

Affective sustainability in everyday life in cities: Mapping experiences

Sustentabilidade afetiva no cotidiano das cidades: Cartografando experiências

Sostenibilidad afectiva en el cotidiano de las ciudades: Cartografiando experiencias

Durabilité affective dans le quotidien urbain : Cartographie des expériences

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Sonia Regina Vargas Mansano  

Docente do Programa de Pós-graduação em Psicologia, do Programa de Pós-graduação em Administração e do Departamento de Psicologia Social e Institucional da Universidade Estadual de Londrina. Bolsista Produtividade CNPq - 2.

Abstract

Cases of predatory environmental exploitation and social calamity are frequent in everyday life. Scholars from different fields clarify the urgency of effective actions to minimize these situations in defense of global existence, which has become even more imperative after the emergence of the pandemic. With this in mind, the present study aims to analyze, from the perspective of social psychology and the philosophy of difference, experiences of affective sustainability in the daily lives of cities. Qualitative methodology was used with the participation of 15 people who were willing to describe their sustainability experiences. As a result, the experiences reported show that caring for oneself, for others, and for nature requires greater attention, especially given the accelerated pace of production that distances the population from caring for social relations, nature, and the common good. With this, it is clear that everyday experiences of individualism, prioritization of accumulation and consumption, as well as competitiveness are some of the factors that contribute to the spread of social and environmental devastation.

Keywords: affective sustainability, nature, Social Psychology, cartography, everyday life

Resumo

Casos de exploração ambiental predatória e calamidade social são frequentes no cotidiano contemporâneo. Estudiosos de áreas distintas esclarecem a urgência de ações efetivas visando minimizar esses quadros em defesa da existência global, o que se tornou ainda mais imperativo após a emergência da pandemia. Atento a isso, o presente estudo tem por objetivo analisar, sob o enfoque da psicologia social e da filosofia da diferença, experiências de sustentabilidade afetiva que se fazem presentes no cotidiano das cidades. Utilizou-se a metodologia qualitativa com a participação de 15 pessoas que se dispuseram a descrever suas experiências de sustentabilidade. Como resultado, as experiências relatadas evidenciam que o cuidado consigo, com o outro e com a natureza carecem de maior atenção, especialmente diante do ritmo acelerado de produção que distancia a população do cuidado com as relações sociais, a natureza e o bem comum. Com isso, constata-se que as experiências cotidianas de individualismo, priorização do acúmulo e do consumo, bem como a competitividade, são alguns dos fatores que cooperam para que a devastação social e ambiental se alastre.

Palavras-chave: sustentabilidade afetiva, natureza, psicologia social, cartografia, cotidiano

Resumen

Los casos de explotación ambiental predatoria y calamidad social son frecuentes en la vida cotidiana contemporánea. Académicos de diferentes áreas aclaran la urgencia de acciones efectivas dirigidas a minimizar estos marcos en defensa de la existencia global, que se ha vuelto aún más imperativo después de la aparición de la pandemia. Consciente de ello, el presente estudio tuvo como objetivo

identificar y analizar; bajo el enfoque de la Psicología Social y la Filosofía de la Diferencia, las experiencias de sostenibilidad afectiva que están presentes en la vida cotidiana de las ciudades. Se utilizó la metodología cualitativa con la participación de quince personas que estuvieron dispuestas a describir sus experiencias de sostenibilidad. Como resultado, las experiencias reportadas muestran que el cuidado con uno mismo, con el otro y con la naturaleza carece de miedo, especialmente en vista del ritmo acelerado de producción que aleja a la población del cuidado de las relaciones sociales, la naturaleza y el bien común. Así, es posible comprobar que las experiencias cotidianas de individualismo, priorización de la acumulación y el consumo, así como la competitividad son algunos de los factores que cooperan para que se extienda la devastación social y ambiental.

Palabras clave: sostenibilidad afectiva, naturaleza, psicología social, cartografía, cotidiano

Resumé

Des cas d'exploitation environnementale prédatrice et de calamités sociales sont fréquents dans le quotidien contemporain. Des chercheurs de divers domaines mettent en lumière l'urgence d'actions efficaces pour minimiser ces situations et défendre l'existence mondiale, une nécessité devenue encore plus impérative après l'émergence de la pandémie. Consciente de cela, la présente étude vise à analyser, sous l'angle de la psychologie sociale et de la philosophie de la différence, les expériences de durabilité affective présentes dans le quotidien des villes. La méthodologie qualitative a été employée avec la participation de 15 personnes prédisposées à décrire leurs expériences de durabilité. En conséquence, les expériences rapportées montrent que le soin de soi, des autres et de la nature nécessite une attention accrue, surtout compte tenu du rythme accéléré de la production qui éloigne la population des soins liés aux relations sociales, à la nature et au bien commun. Cela montre que les expériences quotidiennes d'individualisme, la priorisation de l'accumulation et de la consommation, ainsi que la compétitivité, sont parmi les facteurs qui contribuent à la propagation de la dévastation sociale et environnementale.

Mots-clés : durabilité affective, nature, psychologie sociale, cartographie, vie quotidienne.

The contemporary capitalist socioeconomic system, as it is currently organized, places entire populations with the challenge of ensuring their own survival, facing at least two contradictory social situations: on the one hand, the rates of unemployment, hunger and growing social exclusion and, on the other, the unbridled search for profit and capital accumulation. Despite living in a historical moment marked by technological advances, the significant increase in the population's life expectancy and the systematic production of goods that bring convenience to life in cities, we still live side by side with unacceptable situations of misery (Oxford Committee for Hunger Relief [OXFAN Brazil], 2018). How can we face this global situation, in which extreme poverty and wealth paint a devastating panorama in terms of social and emotional relations, and also culminate in the depredation of nature, compromising the continuity of human life on the planet?

A powerful existence, capable of extracting from social relations and nature the emotional inputs necessary to build an expansive collective, is far from being a feasible possibility for the majority of the population today. Recent studies show that the predatory search for capital accumulation leads to extreme situations of social inequality and specific situations of barbarity that frighten and shock the world (Han, 2017; Sassen, 2016; Žižek, 2017). Despite their brutality, such situations, widely reported by national and international media, are not enough to trigger a critical analysis of the way we are organized socioeconomically, nor of their effects on the community. On the contrary, a recent report published by OXFAN, a global social analysis network operating in Brazil, highlights the economic discrepancy established in our country, which “today has five billionaires with assets are equivalent to the poorest half of the Brazilian population” (OXFAN Brazil, 2018).

Considering this scenario, we use the notion of affective sustainability to problematize how the contemporary capitalist context restricts the possibilities of experiencing the diversity of affects that emerge in everyday encounters, placing entire populations in the search for mere individual and biological survival. Studies in this direction have the survival of planetary life as their main analytical interest, due to the evident threat to the continuity of life on the planet (Agamben, 2017; Beck, 2010; Stengers, 2015). Envisioning affective sustainability in this scenario implies expanding the spaces, situations, and encounters in which existence can be enhanced beyond the interests of capital, encompassing “the permanent tension posed by affective multiplicity” (Mansano, 2016, p. 7) that makes up existences.

How can we overcome this situation, which, despite its imminent gravity, is still far from being received with the necessary political seriousness, especially by the economic sphere, which is much more interested in increasing profit rates and geopolitical dominance? To answer this question, the study followed the following path: first, the notion of affective sustainability and its developments in the Contemporary World, recently marked by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has

made urban problems linked to collective life even more pronounced, is presented; then, the empirical part of the research gives visibility to microsocial initiatives that evoke affective sustainability put into practice in urban daily life.

Thus, the present study aimed to analyze, from the perspective of social psychology and the philosophy of difference, experiences of affective sustainability that are present in the daily life of cities. At the end of this trajectory, it will be possible to demonstrate that the diffusion of subjective components linked to individualism, as well as the prioritization of accumulation, consumption and competitiveness are some of the factors that cooperate in the dissemination of the rapidly expanding socio-environmental devastation. This reveals how much the capitalist organization has become socially and emotionally unsustainable for a large part of the Brazilian population.

Affective sustainability: a challenge for cities

The sharing of urban space throughout history has challenged the population collective to develop a series of actions aimed at the management and organization of cities (Rolnik, 2015). Affecting different dimensions of urban existence, such as the general arrangement of urban movements, social coexistence, security devices, as well as work and production methods, some psychosocial effects of capitalist organization have culminated in an individualistic and competitive omnipotence (Sassen, 2016). Such subjective components are widely circulated in contemporary life and have opened up gaps for the establishment of a policy of subjectivation, in which each person takes care of their own life, losing sight of the fact that society depends on social ties, care for nature and actions aimed at the common good. With this,

disregard, indifference and mainly the illusion that nothing is happening, marked by the omnipotence and idealization disseminated by advanced capitalism, are still quite common attitudes in our society, which has traditionally relied on the natural abundance present in our country, understanding it as inexhaustible (Mansano & Nalli, 2017, p. 7).

Detecting that the situation was rapidly worsening, events addressing socio-environmental issues took center stage nationally and internationally, highlighting the difficulty of implementing effective sustainability practices in their various dimensions (Stengers, 2015). In line with these discussions, social movements of different affiliations are working to identify and invent collective solutions to confront this disempowering and risky situation that has become so naturalized (Beck, 2010).

According to studies by Rolnik (2015), Santos (2017) and Harvey (2013), cities are major producers of subjectivities and one of the elements that participate in this production is precisely the way in which productive activities are organized. Such activities put into circulation and organize the flow of people, values, goods, rules and affections that make up urban ways of life and cooperate to disseminate certain guidelines for social relations. When this social organization, largely linked to work, produces a population that is mostly concerned with its own survival, without considering what is happening in the community, political risks become more prominent (Harvey, 2013; Beck, 2010), including the growing individualism and apathy towards socio-environmental issues, which involve not only the preservation of life (human and non-human), but also socialization and affections (Stengers, 2015).

Now, how could the notion of affective sustainability, extended to the microsocial relations of urban daily life, participate in this debate? With this concept, we start from the Spinoza perspective that encounters with that and those that surround us can either increase or decrease the subject's power of action (Espinosa, 2017). This variation, in Deleuze's reading (2009), presents itself in the encounters of its main source. Thus, when an encounter occurs with something or someone that suits my body, Deleuze (2009, p. 26) shows that the "power to act is increased or favored; when, on the contrary, it is the opposite, when after having seen someone who makes me happy, I see someone who makes me sad, I say that my power to act is inhibited or impeded".

It has been seen, then, that everyday encounters expose us to a continuous variation of affects that act in the mode of "increase-decrease of the power to act or the force to exist" (Deleuze, 2009, p. 26). Since there is no possibility of controlling or predefining encounters and their effects, we live, according to Deleuze (2009), between these two poles, joy and sadness, which make the body's power vary. We are, with these authors, in the vicinity of the concept of power understood as "act, or, at least" as something that "is in act" (Deleuze, 2017, p. 101). Thus, "every power brings with it a power to be affected that corresponds to it and is inseparable from it. Now, this power to be affected is always and necessarily exercised" amid the encounter between humans and non-humans.

Specifically emphasizing the micropolitical dimension of everyday encounters marked by the experience of affections, it is important to understand how the variations that generate increases or decreases in power occur. The increase in power, as a generator of shared joy, is what makes it possible to escape, even if it is momentarily, from capitalist impersonality. In a certain sense, it can be said that the experience of joyful encounters functions as a practice of resistance to forms of exploitation, de-potentialization, and control over life. How? This is what Deleuze (2009, p. 46), always referring to Spinoza, points out with the idea of "common notion". The common notion consists of "something that is common to all bodies or to many bodies – at least two – and that is common to the whole and to the part" (Deleuze, 2009, p. 46), since

it tends toward the connection and expansion of these existences. It is a shared experience that empowers the bodies that encounter each other, making them stronger and, therefore, from the perspective of Deleuze and Spinoza, happier. Both philosophers understand the common notion as a shared experience in which its participants become happier as a result of the lived encounter that expands their existences (Deleuze, 2009, 2017). Hence the difficult task posed by the authors, which consists of “knowing how to create the encounters that suit us” (Deleuze, 2009, p. 49), that is, giving way to encounters that increase vital power. It is noted that in these considerations the idea of a common notion is immediately political, since it implies empowering effects that extend to the participants in the encounter.

Affective sustainability, as understood here, refers to these two dimensions: the variation in the power of bodies in encounters and the possibility of selecting those encounters that enhance life in common. In this sense, it serves as a conceptual tool to implement Spinoza’s invitation (Espinosa, 2017, p. 101) that asks: “what can the body do and what cannot it do?” This problem is emphasized by Deleuze, when he suggests (2009, p. 51): “choose a local starting point in joy on the condition that we feel that it truly concerns us. On this, we form a common notion, on this we try to gain locally, to extend the joy”.

Experiences of joy are multiple and diluted in the microsocial sphere of encounters and, for this very reason, are not easily recognized and sustained. Even less so in a scenario that, as previously described, harbors relational difficulties marked by resignation, fear, nihilism and intolerance towards oneself and others. Sad passions then take center stage, composed of psychic defenses that tend to isolate individuals in their private (Lasch, 1981) and supposedly protected worlds, with fear as its greatest exponent. However, despite this tendency, chance encounters are experienced daily, demanding a continuous analysis of how they favor or diminish the power to exist, in the private and public spheres.

Embracing this practical dimension of everyday understanding of encounters, Deleuze (2009, p. 51) complements his considerations, stating that the analysis of affects implies “a work of life”. In this case, we speak of a life that also manifests its power in small acts that, without being exclusively based on the increase of capital or possible advantages arising from it, bring forth possibilities of being with the other so that, amid encounters, both become greater, expansive and strong. Deleuze (2009, p. 164) says: “when relationships are composed, they form a superior individual, a third individual that encompasses them and takes them as parts”. Thus, we see that for Deleuze and Spinoza, expansion does not occur on an individual level but implies contact between parts that are composed and strengthened, whether these parts are other subjects, nature, cultural productions, technologies and events, to give just a few examples.

It is also worth mentioning that affective sustainability is not something to be achieved and maintained once and for all. On the contrary, it evokes a lively experimentation of encounters and, in particular, a sensitivity to what they produce in the body and which, as already mentioned, can take the form of an increase or decrease in potency. Far from any guarantees, affective variations are marked, to some extent, by chance and presentification. In the face of them, there is no possibility of prediction or control. Deleuze (2009, p. 170) emphasizes that affection “realizes my potency as perfectly as it can, depending on the circumstances, depending on the here and now. It realizes my potency here and now, depending on my relationship with things”, giving movement to the production of plural lives.

Now, if we cannot count on guarantees of results or forms of control over encounters, are we often running the risk that they will decompose us? To a certain extent, yes. This is precisely where Deleuze (2009, p. 174) shows how encounters set in motion learning processes that expose us to the sensitive task of perceiving and “evaluating the signs” produced by bodies, seeking to know, at each encounter, “which relationships suit me and which relationships do not suit me”. In other words, it is a matter of learning which encounters increase and which diminish vital power, paying attention to their affective microvariations. Deleuze (2009, p. 174) makes it clear that in this learning trajectory, it is “necessary to try, it is necessary to experiment”, since nothing is established in advance. Now, what affective sustainability seeks to highlight, therefore, is precisely the openness to traverse and experience the disparity of affects, the plurality of their effects and the chance to learn something from them at each encounter.

How do we tend to position ourselves in the face of this risk-laden learning process? To some extent, by placing ourselves in a defensive position, as Lasch (1981, p. 54) rightly pointed out when characterizing what he called the “minimal self”: an individual who, fearing the risks of encounters, withdraws into his supposedly protective private life, maintaining only superficial relationships of survival and instrumentalization with others. The so-called Invisible Committee (2016, p. 26) forcefully warned about the risks of this defense when it said that in this wake of individualism we produce “souls in tatters, a reflection of our absence from the world, of our intimate impotence to inhabit it”. The greatest risk, then, would be to allow an emotional misery to set in that would make collective existence unsustainable. But would this be our only alternative? Would we be condemned to isolation and emotional impoverishment in the name of the psychic defense of the minimal self? In this study, we argue that this is not the case, given the vital insistence on the variation of affects.

An example of this social and emotional variation can be seen in the daily life of cities, which was greatly transformed by the onset of the pandemic, declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2020. Since then, different areas of knowledge have focused on mitigating its effects, which have taken on tragic dimensions, especially due to the large number of deaths and infections (Birman, 2021). Thus, this has become a serious global problem that has spread widely across

urban areas. Lives, relationships, routines, and connections needed to be reorganized so that biosafety measures could be implemented to prevent further damage. As a result, social distancing and isolation, the use of sanitary measures such as alcohol gel, frequent hand washing and mask use, as well as restrictions on movement, have become part of everyday life on the planet (Latour, 2020).

In terms of affective and relational aspects, the changes in the previously prevailing social and urban organization culminated in difficult challenges that will still require time and affective openness to be understood, sustained, and elaborated. According to Birman (2021), these changes brought with them the traumas of a radical experience of rupture for which there was no possibility of minimal preparation. In his words, this is a “decisive event” (Birman, 2021, p. 66-67) that “is not restricted to the simple recording of a fact,” but implies the “inflection of the coordinates and lines of forces that constitute social space, in order to transform the world upside down.”

In this relational field that was already changing and became even more uncertain in the pandemic context (Birman, 2021; Latour, 2020), disparate forces coexist that cover a wide range of emotions, from practices marked by psychic defenses of isolation and denialism to openness to experimentation with encounters and their risks. The latter is traversed, as stated by Deleuze (2009, 2017), by both an increase and a decrease in the power to affect and be affected. One relational aspect that stood out in the pandemic scenario was that biosafety precautions prioritized social isolation and distancing, which culminated in greater coexistence in the domestic space. However, it was not only safety that was at stake at this time. Coccia (2020, p. 12) draws attention to the demand to “think of the home no longer as a space of property and economic administration, but as a place where things come to life and make life possible for us”.

Whether in homes or in public spaces, made up of nature and social relationships, we are far from a historical event that is configured as a merely individual experience, but rather in the face of something greater that concerns the destinies of planetary life. This opens up the possibility that affective sustainability can be considered, experienced and practiced in everyday urban relationships, connecting people, nature, cultural productions, technology and everything that makes life more vigorous.

Methodological Path

The shared relational existence in urban centers demands an analysis of its political, affective, and social dimensions. Studies dedicated to the organization of cities (Harvey, 2013; Rolnik, 2015; Santos, 2017) show that it is configured as a universe rich in disparate and plural movements that constantly requires new perspectives on its organization and its micropolitical effects. To access this experience, we resorted to qualitative methodology, through which we sought to understand how concrete experiences of sustainable and unsustainable affective relationships make up urban daily life. Thus, we adopted the qualitative perspective to access the experience of subjects open to sharing their life stories and demonstrate, through the reporting of experiences, how a given social phenomenon gains concreteness and collective relevance.

As a research strategy, we chose the cartography of multiple experiences described by people from different social contexts (Passos et al., 2010) and which offered clues for understanding urban affective existence from the perspective of those who experience it in their daily lives. The research included 15 participants, 4 men and 11 women, aged between 19 and 45, composed of undergraduate or graduate students, graduates and professionals. The selection criterion used was having some connection with the public university located in the interior of the state of Paraná that hosted the research. All belonged to the middle socioeconomic class and lived in medium-sized cities. They were invited to freely express the actions undertaken in their daily affective and relational lives in the face of situations that emerged in the daily life of urban life that was already marked by the ongoing pandemic. The names used in the presentation of the results were changed so as not to identify the participants.

The part of the collected data that will be presented here was analyzed with the notion of affect (Deleuze, 2009; Espinosa, 2017) and its connection with sustainability (Mansano, 2016), exposed in the first part of this study, as well as by the concepts arising from the cartographic approach itself (Passos et al., 2010). This allowed a diversified dialogical approach between the participants' perspective and the conceptual field of social psychology (Carvalho, 2018; Mansano & Nalli, 2017) and the philosophy of difference (Deleuze, 1992; 2009), emphasizing the concept of affective sustainability.

Results and discussion

The social relations experienced in urban spaces are largely marked by an affective diversity that exposes the population contingent to a series of affects that culminate in the expansion (joy) or restriction (sadness) of encounters (Deleuze, 2009, 2017). The capitalist socioeconomic organization has long interfered in the experience of this affective diversity, since it participated in the spatial, relational and temporal organization of urban life (Rolnik, 2015). Despite the recurrent presence of the economic sphere, microsocial initiatives of contact with urban spaces are practiced in everyday life in plural ways, revealing how affects connect or separate humans and non-humans in value systems of an order other than monetary.

Before the pandemic, the scenario of capitalist acceleration was already shaping up to be unsustainable for a significant portion of the population (Rolnik, 2015), and this was also mentioned by the participants in this research. This is what we find in Lauro's description, who senses the productivist dynamics naturalized in routine practices:

It seems to me, paradoxically, that before the pandemic there was a certainty, a security, perhaps unjustified, in our permanence in the world, which curiously allowed us to live as if tomorrow did not exist, and as if we could use the planet as we pleased, independent as we believed ourselves to be. However, today we are going through a particular moment that asks us to pause, to retreat, and transforming this moment into a driver of change without, however, falling into the traps that bind us to already established ways of life, continues to be, for me, the greatest challenge. (Lauro, participant).

His testimony resonates with the emergence of the pandemic (Birman, 2021) that radically transformed urban relations (Latour, 2020). Being sensitive to its effects in order to feel and sustain its abrupt changes, embracing a daily life that began to be marked by health care, social distancing and restrictions on movement was a challenge assumed on a planetary scale. Thus, speaking of affective sustainability, in the urban scenario of 2020, necessarily refers to this experience that had repercussions on everyone's daily lives and that brought the possibility, for some, of experiencing a "pause" (Lauro, participant) to, perhaps, rehearse changes that are configured as "the greatest challenge" (Lauro, participant).

In this sense, the actions taken to face the pandemic adversity have opened up in a diverse range of lines, as Fernanda (participant) suggested: "I have been dancing a lot and doing yoga activities to keep my body active and occupied (...). Music has been a good ally to welcome me from all these feelings. Puzzles also make me focus on something completely different". Existence, which in this case was restricted to the space of the house, required a change of perspective that triggered other ways of relating to time, space and the body. Carla (participant) also experiences other connections when she says: "I planted organic crops in the window box. I am anxiously waiting for it to bear fruit". It is clear, then, that the house was invested with other sensibilities, as Marta describes:

Seeing the hummingbird that comes to suck the nectar from the closed hibiscus trees that are right in front of my window where my computer is, every afternoon. Seeing the stars or the moon, walking in the woods behind my house: I discovered a tree that is really nice to climb the other day, a beautiful mango tree, I felt dazzled to be getting to know it now. (Marta, participant)

Latour (2020) explains that the urban transformations precipitated by the pandemic were radical: "The state of society depends at every moment on the associations between many actors, most of which do not have human form. This is true for microbes (...), but also for the internet, the law, the organization of hospitals, state logistics and the climate" (p. 3). Marta (participant) highlights this diversity of actors by stopping to observe what was previously unnoticed and showing her amazement at the beauty and discovery of living details that surround her.

It is worth mentioning that the socioeconomic structure of most participants allowed for this paused contact, since it was possible to resort to remote work or to interrupt it (at least momentarily) at the beginning of the pandemic. This situation, however, was an exception, considering the Brazilian and global population that needed to remain connected to in-person work routines in order to guarantee their own subsistence and the survival of collective life. Birman (2021, p. 96) points out that the possibility of withdrawal into the domestic space did not exist for "the poorest, who, as informal workers and the unemployed" were "often forced to go out onto the streets, with economically and socially substandard services, in order to somehow bring food home." He explains that "such individuals are exposed to imminent contamination, especially in public transport, which, in addition to being overcrowded, often lack an adequate ventilation system" (Birman, 2021, p. 96). The concern for one's own subsistence was evident in Paula's description of having to resort to sales skills to ensure her monthly income. She says: "I am making bread, lingerie, and will soon announce that I will be making cakes, jams, and dried curds on Instagram and Facebook" (Paula, participant). The focus on an economy that, according to financial agents, cannot stop, has spread unemployment and placed part of the population in a critical situation of unemployment or informal work.

For those who were not marked by this socioeconomic limitation, lines of experimentation opened and contact with nature gained relevance, as José (participant) reports: "Looking at the sky has become an increasingly frequent habit... I have been taking advantage of this natural beauty of the exterior of big cities. I have been looking at plants a lot more, playing with some dogs and cats that cross my path". Here, another relationship with time can be noted, mostly marked by urban acceleration and which, now, in a kind of deceleration, has made it possible to access situations that previously, in the rush of production, had no relevance or space. Sabrina (participant) says: "This week I drank while watching the sunset. The colors of the sky are spectacular". Despite the strong anthropocentric tendency that creates a split between humans and nature, considering them as independent parts of planetary life, it is possible and necessary to reclaim Espinosa's (2017) perspective, for whom humans appear as yet another mode of expression in the natural environment. Krenak (2020) also contributes to critically analyzing this vision that separates humans and nature, when he says:

For a long time, we were lulled into thinking that we are humanity, and we alienated ourselves from this organism of which we are a part, the Earth, and began to think that it is one thing and we are another: the Earth and humanity. I do not understand that there is anything that is not nature. Everything is nature. (Krenak, 2020, p. 8)

From the anthropocentric split between humans and nature emerges the difficulty of connecting with the potentialization of life in its broadest sense, previously pointed out by Krenak (2020). Existence in urban space has, to a large extent, become disconnected from nature, restricting its contact, since it does not necessarily generate profit. To some extent, technological expansion and communication devices, disseminated through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have redefined the order and temporality of encounters, marking a continued distance from face-to-face encounters (Carvalho, 2018). The speed of communication is already so ingrained in urban daily life that, according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) released by the Ministry of Communications (2021), internet usage in urban households rose from 83.8% in 2018 to 86.7% in 2019. The massive adoption of this communication device and its remote relational model caused a distance from face-to-face contact that, in some situations, culminated in a kind of digital exhaustion and decline in relational skills (Carvalho, 2018). Julia talks about her effort to break away from this naturalized dynamic that connects the subject to information full-time: “I’m trying to get away from social media, do pleasurable activities, allow myself to experiment” (Julia, 2018). participant).

We thus see an uncomfortable step forward in daily life marked by the naturalization of the use of ICTs. It should be said that these, by themselves, do not degrade relationships, and can even intensify and expand them. The issue raised here refers to their exclusive use to the detriment of contact with other dimensions such as the living presence of others, the functioning of one’s own body, and direct contact with other living beings. This diversity of actors (Latour, 2020), to some extent, was accessed during confinement, which opened up space for contact with other lines of sensibilities and ways of experiencing encounters. Patrícia says:

Regarding my son, who is only three years old, during the week I thought of ways to please him, I thought of new games, and when I met him I decided to surprise him, so on the weekend when I brought him home there was a cabin set up in our living room, where I, still wearing a mask to protect him, prepared a picnic, we told stories and played, bringing him to a safe space that welcomes us. (Patrícia, participant)

Patrícia hints at another relationship with domestic space and its effects. In the same vein, Coccia (2020, p. 4) states: “In a world where politics is prohibited and an impossible reality, what remains are our homes: it doesn’t matter if they are real apartments or houses, it doesn’t matter if they are small apartments or large properties. Everything has become home.”

The line involving the expansion and continuous use of ICTs in an urban pandemic scenario has led to exhaustion and required effective actions to combat and escape it. Regarding this acceleration, Han (2017, p. 70-71) recalls the harmful effects of fatigue generated by high production demands when he says that this culminates in “excessive exhaustion” that “leads to a heart attack of the soul”. This is what Júlia (participant) comments: “I remember that over the years I heard people saying: ‘I wanted to disappear for a moment’, I think I feel that when I read, when I participate in the group, to disappear in some way, for a few moments, the body thanks you”. It is as if Deleuze’s words (1992, p. 217) resonate in these moments of rupture mentioned by Júlia, capable of creating and accessing “vacuoles of non-communication, switches, to escape control”. In this same direction, Maria (participant) presents her present-day actions of “working the land, cleaning, planting”, which were once far from her daily routine.

Lines of sad feelings, as pointed out by Deleuze (2009, 2017) in the company of Espinosa (2017), diminish the power of action and are widely disseminated throughout urban daily life in the form of fear and insecurity in the face of the different, unexpected and uncontrollable. The attempts to face and elaborate them are diverse and can be seen in Cecília (participant): “I share my anxieties with several friends and, even though everyone is not well, it is good to know that we are in this together. Our conversation resulted in great reflections on how the world has changed and how habits have also changed. This is really crazy”. Being with others, even through screens, was something that maintained a possibility of bonding and sharing experiences, which proved to be vital.

How, then, can we deal with a daily routine marked by strict prescriptive restrictions and the health need to break away from the previously fluid daily practices of contact with the city? Building new routines was an initiative often mentioned by the participants in the research. In this sense, Fernanda (participant) reports: “I have been following the same routine so as not to go crazy, studying, writing, exercising at home, missing a beer with friends. José says: I have been trying to take care of myself with simple things, shaving, exfoliating my face, moisturizing my hair”. In this line of care, Joana (participant) adds: “Making a tea to treat my cold made me feel that I can still take care of myself in some way. Not everything that can lower my power is necessarily deadly”. Attention to taking care of one’s own body, to the ordinary practices of general organization and household chores are simple actions that sustain this reorganized daily routine.

Dealing with aspects of existence that simply had no space in life due to the rush established in urban space also gained importance, as reported by Rogério, who had an idea:

I gathered the masonry bricks and wooden beams from the roof left over from the construction to make a bench. I wanted to find a purpose for these leftover materials, to reuse them. While sanding the beams, I remembered that they had been on the roof of my house for 20 years, that they had served as a home for us, as a home for the sparrows that lived in the ceiling of the house. Re-signifying these materials into a bench made perfect sense to me. (Rogério, participant)

Rogério (participant) continues his experiments describing: “Instead of buying some things, I chose to make them, especially those involving wood and finishes. Some friends who have more experience agreed to help me. At the same time, we encouraged (my mother and I) to make the sweets that she likes so much to sell”. Still, referring to the relationship with the space of the house, Coccia (2020, p. 7-8) points out:

No one can go out anymore. No one can escape: locked up at home, it is from home and especially at home that we must rebuild society (...). It will be necessary to unearth from this space a series of invisible corridors that will allow us to transform the domestic space into a new political space.

Revisiting and redefining the affections of the family nucleus gained meaning for José (participant) who describes his lines of experimentation:

One of the things I have definitely decided to do is to take advantage of this time of closeness to show my family things that I didn't have the opportunity/courage/awareness/way to show them before. I have been trying to learn more about them and let them know more about me, what I have been through, what I think, what I feel. This has been a source of relief for me. (José, participant)

Forging new bonds with family members was also a strategy adopted as it became imperative to live in the same space in the house for longer and with greater proximity. This is what Lauro (participant) reports:

We – my family and I – decided to rescue a little of our past through old photo albums, some of which had already turned yellow with time, giving them an air of wisdom (...). I saw myself as a boy again, chasing a ball, covering myself in chocolate, swinging intently on the swing with the sole objective of touching the sky. (Lauro, participant)

Still referring to family closeness as a line of coexistence, Julia (participant) reports:

One of the people I have talked to the most is my nine-year-old brother, who has witnessed and experienced all this chaos firsthand. He himself proposes reflections that I would not expect from a child. This week he asked me why they are burning the trees in the Amazon if we need them to survive and what happened to the indigenous people who live there. (Julia, participant)

Being surprised by those you live with due to the proximity brought about by this new socio-affective reality has opened up previously unimaginable connections. Even when geographically distant, family closeness can be experienced remotely by Antonio (participant) who reports his choice to: “Sing more for my father, via video conference, which is what I could, since he always liked samba”. Seeing and being seen, listening and being heard seem like simple and accessible actions, but they get lost in the tangle of lines crystallized by agendas and the rhythm of production extended to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as pointed out by Crary (2016). The 24/7 regime “gradually undermines the distinctions between day and night, light and dark, action and rest. It is a zone of insensitivity, of amnesia, of everything that prevents the possibility of experience” (Crary, 2016, p. 26).

Cecília (participant) also resorts to the description of practices that were once abandoned or disregarded, but that now surprise and please her:

I started praying every day again. It may seem a bit silly for someone who considers themselves agnostic, but I don't pray to a specific “god.” It's just a brief moment that I do when I wake up and when I go to sleep to give thanks for the privileges that I have (...). It's a way to calm my heart. (Cecília, participant)

The affects triggered in a body that is more sensitive to the emerging event (Deleuze, 2009) and attuned to the lines of variation of power (Deleuze, 2017) open up space to begin a psychic work of elaborating the experience and life constructed up until then. This is what Sabrina (participant) describes when she says: “I recognized that I am not well and I started to seek therapy”. Marta (participant) also follows the direction of therapy and reports: “Luckily, in therapy this week we did some body work in which I was finally able to cry.” More than in times of calm, the clinic evoked here demands an alliance with the critique of the lived experience, extending the analysis of oneself to the political and social relations established. After all, one does not get out of a pandemic through merely individual actions (Birman, 2021; Latour, 2020).

The emergence of sensations that still lack words and require clinical elaboration also appears in Fernanda's (participant) speech: “I cried a lot this week and that really helped to alleviate some pain in my chest. I don't know exactly where

it comes from or how it sets in, but it has been very frequent, and the state of inertia doesn't allow me to look for new resources". When coming into contact with a lived experience that still doesn't admit representation in words to be shared, Rogério comments:

I got on my bike and went out. I pedaled away from everything in my own company. That way, I breathed more calmly, saw more clearly, allowed myself to lose myself and let everything slip away. I can't embrace the world. For me, living is the daily exercise of love, for which I am my only obstacle. I thought about all this while I felt the wind caress my face, and I was gifted with a beautiful sunset. I felt the night fall, illuminated, feeling alive and a little lighter. Yes, "life can be sad, but it is always beautiful"; and even the absurd, for that matter, has its moments of beauty. Sometimes I lack eyes to see and ears to hear. (Rogério, participant)

Later, Rogério adds: "I have never walked so much... I don't know where my feet are taking me, but I trust them with my eyes closed. I have enjoyed my own company. I laugh at myself. Other times I cry, I go overboard, but I pull myself together. With or without strength, I keep walking." In the same direction of what she still cannot find words to express, Renata (participant) describes: "I meditated and prayed a lot, but I think that crying is also a very effective way of expressing the things we keep inside and sometimes we don't even know are there."

The pluralized proliferation of lines and verbs that were put into practice in domestic and urban spaces is striking, but they were not restricted to the traditional segments of working, producing, and meeting goals. The lines of action described by the participants reveal practices that are both simple and present-day, questioning the routine in the face of the daily adversities emerging in the city. It is about "glimpsing a world populated not by things but by forces, not by subjects but by powers, not by bodies but by connections" (Comitê Invisível, 2016, p. 63). The reports presented here, however, open up new questions: Why have we distanced ourselves so much from a multifaceted affective life? Do we need a planetary tragedy to trigger other lines of connection with existence? How did the difficulty of sustaining life in its plural dimension become consolidated, a fact that, to a large extent, made the urban space affectively unsustainable?

Final Considerations

With the aim of analyzing experiences of affective sustainability that are present in the daily life of cities, the research participants cooperated in understanding how it is possible to outline an existence that encompasses the variation of affects. The complexity and plurality actualized in the urban space end up being minimized by the capitalist socioeconomic organization that reduces it to the production activities on which its pillars are built. Breaking with this predefined order in a crystallized way brings into play practices that can have contours of resistance, since they allow us to glimpse other possibilities of composing life, considering the diversity of encounters and the variations in power to affect and be affected by the other. In this sense, the possibilities of contact multiply in distinct affective nuances.

Simple actions such as casually observing what is happening around you or enjoying the flow of nature have become rare and no longer find much space to be carried out. The participants in this research highlighted some of these, showing that urban space can also be a stage for the expansion of a vitality that does not need to culminate in a measurable, controllable and financial result, but can bring to the stage the experimentation of affections and fortuitous encounters.

The anthropocentric distance that we have historically constructed in relation to nature and non-humans highlights the precariousness of encounters with those around us. Allowing oneself to be affected by others and being able to affect them are practices that are activated at all times, but which, due to a scheduled, timed life focused on achieving goals, do not allow us to access them in their nuances of flavors, colors, sounds, temporalities and disparate textures.

At the end of this study, we have reached a conclusion that is both simple and difficult. It is simple, considering that designing an everyday life in cities that is sensitive to encounters brings with it the chance to experience nuances that are within reach, but are still unknown, distant or ignored. It is difficult, because sensitive experimentation requires an attitude of struggle to confront the break with the accelerated temporality of capitalist organization, allowing oneself to take the time to savor encounters and their intensities. The circulation of subjective components such as individualism and competitiveness devastate existence in its social, affective and environmental dimensions. This tends to make urban space increasingly unsustainable for encounters.

Perhaps the pandemic will serve to begin to reverse this situation, since a catastrophe can be educational (Stengers, 2015). However, it will never do so on its own, since its deadly effects will stand out and will traumatically mark this century (Birman, 2021). Only concrete micropolitical actions, drawing on an effective alliance with life, have the possibility of bringing about some reversal. Thinking in this direction is still a limit that the Human Sciences will have to face, since it raises the need for new research into the affective transformations precipitated by the pandemic and their possibilities for elaboration. Inseparable from these studies, it will also be up to the collective to activate the power of action to set in motion affective sustainability, taking the reins of existence and history, both micropolitical and planetary.

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Mailing address

Sonia Regina Vargas Mansano
E-mail: mansano@uel.br



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