balance. This concept is reflected in the Zapatista slogan *un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos* (a world where many worlds can fit) and has been echoed by activists and scholars (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007; De la Cadena & Blaser, 2018; Kothari et al., 2019; Leyva et al., 2015; Walsh, 2017), and most recently, by design (Escobar, 2018; Leitão, 2020; Noel, 2020). The pluriverse recognizes “a multipolar world order (de-Westernization) and epistemic and ontological pluriversality” (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 228), as well as the co-existence of different dimensions of the seen and the unseen, as explained by Battiste:

Indigenous people's epistemology is derived from the immediate ecology; from peoples' experiences, perceptions, thoughts, and memory, including experiences shared with others; and from the spiritual world discovered in dreams, visions, inspirations, and signs interpreted with the guidance of healers or elders. (2008, p. 497)

This echoes ideas of ‘ecology of knowledges’ from epistemologies of the South, where finding “credibility for non-scientific knowledges does not entail discrediting scientific knowledge. It implies, rather, using it in a broader context of dialogue with other knowledges” (Santos, 2015, p. 189). In this sense, the pluriverse integrates multiple dimensions where the spiritual world is fundamental in creation practices, and is strongly linked to individual and collective well-being. At the same time, it connects the different dimensions of our humanity as body, mind, heart, and spirit. This echoes the interconnection between tangible and intangible beings (past, present, and future), nature-culture, and Mother Earth in *uno con el todo*, aligned with *Buen Vivir*. Nevertheless, the pluriverse recognizes differences within the whole, not trying to homogenize, but to embrace heterogeneity, accepting the paradoxes that emerge.

Voice 1 on pluriversal:

As mentioned in *uno con el todo*, Malacate has participated in knowledge exchange sessions with other Indigenous groups from Abya Yala, such as the P’urhépecha from Michoacán, Mexico, and Mapuche from Chile. This shows that they not only recognize the value of the plurality of knowledges within the collective, but also the importance of exchanging knowledge and experiences with other people, communities, and collectives through intercultural engagements. Pluriversal ideas have had a significant impact on my approaches to design, not only on a professional but also on a personal level. I learned from *mis compañeras* the value of the heart and to be guided by its knowledges, what Lopez Intzín calls *epistemologías del corazón* (heart epistemologies) (Hemispheric Institute, 2016). I continue to act, reflect, and write about *corazonar* (Cepeda H., 2017; Guerrero Arias, 2010, 2011; López Intzín, 2015; Santos, 2018) as actions of collective reasoning with the heart, to give space to the knowledges from the heart in academic spaces (Albarrán González, 2022).

Voice 2 on pluriversal:

All the urban farmers came from different cultural backgrounds, but despite their differences, most of them were able to appreciate a wide diversity of perspectives and approaches to farming. They were very inflexible when it came to exploitative relationships, such as government officials claiming their successes, but were far more open to relationships that, despite their limitations of time, could bring a potential benefit. Some of the farmers would expend significant time and money traveling to other farmers to openly learn about their approaches to agriculture. In parallel to this very collegial approach to knowledge, sharing was a realization by the farmers that their knowledge was valuable. Some of them used this to their advantage by making additional income as consultants for NGOs.

Many of them were also part of online Facebook and WhatsApp communities. For most of the farmers, their approach to pluriversal was focused on farming knowledge, but with the specific intention that diverse knowledge implies power. For me, a key learning from the farmers was to always remain open to learning. Being open, listening, and allowing for other ways of doing and being that challenge one's worldview, is central to being a relevant designer.

Equilibrium: Dynamic, Movement, Cycles, Time

Equilibrium refers to the dynamic balance of the different areas of Buen Vivir-Centric design. This relates to the pluriverse and its paradoxes, where the aim is not reaching a static perfect equilibrium without contradictions, but the recognition that everything is constant movement and cycles in pursuit of equilibrium, similar to the cycles in nature. Therefore, it is required to have constant checks and balancing of the different areas, recognizing the interconnected, dynamic, and iterative nature of the approach.

Voice 1 on equilibrium:

Mayan Tsotsil and Tseltal people are closely linked to the cycles of the earth through farming. Many communities in the highlands of Chiapas grow coffee, corn, and other crops for self-consumption and trading. Local festivities, where prayers for good crops and exchanges between communities take place, are influenced by these farming cycles. These factors influence the rhythm of textile work relative to the cropping season, as well as the schedule of celebrations, and are an important part of their *Lekil Kuxlejal*. *Mis compañeras* reflect upon these aspects using textile and embroidery as their vernacular means of expression (Figure 7). For me, equilibrium is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects to achieve in a modern-colonial world, especially inside academic institutions. The multiple requirements between teaching, research, and service, and the pressure of constant academic publications, limit the time and resources to develop deep long-term connections with communities. We need to prioritize respect for their *autonomía* and collective well-being, rather than focusing on publishable outcomes, as required by academic research.

Voice 2 on equilibrium:

Farming as a pursuit is inherently seasonal, with farmers in the highveld of Johannesburg having to be very aware of the destructive frost in winter, hail storms in Autumn, and heat and rain in Summer and Spring (Figure 8). They all had an inherent knowledge of planting to produce a cycle to ensure they could have long selling seasons. Many farmer innovations were created to allow them to have better control of their environment, such as making tunnels to protect crops



Figure 7: *Lekil Kuxlejal* explorations using embroidery. Photography: D. Albarrán González, 2018. Source: Albarrán González, 2020b.

Figure 8: Urban farmer making the most of the Spring sun in Soweto, Johannesburg. Photography: A. D. Campbell, 2014.



from hail, or fabricating greenhouses to extend their growing season. Despite their attempts to control the external environment, they also accept, at some level, that nature is a force of its own and that only so much could be controlled.

From a design perspective, some of the farmers' innovations may seem relatively informal and piece-meal (Pieterse, 2015), but my study was not about celebrating marginalization or informality. Rather, it aimed to show this as a highly appropriate, sustainable, and endogenous starting point, with design,

then, being able to amplify local activities. Such an exploration into grassroots innovation brings attention to an activity from an area of innovation that has for too long remained on the margins of traditionally-focused research and development in South Africa. By shifting the spotlight, a collaborative study like this also shifts the equilibrium of politics, policy, and power in governance and development.

DIALOGIC REFLECTIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Through this dialogic exploration and reflection, we found relevant ‘insider and outsider’ relational spheres that need to be considered in genealogy, as individuals, family and community members, academics, practitioners, and researchers collaborating with historically marginalized communities. The complexity of these can be daunting, but taking a dialogic approach of duoethnography around Buen Vivir-Centric design allowed us to unpack relational issues that need to be considered throughout the research journey. Some of the central themes we identified are:

Contrasting positionalities: A deep need to understand ourselves, and our relations to shifting locations, both in terms of genealogies, values, cultural backgrounds, and worldviews.

Addressing power, privilege, politics, and access (3P-A): This is directly connected to positionality, but it speaks to wider systems that affect us and the communities we are collaborating with. We need to be aware of the 3P-A influences, and where we have agency to use them to favor the communities.

Challenging predetermined definitions: Dominant worldviews can be challenged by shifting terminologies towards more open and diverse positions. Alternatively, the use of non-normative and pluriversal terminologies can also serve the same purpose.

Being in flux: The importance of being able to zoom in on the details without losing sight of the bigger picture. At the same time, the willingness to accept the tension and flexibility that comes with collaboration seeking to transform dominant practices.

Contradictions and paradoxes: The ability to make connections to what happens on a micro and macro level, where situations are in constant transformation, influencing what activities take place and vice versa.

In/action: Undertaking a doctorate seeking to decolonize knowledge is inherently contradictory, but without considered action, nothing changes.

While we are still on a self-reflexive transformational journey, we believe the central considerations that we draw out above are valuable contributions towards more pluriversal design alternatives. In this paper, we hope the readers have been able to gain a better understanding of Buen Vivir-Centric design guiding principles and that, through our dialogue around them, they were able

to recall their own experiences, reconceptualize their research approaches, and contribute to this South-South dialogue. **D**

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