Coproducing wellbeing measurement with a Guarani Mbyá community in Brazil

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Abstract: This research project proposes the co-production of a well-being measure in collaboration with a Guarani Mbyá community in Brazil. Recognizing the complexity of well-being as a thick concept and the limitations of universal assessments, the study seeks to develop a theory and an evaluation instrument that are sensitive to the cultural and ontological particularities of the Guarani Mbyá Indigenous community, aiming to achieve a wellbeing assessment that is genuinely representative of the community. This initiative is especially relevant given the growing interest from governments and multilateral institutions in assessing and comparing well-being across different regions of the world. The project adopts a participatory and democratic approach, inspired by the work of Fabian et al. (2023) with the British NGO Turn2Us, but adapted to an interethnic context. Monthly visits will be conducted to the Takuari village in Eldorado, São Paulo, to involve the community in all stages of the process—from defining the evaluation object to the implementation and discussion of results. Over a 24-month period, the project aims to develop a well-being assessment instrument and conduct two applications within the Indigenous community, spaced 6 to 12 months apart. The three stages of measurement instrument development proposed by Bradburn et al. (2017), and the five dimensions of the participatory process (IAP, 2024) will guide the interactions, aiming for a horizontal relationship between researchers and participants. The main challenges include the continuous negotiation of roles and priorities due to differing worldviews, the identification of relevant experts on well-being from the Guarani Mbyá perspective, the maintenance of community and stakeholder engagement, and the assurance of knowledge ownership and management by the community, including the translation of materials into the Guarani Mbyá language. Expected outcomes include the documentation of the assessment instrument as a model for other Indigenous communities, the design of a well-being assessment protocol for Indigenous contexts, the establishment of a comparative dialogue with international experiences, the evaluation of comprehensive well-being instruments in terms of their relevance to Indigenous populations, and the strengthening of partnerships among participating institutions. The project plans to submit two articles to international journals, participate in four academic conferences, complete a research fellowship at the University of Cambridge, and organise an international meeting in Brazil to discuss co-production and representativeness in the science of well-being.

Keywords: wellbeing, indigenous peoples, measurement, participatory approach, co-production.

1) Problem Statement:

Introduction and the importance of mid-level theories

Well-being is an especially complex object of inquiry. The debate surrounding it has a long history of diverging ideas and a multiplicity of terms (McMahon, 2006; Sewaybricker & Massola, 2022). Adding to this complexity is the fact that its transformations transcend academic discourse, as it operates as a "living" word in everyday language — in expressions such as "I'm happy," "things are going well," or "I'm satisfied with my work." This can be explained by the fact that "well-being," as an idea about the best way to live life, is an object of broad interest. By its very definition, people want to be associated with it. For this reason, knowledge about well-being is especially performative, as it tends to draw widespread interest and elicit strong reactions from people, who seek to consume this knowledge to attain more well-being, be recognised as possessing more well-being, or be viewed as experts on the subject to gain social advantages (Ahmed, 2023).

Some authors refer to objects such as well-being as "thick concepts" (Alexandrova, 2017). They are characterised as objects that inevitably evaluate a mode of conduct as much as they describe a phenomenon. Moreover, due to their breadth, these are objects that require detailed consideration at the level of people's lived experience in order to perform an evaluative function. A broad definition of well-being is of limited utility for guiding practical life assessments. It is necessary to adapt comprehensive criteria to the particular elements that arise in each context. For example, "being healthy" may be understood as a necessary component of well-being. Yet how "being healthy" manifests itself in someone's life, and how it is perceived and valued, will vary. It may relate to the absence of significant illnesses (at present or within a certain time frame), an older person's ability to maintain personal hygiene, a middle-aged person's capacity to run a half-marathon, or a child's mental and physical development. For this reason, Alexandrova (2017) emphasises the importance of mid-level theories of well-being — a specification of the object of inquiry that is sensitive to the lives being assessed, something that a broad theory of well-being cannot achieve.

Due to the object's inherent complexity, the presentation of a definition of well-being and the construction of an assessment instrument will therefore be actions permeated by normative choices. These, like the manifestation of good health, will be more closely aligned with some people's ideas than with others' about the best way to live (Ahmed, 2010). As Rodriguez Duque et al. (2024) argue, this normativity is evident throughout the scientific process — in the justification for the research (e.g., the desire to improve people's lives), in the choice of theoretical framework (e.g., hedonic, eudaimonic, or utilitarian), and in the many decisions about how to operationalize such characteristics in a measurement instrument and its subsequent validation.

Thus, even assessment instruments that aim at neutrality and, consequently, at broadly representing what people understand as well-being will still be normative, failing in the task of "universality." Nevertheless, the pursuit of neutrality and universality in well-being assessment is defended by many researchers in the science of well-being, such as Diener (Diener et al., 2009), Veenhoven (2018), Layard (2021), and Easterlin (Easterlin & O'Connor, 2025). As Diener & Seligman (2004, p.24) summarise: "So we believe that measures of well-being are—and must be—exactly as neutral politically as are economic indicators."

In well-being science, this value-neutral posture tends to be expressed most clearly in comprehensive assessment instruments that seek to evaluate people's well-being levels from one or a few broadly framed self-reported questions (e.g., "from zero to ten, how satisfied are

you with your life as a whole?"). These instruments are often described as non-paternalistic for intentionally leaving the object of evaluation vague and allowing respondents to consider whatever they find most relevant in their assessments (Easterlin & O'Connor, 2025). Due to their simplicity, this specific expression of "neutrality" in well-being science is considered useful, facilitating large-scale application, making results comparable, and reducing assessment costs. Reinforcing this utility, researchers have found that the results of these instruments are good at predicting people's behaviour, such as voting trends, job changes, and marital dissolution (Kaiser & Oswald, 2022; Ward et al., 2021; Liberini et al., 2017). Therefore, it is not surprising that this type of assessment is widely used (see the World Happiness Report and the European Values Study) and recommended by the OECD (2025) for government monitoring.

In any case, the utility of an instrument does not indicate its construct validity or the representativeness of the many being evaluated (Alexandrova & Haybron, 2016; Rodriguez Duque et al., 2024). Some of the most incisive critiques of these instruments have been presented by Schröder and Yitzhaki (2017), Bond and Lang (2019), Fabian (2022), and Fabian et al. (*in press*). These works emphasise that, despite the apparent "neutrality" of such a broad question about life, there is evidence of high variability in the understanding of the object and in the reporting function, which consists of the complex "affective, cognitive, social, and linguistic process that maps subjective judgements to numerical response categories on a scale question" (Fabian et al., *in press*).

In particular, researchers highlight weaknesses arising from the very nature of the object of study itself (Flanagan et al., 2023; Alexandrova, 2017; Angner, 2013; Rodriguez Duque et al., 2024). Unlike a ruler, which measures length using consistent units (of length), well-being—an abstract and highly contested object—is measured using integers, a property of an entirely different kind. A score of 5 may mean a great deal—or very little—to different people, or even to the same individual at different times. Thus, score increases may not correspond to linear increments of the underlying concept. For instance, the jump from 5 to 6 may feel larger than from 8 to 9; or for some a 6 might represent a neutral point in the scale, while for others that might be better represented by a 5. For this reason, the assumption that respondents in broad well-being assessments use the evaluation scale (from zero to ten) linearly, and that their responses are comparable (across respondents and over time for the same respondent), is weak (Fabian et al., *in press*). This problem is not unique to the cardinal evaluation of well-being, but it is more acute in this case, given the complexity of the object.

Panasiuk et al. (2025) and Barrington-Leigh (2025), when analysing databases from different studies that used single-question well-being assessments (such as the Gallup World Poll, Global Flourishing Study, and World Values Survey), found that the distribution of responses differs significantly from that of a normal curve.

> We found that the distribution of life satisfaction deviated significantly from a normal distribution in all countries, suggesting that using the mean and standard deviation cannot adequately capture the full distribution. After re-ranking countries according to the degree of life satisfaction inequality, we found that 56 countries deviated by at least 20 ranks compared to their average life satisfaction rankings. Finally, we observed that 9%–46% of the time, increases in average well-being at the country level were accompanied by increasing suffering and inequality. (Panasiuk et al., 2025)

First, this indicates that analyses relying on average scores—a very common practice in the field (see World Happiness Report)—foster an illusion of unity where there is, in fact, considerable divergence. Second, it is important to note that this difference in response distribution is more pronounced in some regions than in others. In European and Anglophone countries, where most theories and measures are developed, the variation in the distribution of responses between different instruments is considerably smaller than in other regions. In Latin American countries, however, this variation is especially large (Barrington-Leigh, 2025).

In a study conducted with Indigenous communities from 19 regions across 5 continents, Galbraith et al. (2024) found substantial variation in both the means and the distribution of responses across different regions. In some of them, such as Darjeeling in India, the distribution of responses resembled a normal curve, indicating that being a non-Anglophone or non-European population does not necessarily imply a high standard deviation. However, even a low standard deviation may signal a particular relationship between a given population and the instrument or scale. For example, in the region of Kubumgu, Ghana, 98% of responses were concentrated in the values 5 and 6 on the scale—something not observed in the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al., 2025). In other regions, responses appeared to be more erratically distributed, such as in Vavatenina, Madagascar, where 65% of responses were concentrated at the extreme values of the scale (0 and 10), and in the Bulgan district of Mongolia, where 83% of responses were distributed among the scores 10, 8, and 5, with no responses given for the scores 9 and 7.

These results suggest that the assumption—held by some researchers—of homogeneity in the understanding of the object and in the use of the instruments seems more plausible in regions where such theories and instruments are developed. In these places, the problems of lack of representativeness in the concept of well-being and in its assessment instruments would be smaller. Regarding the use of scales, we may assume that, in certain regions, familiarity with evaluating abstract objects on numerical scales—such as grading in schools, assessing pain levels in hospitals, or rating satisfaction with products or services—makes the task of evaluating well-being more homogeneous. It is also worth noting that many of these abstract evaluation scales precisely use 0-to-10 or 1-to-10 ranges. It is no coincidence that, for 13 of the 19 Indigenous communities investigated, Galbraith et al. (2024, p.5) had to provide detailed explanations of how the scale worked, rephrase the main question, use visual aids, or offer examples before the evaluation could be conducted.

As for the object itself (well-being), although it is complex and variable, its frequent mention in social dynamics may promote greater unity in its understanding. This is the thesis advanced by Cromby (2011) in the case of the idea of happiness. He argues that, even if people cannot clearly define what happiness consists of, they share a relatively homogeneous understanding of when it is appropriate to use the words happiness and happy. For instance, in expressions such as wishing someone “happiness” on a birthday or the birth of a child, or in describing as “happy” those who smile often, those who received a job promotion, or those who got married. For this reason, even if someone cannot define the object or does not quite know what it means, the frequent use of these expressions in social interactions allows them to assess how appropriate it is to say that they are or are not happy, or whether a given moment involves much, some, or little happiness (Ahmed, 2010).

It is important to note, however, that the frequency with which expressions related to well-being (such as happiness) are used varies across regions. That is, this familiarity will be more common in some regions than in others. Wierzbicka (2004) and Oishi et al. (2013), for example, point to the especially intense presence of expressions concerning happiness in the English language, particularly in the United States. More specifically, Wierzbicka (2004, p.38)

observes that the English word happy is used more frequently—in a ratio of 5:2—than its French counterpart, *heureux*.

The studies mentioned above strengthen the argument that there is variability both in the interpretation of an object such as well-being (a “thick concept”) and in the translation of its evaluation into a cardinal scale (the reporting function). In particular, they highlight the cultural nature of this object and the need for special attention from researchers who wish to adequately represent marginalized social groups in their studies—by developing assessment instruments more sensitive to the particularities of those being evaluated. Following Alexandrova’s (2017) call, such instruments should derive from mid-level theories developed from the lived realities of those assessed.

Given this, the question we ask ourselves is: how can we develop a mid-level theory of well-being and a corresponding assessment instrument in the context of a community that is culturally very different from the centers where well-being theories and instruments are produced, such as an Indigenous community?

Mid-level theories and assessment: the importance of coproduction

An important question that emerges alongside the advances in rigour offered by mid-level theories concerns their process of development. Who should be involved, and what process should be followed to arrive at a theory that is genuinely sensitive to those it aims to assess? Moreover, what would an appropriate evaluative process for such a specific reality entail? “Thick concepts”, for their very nature, will inevitably have an open-ended character. In other words, they will always be subject to questioning and revision. For this reason, Alexandrova and Fabian (2022) argue that the legitimacy of a theory of well-being and its measurement does not stem from its final form, but especially from its development process – one that they argue should be constituted democratically together with those the theory and the instrument aim to represent. They define this process as:

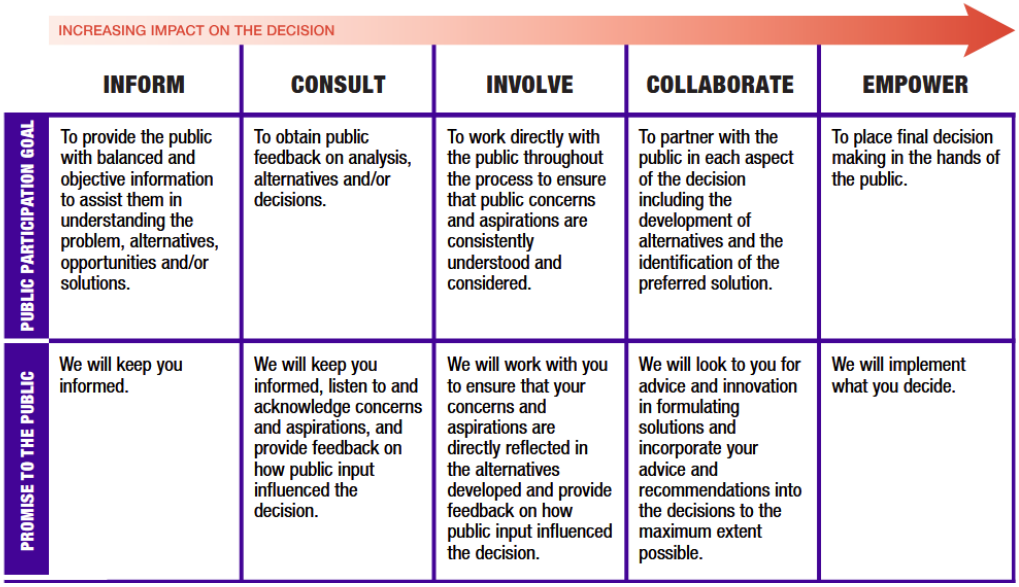
> Co-production is an arrangement for sharing power and responsibility in the process of defining thick concepts and developing their measures. This arrangement requires, first, recognising different types of expertise that each group of stakeholders have about these concepts and their measurement and, second, ensuring that the final products meet, to the extent that it is possible, the demands stemming from each type of expertise. (Alexandrova & Fabian, 2022, p. 12)

Although they are not dominant practices in the science of well-being — due to their local and qualitative nature, implying smaller scale and higher cost — participatory approach methods do occur, and they reveal a rich repertoire of distinct perspectives on this subject (Yap & Yu, 2016; Bright & Boyd, 2024; Sollis et al., 2022). Participatory methods can be seen as correlates to the co-production proposed by Alexandrova and Fabian (2022), insofar as they rely on “bottom-up processes which view participants not simply as research subjects, but as experts on the subject matter as well as partners within the research” (Sollis et al., 2022, p. 2).

The co-production of theories and assessment instruments can occur in many different ways, as pointed out by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2, 2024). Some initiatives may be carried out with greater distribution of power, others with less. Thus, an initiative of co-production that claims to be democratic and participatory must remain attentive to this. According to the IAP2 (2024), the different levels of community involvement,

with increasing participation and power, are: “informing” the community about the development of the assessment; “consulting” the community’s opinion on different aspects of the project (e.g., meaning of well-being); “involving” the community throughout the different stages of the project (e.g., defining the evaluation scale); promoting “collaboration” between the community and other stakeholders at various stages of the instrument’s development process (e.g., being part of the committee responsible for the project); and “empowering” the community to decide on the most important aspects of the assessment (e.g., approving or not its final form and the data management format).

Figure 1 - Public Participation Spectrum



Source: IAP2 (2024).

Given the frequent desire of governments, institutions, and researchers to develop comprehensive and practical well-being assessment instruments, it is most common for co-participation to be limited to merely “informing” the community about their development (Sollis et al., 2022, p.18; Sollis et al., 2025). This would be the most basic level of a participatory process—far from realizing its potential to achieve representative results.

In the development of well-being assessment instruments, some studies incorporate Indigenous perspectives in their design, such as relational well-being (McCubbin et al., 2013), sustainable well-being (O’Mahony, 2022), and the suggested additions to the Gallup World Poll (Lambert et al., 2020). However, these studies tend to be limited to this theoretical-conceptual “consultation”—the second level of the participatory process—without involving the communities in the actual development of the instruments.

Fortunately, Fabian et al. (2023) present one of the few examples of a complete process of well-being co-production, conducted in partnership with the British NGO Turn2Us. The process presented by the researchers serves as a foundation for the present study, which aims to adapt and transpose it to the context of an Indigenous community in Brazil. Other noteworthy cases of co-participation in the science of well-being that influence this research include the development of comprehensive well-being assessments in New Zealand in partnership with Māori communities (Bright & Boyd, 2024) and the creation of the mabu liyan assessment with the Yawuru people in Australia (Yap & Yu, 2019).

Co-production with an indigenous community

We can assume that the problems of rigour and representativeness mentioned earlier will be even more significant when there is greater diversity among the people assessed by a given instrument. The contrast between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is a compelling example of such diversity, as it generally entails distinct ways of life, frames of reference, epistemologies, and ontologies (Guimarães, 2019; Sewaybricker, 2024).

For example, in recent well-being research conducted with the Guarani Mbyá people in Brazil (Sewaybricker & Massola, 2025), a significant shift emerged in the conception of the person compared to the dominant practices in well-being science. For the Guarani, the idea of an "individual" within whom well-being occurs was unfamiliar. Well-being, as a phenomenon, extends to the environment, the community, and the spiritual world (see Takuá, 2018; Uotinen et al., 2025). The different perception of the relationship between self and environment (or of the separation between nature and culture) among some Indigenous peoples implies a reorganization of the meaning of life and of the reference unit for its evaluation. As Descola (2013, pp. 16–17) wrote:

> From the luxuriant forests of Amazonia to the glacial spaces of the Canadian Arctic, certain peoples thus envisage their insertion into the environment in a manner altogether different from our own. They regard themselves, not as social collectives managing their relations with the ecosystem, but rather as simple components of a vaster whole within which no real discrimination is really established between humans and nonhumans.

This distinct understanding of personhood also led some community members to regard both the use of self-assessment as the primary method of measuring well-being and the translation of such assessments into numerical scales as puzzling or inappropriate (ver também Galbraith et al., 2024). In fact, familiarity with quantification and the regular use of numerical scales is not equally present across all social groups, specially among certain Indigenous peoples (Sewaybricker & Massola, 2025; Da Silva Sinha et al., 2017).

Engaging in dialogue with Indigenous communities, therefore, exposes tensions within many of the assumptions typically taken for granted in science, such as the concept of personhood, the relationship between the knower and the object of knowledge, and the quantification of abstract objects. Even the very idea of what constitutes an adequate process of knowledge construction must be reevaluated, given that historically the scientific field has treated Indigenous peoples as passive subjects of study, extracting knowledge from them with little regard for its impacts on the community (Gonzalez & Guimarães, 2020; Dent, 2023). Not surprisingly, some Indigenous communities reject the possibility of partnering with researchers, viewing the university as a mechanism of exploitation that is alien and exclusionary to their interests (Tuck & Wayne Yang, 2014).

In light of this tense history and the deep differences in ways of life, applying the method proposed by Fabian et al. (2023) with an Indigenous community can serve as a stress test for the science of well-being — a test of its ability to consider diverse perspectives and genuinely include marginalised groups. Moreover, reproducing the method in such distinct contexts – from a British NGO to an indigenous community in Brazil – favour the comparability and interethnic dialogue, all relevant for the development of the science of wellbeing.

Method

We adopted the work done by Fabian et al. (2023) with the British NGO Turn2Us as a reference for the present project while remaining attentive to potential challenges arising from interethnic interaction with a Guarani Mbyá community (Guimarães, 2019). In their study, Fabian et al. (2023) followed what Bradburn et al. (2017) describe as the three stages of developing a measurement instrument: (1) defining the boundaries of the object, (2) representing the object's metric system, and (3) establishing the procedures for applying this metric system. Completing these three stages, as the authors explain, supports systematic and well-founded measurement, increasing the likelihood that the instrument's results allow for prediction, comparison, and explanation. We find value in following these three stages, since we are also interested in communicating the specific results of this project to those outside the Takuari community and in articulating our experience with that of other researchers and communities.

It is important to emphasise that, as Bradburn et al. (2017) themselves note, the three stages are neither independent nor necessarily carried out in a linear sequence. We assume that the process of community-based construction may require returning to earlier stages and making revisions, for example. To support us in conducting the three stages proposed by Bradburn et al. (2017) with due ethical care toward the community, we will adopt a second reference: the dimensions of the participatory process (IAP2, 2024). As an ethical-structural reference, we will regularly seek to encompass the five dimensions ("inform," "consult," "involve," "collaborate," and "empower") in our work with the community.

Regarding the challenges and particularities involved in developing a well-being assessment with an Indigenous community, we can identify, for now, two important differences compared to the work of Fabian et al. (2023). The first difference concerns the origin of the project. While the work of Fabian et al. (2023) was initiated by the community itself — the NGO Turn2Us requested support from researchers to create a measurement instrument for thriving — the present research was suggested by the researcher responsible for this project, Luciano E. Sewaybricker..

During previous work experiences, between 2022 and 2025, the themes of happiness and well-being, named at the time as teko porã, were discussed with the Mbyá Guarani community of Takuari (presented in the next section). Community leaders expressed particular interest in discussing these topics among their members, considering a project focused on them an important opportunity for recording and transmitting knowledge from elders to younger generations. This interest was reinforced during a field trip to the community in February 2026, when this project was presented, discussed, and finalized collectively.

However, if the discussion about *teko porã* is clearly relevant to the community, its measurement is not. Even though, in the field of ideas, the community indicates agreement with the measurement initiative, the process for doing so, the final format, and its usefulness are less tangible for everyone involved. In other words, considering the three stages proposed by Bradburn et al. (2017), we can assume that the Takuarí community clearly requested suuport for the first of these stages. The other two, given the lack of reference points both for the researchers and for the community, will require ongoing alignment. The purpose of this research will demand continuous negotiation and dialogue.

The second difference to the work done by Fabian et al. (2023) concerns the scope of the assessment instrument. Whereas the work with the NGO Turn2Us aimed to evaluate well-being in relation to what the organisation offers its audience (the alleviation of financial hardship), the present project focuses on the community members' lives as a whole. In this sense, identifying who the "experts" are in the subject under evaluation—life as a whole—is less straightforward. In particular, who the specialists will be for each of the evaluation

development stages. For example, while Takuari community leaders indicated the necessary participation of elders in the discussion about *teko porã* (in defining the scope of this idea), they also indicated the importance of listening to the community's younger members throughout the elaboration. The participation of the elders - regardless of whether they reside in the community - is fundamental because they are the guardians of Guarani ancestral knowledge (Sewaybricker & Massola, 2025); the participation of the younger members is fundamental for two reasons: so they can learn from the older people and so they can express their feelings and perceptions, overcoming a gap in generational communication.

The Guarani Mbyá community of Takuari

The Guarani Mbyá are one of the Guarani ethnic subdivisions alongside the Kaiowá and Nhandeva. These groups inhabit regions spanning Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, and Uruguay, unified by their shared language lineage, the Tupi. The Mbyá community consists of approximately 7,000 members in Brazil or, as they call it, Pindorama. While they are distributed across various states, there is a significant concentration in São Paulo (Grünberg, 2012).

This project will be conducted specifically in partnership with the Guarani Mbyá village (or, in Guarani, *tekoa*) of Takuari. The *tekoa* Takuari is located in the municipality of Eldorado, in the state of São Paulo, along the banks of the Ribeira de Iguape River, and is crossed by the Taquari River. It was established in 2013 on the site of a former farm as part of a compensation process for the impacts caused during the construction of the Mário Covas Beltway. The Government of the State of São Paulo implemented this measure in response to the significant occupation of Indigenous Lands and the Serra do Mar State Park in the southern region of São Paulo city.

The Takuari community is led politically and spiritually (in the roles of cacique and xeramoy) by Timóteo da Silva Verá Tupã Popyguá, an influential Guarani Mbyá leader in Brazil. Timóteo has published books (Popyguá, 2022; 2024) and frequently participates in events across the country. As of August 2025, the community consisted of 30 families, totaling approximately 140 inhabitants.

The Takuari community is a partner of the research and extension center called the Indigenous Support Network of the University of São Paulo (Rede Indígena - USP; see Bertholdo & Silva Guimarães, 2018), where two of the researchers of this project work (Danilo S. Guimarães as coordinator and Luciano E. Sewaybricker as collaborator). Luciano E. Sewaybricker and Danilo S. Guimarães will be responsible for contact with the community and for field trips. It is important to highlight that, between 2022 and 2025, both worked jointly with the Takuari community on a project related to well-being and food sovereignty linked to Rede Indígena - USP and funded by FAPESP (process no. 2022/04906-3). This experience provided important learning that is incorporated into this project, such as the importance of financial support for administrative activities carried out by members of the Takuari community (such as preparation of materials and the space for visits). Without this financial support, community mobilization is greatly diminished due to the families' urgent need for income. Furthermore, Rede Indígena - USP, with its accumulated experience and access to various resources within the University of São Paulo, constitutes an important partnership for the success of this project.

In turn, the trust between researchers and community members, which also includes collaboration in writing book chapters (Sewaybricker et al., *in press*) and participation in one of the tables of the 1st International Meeting of Indigenous Psychology (2025), favors the partnership in this new project. It is also important to highlight the participation of Takuari

community leaders as part of the research team, either as an Associate Researcher (Timóteo Verá Tupã Popygua) or as Technical Support (Marciano Nhurim Boggarim, Luiza da Silva, Fabiana Ara Mirim, Ataíde Vherá Mirim).

Theoretical framework

Beyond the general framework mentioned earlier, the work conducted by Fabian et al. (2023) was grounded in theoretical references relevant to community-based and co-participatory research: action research (Tripp, 2005), relational interview (Fujii, 2017), and grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). These references resonate with many of our own interests—for example, the desire for "political change, awareness-raising, and empowerment" (Tripp, 2005, p. 445), or, as Minkler (2000, p. 192) writes, the aspiration to "consciously blur the lines between the researcher and the researched," fostering a bottom-up development process.

However, the specificities of working with Indigenous communities require attention to other aspects, such as the importance of Indigenous peoples' self-determination and the risks of epistemic violence (Fricker, 2007; Guimarães, 2022). It is not uncommon, for instance, for knowledge originating from Indigenous peoples to be regarded as inferior—classified as magical, fanciful, and ultimately untrue when compared to scientific knowledge (Marková, 2016). Valuing Indigenous self-determination, in this context, means not only giving voice but also ensuring that the very mode of knowledge production (the method) is constructed with the community. For this reason, the theoretical reference of "observant participation" (Albert, 2014; Vas & Guimarães, 2023) more accurately reflects our working approach throughout this project.

In observant participation, the idea is reinforced that the knowledge and the way of producing it—both belonging to the community—emerge within and through the community itself. It would therefore make little sense for the mode of production, data collection, and analysis to be predetermined in an academic setting (outside the community). To propose a method in such terms would imply (a) a presumed predictability of how the many actors will position themselves throughout the project; (b) the researcher's, rather than the community's, responsibility for defining the modes of producing relevant content; and (c) the need for extra-community analyses to assign meaning to the content emerging from communal experiences.

Accordingly, we will align this project's working approach with that practised by the Indigenous Network – USP, including its collaboration with the Takuari village itself. Within the context of the USP Indigenous Network, the activities carried out are understood as university extension and defined with the communities themselves, according to their priorities and interests. The activities carried out, in turn, are documented in co-authored reports (Guimarães, 2020). These reports present the project's progress, lived tensions, disagreements and agreements, doubts, expectations, the different meanings attributed to what was experienced or discussed, and the arrangements for future meetings. It is thus encouraged that meaning attribution—which traditionally might occur in a field diary or during interview transcription analysis—always be shared with and discussed by the community. These co-authored reports will later serve as the basis for analytical and communicative extrapolations that may occur outside the community, such as in new academic research, article preparation, and conference presentations.

We will therefore work in the same format. Each of our visits to the Takuari village—outlined in more detail in the next section—will provide an opportunity to discuss the project's theme and to collaborate, resulting in a report co-authored by the researchers and the

community. Each report will be translated from Portuguese into Guarani Mbyá for internal sharing within the Takuari community.

Finally, it is important to note that the three stages proposed by Bradburn et al. (2017) constitute a framework for knowledge construction originating outside the village and already represent a potential source of tension in interethnic interaction, which must therefore be constantly negotiated. At the same time, it is necessary to acknowledge that these three stages reflect part of the researchers' own interests—namely, to communicate the project's experience to the academic public and to compare it with other studies in the science of well-being.

Field trip and data analysis

Drawing from part of the team's experience in the project on well-living and food sovereignty in the Takuari village (Sewaybricker et al., *in press*), we learned the importance of in-person contact within the community for the progress of the various proposed initiatives. Asynchronous activities and remote discussions showed low engagement among community members. Therefore, throughout this project, we will prioritise collective in-person work within the community. We plan monthly visits lasting at least two days. Depending on the project's stage, the visits will include activities (to be agreed upon) in large or small groups, individual conversations, and diverse shared experiences. We will also remain attentive to the importance of building trust with the community, which will sometimes include our participation in activities of other kinds, such as ceremonies, cultivation tasks, and support for community needs.

Although the specific purpose of each visit will depend on ongoing negotiations with the community, we outline here a preliminary version of the research process. This process is organised into six "moments" during visits to the village. These moments aim to encompass, though flexibly, the stages described by Fabian et al. (2023) and Bradburn et al. (2017).

In the first moment, visits to the Takuari village will aim to present the project and seek broader community engagement in its implementation. Although this presentation took place during the project's preparation, we understand that verifying and revitalising community support will need to be continuous. At this stage, we also intend to involve, with the community's consent, other actors to discuss the potential benefits of assessing the community's well-being. This may include other researchers, partner NGOs, and government bodies such as the National Foundation for Indigenous Peoples (FUNAI).

In the second moment, the visits will focus on consulting and involving the community in defining the boundaries of the object of evaluation and, subsequently, in a third moment, its metric representation. To determine the boundaries of the object, we will encourage community members to share their views on the best ways of living within the community and their knowledge of Guarani concepts related to well-being, that the community indicated should be organized based on the expression *teko porã* (Sewaybricker & Massola, 2025). For this stage, the community indicated that elders from communities near the Takuari village (villages in the Ribeira Valley region) should be present. This will be an essential stage for both discussing diverse indigenous and non indigenous perspectives and recovering and strengthening ancestral Guarani knowledge, which was a request from members of Takuari community.

Regarding the metric representation, if discussions on this topic prove abstract or difficult to grasp, we will present examples of well-known well-being science instruments and community-based initiatives so the community can evaluate and debate their adequacy. For example, we can present assessment instruments related to the community (such as health

and education indicators) and evaluation initiatives of well-being in other indigenous communities so that those involved can get to know them and discuss their suitability or not.

In the fourth moment, the visits will focus on presenting a first version of the developed well-being assessment, including the definition of the object's boundaries, the measurement system, and the application process. The goal will be to gather community members' feedback, assess the material's representativeness, and encourage suggestions for improvement, aiming to reach a more representative and appropriate version of both the object and the instrument.

In the fifth moment, the visits will focus on applying the assessment and on discussing the results. Our goal is to use the instrument at two different points in time (6 to 12 months apart) to, together with the community, assess the adequacy of the instrument (and the method) for longitudinal comparison. The second application of the instrument will constitute the sixth moment of this research. In both applications, we will discuss the results with the community and the stakeholders involved. We will seek to evaluate both the instrument's adequacy in representing the reality of the Takuari village and its usefulness in addressing the diverse interests of those involved.

In summary, the six stages of the research are:

1. Present the proposal and seek engagement.
2. Define the scope of the assessment object.
3. Define the metric representation of the object.
4. Present the first version of the assessment and refine it.
5. Conduct the first application and discuss the results.
6. Conduct the second application and discuss the results.

As we noted regarding the three stages of developing a measurement instrument (Bradburn et al., 2017), we do not expect these six moments to occur independently or in a linear sequence. On the contrary, we understand that the process may unfold in a non-linear way, with returns and overlaps. In any case, the six moments serve above all as a general direction and rhythm for carrying out the work within the stipulated timeframe.

2) Research outcomes

The project aims to achieve the following six outcomes:

- (1) Document the assessment instrument developed with the Takuari village as a potential model to be replicated or adapted for other Indigenous communities worldwide.
- (2) Design a well-being assessment protocol for Indigenous communities through a participatory process inspired by the experience of Fabian et al. (2023).
- (3) Establish a comparative dialogue between the project in the Takuari village and international experiences of well-being assessment in Indigenous communities (see Yap & Yu, 2016).
- (4) Develop a mixed-method participatory-approach based model for the science of wellbeing researchers' community to achieve complementary locally representative metrics.
- (5) Evaluate broad well-being assessment instruments (Gallup World Poll, Global Flourishing Study, World Values Survey, OECD Guidelines) regarding their relevance and shortcomings for Indigenous communities.
- (6) Strengthen the partnership between São Camilo University Center, the Indigenous Network – USP, and international researchers.

3) Scientific and technological challenges and ways of overcoming them

We expect that the co-production of a well-being measure with an Indigenous community, as exemplified by the experience with the Guarani Mbyá (Sewaybricker & Massola, 2025), is feasible. However, when compared with a co-production process that does not involve interethnic dialogue (and is conducted within a more culturally proximate context), the process involving an Indigenous community will be less straightforward and thus more challenging. We anticipate five main challenges in applying the present method.

(1) First, we understand that, given the differences in worldviews between Indigenous and non-Indigenous actors, as well as the specificities of the Guarani Mbyá cosmology, the process will necessarily involve ongoing negotiation of roles, responsibilities, and priorities (Guimarães, 2020). In the words of Latour (2004), the researcher's role should be less that of a "representative" and more akin to a "diplomat" — relinquishing their status as an expert on the object and its measurement, and positioning themselves as a facilitator of dialogue among the various stakeholders, including the scientific community.

(2) Second, the significant differences in worldviews will require special attention to identifying who the relevant experts are for the object of interest and the measurement process, as this will not follow familiar scientific patterns. For example, based on previous research (Sewaybricker & Massola, 2025), we anticipate that the unit of well-being assessment might not be individual, but collective (and may even involve non-human entities), and that the community will have reservations about a numerical representation of the evaluation. In the case of the research by Galbraith et al. (2024), researchers dealt with this obstacle by providing more detailed explanations of the instrument, using examples, and sometimes using visual aids to replace the numerical scale.

(3) Third, since the project was proposed by researchers to the community, it will be important to continually address the relevance of the research and the interests of the different actors involved. From our prior conversations with leaders of the Takuari community, we assume that the project is initially of interest to the community. Moreover, we understand that the outcome of the project may also be of interest to other actors connected to the village. There is increasing attention from the Brazilian government and multilateral organizations towards the quality of life of Indigenous peoples (e.g., viewing them as holders of valuable knowledge for addressing climate change). Nevertheless, the value of this project should not be assumed to be obvious or stable over time. It will be necessary to revisit agreements and regularly reinforce trust between researchers and the community.

(4) A fourth challenge, connected to the last one, involves mapping the stakeholders who must be engaged in the co-production process. In addition to the Indigenous community itself and the internal distribution of power, many other actors may be deemed relevant, such as members of other Indigenous communities, non-Indigenous partners engaged in projects with the community, government representatives, and NGOs. Who these stakeholders are and whether they will be perceived by the community as such throughout the research will be a matter of ongoing dialogue and will add complexity to the project management.

(5) The fifth challenge concerns the ownership of the knowledge produced and its management. In light of the long history of exploitation suffered by Indigenous peoples, it is an ethical imperative to ensure that the community actively participates in the production of knowledge and has a deciding voice (as co-authors) over how, when, and where that knowledge is disseminated (Dent, 2023). This fifth challenge also highlights the linguistic barrier faced in this project. For the knowledge produced during the research to be

appropriated and controlled by the community, it is important that researchers pay attention to both the limitations of Guarani Mbyá translations and ensure that all materials developed are translated into Guarani Mbyá.

4) Schedule (spreadsheet)

The activities to be carried out are listed in the schedule below. The project is expected to be carried out over 24 months, from September 2026 to August 2028. As key milestones, we plan to conduct the first well-being assessment in the Takuari village in the 9th month of the project; in the 15th month, undertake a brief research fellowship at the University of Cambridge (UK) to discuss the data and prepare the first article; conduct the second assessment in the 17th month of the project; and finally, host an international meeting (in Brazil) to discuss co-production and the representation of marginalized groups in the science of well-being.

Schedule (24 months)	Month																							
Item	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**	**18**	**19**	**20**	**21**	**22**	**23**	**24**
First stage: present proposal and engage																								
Second stage: define the perimeter of the evaluation object																								
Third stage: define metric representation of the object																								
Fourth stage: present first version of the evaluation and refine it																								
Elaboration of the first article																								
Fifth stage: application of evaluation 1																								
Fifth stage: data analysis 1																								
Fifth stage: discussion of results 1																								
Prepare partial project report																								
Presentation of results to stakeholders																								
Fellowship at the University of Cambridge																								
Elaboration of the second article																								
Sixth stage: re-present evaluation tool																								
Sixth stage: application of evaluation 2																								
Sixth stage: data analysis 2																								
Sixth stage: discussion of results 2																								
Elaboration of the third article																								
Host International Meeting																								
Prepare final project report																								

5) Research team's activities and roles

Associate Researchers

Anna Alexandrova, *University of Cambridge*
- Role(s): specialist in measurement in the social sciences, democratic measurement, and the science of wellbeing. Sponsor at the University of Cambridge (UK).
- Engagement: periodical 1:1 meetings to discuss research development, guidance for writing two research articles, review/edit manuscripts, and participation in the international meeting at the end of the project.

Danilo Silva Guimarães, *University of São Paulo*
- Role(s): specialist in indigenous psychology and research with indigenous peoples in Brazil. Sponsor at the University of São Paulo and the Indigenous Support Network.
- Engagement: participation in field trips to *tekoa* Takuari, support in data analysis, review/edit manuscripts, and participation in the international meeting at the end of the project. Special support for the development of the result (2): "Design a well-being assessment protocol for Indigenous communities through a participatory process."

Kate Sollis, *University of Tasmania*
- Role(s): specialist in participatory approach method and science of wellbeing.
- Engagement: advisor on how to maintain participatory-approach standards, guidance for writing two research articles, review/edit manuscripts, and participation in the international meeting at the end of the project. Special support for the development of the result (5): "Evaluate broad well-being assessment instruments regarding their relevance and shortcomings for Indigenous communities."

Mark Fabian, *University of Warwick*
- Role(s): specialist in democratic measurement, measurement in the science of wellbeing, and science of wellbeing.
- Engagement: advisor on how to maintain the standards used at the Turn2Us project, support in comparing data from the project with data from Turn2Us, review/edit manuscripts, and participation in the international meeting at the end of the project.

Timóteo da Silva Verá Tupã Popygua, *Guarani Mbyá Community*
- Role(s): especialista na cultura indígena Guarani Mbyá.
- Engagement: consultoria sobre adequação do projeto (conteúdo e processo) em relação à cultura Guarani Mbyá, revisão/edição de manuscritos e participação no encontro internacional ao final do projeto.

Technical team

Nhurim Marciano Boggarim (TBD)*, Guarani Mbyá Community*
- Role(s): Sponsor of the Takuari Indigenous community, community engagemente, and advisor on data sovereignty.

- Engagement: mediation with and representation of the indigenous community, review/edit documents, participation in community activities, in the international meeting at the end of the project.

***Luiza da Silva (TBD)**, Guarani Mbyá Community*

- Role(s): Sponsor of the Takuari Indigenous community, community engagemente, and advisor on data sovereignty.
- Engagement: mediation with and representation of the indigenous community, review/edit documents, participation in community activities, in the international meeting at the end of the project.

***Fabiana Ara Mirim (TBD)**, Guarani Mbyá Community*

- Role(s): Sponsor of the Takuari Indigenous community, community engagemente, and advisor on data sovereignty.
- Engagement: mediation with and representation of the indigenous community, review/edit documents, participation in community activities, in the international meeting at the end of the project.

***Ataíde Vherá Mirim (TBD)**, Guarani Mbyá Community*

- Role(s): Sponsor of the Takuari Indigenous community, community engagemente, and advisor on data sovereignty.
- Engagement: mediation with and representation of the indigenous community, review/edit documents, participation in community activities, in the international meeting at the end of the project.

***Undergraduate student scholarship 1**, Psychology student*

- Engagement: participation in field visits, transcription of the content from the visits (interviews, group activities, meetings), analysis of the data from the transcribed material, support in organizing the international meeting. Presentation of a paper at one scientific event.

***Undergraduate student scholarship 2**, Psychology student*

- Engagement: participation in field visits, photographic documentation of the visits, preparation and management of visit reports, organization of Portuguese–English and Portuguese–Guarani Mbyá translations, support in organizing the international meeting. Presentation of a paper at one scientific event.

6) Communication efforts

- Host an international meeting at Centro Universitário São Camilo on democratic measurement and participatory approaches in the science of wellbeing. The meeting will bring together international and national researchers associated with the project, members of the Takuari community, and other community partners (NGOs, representatives of government agencies – FUNAI) engaged in the research and the democratic co-production process of well-being assessments.
- Submit three co-authored articles with associated researchers and the Takuari community for publication in international scientific journals. After publication, both articles will also be made publicly available in Portuguese and Guarani Mbyá.

  - Article 1: presenting the idea of well-being as defined by the Takuari community and its comparison to other definitions of the Science of Well-being.
  - Article 2: presenting the measurement instrument developed and its comparison to other instruments commonly used in the Science of Well-being.
  - Article 3: presenting the result of the two applications of the instrument and its relevance to the Science of Well-being.
- Present the research results at two international and two national scientific events.
- One-month exchange of the Principal Researcher as a visiting scholar in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge for participation in meetings with associated researchers, discussion of research data, joint writing of the first research article, exchange of experiences with other researchers at the institution, and strengthening of institutional partnerships.
- Publish two public reports, each corresponding to a 12-month period of the project, in Portuguese, English, and Guarani Mbyá.

7) Other support:

- Support from Centro Universitário São Camilo for hosting the event, providing the venue, necessary equipment for recording and streaming, and a support team (institutional communication for the event, technical team for streaming, recording, and venue organization).

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9) Budget:

Travels and field work (R$89.627,16)

- Principal researcher and one associate researcher: R$ 47.040,00
- Two undergraduate student: R$ 31.416,00
- Transportation of Guarani Mbyá elders: R$11.171,16

Scholarships (R$54.720,00)

- Two undergraduate student scholarships: R$54.720,00

One-month Fellowship at the University of Cambridge (R$37.101,15)

- Flight ticket: R$ 7.500,00
- Daily resources: R$ 23.171,15
- Travel insurance: R$ 1.680,00
- Visiting scholar tax: R$ 4.750,00

Equipment, tools, and communication (R$77.213,86)

- Administrative support to Takuari village: R$14.400,00
- Translation to Guarani Mbyá: R$ 68.400,00
- Adminstrative support to Guarani Mbyá community's activities:

International Event (R$54.198,00)

- Staying for three foreign associate researchers: R$ 17.178,00
- Flight ticket for three associate researchers: R$ 22.500,00
- Simultaneous translation: R$ 11.600,00
- Staying for five indigenous and non indigenous brazilian partners: R$ 1.870,00
- Trip for five indigenous and non indigenous brazilian partners: R$ 1.050,00

TOTAL: R$ 318.446,31

Item	Amount	Unity of measurement	#	Total	Observation
Open access publication	R$ 0,00	per publication	3	R$ 0,00	Use of technical reserve (up to R$12,000.00 per publication)
Translation field trip report to Guarani Mbyá	R$ 2.850,00	per report	14	R$ 39.900,00	Translation of 14 field trip reports to Guarani Mbyá (estimate of 5000 words per document)
Translation article and anual report to Guarani Mbyá	R$ 5.700,00	per article or anual report	5	R$ 28.500,00	Translation of 3 articles and 2 reports to Guarani Mbyá (estimate of 10,000 words per document)
Participation in scientific events	R$ 0,00	per event	2	R$ 0,00	Use of technical reserve (transport, per diems, insurance and registration) (estimate of R$30,000 per event)
Administrative support to Takuari village	R$ 600,00	per month	24	R$ 14.400,00	Costs of working hours for the school cleaning staff (where activities take place), administration of the computer lab (where documentation activities are carried out), and community mobilization (including the time dedicated by young people and adults). Reference value used in FAPESP project no. 2022/04906-3
Daily allowance (responsible and associated researcher)	R$ 560,00	per day, per researcher	84	R$ 47.040,00	Monthly visits to Takuari village for 3 days (2 per diems) over 21 months (excluding the month the responsible researcher will be in Cambridge)
Daily allowance (scientific initiation scholarship holders)	R$ 374,00	per day, per initiation scholarship holder	84	R$ 31.416,00	Monthly visits to Takuari village for 3 days (2 per diems) over 21 months (excluding the month the responsible researcher will be in Cambridge)
Transport of 4 Guarani Mbyá elders to Takuari village	R$ 132,99	per visit, per elder		R$ 11.171,16	Considering round-trip travel from Guarani Mbyá villages in the Ribeira Valley to the Takuari village, the average mileage was calculated, with a reimbursement of 1 liter for every 10 km traveled, and the average fuel price in the State of São Paulo

					of R$6.20 (https://precos.petrobras.com.br/w/gasolina/sp). > Cananeia (131 km - considering aldeia Ariri) > Iguape (75 km - considering aldeia Guaviraty) > Miracatu (146 km - considering aldeia Amba Porã) > Pariquera-Açu (63 km - considering aldeia Pindoty) > Sete Barras (86 km - considering aldeia Peguaoty) > Tapiraí (181 km - considering aldeia Guyrá Pepó) > Registro (70 km - considering aldeia Tupã Rekó) > > average distance: 107,4 km per elder, per visit: 214,8 km (*10 km por litro) per elder, per visit: 21,45 litros (average cost in SP, R$6,20 18.02.2026) per elder, per visit: R$132,99 Considering 4 elders and 21 field-trips: R$11.171,16
Monthly maintenance in Cambridge	R$ 23.171,15	per month	1	R$ 23.171,15	According to the Overseas Research Scholarship table (reference £3,180.00)
Flight São Paulo - England	R$ 7.500,00	round trip	1	R$ 7.500,00	Estimate of USD1,300.00
Visiting scholar fee University of Cambridge	R$ 4.750,00	Fixed fee from the Department of History and Philosophy of Science	1	R$ 4.750,00	Considering £650.00 per term
Travel insurance for the United Kingdom	R$ 1.680,00	per month	1	R$ 1.680,00	According to FAPESP table for travel insurance
Undergraduate scholarship	R$ 1.140,00	per month, per initiation scholarship	48	R$ 54.720,00	Two students for two years according to FAPESP table

		holder			
Undergraduate student participation in national conference	R$ 0,00	per scholarship holder, per event	2	R$ 0,00	Use of technical reserve (transport, per diems, insurance and registration) (estimate of R$2,000 per event)
Daily allowance (foreign associated researchers)	R$ 818,00	per day, per researcher	21	R$ 17.178,00	Considering one week (7 days) stay and 3 associated researchers
Flight to Brazil	R$ 7.500,00	round trip	3	R$ 22.500,00	Reference of USD1,300.00 and 3 associated researchers
Interpreters during event	R$ 2.900,00	per day per professional	4	R$ 11.600,00	Translation to Portuguese and English, 6 hours of event, estimate from the National Union of Translators
Daily allowance (members of the Takuari community)	R$ 374,00	per community member, per day	5	R$ 1.870,00	Considering value of team members (FAPESP) and 5 community members and 1 per diem.
Transfer (Takuari community - São Paulo)	R$ 105,00	per community member, per trip	10	R$ 1.050,00	Considering the bus fare between Eldorado-SP and São Paulo-SP
				R$ 318.446,31	