

## For a Circular Education: sustainable transition in the pandemic context

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**ABSTRACT.** This theoretical essay presents a brief literature review on the Business Model in Circular Economy (CE) and aims to answer the question: what would be the main aspects of the circularity to integrate Countryside Education in the current context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil? In an essayistic manner, the study made it possible to reflect critically on the opportunities that CE can represent for Countryside Education. The results reveal converging aspects between Countryside Education and CE and that could be seen as a reference for solutions that deeply comprise the cause of socio-environmental problems currently present in the life and production in rural territories in Brazil.

**Keywords:** circular economy, countryside education, covid-19 pandemic.

## Por uma Educação Circular: transição sustentável no contexto pandêmico

**RESUMO.** O presente ensaio teórico apresenta uma breve revisão de literatura a respeito do Modelo de Negócios em Economia Circular (EC) e procura responder à pergunta: quais seriam os principais aspectos da circularidade a integrar a Educação do Campo brasileira no atual contexto da pandemia de Covid-19? De forma ensaística, o estudo possibilitou refletir criticamente quanto às oportunidades que a EC pode representar para a Educação Campesina. Os resultados revelam aspectos convergentes entre a Educação do Campo e a EC e que podem servir de referência para soluções que abrangem mais profundamente a causa dos problemas socioambientais presentes no atual cenário brasileiro da vida e da produção em territórios rurais.

**Palavras-chave:** economia circular, educação campesina, pandemia de covid-19.

## Hacia una educación circular: transición sostenible en el contexto de la pandemia

**RESUMEN.** Este ensayo teórico presenta una breve revisión de la literatura sobre el Modelo de Negocio en Economía Circular (CE) y busca responder a la pregunta: ¿cuáles serían los principales aspectos de la circularidad para integrar la educación rural brasileña en el contexto actual de la pandemia covideana? 19. De manera ensayística, el estudio permitió reflexionar críticamente sobre las oportunidades que la CE puede representar para la educación rural. Los resultados revelan aspectos convergentes entre Educación Rural y EC y que pueden servir de referencia para soluciones que cubran más profundamente la causa de los problemas socioambientales presentes en el actual escenario brasileño de vida y producción en territorios rurales.

**Palabras clave:** economía circular, educación campesina, pandemia de covid-19.

## Introduction

The Circular Economy (CE) emerges in a context of concern about the paradigm shift towards another possible future for humanity different from what was imagined until then. MacArthur (2018) states that the modern illuminist view on doing things is reaching its limit, "the current system is no longer working for businesses, people or the environment." Given this scenario, the CE replaces the concept of end-of-life of goods and resources with value restoration cycles, eliminating waste and incorporating new processes of reusing and transforming materials and products (Sassanelli et al., 2019). CE's goal is to improve the production flows of goods and services to create a new "circle of values" for technical and biological materials in such a manner that it is possible to rebuild capital, whether it is financial, manufactured, human, social or natural, and developing smarter, more sustainable, and profitable companies (Weetman, 2019).

The idea of CE has been strongly disseminated on a global scale since 2012, through the initiative of *Ellen MacArthur Foundation* when a series of reports entitled "Towards the Circular Economy" was published. The CE is a new concept of economic practice that respects sustainability cycles and is in constant

dialogue with the local community (Azevedo, 2015). Counterpointing the Linear Economy, the CE aims to transform the production processes to reduce the extraction of natural resources so that, once extracted, the resources remain longer in the economy in a cycle that involves doing-and-redoing and using-and-reusing. This initiative is in accordance with the United Nations proposal for sustainable development, especially with regard to millennium development goal number 12, which aims to ensure sustainable standards of both consumption and production (Duthie & Lins, 2017).

According to Jabbour et al. (2019), CE requires significant transformations in the way organizations operate, creating an approach of sustainability, through new forms of product designers to reshape operations in supply chain, and this knowledge can support the transition to circular economy based on the perspective of dynamic resources. However, this change of mindset<sup>i</sup> is not automatic and requires a collective and orderly effort to change people's ideas and habits through the problematization of culture and relations between work and production. In this process, education is an essential strategy for the change.

From this perspective, it is proposed to (re)think about the practices of

Countryside Education in the current Brazilian context, and the objective of this study is to critically reflect on the possible contributions of CE to Countryside Education in Brazil, considering in particular the impact of the current pandemic context on the world economy that already interferes widely in rural production.

### **Methodology**

This article was directed through a literature review with the purpose of analyzing the contributions of CE to Countryside Education in Brazil in the face of the current pandemic context in the world economy that already interferes widely in rural production. The methodology used in this study follows the perspective of qualitative essayistic research, which, according to Campos (2015), is a problematization tool based on the discursive and evaluative interpretation of a given field of knowledge, in order to generate new discussions and debates, instigating some ethical and critical positioning in a contextualized and synthetic way from the reflexive analysis when facing some matter.

The essayist intention of this study is to approach Countryside Education to Circular Economy, starting from the premise that it is a process of a social

nature. Castel (1998) postulates that the social occupies the existing gap between political organization and the economic system. Its function is "restoring or establishing ties that do not obey either strictly economic logic or strictly political jurisdiction. The social consists "of systems of non-market regulations, established to try to fill this space" (Castel, 1998, p. 31). Baremlitt (2002, p. 35) defines that the society is the space for the interpenetration of reproductive and anti-productive forces "whose functions are at the service of exploitation, domination and mystification, as well as being constituted by the interpenetration of the forces and entities that are at the service of cooperation, freedom, full information (transversality)." Therefore, studies addressing social phenomena concern a complexity and should use devices that affirm the inclusion and transversality of the field. Thus, a demand for methodologies aimed at contributing to insights regarding possible perspectives for Countryside Education is established.

### **Countryside Education in Brazil today**

The conception of Countryside Education is not limited to the pedagogical dimension of a school located in rural areas (Distrito Federal, 2018). The concept of Countryside Education emerges in the

early 1990s in the context of social movements for agrarian reform in Brazil and counterpoints the notion of Rural Education focused mostly on agribusiness and the exploitation of natural resources (Cezar & Silva, 2016).

The characteristics of living in the fields should be contemplated in the social curriculum of the community in which the peasant students are inserted. That is, the educational curriculum should be understood as "the set of intentions that permeates the entire school environment, as well as its interactions with the community in its surroundings" (Nascimento et al., 2019, p. 14)

Arroyo (2012) considers that pedagogy should not undergo an adaptive process to the fields, but rather a reformulation by the knowledge of the fields. A non-rural association of the fields expresses a positioning of resistance and social mobilization as a primal differentiator. Costa and Cabral (2016) assess that the differentiating principles of Countryside and Rural Education originate from landowners' thinking related to Rural Education, whereas the other emerges from social struggles. Therefore, they are based on opposing paradigms. Arroyo (2012) describes that Countryside Education, par excellence, produces subjects with critical and political thinking.

Social collective groups in their presence in social movements or in schools bring other pedagogies. Victims of historical processes of domination/subordination bring their pedagogies of resistance. Other political and political subjects are produced in these collective actions through liberation/emancipation. They demand recognition, they build their self-recognitions. They put pressure on the state for another project of field, of city, of society. (Arroyo, 2012, p. 14-15).

The subject, in a problematizing and historical education, understands the need for a reflexive discussion about the economy established in our society. A static and reproductive economy in the scope of inequalities and impoverishment of the planet and society. Countryside Education is translated as

Pedagogical political conception, aimed at boosting the connection of human beings with the production of conditions of social existence, in the connection with the land and the environment, incorporating the societies and space of the forest, livestock, mines, agriculture, fishing grounds, fishermen, riverside populations, quilombo communities, indigenous peoples and extractivism (Brazil, 2001).

In this perspective, similar to CE, Countryside Education adopts a systemic view in which the relationship of the human being with the environment is imbricate in socio-historical processes that need to be considered.

However, the data related to the practice of Countryside Education, featured in the 2020 INEP education census and developed by Molina and Freitas (2011), point to a set of reticent historical difficulties in education: structural problems in school buildings, long distance between homes and school groups; multi-grade classes; disqualified teachers; lack of teaching material; decontextualization with the realities of life in the countryside – such as evasion in the harvest periods; lack of teaching material and restricted or non-existent access to the Internet.

It is an education, which by its context becomes dialogical in the process of inclusion/exclusion. According to Sawaia (2009), it is a contradictory game in an unequal pre-established social order and that implies an illusory aspect of inclusion. Included at a certain level but inserted in precarious and insufficient conditions. Nevertheless, the desire to remain in the educational sphere, sheltered and humanized, contextualized, and reflective relationships demonstrate the desire to remain and transform. Within this dialectic, Sawaia (2009) also points to a vulnerable and hopeful subject in the face of the current economy.

In times of global pandemic and in territories of extreme vulnerability,

Countryside Education requires poignant changes and the search for new economic forms becomes a primary necessity.

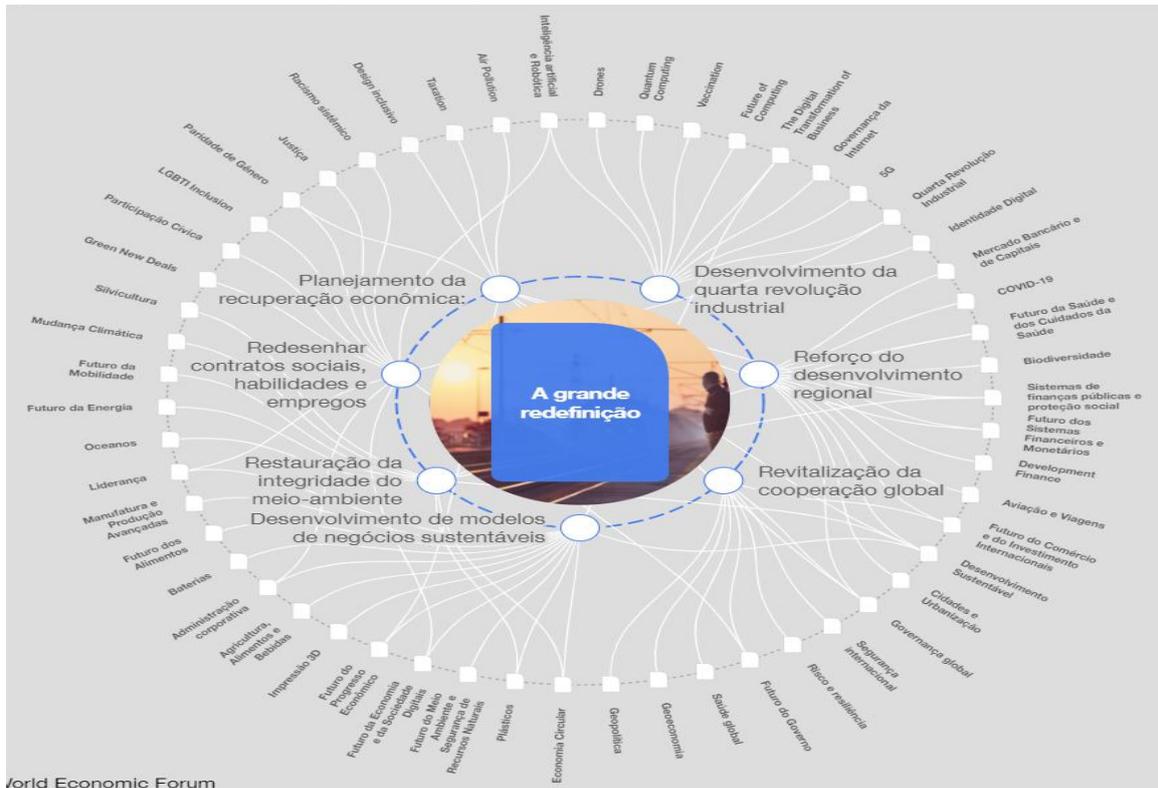
### **CE in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic**

The Circular Economy emerges in the context of the ethical and socio-environmental concerns of the contemporary world, in which economic power has also been the source of numerous societal problems, such as environmental degradation, the expansion of social inequality and the cyclical production of catastrophes and economic crises on a national scale and worldwide. However, because it is an emerging field, the production and dissemination of knowledge related to management operations, decision-making process, and product design and development are still insipid, and there is a lack of tools that enable greater capillarity without losing such valued systemic vision of the circularity of resources, products, and services of this new production paradigm though (Jabour et al., 2019). One of the main questions in this field is the elucidation of "how" to put into practice and ensure perennialism and prosperity to Circular Economy organizations (Jabour et al., 2019).

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF, 2020, p. 1) "the world is at a historic crossroads, as economies everywhere try to get out of a hiatus induced by COVID-19." Despite the high human and economic cost, the social isolation has brought new references for a "responsible and inclusive reconstruction... The lockdowns ... provided a glimpse of what is possible in terms of pollution limitation" (WEF, 2020, p. 1). In addition,

the number of people affected by the pandemic has made clear "what can happen when health systems and social safety networks are neglected" (WEF, 2020, p. 1). Such scenario evidenced the systemic and holistic character of life in society and constant interaction with nature. Figure 1 shows how this redefinition of the world order is happening.

Figure 1 - The great redefinition of the world order.



Source: WEF (2020).

Figure 1<sup>ii</sup> shows that from the perspective of the WEF (2020), the great redefinition underway on the planet involves the interrelationship between seven dimensions: planning the economic

recovery; redesign of social contracts, skills and jobs; restoration of environmental integrity; development of sustainable business models; revitalization of global cooperation; strengthening

regional progress and development of the fourth industrial revolution. " Public and private sector leaders are the ones who need to seize the moment and help create a more equitable and sustainable society"(WEF, 2020, p. 1).

CE gathers many characteristics and, therefore, it is at the center of this great reinvention of civilization. But it still needs to make great progress, with emphasis on decent work, since "labor relations are marked by values, culture and power relations that constitute the basis of the institutionalization of work as employment"(Resende, 2019, p. 38). To date, the literature review conducted in this study has revealed the need to develop an idea of circularity of both the workforce and processes of human resources management. In this perspective, circularity should contemplate the entire cycle of basic education and professionalization.

Due to the accelerated innovation of production processes, a more comprehensive system for the development of technical skills (hard skills) and attitudinal skills (soft skills) should also be created. The current scenario points to a greater need to develop socio-emotional skills, since it is expected from individuals to be flexible, emotionally self-controlled, capable of acting in multiple tasks and

adapting to constant changes (Resende, 2019). In this perspective, Countryside Education demands new characteristics from the subject facing the world and its current economy.

By combining the conceptual perspectives of Goleman (2012); Dweck, (2017) and UNESCO (2015) it is possible to synthesize the concept of soft skills as a set of skills (knowledge, abilities, and attitudes) that designate the adaptive and collaborative capacities of an individual in relation to the environment in which they are inserted. Therefore, to be considered mature or proficient in soft skills, it is expected that the individual presents high levels of self-knowledge, emotional control, analytical capacity, and assertiveness, both in decision making or in the action or attitude that they assume when facing the various situations that emerge in the routine of an organization or in the work environment.

When considering the development of soft skills as a process directed by learning relationships, it is important to highlight the relational aspect of soft skills in a context of mutual affectation/transformation between the individual and the environment/organization. It means that this is a dialogical and circular process. Hence, it is necessary to be attentive to the

dimensions related to quality of life and working conditions, since these factors interfere in the worker's productivity, engagement, and potential (Resende, 2019). These aspects indicate the need to combine the dimensions of care/assistance and empowerment.

In a scenario of economic crisis, people in vulnerable situations must develop their survival capabilities. Monteiro (2021) describes that vulnerability is an absence of power that makes conditions of development or recognition of individual themselves and of the world impracticable. The condition of vulnerability incapacitates a perspective for future in the affected groups. A limitation of the abilities of questioning themselves and the world to the extent that this process is often permeated by transformations of lexicons that coincide with social, political and mental transformations marked by the imposition of rules and norms over poor and excluded populations, as a condition of social, political and economic integration (Ribeiro & Resende, 2017).

Currently, according to Le Blanc (2011), there are two paradoxical normative options for coping with vulnerability and exclusion: care on one side and empowerment on the other. These two options work mostly at the service of

the neoliberal sense. This is because the process of co-optation of neoliberalism also expands towards the dissemination of market values to social policies, under the motto of inclusion. The great challenge of neoliberalism today is to make social policies a central part of the economic market, making controllable individuals who were previously not able to be controlled. In both cases, there is a culturalization of the social problem (Le Blanc, 2011).

Therefore, euphemizing the social over the corporate culture employs a power of disguising the reality. Empowerment is shaped by the neoliberal requirements of performance calculation. Life, from birth to death, functions as a company of its own. Empowerment requires the accountability of the administered subjects. Individuals should not depend on the state, but on themselves. (Le Blanc, 2011).

This demand of responsibility presupposes a philosophy of empowerment. On the other hand, the emphasis in care is based on the fact that lives depend on assistance, since they are considered to be excluded from the market and from the possibility of participating in the city. They operate under the logic of donation, establishing an administration of the excluded individuals, based on procedures of evaluation and control.

Social works in charge of creating bureaucracy and silencing the voice of the excluded ones (Le Blanc, 2011).

Le Blanc (2011) argues that the protection network depends on the intertwining between care and empowerment in a libertarian way, as, for example, proposed by Paulo Freire, cited by the author. It is necessary to think of care as a mean of empowerment. Only a new dimension of care supported in empowerment can contribute to the emergence of a critical cluster. However, it is necessary to ensure that care and empowerment do not rhyme with social readaptation or disguised orthopraxis. It is necessary to overcome the purely individual sense of empowerment, accrediting collective spheres, such as labor unions. In this perspective, the singular awareness of exclusion must at the same time be a collective awareness. Paulo Freire proposes the freedom of the oppressed population through awareness, in compliance with that stated by Le Blanc (2011), who believes that the oppressed ones welcome the oppressors in their psychic life in such a way that they cannot go on without them. The oppressors' way of life is coveted by the oppressed ones due to the subjective co-optation that their socio-historical context has imposed them.

The method of awareness in this case should clarify this mental scene (that idealizes a self-image identified with the tyrant boss), aiming at the freedom of the oppressed individuals from their own power of action differently from the hegemonic view. Instead of internalizing the judgment of the oppressor, they should build their own judgment. But for this, they must convince themselves that they are able to elaborate a possible way out through mental attitudes in which a transformative action is possible. The awareness of the marginalized and oppressed individuals is a condition for restoring their power to act. Accountability in turn refers to the empowerment of fragile lives. Thus, empowerment is equivalent to a series of practical and cognitive resources that the precarious or even excluded subjects can employ to face their social condition and demand justice. In this perspective, empowering social movements suggests the transformation in relations of power, restoring the power to act. It means admitting that there is a power in lives thought of as powerless. The excluded ones themselves are agents of resistance to the exclusion of which they are object. This methodology returns the power to act, but denounces neoliberalism, which abandons individuals and society at

the whim of market forces (Ribeiro & Resende, 2017).

In search of an economy that intends to circulate the Countryside Education, due to its history of struggle and questioning about the hegemonic economic model, it is perceived that it is able to outline primordial foundations related to the accomplishment of a new vision necessary to change the model of production, consumption, and work. The social mobilization and the struggle are characterized as a moving engine in this journey. When added to a constant repositioning of technical and attitudinal skills collectively built and continuously rethought, they are determining steps of the Countryside Education articulated with the empowerment of processes and their care with history and movements. It is a search not for development in capitalist parameters, but of a sustainability that incorporates new knowledge.

Lately, there is a growing and more profound movement that has been dedicated to rethinking social and work organization. Especially because despite all technological progress and increasing global wealth, the current scenario is critical with regard to environmental issues, hunger, the exclusion of ethnic minorities, gender, and people with disabilities. But what is the main problem

when a company, a school or a nation refuses to be inclusive?

Today, more than one billion people suffer from starvation in the world (BBC News Brazil, 2010). Such a phenomenon itself is already a large and complex problem. Vanguard corporations, some governments and social movements have already found that in order to achieve the desired economic development on a global scale, it is necessary to double consumption of energy. Yet, doubling production in the current standards will double social exclusion and generate an environmental collapse in less than 10 years. This means that there is no other way out than to invest in energy efficiency favoring social inclusion in a sustainable way.<sup>iii</sup>

In this context, Countryside Education has a great potential of contribution to CE, fostering solutions that focus more on the causes rather than in the consequences. These are just some of the numerous possibilities of reinvention of the CE to Countryside Education. It is understood that it is necessary to work the equalization of the various dimensions present in the formative stages of Field Education in a systemic and transdisciplinary way, such as: health, safety, quality of life, human, social and labor rights, diversity, among others.

## Final considerations

The present time is marked by uncertainties, in which the past has already been overcome and the future is undetermined. From this perspective, it is important to mobilize memory and hope in order to try to understand the present in a conscious and strategically optimistic view. (Ribeiro & Resende, 2017).

The context of the economic crisis is always accompanied by unemployment. This phenomenon of dismissing workers from their jobs "gains a moral connotation, according to which the less skilled cannot succeed in the competitiveness of the market" (Ribeiro & Resende, 2017).

These aspects occur in the socio-territorial peasant identity to the extent that they act in the constitution of the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of the students and, therefore, must be taken into account in the process of understanding and strengthening the resistances and struggles that permeate the territories of production and reproduction of life in the field (Esmeraldo et al., 2017).

The Circular Economy within this context is seen as convergent and with the potential to import its main aspects to Countryside Education, going through an economic praxis centered on the sustainability cycle, on constant dialogue with the local community, on the systemic

conception of processes, on the prolongation of the lifetime of goods and resources, on cycles of value restoration, eliminating waste and incorporating new processes.

In Countryside Education, this positioning can be consolidated as a possibility of empowerment, awareness and participation of educational processes applied to society. Countryside Education, in its political and historical establishments, regularly negotiates the production with humanization and encourages the collectivity to the responsible and empowered participation of its members for a social development in the micro and macrosocial perspectives.

In this perspective, a circular Countryside Education can function as a device to face the challenges imposed by the pandemic context to the extent that it enables the restoration of values by updating the arguments regarding waste transformation and incorporating new processes of knowledge reutilization in productive and human matter for sustainability.

The central idea is to bring the concepts of CE to the pedagogical projects of Countryside Education as a mean of updating the arguments aimed at the protagonism and emancipation of students by innovating the practices of collective

articulation through instructions for sustainable action in the daily life of the community, by problematizing situations and forms of pressure for environmental degradation articulated to personal or collective experiences or from the memory of a community, and by engendering new ways of representing life and production in rural areas in a circular and integrated view.

Costa, Monteiro, and Ribeiro (2019) propose that the education for the Circular Economy should be carried out through pragmatic awareness and sensibilization focused on life habits and behavior change, especially with regard to everyday attitudes towards water use, biodiversity valorization, conscious consumption, recycling, and care about waste production such as plastic.

The shift from linear economy to circular economy implies profound changes in society. It is not enough to change punctually and isolatedly some consumption habits, promote recycling and energy efficiency or to promulgate environmental policies with ineffective results. It is essential to radically change the behaviors of each and every one, promoting an education for sustainability and for the circular economy (Costa, Monteiro & Ribeiro, 2019, n./p.).

Costa, Monteiro, and Ribeiro (2019) used the calculation of the ecological footprint to work on the notion of sustainability and awareness of educators

on the subject of CE. Such a strategy can be useful for evaluating the mindset of teachers and students in the countryside.<sup>iv</sup>

Another important factor in the awareness stage is the visit to organizations or communities that have already migrated to the CE model. According to Costa, Monteiro, and Ribeiro (2019), knowing the reality on-site is a motivation for the participation and engagement of the individual in the formative experience in CE. Participating in small groups is also a motivational factor that may be important for a better understanding and problematization of local reality.

In addition, the bond that is formed in this type of group activity will be important for new attitudes of professionals in the work environment in the future. Finally, this study showed the relevance of developing practical activities beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and information. The innovative experiences within the CE begin with "a greater awareness regarding the adoption of new behaviors and thus contribute to their dissemination in their professional practice" (Costa, Monteiro & Ribeiro, 2019, p. 10).

In this context, Countryside Education should continue to promote awareness. First, it is necessary to make

individuals become aware of themselves and of their existence in a certain historical context in an attempt to reconstruct the past while they are alive in the present and, therefore, have implications for the future.

It can be concluded that the CE, more than a path, consists of a way of moving that is convergent to the Countryside Education proposal in such a way that learning happens dialogically, as the human being empirically discovers the benefits of sustainability for life in community.

In this context, resisting means identifying and breaking through the processes of control initiated by capitalism by criticizing the reductionisms of subjectivity and offering "loopholes" to think differently and to innovate praxis so that it is possible to construct (or invent) escape lines from the regime of productivity and hegemonic consumption.

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<sup>i</sup> Mindset: English word that designates mental model, that is, the configuration of the human mind that indicates a psychological predisposition of a person or social group to certain thoughts and patterns of behavior.

<sup>ii</sup> Retrieved from:  
[https://intelligence.weforum.org/topics/a1G0X000006OLciUAG?tab=publications&utm\\_source=sfmc&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=2733839\\_Agenda\\_weekly-16October2020&utm\\_term=](https://intelligence.weforum.org/topics/a1G0X000006OLciUAG?tab=publications&utm_source=sfmc&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2733839_Agenda_weekly-16October2020&utm_term=)

<sup>iii</sup> Retrieved from:  
[https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2010/10/101012\\_fome\\_relatorio\\_jf](https://www.bbc.com/portuguese/noticias/2010/10/101012_fome_relatorio_jf)

<sup>iv</sup> The questionnaire in Portuguese is available electronically and free of charge. Retrieved from:  
<http://www.pegadaecologica.org.br/2019/pegada.php>

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