

EL PAÍS

Alterconsumerism / SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Rio favelas say no to waste

In the communities of Babilonia, Regina Tchelly has managed to extend the duration of a basic food basket from ten to thirty days, taking advantage of 100% of the food

LEONARDO MARTINS DIAS
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Mural of Regina Tchelly's recipes, in the favela Babilonia.

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Regina Tchelly (41 years old) was 19 when she immigrated from the poor northeast of Brazil in search of a better salary. She exchanged the 11 euros a month that she earned as a domestic worker in Paraíba for the 42 that she was paid in Rio de Janeiro. Upon arriving in the Rio de Janeiro city, located in the southeast of the country, in 2000,

Tchelly was impressed by the amount of wastes in the streets. "After the street markets, there were mountains of food left over that we used in Paraíba", she explains. Unconsciously, this first perception, fruit of the richness of multiculturalism, was building a bridge towards her future as an entrepreneur.

In 2011, the communities of Babilonia, a favela in Rio de Janeiro where Tchelly lives and runs his business, in Leme neighborhood, made a boat to strengthen their [Favela Orgánica gastronomy project](#). They bought ten uniforms, boards and knives. Tchelly began to produce bread with banana remains, broccoli stem ceviche, flour or meatballs with leftover beetroot, pumpkin seed milk, or to reuse coconut remains, the removal of which is a big problem for the city council due to its weight and volume. "My restaurant has never had a menu, I have always created the dishes with what we have at the moment, like in Paraíba."

Today, Favela Orgánica has sustainable orchards and various initiatives. "I serve meals here, I deliver, I sell frozen foods, and I teach sustainable gastronomy and entrepreneurship, among other initiatives. For example, my clients show me their fridges with the mobile camera and I explain how to take advantage of 100% of the food in a healthy, nutritious and rich way. I manage to extend the duration of a basic food basket from ten to thirty days. Moreover, I am producing an application to reduce waste. The few leftovers that are left over returns to the earth as compost. I sell half a litre of bio fertilizer for one euro and twenty cents, and a kilo of natural fertilizers for ninety cents. I turn the used frying oil into soap", she explains.



Regina Tchelly at the entrance of her Favela Orgánica project, in the Babilonia favela.

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Tchelly has clients both in the favela and on the asphalt (a slang used in the favelas to refer to the formal part of the city). But she was not recognised in Brazil until his project gained media visibility in Europe. Leading chefs from Turin took her to Italy three times for Tchelly to train them. "In Brazil they did not value me. Gaining visibility and recognition in Europe motivated me a lot to continue with Favela Orgánica. It inspired me to unleash my dreams." Opening her arms in the organic garden and turning around her own self, Tchelly affirms, smiling and very proud: "Look what we can do when we are able to dream."

Favela Orgánica, in addition to being framed under the environmental dimension of sustainability, is also a social project. "I make a more humanized, loving and inclusive gastronomy. I use food to unite people. I distribute recipes on the walls of the favela. During the pandemic I distributed more than 600 dishes and taught how to take advantage of food. I educate and get children off the streets and from vulnerability to crime. I foster what companies call 'entrepreneurship' to promote the generation of income among unemployed people. Two hundred people from all over Brazil signed up for the first edition of my online course. In short, my life is really reflecting on how to consume and accumulate less and seek self-esteem. Why buying so much clothing and food or use so much water?", she wonders.

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Tchelly does not know the 2030 Agenda and is critical of companies. Her comments make remember the film *Plácido*, directed by Luis Berlanga, in which the rich receive a poor person for dinner at their table at Christmas: "Companies have to think less about their benefits. They have already extracted enough from the planet and from people. Its managers have already amassed enough resources. They should really support us, not just for marketing. Circular economy and these fads may be fine, but there is a long way to go because often those who move them tend to do so to accumulate money. They have not even really cut back like we do here. We are all tired of empty sustainability discourses, of helping the poor and of saving the world... Are there people who really believe it? ", she reflects.

For all these reasons, Tchelly does not collaborate with companies. "In the end it is always the same. They want promotion. They use our humanity to wash their inhuman and unsustainable images. They do business around hunger and promote welfare policies that do not bring any change, but rather perpetuate unsustainability. If you let them, they keep everything. They compete to keep it all without limits. They want more and more and more... They take advantage of the pandemic, of the crises... What sustainability is this? Here we trust in collaboration and the sense of community ", she states.

"There are thousands of examples," she says. "Company representatives come here saying they want to teach us entrepreneurship. However, their pride prevents them from understanding what we already know. Here we are entrepreneurs since we are

born, to survive, without resources and with creativity, as companies are incapable to do. We need to amplify our own voice, for example, through interviews that are published in the media. This raises our self-esteem and allows us to believe our dreams. We need autonomy, education of quality, which is not what companies or public administration bring to us", she denounces. Regarding the universities, she feels that they support the communities in the favelas: "Nutritionists come to investigate what we do and give us free consultations, which we could not afford because they cost around one hundred euros."

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This is the seventh article in the series '[Relationships with communities and informal popular knowledge: central pillars to transform towards authentic sustainability](#)' published by Leonardo Dias.

[Leonardo Martins Dias](#) designs and implements multi-stakeholder sustainability projects. He teaches and researches on a more authentic sustainability, currently with a focus on education.

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