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# The emergence of cultural complexes in ecovillages: ethnographic studies Brazil/Switzerland

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## Abstract

This article aims to contribute to the subjectivity study of ecovillage dwellers based on the concept of cultural complex. The investigation focused on the complexes that emerged with regard to the individual, collective, and nature, how they developed and were worked on. We rely on the notion of cultural complexes to understand the relationships of individuals with themselves, with others, and with the environment in the community framework. We observed the participants in two ecovillages in Switzerland and one in Brazil. The analyses evidenced that life in ecovillages develops collective complexes that mediate the relationships of individuals with their relevant groups regarding aspects of individuality and collectivity and ways of relating to nature. However, in each community, the physical context and the presence or absence of self-reflection works developed cultural complexes in different ways, producing specific relationships between each individual and their context.

**Keywords:** Community integration; Community-Based Participatory Research; Culture; Environment.

Faced with the economic and environmental crises that the post-industrial world has been experiencing and the excessive focus given to individualization, community life has been an alternative to deal with the effects on society (Merz-Benz, 2006). The ecovillage movement is a modality that has grown within this perspective.

According to current data from the Global Ecovillage Network, ecovillages have more than 10,000 communities on all continents in the world. In Brazil, there are 41 registered ecovillages (Global Ecovillage Network [GEN], 2021). They are a model of intentional communities and their aim is to make changes in sustainability practices in their social, cultural, ecological and economic dimensions (GEN, 2021). Ecovillages aim to integrate all dimensions of sustainability into a whole-system approach, seeking to restore and regenerate their social and natural environments.

Considered key subjects, social relationships and individual improvement in ecovillages' research has advanced in recent years. Some studies have analyzed how

people in ecovillages develop practices such as self-knowledge (Roysen & Mertens, 2019), conflict resolution and decision-making (Chitawere, 2017), but little has been investigated on the subjectivity of the inhabitants of this type of human settlement (Duarte & Ferreira Neto, 2021).

In this connection, this article aims to contribute to the study of subjectivity of ecovillage residents from the standpoint of cultural complex, a concept derived from Analytical Psychology. Research focuses on the complexes that emerged in relation to the individual, the collective and nature, and how they developed and were worked on.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to Analytical Psychology, which has privileged individual evolution and the individuation process, from its creation with Jung (1971/1991) to the present days (Stein, 2020). Even when working on the relationship with nature, the studies often relegates society and groups to a shadow status (Kiehl, 2020).

To counter this perspective, Singer and Kimbles (2020) developed the concept of cultural complex. For the authors, cultural complexes structure personal and collective emotional experience. They are a way of describing how ingrained beliefs and emotions affect the life of the group and would have the function of mediating the relationship between the individual and the collective.

Studies on cultural complexes have expanded, being used, for example, to assess the most diverse cultures, such as those of Brazil (Boechat, 2014), Mexico (López, 2010) or Australia (Mawby, 2019). Or even some groups, such as indigenous people (Oliveira, 2020) or enslaved people (Oliveira, 2018). However, there is still a gap in studies that address how these complexes are produced in small groups, especially in intentional communities, new approaches that we intend to develop here.

## Cultural Complex

Singer and Kimbles (2020) developed the concept of cultural complexes as being responsible for the development of the essential components of an inner sociology. The complexes (Jung, 1971/1986) are understood here as the congregation of affections, images, experiences, around archetypal cores – collective, abstract and hypothetical patterns of behavior (Jung, 1976/2006) – having a certain degree of autonomy, capable of directing the perception and attitude of each individual, beyond their conscious intention. With regard to cultural complexes, they will present a similar composition, albeit at a collective level, that is, information and misinformation about the structures of societies, as they have been experienced throughout the history of each specific group (Singer & Kimbles, 2020), and in our case, the ecovillages.

As Jung pointed out in his 1925 lectures, between the individual psyche and the collective unconscious, there are intermediate cultural layers (family, tribe, nation) (McGuire, 1989). These layers of personality would be composed of representations coming from the emotions experienced by the subjects, mediated by the experiences of a certain social group and registered in the collective psyche (Boechat, 2014).

As we can understand so far, cultural complexes play a significant role in the structuring of emotional experiences, acting both at an individual and collective level (Singer & Kimbles, 2020). According to the authors and for us, as a way of instrumentalizing the concept for the assessment of life in ecovillages, cultural complexes will be worked out as the beliefs and emotions sedimented in the group, which function autonomously and mediate the individual/community relationship. This mediation stems out from the subject's feeling of belonging to the group in which he/she is inserted. In this connection, cultural complexes create resonances between the people involved, creating a sense of familiarity. In the case of ecovillages, it is a matter of understanding of how they

would organize the residents around collective expectations, their self-definition as a group, their destiny, uniqueness and their projections and introjections.

## Method

Data collection took place in three ecovillages located one in western Switzerland, another in northern Switzerland and the third in southeastern Brazil. The process took ten to eight weeks of immersion in each field of research (January / March, June / August, and October / November 2019, respectively) as well as participants' observations, and interviews. The authors shared the survey results with the participants.

The participant observation method involves participating in the daily activities of a group to learn the explicit and implicit aspects of their routines and culture. As pointed out by Aagaard and Matthiesen (2015), this method goes beyond the exclusive use of language for data analysis. Another tool is to pay attention to the material world, human bodies, and other objects to learn the meanings embedded in group life.

Participant's observation allows comparing the subjectivity of participants and their behaviors, reporting their beliefs and actions. It helps to understand the physical, social, cultural and economic contexts in which participants live. It is possible to witness the relationships between people, contexts, ideas, norms and events.

The data reviewed concern the physical and administrative structure of each ecovillage, the residents' relationships between themselves, with other people and with the environment. All interviews were recorded and later translated. For analysis purposes, the selected data were deductively coded around three subjects: 1) the emergence of complexes; 2) how they were worked on; and 3) how they developed (Creswell, 2014).

Data analysis was performed from an ethnographic perspective, in which the interpretations were made based on the routine and key events of each community, presenting different perspectives of the participants in relation to each one of them. To make the cross-cultural comparison between ecovillages, we applied the ethnographic perspective analysis to the case study approach, looking for similarities and differences among the cases (Creswell, 2014).

All ecovillage residents were invited to participate in the investigation and those who accepted signed a Free and Informed Consent Form that was submitted and accepted by the Ethics Committee (CAAE nº 89152318.5.0000.5137) and complied with all the ethical precepts of both countries.

### **Analysis of the emergence of cultural complexes**

From the research data we extracted two cultural complexes which we called collective/individual and Gaia. We analyzed the material collected around three aspects: 1) the emergence of cultural complexes; 2) working with cultural complexes; and 3) development of cultural complexes.

#### ***Individual / Collective cultural complex***

The data collected, allowed us to verify that the individual/collective cultural complex addresses both nuances of the conflict between individuality and collectivity, as the experience of

being part of a group and feeling alone. Furthermore, hierarchy constitutes a part of the cluster of this cultural complex.

The first ecovillage is an intentional community, managed by a cooperative. The community is located in a house in western Switzerland, with easy access to public transport and urban centers. During the time of the observation process, house dwellers included 16 people, on average, taking into account the turnover. Among the residents, one was a member of the cooperative. At the end of the observation period of this study, four of the sixteen dwellers had lived in the house for more than six months. The age of the residents ranged from 1 to 60 years.

In this ecovillage, the intention to change the community relations was based on a social contract. The main objective of the social contract was to develop a notion of community that “has common bases, a common intention and adapts to different contexts”, as said by a cooperative member. In order to create such circumstances, the cooperative assumed that the community meeting was the key event of the encounter and that the architecture of the house itself, equipped with a community kitchen and less individual spaces, fostered such encounters. The idea was to promote a sphere of communion, as one of the oldest residents claimed. The cooperative, represented by the oldest resident, predicted that over time, the notion of “mine” would dissolve, creating the notion of “our”, in which everything could be shared.

However, during the observation process, this idea did not materialize. In periods of greater presence of cooperative representatives in the house, activities were more regulated, enhancing the hierarchy between cooperative members and other residents, and were taking place in a more individualized way. In the absence of the cooperative representatives, the meetings in the house took place more spontaneously. As Duarte (2021) points out, the presence of guardians causes dissipative effects in communities, while the freedom to meet in an environment that offers such conditions helps in the meeting and community investment by its residents.

The community meetings, which took place once a month, were an informative space. During the meetings, what occurred in the community was passed on. The meeting addressed more the techniques for reducing consumption than promoting the dwellers’ reflection and personal development.

Respondents said that these procedures centralized decision-making power on the cooperative members. This showed up during a meeting. Before starting it, two representatives of the cooperative (one resident and the other who took care of the technical part) announced that the heating equipment would be modified, because the current one only heated up a little. They criticized the attitude of the residents. Some tried to argue that they had not had the chance to discuss the matter, but they were rebuffed, with affirmations that those responsible for the heating project were the ones who decided.

When discussions arose during meetings, cooperative representatives enhanced that the decision-making process was described in the social contract. They justified this choice by saying: “We cannot let all new residents make decisions that could change the entire community”. In order to participate in the decision-making process, it was necessary to have lived in the community for at least six months.

As Calland (2019) points out, even with the existence of the desire for love, here understood as community communion, it is often necessary to challenge the structures of power to develop that communion. In this connection, the representative of the cooperative decided the topics to be discussed, and the others had to follow. One of the residents stated in an interview that “When I arrived, I wanted to help the community, but I did not know how. There are times when people who

don't live here have more power than us who live here". Some consequences of the management model based on vertical normativity generated a growing dissatisfaction among the residents of the community, causing a high turnover.

When we called it individual/collective cultural complex, we found that, instead of being able to develop a complex that promoted the union of the group, two traditions confronted each other in the ecovillage experience. On the one hand, the tradition of community life encouraged everyone, cooperative and house dwellers, to seek a housing and coexistence model that would give priority to the collective. Thus, they lived close by, they met frequently; however, this phenomenon was taking place under the aegis of the cooperative, which, in the figure of its coordinator, assumed a patriarchal aspect. Unlike Jung's assertion that the European soul was used to the patriarchal order and that its absence would lead to anarchy (Jung, 1941/1988), in this case, the patriarchy, in the incessant search to submit the cohabitants to the law, weakened the affective ties and the absence of the patriarchal figure, allowed communion of the house dwellers.

The second ecovillage. The second ecovillage is located in an 18th century castle, located in northern Switzerland, three kilometers from the city downtown. It was formed by five distinct spiritual groups that came together with the intention of creating a community that promoted "Encounters and Self-Awareness" without having a spiritual guide. They also created a Seminar Center where they would promote workshops associated with the topic of personal development.

The ecovillage population was multigenerational (ranging from 1 to 65 years) and multicultural. At the time, there were 57 residents, 34 adults and 23 children, who had lived in the community for an average of 8 years.

In this ecovillage, the main focus was to enable individuals to work on their own personalities and interpersonal relationships, without disregarding the importance of community cohesion. This process of self-reflection would be the greatest collective force that the ecovillage could create. Even if at that time Jung (1941/1988) privileged only psychotherapy, he already emphasized the importance of the individual's work for the common good, since it is in the individual that life thrives.

As in the other ecovillage, residents sought life in a community to escape the isolation experienced in large centers, in search of closer relationships that they believed existed in the community. At that time, the collective/individual cultural complex required a process for the individual to be able to live in the community. As an employee who worked at the Seminary Center puts it: "Many people felt deluded by life in the community. They thought they would get here and would never feel alone. It is not true. I've seen people feel lonely in the community and leave". In contrast, one of the most recent residents emphasizes the joy of living in the ecovillage: "I realized that whenever I come back from vacation, it goes like this, 'Oh, hello!'. And everybody says, 'How was it?' So it's like 'wow' a lot of people here know where I've been, and we're happy".

We realize that the collective/individual complex present here does not concern a loss of individuality, but on the contrary, it is a collective that includes the individual as an essential part. Hence the nomenclature collective/individual cultural complex as one does not overlap the other, but integrates them and allows dialogue between opposites pairs, being interdependent. And what would make you different in an ecovillage compared to society at large? In the present case, the work that individuals and groups carry out on themselves in regular meetings that they called large circles (weekly) and intensive periods (three times a year).

The main artifice highlighted by many of them is the work with the shadow. One of the members said, "I think I've learned a lot talking about my inner world. It also helps with the relationships. I accept shadows better than before. Shadow means qualities and difficulties I have

with myself and other people". Reflection occurs through the process that they call mirroring, when they learn from their own projections. The same resident stated: "We are mirrored in this community. In other words, here I learn, for example, what I had learned before and I didn't advance". In this connection, group work proves to be very effective in two aspects, both in the integration of residents and in individual development.

Unlike Jung's claim in a letter to Iling (Hobson, 1964), in which Jung claimed that groups tended to create a false sense of security, comparable with father or mother's status, this ecovillage did not fully offer this parental welcoming presumed by the author. The effects of non-development, dependency maintenance, insecurity and childishness foreseen, are present and can be worked on by the group, as pointed out by a psychologist who lived in the community: "There are two motivations for living in a community, one conscious and the other unconscious. And the unconscious motivation almost no one works on it. (...) There are expectations about what others can do about their own unresolved children's stories". And this is one of the main sources of conflicts in the community, which changes when subjects are willing to become responsible for themselves and for their functions. And as the psychologist pointed out, the community becomes a space to "go in and open up, and expose yourself with all your strengths and weaknesses".

The collective/individual cultural complex mediates the relationships between individuals and the group. When it generates the feeling of acceptance, it requires limits so as not to be consumed by the collective. "For me, living in a community is to raise barriers. I always maintain my individuality, in order not to get lost in the community", said one of the residents. On the other hand, residents could not rely on their individualism. Another resident stated that "to live with other people, you must not cling to your own ego. You need to reconfigure your mind into a 'we' instead of an 'I'. And if that happens, everything is influenced. It is not 'mine'. It is 'our' garden. It is 'our' place. It is 'our' community. It's 'our' life here. It is 'our' responsibility". In other words, living the collective/individual complex presupposes dealing with the duality of the existence of a group, with its moments of communion and others of division, both necessary for the individuals and for the community.

The development of the collective/individual cultural complex, which intends to integrate the two different characteristics in everyday coexistence, proposing the coexistence of both, presented similar aspects in the third ecovillage, located in southeastern Brazil, and in the second one.

The third ecovillage was created in southeastern Brazil by a group of friends, who had already performed many community activities together. At one point in time they decided to study the ecovillage life model.

That ecovillage is located in an environmental preservation area 16 km from downtown a city of approximately 5,000 inhabitants. During the investigation, the community had eight residents. Most of them were over forty, but there was also a child.

The first characteristic that we can indicate regarding this similarity between the second and third ecovillages is the dichotomy between the communion of the members and the feeling of isolation. Since the creation of the group, the founding members carried out various activities called community activities (they lived together, set thrift stores in the neighborhood), which united the group while maintaining their individuality. The ideal of community construction symbolized this aspect, with a lower circle being the common space for living together and housing located in the center of the hill, preserving the independence of each dweller.

During events, or when there were more people in the community, the feeling of communion was more present. When there were more residents, respondents said they held regular meetings,

both to carry out self-reflection activities and to have meals together. According to the main author, during the Gaia Education stage (for more details, see <[www.gaiaeducation.org](http://www.gaiaeducation.org)>), encounters for self-reflection, such as the ZEGG Forum, often took place. During the meeting, a person who did not feel allowed to speak, went to the center of the premises and exposed his/her feelings, thoughts and experiences. Then, three people voluntarily went to the center, one at a time, to reveal how the speech reverberated in the individual, in order to collectivize the feelings and experiences which until then were considered individual matters. As Odde and Vestergaard (2021) point out, individual and social fields emerge from the same relationship and interaction dynamic processes.

However, as in the ecovillage in northern Switzerland, even with the feeling of communion fostered by the group, individuality was overrun in three occasions. The first concerns the feeling of loneliness, exacerbated by the scarcity of residents and by the architecture. As one resident pointed out, “I think that ecovillage with only few people with distant houses generated a little bit of a feeling of loneliness”.

The second moment refers to the need to impose limits. As one resident pointed out, regarding individual rhythm:

I must find my rhythm and keep my rhythm and establish a dialogue with this collective rhythm. I must get organized to be there in the really important moment and get my personal space. This is a learning experience and everyone has to go through it when they move there, separating the collective from the individual.

The third moment refers to the need to confront one’s own point of view with the collective one. Terms like mirroring and shadowing also came up. One of the residents stated that:

For me, this adaptation to the collective is the biggest challenge here. Living with all and everyone being different, understanding their performance within the group and seeing how it affects the other. You have to tear yourself open so that the other person knows what you’re thinking, because if you don’t, things won’t happen and we’ll reproduce what’s out there.

Different from what most of the literature in Analytical Psychology proposes, from Jung’s writings, that group life would nullify individuality (Hobson, 1964); the two experiences of the ecovillages show that the development of the collective/individual cultural complex demands from the participants of a particular group, the experience of both communion and collective seduction, as well as the self-knowledge and loneliness that goes with the individuality. On the other hand, corroborating the author’s own idea, it is only with the willingness of everyone to work on their own individuality that the complex characteristics approach consciousness, enabling better handling of situations. For this to occur, hierarchy relationships need to be more flexible and the subjective work of each individual is necessary. Thus, living in a group is paramount, as projections and shadows appear in it and each one has the chance to expand their consciousness further, thus strengthening each individual and the collective simultaneously.

### ***Gaia cultural complex***

Like the complex reviewed in the previous section, the cultural complex of Gaia also presents two polarities. From the observations in ecovillages, we verified that this complex can emerge in one pole through the consumption of resources originating in the environment or in the other pole as an identification with natural cycles.

In the first ecovillage, the reduction of environmental impact was closely linked to the physical structure of the building. The house was basically built of wood. Only the ground floor was built in masonry, due to the safety requirements of the canton administration. The rest of the construction of the house was guided by the precepts of bio-construction. The heating system of the house used wood pellets a system that consumes less natural resources than the heating provided by the canton, which is based on oil and nuclear energy. With such structure, the house received the Swiss sustainability certificate (Minergie).

As far as pro-environmental behavior was concerned, residents' opinions differed. For some, the structure created by the cooperative allowed them to feel more ecological. This is because they consumed some food together and originating from local producers, in addition to providing a more optimized use of physical spaces.

The logistics proposed by the cooperative included the purchase of organic vegetables from a local farm. These vegetables were bought from a common fund and could be consumed by everyone in the house, both the residents and the servicing cooperative members. In this connection, one of the residents who was an architect said: "Here I feel more ecological, as we share the vegetables and we buy organic food from a local farmer".

For another resident, who was also working on the construction of the house, the bio-construction of the ecovillage was exemplary. He stated that "Here I learned a lot about bio-construction. I intend to take advantage of this new knowledge to build my own community with some friends".

On the other hand, with regard to the pro-environmental behavior of the residents taken individually, the opinion was the opposite. This is because the individual consumption of food and means of transport remained the same as before joining the community. One of the residents, who was an engineer, said that "Here we don't have the top of sustainability. There are better projects. Here, everyone has their own car. In addition, we consume as we did before, without any concern about sustainability".

We can observe that the model of the relationship with nature was based on an ecologically efficient construction within standards. We thus affirm that the ecovillage structure promotes a platform where people do not need to reflect to adopt pro-environmental behaviors in their daily lives, since the structure is energy-efficient. However, the behaviors that depended on individual reflection and choice did not change, as people were not led to reflect on their own attitude and behavior in connection with such a structure.

In the second ecovillage, even with personal and social development as the main focus of the community, ecological development appears as a precept of the ecovillage and presents its effects and results.

The physical structure of the buildings was a hindrance to the structural renovation, aiming at the more efficient use of natural resources. The inhabitants wanted to develop rainwater collection systems and change the way the buildings were heated, but they did not have enough financial resources to do so. On the other hand, community life, with the self-reflection processes promoted in the meetings, facilitated the development of environmentally sustainable projects. They jointly created a permaculture vegetable garden that served the residents and a small organic food market within the community itself for domestic supply.

At the individual level, community life produced two effects, in terms of consumption. First, even considering themselves as consumers having little resources, many residents said that life in the community made them more critical of their consumption habits. They said they bought

less on impulse and more out of need. As one of the community founders puts it, “I think the last thing I bought was two years ago or so. But I arrived too late. So what’s left are oversized pants. I just gave up. I do not need this”.

According to the interviewees, this attitude is due both to the level of contentment with life and the resignification of the purpose of each thing and to the reduced need to present oneself impeccably to other people. One of the most recent residents said: “So when you’re happy with things, it’s not important how they are. Now I’ve really started to appreciate things for their purpose”.

Having a permaculture vegetable garden and a market in the community also promoted new experiences. The trip to the city became less necessary, reducing the consumption of fuel and industrialized products. The person in charge of the permaculture vegetable garden told about this experience,

The permaculture vegetable garden has changed my consumption a lot. Now it’s quite different. I also realized that there was no point in buying food that came from so far for feeding us in the winter. So I became more conscious about food.

In addition, some people felt that life in the community had brought minor changes in their consumption. In these situations, they preferred to preserve their individuality and focus on preserving their own lifestyle, as one of the residents points out: “My habits haven’t changed much. On my priority list is the appearance of my apartment. We refurbished and repainted it, making it beautiful and chic”. Even with the permaculture vegetable garden, not everyone used this possibility. The person in charge of the project was surprised: “I don’t understand some residents. They even invest financially in the project, but I’ve never seen them here to get any vegetables. At least they help others who need food most”. Even with different attitudes regarding the consumption model, this did not turn into a conflict among the residents. The tendency of the majority was to reflect more on their behavior towards reducing the environmental impact, respecting the individuality of each person.

As Han-Pile (2016) points out, self-reflection practices, such as reflection circles, intensive periods promoted by the community and community activities, such as the collective cultivation of the vegetable garden and the cleaning and organization of buildings, exercise criticism or self-criticism. It allows disidentification with a form of subjectivity, promoting the construction of new forms of existence. In the case of the present ecovillage, these practices made the inhabitants overcome, to a certain extent, the influences of norms and social identity in their pro-environmental behavior. Emotions and the individual morals gained more relevance in decision-making, causing them to criticize and reduce their consumption needs.

We found that the relationship with the nature of this ecovillage was also based on consumption. Even if there was the work of each individual with himself, the relationship with the environment still revolved around the sparing of resources. We can say that, in this connection, pro-environmental behaviors are linked to self-reflection, self-criticism and personal decisions. We do not mean that all behavior depends only on individual initiatives, but that, even with the limitations of structures, subjects start to reflect on their behavior, in the construction of an ethical life, consistent with the environmental morals they wish to follow.

In contrast, the residents of the third ecovillage said they followed the precepts of permaculture. This means that they sought to use natural resources with the aim of not depleting them, preserving or even regenerating them. One resident explained this reflection on the relationship between the individual and nature “Living in an ecovillage is living in a place that has a model designed to be integrated with nature. A model in which we see ourselves as part of nature”

and she adds “everything we consume we return to nature in a clean way, as much as possible, compared to our contemporary world”.

In the interviewees’ view, the creation of the ecovillage aimed to recreate a life system that would make its residents responsible for the preservation of nature and provide learning. In this new system, they were more reflective users of natural resources and physical structure. For them, the life model they created was a process of constant questioning of their own actions. They would like to develop a system that would be an example to others. This continuous reflection led them to denaturalize their consumption model, understanding that it was possible to create more ecologically sustainable ways of life, as one of the founders said:

It’s being able to be more responsible for my own ecological footprint, more aware of it. I leave, I withdraw from a system where I compulsorily have to use things I don’t believe in and don’t agree with. I’m going to seek to minimize their impact and I think that people here have a marked education profile, seeking to try to experiment things so that this is watched and replicated.

The continuous scrutiny of sustainability practices led to a transformation in the reflection about the relationship with nature and in pro-environmental behavior. This questioning promoted a process of unlearning and relearning, that is, of disidentification with a form of subjectivity in order to build another one with more coherence with the project (Han-Pile, 2016). They developed complexes that led them to perceive themselves as part of nature, and no longer as subjects distinct from the natural environment, consumers of resources.

The residents of the ecovillage used different strategies to change their relationship with nature. They used permaculture norms and principles to define what would be more ecological for the community and to govern community life, and carried out self-reflection practices (such as meetings and dialogues – either in the classroom or in contact with the environment), both on a reflective and practical level. This model promoted noticeable environmental results, such as changing consumption habits and the preservation and regeneration of the surrounding vegetation, in addition to modifying the notion of living of the inhabitants, who felt that they were a constituent part of nature. One of the oldest residents said: “we are the self-reflective element of nature”.

From the daily life of the third ecovillage, a Gaia cultural complex emerged in which the dwellers saw themselves in another type of relationship with nature. On the one hand, pro-environmental behaviors are linked to a structure that requires certain actions and reflections on the subject of environmental sustainability by the residents. On the other hand, the functioning of this structure depended on the self-reflection and self-experimentation of the inhabitants in a direct interaction with the environment.

The comparison of the three ecovillages highlighted the importance of self-practices in the development of Gaia cultural complexes. Unlike what Kiehl (2020) points out, it is not only through individual self-reflection, such as active imagination, that a new perspective on the relationship between man and nature is reached. The physical structures and social norms facilitate or hinder the execution of this behavior modality. Together with the structures of the community, it was the exercises of the inhabitants of the ecovillages about themselves that made it possible to change individual attitudes and behavior in favor of the preservation and recovery of the environment.

## Conclusion

Based on the observations of the participants, we were able to evidence how life in ecovillages enables the development of new cultural complexes. In addition, we verified that,

besides the historical aspects, cultural complexes are updated in everyday life, based on the work that each individual does on their own subjectivity, especially when in contact with the group to which they belong.

On the one hand, we were able to verify that community life does not lead exclusively to submission to the collective, but that the dichotomy between individuality and collectivity is activated in the community experience, which we call the individual/collective cultural complex. The same occurs with the Gaia cultural complex, which gives rise to two ways of relating to nature. On the one hand, in the form of consumption and on the other, as an integration to the rhythm of nature. However, as empirical experiences show us, only the hard work of self-reflection of each individual in community meetings allowed the integration of these complexes, enabling a better negotiation between the opposite poles of each participant.

Given the purpose of this work, and the recent experience of ecovillages, we still cannot say how these experiences leave, or not, unconscious records, for greater integration of the complexes present in the relationships of individuals with the community and the environment. To this end, further research that addresses such aspects and the development of cultural complexes today becomes necessary, to deepen and expand the concept of cultural complexes.

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## Contributors

L. G. M. F. DUARTE was responsible for the conception and design of the study, review and approval of the final version of the manuscript. H. BARÇANTE, J. BRAGANÇA E MOREIRA and L. G. M. F. DUARTE participated in the analysis and interpretation of the study data.