

University of Brasilia at IBC

On October 11, 2018, we received 13 undergraduate students from University of Brasilia, together with professors Renata Corrêa Martins, Clarisse Rezende Rocha and the collaborator Raquel Trevizam for an experience here at IBC. The students are attending the subject “Interdisciplinary Studies of Cerrado”. They come from varied courses: biology, economy, psychology, environmental sciences, and chemistry, among others. They were all very excited with the experience. It was the first time they visited an ecovillage.

After check-in round, I explained to them a little about the concept of ecovillages and the sustainable, community and spiritual practices we develop. I also spoke about IBC’s history. Afterwards, we divided the participants in three groups for the hands-on workshops: one group went to Daniel’s house to see the natural building techniques he used and to make a garden bed; a second group went with Lorena to Ricardo’s house to make earth plaster; and a third group went with Andrea to the community showers to make an earth wall using pau-a-pique technique. The workshops ran simultaneously until midday, when a delicious vegetarian meal was served, prepared by Pamela and Marcel.

After lunch, we gathered in a circle for the groups to share a little about what happened in each workshop. Then, we did an activity using GEN Ecovillage Playing Cards (which were translated for Portuguese last year). Each participant selected a card and, in pairs, they discussed its principle. They were encouraged to see the cards as an oracle for this moment of their lives. After the pair work, we gathered in one circle and shared the main points and insights discussed in their pairwork. It was very exciting to listen to the student’s reports, very conscious and critical of many political, social, cultural and ecological issues of contemporary lifestyles.

Afterwards, we did a more ludic practice to experience a wider sense of time – what Joanna Macy and Molly Brown call “deep time”. The idea is to abandon the fragmented experience of time we live in contemporary society. In our society, the natural pace of agricultural or craft work gave way to a time measured by the clock, generating a rigid separation between work time (usually the eight-hour journey in which we must be “productive”) and leisure time (when we can “enjoy” life and be creative). Never in the history of mankind have people had so many appliances that can help them save time and, nonetheless, never has a society been so driven by hurry. In this overwhelming pace of consumption and technical innovations, people have become ever more disconnected from their ancestral heritage and from future generations. The legacy of their ancestors is easily destroyed in the same way they destroy the resources future generations will need.

The deep time experience helps us reconnect to a wider experience of time, tuned to longer ecological rhythms and connected to past and future beings. We learn to act as ancestors of future generations and, as such, we take responsibility for the legacy we are going to leave on Earth. In this way, we can realize the importance of our present work for the Great Turning towards a life-sustaining society.

It was beautiful to see the students’ and teachers’ surrender to the practice. In the feedback circle, we were moved by the intensity of the experience. Certainly, many of the students left IBC with a new perspective on life and with the hope that even in dark times (we are facing a particularly dark political time), there are people working for the Great Turning. I believe that the most rewarding work is to show young people that there are alternatives and that they can be a part of this movement for a more sustainable, collaborative and just world.

University encourages the capacity of critical thinking and teaches us about the problems of capitalism and consumer society. But ecovillages offer solutions and constructive proposals. They offer the possibility for people to be a part of the solution. That is why the partnership between ecovillages and Universities is so important to the education of young people: so they can engage in occupations that do not reproduce unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, but, instead, lead their careers towards sustainable, participatory and integrative solutions. Being a part of this movement for change, of the Great Turning, gives us a huge sense of purpose.

Hearing the feedback from students and professors on that day was extremely rewarding. These feedbacks remind me that the work we are doing here is worthwhile. It is not only for us that are here today. It is for all future generations.

Highlights from the student's written reports:

"It certainly was a true immersion experienced by all of us. In the feedback circle, the feeling was inexplicable: a consciousness of belonging, the recovery of the feeling of being part of the whole was much reported. It was perceptible that changes in behavior and thought were achieved". Yeda Carla Taquari Silveira, Environmental Science student.

"On October 11, our professors took the class to Instituto Biorregional do Cerrado (IBC) for an enriching experience. [...] For many students it was a morning full of novelties and, to all of us, of much learning and hope. [...] The Ecovillage Playing Cards practice] was an incredible activity and makes me rethink the mode of consumption and production and our complex social and environmental relationships. The last activity was, for me, the most profound and reflexive I have ever participated. [...] I am speechless to describe what was that practice and the repercussion it had on me. Once more I would like to thank immensely for the opportunity and experience". Layane Carvalho, Environmental Science student.

"The visit to IBC ecovillage was not only a great academic experience, but a sensorial, transcendental and humanitarian one. [...] We discussed about specific topics like how to be more proactive in relation to indigenous' and marginalized communities' rights and how to have more conscious consumption and habits. It was incredible have the notion that the feeling of belonging, as a human in nature, answered all of them – a feeling which I took hold of during this trip in a genuine and unique way. [...] To end the day, we had a pair work in which we talked visually and orally about our perspective on the present global situation and about what we are doing to leave an honorable legacy for future generations. Once again, the feeling of belonging took me over and transformed that moment in something extremely transcendental and profound – those moments we know we will carry for our whole lives. Therefore, the visit to IBC was important for the group to analyze empirically and sensorially the real Cerrado experience, reinforcing in me the sense of belonging to the environment. It was one of the most valuable experiences I have had in my life". Gabriel de Medeiros Jerônimo, Production Engineering student.

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