

Buen Vivir and the Art of Living: Comparing Western and Latin American Perspectives on Living a “Good Life”

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While interaction and exchange between cultures is arguably increasing in our globalized world, sentiments reflecting division among cultures and ways of being in the world remain. In particular, the relevance of ideas, theory, and philosophy based on traditional “Western” values and a focus on the individual is often drawn into question for collectivist and community-centred cultures—and vice versa. This has implications for education, given that much of the education discourse and approaches based on Western traditions are affecting education system across the globe and across cultures. It is also of particular significance for the educational approach focusing on developing students’ own “art of living.” While undoubtedly significant fundamental differences exist between most cultures, this article aims to suggest that, nevertheless, synergies and connecting points exist between Schmid’s philosophical concept of the “art of living”—which is based on so-called traditional Western philosophy—and the Latin American notion of “buen vivir” (good living)—which is based on the traditions and cultural worldview of Indigenous peoples of this subcontinent. While we acknowledge the vast differences in culture and the depths of the cultural divide, our comparative review indicates that connections can be drawn on fundamental ethical aspects of human co-existence. We argue that these connecting points suggest that Schmid’s philosophy can be of relevance to non-Western cultural contexts, as much as Indigenous ways of knowing and being can be of relevance to those in the “Western” world pursuing an art of living, which, consequently, indicates that an educational approach to the art of living can be relevant to diverse cultural contexts beyond Western-centric settings.

Introduction

Since the turn of the century, a shift can be seen internationally that has begun to place more emphasis on people’s wellbeing and happiness, transcending the historical reliance on GDP as a main measure of a country’s performance and success.¹ A likely cause, or at least contributor to this trend can be found in positive psychology research undertaken in recent decades and the emergence of global indices measuring people’s wellbeing and “happiness.”² However, such measures of happiness and wellbeing have been contested (e.g. Smith, 2008; Suissa, 2008) and philosophers have raised the question of whether what we measure with these instruments actually captures what people generally understand and value “happiness” to be, or if “happiness” in this context is rather defined by what we can (easily) measure in

¹ See, for example, UK (Easton, 2006), Bhutan (OPHI, 2022), the “Happiness-GDP” measure by van Suntum and Uhde (2010) in Germany, and the “wellbeing budgets” in New Zealand (New Zealand Treasury, 2022).

² Two examples are the World Happiness Report by the UN (<https://worldhappiness.report>), and the OECD Better Life index (<https://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/topics/life-satisfaction>).

the first place (Biesta, 2010; Smith, 2008). A further issue to raise in this context is whether the notions of happiness and wellbeing are the most appropriate concepts to consider in the context of a country's "success." Related and potentially more appropriate concepts, but possibly more difficult to measure, are people's life satisfaction and ability to live a good and "beautiful life," whatever that might mean for each individual member of a society.

The answer to these questions is not just relevant to a country's political direction, but it directly and indirectly affects the embedded education system. The aims and ends that education and schooling should or ought to have are contested and range from job readiness to socialization, to citizenship, to flourishing (cf. Kristjánsson, 2019), to indoctrination in some countries. Different answers are also given based on who is asked: the teacher, the student, the parent, the politician, the future employer. Biesta (2013) argues that "good education" in schools would see a balance between qualification, socialization, and subjectification. The latter, for Biesta, can be described as the becoming of a human being, the development of agency in the world. Biesta also critiques the disproportionate focus on the qualification function of schools and education systems today, largely progressed through neoliberal ideology permeating educational policy and practice (measurement, performativity, accountability, league tables, and so forth). A related argument has been made by Teschers (2017; 2018) that education systems and schooling should move beyond simply awarding qualifications for job readiness and rather enable students to develop their own "art of living" and be able to shape their life actively into what they would consider a beautiful life to be. This argument has been made based on Wilhelm Schmid's (2000b) conceptual understanding of the art of living, which, Teschers argues, provides a strong philosophical approach to consider relevant questions, such as meaning in life, personal norms, values, and beliefs, as well as key faculties and knowledge areas that support the pursuit of a "beautiful life." For Schmid, to engage in the art of living requires taking ownership of one's own life and actively shaping it along norms, values, and beliefs that have been actively reflected on and accepted by the individual, rather than being driven by external expectations and (unquestioned) societal norms (see below for more details). Schmid's approach also holds promise for a more equitable, tolerant, and socially just society.³ While emphasizing that what a beautiful life might look like cannot be prescribed and has to be decided by each person themselves, Schmid's philosophical approach to the art of living takes a meta perspective, exploring the horizon of what we can talk about and to a point generalize what it might mean to engage in the process of developing one's own art of living. Schmid's work, although eclectic and drawing on a wide range of philosophical perspectives, is strongly situated within what is often termed the Western philosophical tradition. The challenge that emerges here for the philosophy of the art of living as well as any educational approach to the art of living, as proposed in earlier work (Teschers, 2018), and which will be one focus of this article, is first of all a philosophical one. In considering the contested nature of "happiness," despite its prevalence in contemporary social discourse, we are asking what an approach to living a good and beautiful life might look like and if Schmid's art of living, and consequently any educational approach towards an art of living, could be relevant outside cultures built on what is considered traditional Western philosophy and thought. To say it simply: can Schmid's philosophy of the art of living be relevant to peoples with a non-Western cultural background? The relevance for our work is that, if this question can be answered positively, the argument made previously (Teschers, 2017; 2018), that the overarching aim or end of education, which should be to enable all students to develop their own art of living and to pursue their version of a beautiful life, can likely be expanded beyond a Western cultural and national context. In our globalized and increasingly multicultural world, it would further support a potential shared aim for schools and education systems in countries with strongly diverse cultural peoples and those that include Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, such as the Americas (South and North, including Canada), Australia, and New Zealand, for example.

As part of a larger international, cross-cultural study aimed at exploring the relevance of Schmid's (2000b) philosophy and Teschers' (2018) proposed educational approach to the art of living, we explore

³ Due to scope, this argument will be made in more detail in an upcoming book by Teschers, which is currently under contract with Peter Lang.

in this article how the (Western) philosophical notion of the art of living relates to Indigenous Latin American perspectives, commonly referred to under the notion of “*buen vivir*” (good living). In the following, we discuss how aspects of *buen vivir* resonate with some Western philosophical perspectives of living a good and beautiful life, and particularly Schmid’s concept of the art of living. To do this, we will first give a short overview of Schmid’s concept, followed by an introduction to the notion of *buen vivir*. We will discuss the origins and meaning(s) of the term in relation to different Indigenous traditions in Latin America. We will indicate some connecting points between *buen vivir* and Schmid’s art of living, before discussing in more detail some of the values and themes attributed to *buen vivir* that are shared with Schmid’s concept of the art of living. Our findings indicate that Schmid’s concept connects with and resonates with aspects of *buen vivir*, which suggests possible relevance of the art of living for people beyond the cultural sphere of Western European philosophy; and, similarly, we suggest that insights from Indigenous knowledge and worldviews can have relevance to people pursuing an art of living in Western contexts. This reciprocal relationship, we suggest, consequently informs educational considerations for supporting students in the development of their own art of living, some of which will be mentioned here but will have to be explored in more detail in future work.

A Short Overview of Schmid’s Art of Living

Schmid has focused on the philosophy of the art of living since the early 1990s and released his seminal work, *Philosophie der Lebenskunst* [philosophy of the art of living], in 1998. Since then, he has contributed a wide range of articles and books on the topic and explored different perspectives of what it means to live a *schönes Leben* (beautiful life), a term he coined to emphasize that judgement of the quality of one’s life has to sit with the person living this life. He states that we cannot define or prescribe what a beautiful life might look like, as every person engaged in the art of living will have their own perspective and aspirations. To engage in the art of living, then, means to become the artist who shapes their own life actively in line with one’s own norms, values, and beliefs. Schmid deliberately uses the term “beautiful life” to emphasize that, similar to a painting or a sculpture, the question of whether the life a person is living is seen as beautiful lies in the eye of the beholder. Beauty is a question of taste and therefore cannot be argued about, defined, or prescribed. Hence, he argues, as we cannot define what a beautiful life is or should be, every person must decide for themselves if the life they are living is beautiful to them or not. What is important for Schmid’s concept is the active pursuit of a beautiful life rather than letting oneself be driven passively by external circumstances, such as what others expect, what society says, and what life “throws” at us. While we obviously cannot change the world in every respect, Schmid suggests that to develop an art of living, it is important to be able to see how certain aspects in the world are interconnected, how certain actions create distinct reactions, and how events in one place can affect circumstances in another. Only through the ability to see these interconnections can one enact effective agency in shaping the direction of one’s life and influence the world around oneself to some extent in line with one’s own reflected norms, values, and beliefs. Here, Schmid emphasizes the importance of (self-)reflection, as a part of shaping one’s own life actively, and that this must include reflecting on the norms, values, and beliefs we are presented with by society—by our parents, peers, culture, religion, media, etc. A person engaging in the art of living has to reflect on these norms, values, and beliefs, and decide if they are acceptable for oneself, that is, if they are in line with how one wants to live one’s life. Therefore, what is important for developing an art of living are certain skills, faculties, and insights into the world, as discussed elsewhere (Teschers, 2017; 2018), which includes the ability for *Selbstbildung* (formation of one’s self; self-cultivation) and the faculty of what Aristotle (1996) calls *phronésis* (prudence and practical wisdom).

While Schmid’s work is rather eclectic, it is, as indicated above, situated in the tradition of so-called Western philosophy, as well as the Central European cultural sphere. As such, Schmid’s art of living approach starts with the individual and each individual person’s view of how a beautiful life might look to them. However, even though Schmid starts with an individual perspective, he acknowledges that

human beings are (nearly) always embedded in a community and a social environment. Hence, one's pursuit of a beautiful life is situated in social settings, including reciprocal relations with and effects on other people. Therefore, Schmid draws on the Aristotelean notion of *phronésis*,⁴ to argue that a person engaging in the art of living will understand through practical wisdom that the pursuit of their own beautiful life would be supported by an environment that allows each person in the community to equally engage in the pursuit of their own art of living and beautiful life. They will also come to understand that their actions, if affecting other people, will result in reactions from others and bear consequences for one's own ability to live a beautiful life, especially if such pursuit encroaches on the freedom and life of others in the community. Therefore, the person engaging in the art of living will, through *phronésis*, develop an *enlightened self-interest* and come to realize that it is in their own best interest to not only care for oneself, but to similarly care for the people and community around oneself (Schmid, 2000b, pp. 60–71). In a similar manner, Schmid argues that this enlightened self-interest will also lead one to consider and care for the wider environment in which they are living, whether it be society, humanity, or one's natural environment and the planet. As such, Schmid develops an ethics model that is based on the self-interest of the (post-)modern individual but transforms through prudence and practical wisdom into an enlightened form of self-interest that shows a care for oneself; for community, society, and humanity; and for our planet and environment. The ethical foundation that emerges as part of Schmid's concept of art of living will be of particular relevance in our further discussion of the relationship between this Western philosophical model and the concept of *buen vivir* in the tradition of the Indigenous peoples of Latin America.

Origin and Meaning of *Buen Vivir*

Buen vivir (good living) is a relatively recently coined term (towards the end of the 20th century) that builds on a cultural concept found in the history of the Indigenous peoples of Latin America (Burgos, 2016; Durán López, 2010; Esteva, 2009; Houtart, 2011; Tortosa, 2009; Kowii, 2015; Medina, 2001; Huambachano, 2018; Quijano, 2012). Quijano (2012), for example, argues that “despite being presented by some analysts as a novelty, ‘good living’ has always been present in the worldviews and existential practices of Andean indigenous peoples” (p. 140).⁵ As a recently coined term, “*buen vivir*” refers to ancestral values and practices put in dialogue with each other as well as with concepts and theories of the Western world. As such, *buen vivir* has seen increased popularity across various population groups in Latin America and reached beyond traditional Indigenous peoples. It has been taken up by some mestizo (non-Indigenous) political leaders, such as José “Pepe” Mujica (former president of Uruguay), Gabriel Boric (current president of Chile), and Francia Márquez (current vice-president of Colombia), and is filtering increasingly into the cultural consciousness of different cultural groups in a challenge to dominant neoliberal agendas present in many countries in the region. However, the understanding or “appropriation” of the Indigenous concepts summarized under *buen vivir* can lack the depth and complexity of the underlying Indigenous worldviews (Houtart, 2011).

Prage (2015), for instance, compared the Indigenous concepts of *sumak kawsay* from the Kichwa people and *lekil kuxlejal* from the Maya people, and discussed them together under the notion of *buen vivir*. She argues that, although both Indigenous concepts hold similarities, they are not identical, as differences in understanding exist. Likewise, Tortosa (2009) argues that *buen vivir*, *sumak kawsay*, and *suma*

⁴ *Phronésis* is translated as *Klugheit* in German, as used by Schmid in his work, and sometimes as “prudence” and sometimes as “practical wisdom” in English. Arguably, these two different translations in English capture two spheres of emphasis that are represented in both *phronésis* and *Klugheit*: prudence indicates an understanding of the world that allows one to reach a desired goal or outcome through effective action; practical wisdom, on the other hand, has an ethical component—to know what the ethical thing is to do is in a given situation.

⁵ Please note that all direct quotes from Spanish originals—Quijano, Kowii, Tortosa, etc.—are our translations if not stated otherwise.

qamaña (Aymara) have the same meaning, “although each one, located in its context, has some differentiating nuances” (p. 1). He goes on to explain that *suma qamaña* in the Bolivian Aymara introduces a “communitarian element” (Tortosa, 2009, p. 1). He suggests that a more accurate translation of the term to the Spanish language (translated to English here) could be “[g]ood co-living” concerning “a good society for all with internal harmony” (Tortosa, 2009, p. 1). This resonates with Schmid’s notion of a care for others and society as part of an enlightened self-interest within the art of living, as explained above. Interestingly, Quijano (2012) connects a third language and people, and suggest that *sumak kawsay*, *suma qamaña*, and *ñande reko* (Guaraní) are “expressions that, with subtle linguistic differences, generally account for a ‘clean and harmonious life,’ ‘good and beautiful existence,’ and ‘good living’ as existential and cultural perspectives” (p. 142). Such subtle linguistic differences imply that instead of searching for *buen vivir* as an approximate translation of Indigenous concepts, *buen vivir* could invite a reflection on the values, principles, and practices encapsulated in the ancestral worldviews.

Latin American Indigenous Values, Principles, and Practices

Notwithstanding the uniqueness of the experiences of *buen vivir* within each Indigenous nation in Latin America (see Burgos, 2016), researchers agree that, overall, *buen vivir* refers to values, principles, and practices that support a good and beautiful life. Table 1 displays the cultural concept in relation to the particular Indigenous language and people, and the country where most of the respective population lives today. Two Indigenous concepts⁶ will be discussed in more detail below to illustrate the deeper meaning and complexity behind the current notion of *buen vivir*.

Cultural Concept	Indigenous peoples and language	Country most present
sumak kawsay	Kichwa	Ecuador, Peru
suma qamaña	Aymara	Bolivia
lekil kuxlejal	Maya	Mexico
ñande reko	Guarani	Chile
wët wët fxi’zenxi’	Nasa	Colombia

Table 1. Indigenous concepts referring to *buen vivir* in Latin America

Sumak Kawsay

The concept of *sumak Kawsay* has been studied in the last 10 years by both Indigenous (Kowii, 2015) and non-Indigenous scholars (Burgos, 2016; Durán López, 2010; Esteva, 2009; Houtart, 2011; Tortosa, 2009) from different perspectives and fields of knowledge.⁷

⁶ While all concepts have their own idiosyncrasies and are of equal relevance, in the interest of scope we focus on two examples here that allow us to make the key argument we aim for in this article.

⁷ Kowii (2015), for example, provides a unique perspective as an Indigenous scholar explaining *sumak kawsay* in the context of Kichwa narratives and worldview, whereas Burgos (2016), a mestizo scholar from Colombia undertaking a PhD in Spain, proposes the inclusion of *sumak kawsay* as a conceptual base towards a reform of the school

According to Kowii (2015), *sumak kawsay* reflects the ancestral understanding of a good and beautiful life, where *sumak* means “the ideal, the beautiful and the good, the realisation” and *kawsay* means “life,” concerning a “life that is dignified, in harmony and equilibrium with the universe and human beings” (p. 5). Likewise, Tortosa (2009) explains that *sumak kawsay* expresses the idea of a “life not [in itself] better, nor better than that of others, nor a continuous urge to improve it, but simply good in all its aspects” (p. 1).⁸ This means that contentment with one’s life, rather than competition and accumulation, reflects the values of *buen vivir*. Tortosa understands *sumak kawsay* as an “alternative to the development model,” and for this reason he finds a point of contrast between a good life in contentment and a good life driven by the urge to have more. Hence, both Kowii and Tortosa suggest that *sumak kawsay* is an ancestral worldview about how a good life should be lived that does not require aspects of (self-)maximization or constant improvement (understood here as accumulation of tangibles, not as moral or personal self-improvement as human being), and it is not measured in comparison to other people but measured against other criteria. While some of these aspects resonate well with Schmid’s take of a beautiful life, the criteria of what constitutes “good” in the Indigenous context needs further exploration. Schmid emphasizes the individual, personal perspective as measure of a beautiful life rather than any external criteria. We will revisit this point in our comparative discussion in the next section of this article.

According to Kowii (2015) and Tortosa (2009), a good life is beautiful and harmonious, while living a good life entails coherency between attitudes and practices—a notion that is mirrored in Schmid’s understanding of an art of living in which actions should align with personal norms, values, and beliefs. Moreover, the principles and values of *sumak kawsay* are properly understood when they are enacted in response to each situation and context: “El Buen Vivir se logra haciendo bien las cosas” [good living is achieved when one is doing things well] (Durán López, 2010, p. 59). Durán López’s interpretation of “well” in this context seems to mean “doing what is appropriate,” including both being aware of the context to act ethically, that is, *doing the right thing*, and being aware and focused on what one is doing to act in a diligent way, that is, *doing things right*. As such, there is some connection to *phronésis* as used by Schmid, as the first aspect could be related to its interpretation as practical wisdom, the second as prudence.

Lekil Kuxlejal

Prage (2015) connected the principles of *sumak kawsay* with the principles, values, and practices of *lekil kuxlejal*, which is an expression in Tsotsil and Tseltal, two of the Mayan languages spoken in Chiapas (Mexico). She maintains that “*lekil* translates as good, *kuxlejal* as life” (p. 5). According to Prage, *lekil kuxlejal* is usually translated as “good living, living well, or a dignified life” and involves many aspects, such as autonomy, the recognition of all living beings, and harmony between humans, as well as between humans and nature (Prage, 2015, p. 5).

Prage (2015) discusses three dimensions of *lekil kuxlejal*: first is “the centrality of earth” or the “recognition of earth’s subjectivity” (p. 20), second is social justice, and third is government. Within the first dimension, three associated values are reciprocity, happiness, and spirituality. Within the second dimension, the central value is dignity, or to acknowledge the greatness in all beings—not only humans but every living thing. Such dignity, in turn, requires respect and the awakening of a conscience within the Indigenous communities in which they have rights to claim, thus, “making people question their own situation” (Prage, 2015, p. 36). Within the third dimension, the central value is autonomy, expressed in the struggle for autonomous health and education within their cosmovision. These three dimensions that move from the outside in, from the macrocosm to the microcosm, so to say, is mirrored in reverse in

curriculum. Durán López (2010), on the other hand, suggests that *sumak kawsay* should be the foundation of environmental sustainability policies in Latin America.

⁸ Tortosa shifts away from neoliberal considerations of comparison and (self-)maximization, and emphasizes “goodness as both ethically good and good in terms of diligence and doing things well.

Schmid's ethics model of the art of living. In Schmid's model, he builds on the enlightened self-interest of the person who, through *phronésis*, comes to understand that they need to care for the people and community surrounding them and the environment we are living in. While the starting positions of these two approaches are reversed, arguably there is common ground in the shared dimensions they both come to value,⁹ as will be discussed in more detail below.

Challenges of Indigenous Perspectives of *Buen Vivir* in Current Socio-Cultural Contexts

Buen vivir has been described as an “alternative” (Durán López, 2010; Esteva, 2009; Tortosa, 2009), as well as a “rupture” (Quijano, 2012; Prage, 2015) with Western, neoliberal models of economic and social development. “Alternative” and “rupture” here refer to Indigenous people's self-assertion as cultures with distinct ways of being and knowing. Such self-assertion relates to how Indigenous peoples in Latin America have made available to non-Indigenous people the practices, values, and principles inherent in *buen vivir*.

Moreover, Indigenous peoples in different countries refer to the underlying traditions informing *buen vivir* as ways of being and knowing that have outlived colonization. In this sense, the narratives and testimonies of Indigenous peoples suggest that *buen vivir* is connected to “struggle” and “survival” (Prage, 2015, p. 17). Asserting the underlying Indigenous traditions of *buen vivir*, according to Prage, helped Indigenous peoples in Latin America to endure the various forms of domination and cultural invasion, including the prohibition of Indigenous languages, the imposition of religion, and forced displacement from territories. In Chiapas, for instance, Prage explains that Maya struggled to have *lekil kuxlejal* acknowledged as an old system of beliefs and practices that sought to ensure sufficient access for every individual and family to wellbeing. Bearing the phrase “another world is possible,” the Indigenous movement in Chiapas—and indeed the Zapatista “uprising” that voiced Indigenous demands for justice and political participation—has become known for its struggle for autonomy and resistance against neoliberalism (Prage, 2015, p. 2). Similarly, in Colombia, the Nasa and Misak people have struggled to have specific demands and claims acknowledged around land reclamation and recognition/respect for their unique socio-cultural traditions. According to Quijano (2012), their “economía propia” (our economy) life project for the last 30 years is based on the culture and the spirituality of *buen vivir*. These two cases, that of the Mayas in Chiapas (Mexico) and of the Misak and Nasa in Colombia, question the mostly hegemonic visions of what constitutes “development” and well-being in Latin America. Rico (2019) refers to this questioning as “a challenge of epistemological recognition and acceptance” (p. 47), meaning that the cultural concept of *buen vivir* questions the prevailing scenario of academic and political dialogue.

Nonetheless, some scholars argue that *buen vivir* should not be “romantized” (Prage, 2015, p. 8) or adhered to with “uncritical enthusiasm” (Tortosa, 2009). Instead, *buen vivir* invites a reflection of alternative ways of organizing society, economy, and relationships with nature, different from and departing from the tenants of Western capitalism and individualistic approaches, which resonates with Schmid's art of living approach, as will be discussed below.

Similarities and Differences of *Buen Vivir* and Schmid's Art of Living

The Tradition of Values, Norms, and Beliefs

⁹ It needs to be acknowledged here that the Indigenous model points to a much deeper interpretation and relationship with the world, people, and oneself than Schmid's ethics model suggests.

The values, principles, and practices of each Indigenous culture that relate to the notion of *buen vivir* derive from ancient cultural knowledge. A mainly oral tradition allows for the intergenerational transmission of such knowledge. Each Indigenous culture introduces new generations to living a good life by engaging with adults in the daily activities where actions are to be performed according to the respective values and principles (Prage, 2015, p. 6).

This relates to Schmid's concept insofar as the art of living includes an alignment between one's norms, values, and beliefs with the actions one takes—one's gestures and habitus, as Schmid (2000a) calls it. However, Schmid points out that to develop one's own art of living and actively shape one's own life, one has to reflect on the norms, values, beliefs, and principles being offered by society. As such, while learning the values and principles that are seen by a people or a group as contributing to a "good life," a person engaged in the art of living needs to reflect on these values and principles, and decide if these traditions conform to one's personal views on life and the personal values one holds. If they do align, one can actively accept them into shaping one's life in such a manner, but if certain traditional values and principles do not resonate with one's personal view of life and how one wants to live, they need to be adjusted or abandoned. This said, Schmid also points out that someone engaged in the art of living will have to periodically reflect on their own norms, values, and beliefs, which can change through the experiences we have and our subsequent personal development. As such, traditional values and principles, and handed-down cultural wisdom might influence one's worldview and what it means to live a good and beautiful life, but they need to be actively tested by each person before being accepted and incorporated into their own life. So, while there are connecting points insofar as people in any cultural setting are exposed to cultural norms and values, Schmid emphasizes the need to reflect on them and make decisions on a personal basis rather than a communal basis. In Indigenous communities, such contemporary adjustments to cultural values are more likely to be negotiated in a communal sense, along with a slow adaptation of traditional values to a changing environment (cf. Viasus, Posada & Díaz, 2016).

Valuing and Enacting a Care for Others and Community

According to all authors reviewed in relation to *buen vivir*, the principles and values of good living are still part of life today for Indigenous communities. However, the authors agree that the connection with ancestral knowledge is fragile and in danger of being lost. Specifically, the relationship between humankind and nature is a fundamental part of *buen vivir*, and that relation "has now been degraded" (Prage, 2015, p. 21) in the more contemporary understanding of the term and the changed environment in Latin America through colonization. The preservation of the mother tongue for Indigenous peoples seems decisive in ensuring the survival of that knowledge. Kowii (2015) maintains that, although some of the practices and concepts of *buen vivir* endure, they could also be in decline due to an insufficient understanding of the depth of the underlying cultural vision. Hence, investigating and learning about these practices and concepts might suggest alternatives for caring about the planet and the lives of people.

This resembles the clash of worldviews between traditional communal approaches to good living and the dominating neoliberal ideology promoting individualism and self-maximization as a mantra for living a "good life" which is strongly present in many countries in Latin America, as well as most of the Western world. The notion of *buen vivir* has been suggested (Esteva, 2009; Houtart, 2011; Prage, 2015; Rico, 2019) as a counter to these neoliberal agendas, which links with Schmid's concept of an art of living that requires each individual through *phronésis*—prudence and practical wisdom—to develop a care for others, society, humanity, and the planet (Teschers, 2017). As such, Schmid's art of living approach can be positioned as one way that, while starting with the self-interest of the individual, transforms each person engaged in the process, allowing them to take a more holistic and caring approach, and to acknowledge that to be able to live a beautiful life is strongly connected to the ability of other people and the wider community and society to also be able to shape their own versions of a beautiful life. As such, a care for others and the surrounding community is an important aspect of Schmid's art of living, just as it is a key aspect for Indigenous people to uphold the depth of their own culture and shared understanding of how to practice *buen vivir*.

The Notion of “Good” and “Goodness” in Buen Vivir and Schmid’s Art of Living

Quijano (2012) argues that the “goodness” of life in the cosmovision of Indigenous peoples in Latin America differs substantially from the ideas of a “good life” as meaning comfort and increased access to material goods, which is typical in a capitalist/Western socio-economic approach.¹⁰ Quijano (2012), echoing Medina (2006), argues that the “goodness” inherent in *sumak kawsay*, *suma qamaña*, and *ñande reko* refers to a life characterized by balance, sufficiency, beauty, and inclusion. Ultimately, a good life is also a “sweet life”:

The feeling of a sweet life is described as an interactive and everyday experience of having at hand what is necessary and sufficient within an austere and diverse way of living, smoothed by an affection that excludes no one. In this model of austerity, balance, and sufficiency of the good, beautiful, and necessary, no one is excluded, neither the gods nor nature. (Medina, 2006, as cited by Quijano, 2012, p. 142)

This alternative take on what a “good life” might be resonates with Schmid’s critique of the pre-conception of the term in the public consciousness in Western (and other) societies. Schmid has argued that such often narrow preconceptions of a good life as comfortable, pleasurable, and “happy,” primarily pursued through consumption, do not reflect the wide variety of life concepts. Similarly, positive psychology research has shown that these preconceptions regarding monetary wealth and the pursuit of a narrow form of pleasures as so-called “happiness” can be misleading and do not necessarily include what gives people meaning in life or increases their life satisfaction overall (Boniwell, 2008). Schmid, therefore, uses the term “beautiful life” to indicate that views on what makes a life “good” or worthwhile are subjective, as it is a work of art.

While this subjective notion of a beautiful life is not synonymous with the notion of goodness as described by Quijano and Medina, both approaches offer a critique of common popular conceptions of a good life having to include the accumulation of wealth and the pursuit of amenities, pleasures, and happiness. In fact, the call for austerity and affection for others links with early Epicurean forms of hedonism, which did not proclaim the pursuit of excessive pleasures but rather taking enjoyment from the simple pleasures in life, such as the enjoyment of a sustaining simple meal or the company of a good friend (Feldman, 2004). Returning to Schmid’s work, we want to re-emphasize that the Aristotelian notion of *phronésis*, which Schmid sees as central to an art of living, will lead each person developing an art of living to consider the impact of their actions on others and the environment. This will, therefore, lead to considerations of balance and a prudent use of resources in the best interest of all, which links again to the notion of inclusion as indicated in the quote by Medina above.

The Primacy of the Collective

Burgos (2016) notes that *buen vivir* is an understanding of life in which the community aspect prevails: “No admite una buena vida de pocos—acumuladores—sostenida por muchos que no logran” [It does not admit a good life of a few people accumulating wealth at the expense of many who fail] (Burgos, 2016, p. 189). Similarly, Prage (2015) notes that the concepts of *lekil kuxlejal* (good life/dignified life) and

¹⁰ We would like to acknowledge that capitalism takes many forms across nations, some of which are strongly influenced by neoliberalism, while others are more strongly informed by social-democratic market models. While we see a particular challenge in the advanced implementations of neoliberally informed capitalism, the scope and focus of this article does not allow for a detailed discussion of the particular differences. Suffice it to say that for the argument at hand, capitalism—and particularly neoliberally driven capitalism—as it influences the thinking and economic drivers for people in many Western cultural settings, is at odds with the notion of *goodness* as inherent in *buen vivir*. We thank the reviewer for drawing attention to this complexity.

sumak kawsay (*buen vivir*, good living) are to some extent “equivalent,” as both emphasize the collective (Prage, 2015, p. 8).

Here, again, we can find links to Schmid’s ethics model and the necessity to consider others and the care for others through *phronésis*. Being part of a community and society requires the individual person to consider the good of the community to create an environment that is conducive to the development of their own art of living and a beautiful life, which will also make it conducive to the development and pursuit of a beautiful life for other people. So, while Schmid in the art of living does not emphasize the primacy of the collective as an inherent value, through the insight of prudence and practical wisdom the individual person engaged in the art of living will understand that undue accumulation of wealth and resources at the expense of others can effectively hinder the pursuit of their own beautiful life. This also relates to the following idea of “non-exclusion.”

All of the authors we reviewed in relation to *buen vivir* agree that a good life must be good for everyone. This principle implies that social and economic arrangements should allow for cooperation, mutuality, and reciprocity. Inclusion, therefore, seems to reject what Prague (2015) termed “the capitalist system’s logic of maximization” (p. 7). Instead, she argues that *buen vivir* inevitably has an economic aspect to it, but it is based on producing *enough* rather than on producing as much as possible. Again, links to *phronésis* in Schmid’s art of living model can be drawn here.

Harmony and Interconnectedness

Authors such as Houtart (2011), Kowii (2015), and Medina (2001) emphasize that across the Indigenous peoples of Latin America the notion of *interdependence* is a central value in *buen vivir*. Interdependence here means the recognition of the inherent worth of every creature and how our lives depend on the wellbeing of others. This principle also implies an understanding of how different forms of life depend on one another. Moreover, interdependence and *interconnectedness* also relate to the primacy of the collective, as each individual understands that it “makes sense” to care for one another.

Schmid similarly emphasizes the importance of seeing the “interconnections” (*Zusammenhänge*) in the world. While he does not explain the interdependence of human life with that of other creatures, he does explain that only through an understanding and awareness of how aspects of life in the world interconnect, and how our actions and interventions affect other aspects and other people in our environment (which then again reflect back on us) can we actively shape our life and take effective action. For this, Schmid argues, a combination of *Bildung*¹¹ (self-formation, self-cultivation) and practical wisdom is needed, which can be scaffolded in educational settings. The link to *buen vivir* here would be that our understanding of how our actions impact our local and global environments (for example, in the form of global warming but also mass extinction of animals and plant populations) will at some point affect the quality of life for ourselves or our children and the next generations. Provided that we care for our offspring, and/or the continued existence of the human species overall, including their ability to live well instead of having to struggle to survive—again, *phronésis* is the driving faculty for these considerations—one will have to moderate one’s actions in line with what is good for all, rather than only with what is only good for oneself. In relation to education, Biesta (2022, pp. 90–101) refers to Hannah Arendt and calls this “being at home in the world” in the meaning of managing one’s own desires and considering if what one desires is actually desirable—for oneself and for others in the world, which Biesta sees as a critical outcome of education and schooling.

In the context of *buen vivir*, authors similarly argue that the value of “harmony” relates to the idea of interconnectedness. Acosta (2014), for example, explains that “good living is the life in harmony, of the human being with himself, of this human being with the rest of humanity, and of each individual and the community with nature” (as cited in Burgos, 2016, p. 189). Again, we can find links to the earlier

¹¹ For a more detailed account regarding the role and understanding of *Bildung* in the context of the art of living and education, please see, for example, Schmid (2000b) and Teschers (2017; 2018).

discussed ethical model in Schmid's philosophy of circles of care for oneself, others, and the environment. Walsh expands the idea of harmony and interconnectedness, stating that:

Buen vivir is based in "being," in peace, in the inner stillness and bonds of the human being with history, society, and nature, as a temporal space and cosmological whole of existence that makes thinking about life not individually but in relation to a whole. (Walsh, 2009, p. 213, as cited in Quijano, 2012, p. 140)

Actions, Practices, and Actively Pursuing One's Own Art of Living

In our review of the literature for this article, it came to the fore that across cultures, *buen vivir* is seen as something to be practised rather than preached. The notion of values in action entails an expectation of living a life according to certain principles. Nevertheless, there are no formulas, or prescriptions. For example, Prague (2015) found that one of the participants in her research affirmed that "'*buen vivir*' is not only a concept. It's to be put into practice" (p. 21).

The idea of making one's life an expression of the principles and values of *buen vivir* is also clearly expressed in Kowii. He asserts the Kichua notion of *runakay*, *el saber ser* (knowing to be). According to Kowii, *runakay*

is the sum of all the elements noted above. *Runa* literally means person, human, the *runakay* synthesizes the realization of the human being; to achieve this dimension, it is essential to learn to fulfill gradually, each and every one of the values described above. (Kowii, 2015, p. 5)

What stands out here, in relation to Schmid's art of living concept, is that, while *buen vivir* does include a set of cultural values, these are rather broad and not prescriptive in detail. They can be seen more as general guidelines for a life in harmony with one's environment. Schmid goes a step further in not spelling out any such guidelines directly, but he does discuss the implications of enacting *phronésis* for those who are situated in social communities and a larger environment. These implications that emerge for someone developing an art of living, in Schmid's reading, will largely reflect a similar set of guidelines as are captured in the texts outlining the traditional underpinnings of the Indigenous concepts behind *buen vivir*, such as the care for others and one's environment, seeing the interconnections in the world, and striving for a certain harmony and balance between one's own desires and the world.

It needs to be pointed out again, though, that Schmid's approach starts with the enlightened individual person and through prudence and practical wisdom moves from a care of the self to a care for others, society, humanity, and our planet. The approach that seems to be shared across the Indigenous peoples of Latin America, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction: it starts with the consideration of earth as the first concern, then to a care for the community and society, and only then to a care for oneself.

Concluding Thoughts on the Reciprocal Relationship Between *Buen Vivir* and Schmid's Art of Living for Education

In this article, we have discussed the contemporary interpretation of the concept of *buen vivir* and explored some of the values and aspects that underpin it from the traditional worldviews of the Indigenous peoples of Latin America. We further discussed how many of the aspects and values of *buen vivir* relate to Schmid's Western philosophical concept of the art of living and highlighted many of the parallels between the two approaches to living a good and beautiful life. The main parallel emerged with Schmid's emphasis on *phronésis* as a key aspect for developing an art of living, which leads a person to develop an enlightened form of self-interest that not only cares for oneself but also for one's community, society, and humanity, as well as the environment in which one is living. This resonates with the Latin American Indigenous

approach of caring for our environment, followed by the people, the collective, and then caring for oneself. While the direction of care—from the inside out in the Western cultural tradition, and from the outside in for the Indigenous cultures we considered here—is reversed, the implications for living one’s life seem rather similar in principle. In future, it would be interesting to reason through a range of key scenarios of decision making for people under both approaches to see if the actual implications for living one’s life are indeed similar in practice. Some deviation of context and personal considerations would have to be expected, though. However, while we focused on highlighting some of the parallels between these approaches from significantly different cultural traditions, there certainly remain many differences in culture and actual life pathways.

We can see a number of implications for an educational approach to the art of living. First, it seems at least possible, if not probable, that considerations of an education that is aimed to support students to develop their own art of living can be relevant for students from cultures outside of so-called Western societies. It seems also likely that Indigenous perspectives and worldviews on living a good and beautiful life can support the development of approaches to an art of living for people in Western cultures and, insofar, inform educational considerations regarding curriculum and pedagogy. The details of this will have to be explored further in future work. Both implications also resonate with other work done by Angus and Sonja Macfarlane (Macfarlane & Macfarlane, 2019) in their *he aua whiria* (braided rivers) model of combining Western and Indigenous ways of knowing to arrive at a deeper understanding of the world. Considering the work by Macfarlane & Macfarlane, and others, in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context of “braiding” knowledges and the findings in this article, it seems possible that considering education and schooling through an art of living lens can prove relevant for students from various cultural backgrounds, with all the implications for curriculum and pedagogy that has been discussed in earlier work (e.g. D’Olimpio & Teschers, 2016; Teschers, 2017; 2018).

This all said, the intention of this paper was not to assimilate or glance over the differences between cultures, nor to suggest that life in different cultures can be aligned, but to explore if the insights developed from what is considered traditional Western philosophy might hold some relevance for people from very different cultural backgrounds, and, vice versa, if Indigenous knowledge can inform Western philosophy and practical ways for people of living their lives in meaningful ways.

So, to conclude, what we have shown in this article is that Schmid’s philosophy of the art of living resonates with the Indigenous notion of *buen vivir* from Latin America, and respectively, that those engaging in the art of living can benefit from considering the values and principles underpinning the notion of *buen vivir* for their own considered development of a beautiful life. We have also alerted to some of the implications in principle for educational approaches towards an art of living, and created the first pillar, so to say, that supports an education for the art of living approach to be considered in diverse cultural settings. As a next step, while parallels between these and other Indigenous approaches are likely, further comparison of other cultural perspectives of what it means to live a “good and beautiful life” and develop an art of living is indicated and will be pursued as part of the wider study from which this article emerged.

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