

# Almanac of the Future

A STORY OF SUCCESS

Motivational Experience No. 42



**KUSI KAWSAY:  
A HAPPY SCHOOL IN THE  
PERUVIAN ANDES**

*Kusi Kawsay, Quechua voice translated into English as happy life, is the name of the Andean school in Písaq, Cusco-Peru, whose purpose is true to its name: to produce happiness in the lives of students, teachers, collaborators and their families. Its recipe sounds as simple as it is novel: Waldorf pedagogy contributes part of the methodology and the teaching content comes from the Andean culture and cosmovision. The result: a school that strengthens cultural identity and prepares for life in harmony, beyond competitiveness and individualism. A bet, which at the beginning has had to swim against the current; now it is gradually becoming a reference.*

## HAPPY FROM AFAR

Miriam Pacco is in her ninth year at Kusi Kawsay; she is 15 years old and lives with her parents and siblings in the Quechua community of Paru Paru. The school is located in Písaq, which is relatively far from her home. It takes Miriam an hour to get to school on foot and then another half hour by bus, but she would not change her school

for anything in the world. She likes to write reports and wants to learn journalism. Niall Hart is returning to Kusi Kawsay from further afield. The Canadian boy spent his high school years at this school when he came with his parents to Peru. Niall has a degree in filmmaking in Canada and is a cameraman. Three months ago he returned to the world of Kusi Kawsay to support with his profession and to stay.



## AGAINST ALL ODDS

About 18 years ago, several families from Písaq and Taray, a neighboring town, were looking for a school education for their children, different from the public school, based on the principle of reaffirming the Andean cultural identity, since conventional education still aims at devaluing cultural expressions and the Andean cosmivision. Susana Bolívar, pedagogue and currently executive director of the Kusi Kawsay Association - the association runs the school and is a very active promoter of Andean culture - explains: *"My parents, together with other people, made many efforts to allow us an education that valued our origins. This attitude counteracted the self-denial of many who said that it was better not to speak to children in Quechua because it would harm them in society."*

At first, a Waldorf teacher was approached and agreed to teach in the Taray public school. But the parents' hopes for a step-by-step change in the



approach to teaching in the village public school quickly fizzled out: the guidelines from the ministry of education and the practices in the educational area were too vertical, hermetic and discriminatory.

The group of parents, faced with this discouraging panorama, decided to create a private school. Sara Franco, Susana's mother, along with Fielding Wood and others pushed the idea of an Andean school tirelessly. Fielding,

being an American, was able to get financial support for the school from several friends in the United States. It took them several years to obtain permission to operate their school when this procedure for other private schools takes only 3 months. When the school finally opened its doors officially in 2009, Susana, Sara's oldest daughter, had already finished her schooling, but during her university studies in education she was already interning and volunteering at Kusi Kawsay.

## WE HAVE BEEN TOLD ALL SORTS OF THINGS

From the beginning, the school's managers had to tolerate all kinds of comments: the local society of Písaq and Taray was obviously not ready for this new way of teaching, overcoming the usual cultural discrimination, stimulating the creativity of children and young people. This generated criticism, rejection and even slander. Iñakapalla Chávez, director of research and development at Kusi Kawsay recalls. *"When I started working in Kusi Kawsay, some years ago, I heard various comments in the village, which alluded to the members of Kusi Kawsay as heretics, because it was an alternative school that did not promote the Catholic religion. In this school the use of native dress has been promoted, because in the Andes it is a symbol of cultural identity that has been denied to us by the invasion. Instead of going to the town's festivities, marching as in a parade to military rhythm, we have participated, but with our music, traditional dress and native dances. Now*

*the people of Písaq are proud of this educational initiative".* Only when a journalist from a regional newspaper wrote an article hailing the Andean cultural rescue practiced by the students of Kusi Kawsay in the parade, the dissonant local voices began to be silenced. But to this day, in Písaq, Andean culture is seen more as a relevant accessory to attract tourists and not as a bearer of identity and pride of the person.



## ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE AND SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES

In addition to the Andean school, the association promotes two other initiatives: as a cultural manager with its project Ñawpa Ñan, translated from the Quechua ancestral path, and the organic farm Kusi Ñan, happy path. It seeks to merge knowledge and ancestral traditions of the Andes with sustainable practices to contribute to the empowerment of children, youth and adults in rural communities in the area. "We", says Susana, *"live our cultural identity in the here and now"*. With Susana, the second generation has taken over the reins at Kusi Kawsay. The parents founded the school; now it is up to the young people to systematize the experiences in order to achieve impact from the model of cultural and educational work.

The school has a capacity for more than one hundred students and the average class size is fourteen children or young people. The demand is greater than the school's capacity. "We give priority to the empowerment of economically challenged children," Iña explains. More than half of the openings are reserved for children and

youth from the communities in the area. *"We seek equal opportunities and our dream is for children to embrace ecological awareness, achieving academic, emotional and socio-cultural progress, with greater self-esteem,"* says Susana and continues: *"More than an educational program, it is a strategy for a cultural renaissance, seeking social change. We work with the children on their identity origins and it is amazing how quickly they are able to connect with nature"*.



The inspiration and creativity of Kusi Kawsay comes from the music, dance and weaving of Andean culture and ancestral wisdom; this current enters in symbiosis with Waldorf pedagogy, guiding the ways of sharing and teaching in Kusi Kawsay. But undoubtedly the focus on culture, identity and ancestry prevails. *"To see the future, we must also look back,"* Sara explains. She accompanies the children at the preschool level.

*"The rhythms and cycles of the Andean agrarian calendar are our curriculum". Nelba Mendoza is the bio-garden and permaculture teacher. "The vast majority of the students like the garden. During elementary school we work with plants, and also with food preparation. In high school we practice composting, aromatic plants and soon we will grow mushrooms."*

## **EDUCATION FUSION**

The confluence between Good Living, Sumaq Kawsay and Andean cultural elements on the one hand and Waldorf pedagogy with its anthroposophical foundations make the Andean school Kusi Kawsay. There are no threats, pressuring children from grades; learning difficulties are solved from the collective and teachers

handle different methods of measurement, where the process always prevails and not the result. In Kusi Kawsay one looks in vain for punishments or the education of the executioner. This pedagogical approach leads both parents and teachers to break stereotypes. There have been cases where teachers have resigned, confessing that they have not been able to assume this healing education.

There are also cases of mothers and fathers, both in Andean communities and in urban families, who have found it difficult to understand this transition from the basic paradigms of colonial-patriarchal-anthropocentric education. *"Often it is the children who educate their parents at home, encouraging healthier eating, creativity and many other issues,"* shares Susana.

After more than 10 years of operation, Kusi Kawsay is an alternative educational model in the region. In the year 2021, it has been awarded by UNESCO for its innovative educational method. Susana, as executive director of the association, sees opportunities in the current situation. *"Before we were frowned upon, but now the perception in PISAQ regarding the school is different. Before, the educational authorities did not come to evaluate the school, but now they do come and show greater openness and even curiosity. This opens up the possibility of influencing the pedagogical approaches of public education. This is why this year we will have to systematize our entire educational path; only when we have everything well documented and argued, our strategy and proactive attitude can be successful".* There is a long way to go. For Kusi Kawsay, for example, a traditional dance means identity, cultural roots, an affirmation with the self, the community and the territory. For the vast majority, however, and not only in PISAQ, a dance is something that only allows to win a prize in the so usual competitions or a mere



tourist presentation. *"These days Písaq has a celebration," adds Susana. "We are participating but instead of being part of the military-style parade, we will organize a nighttime torchlight walk accompanied by traditional music to commemorate Tampuwaqso, our cacique (chieftain) who fought against the Spanish invaders and was betrayed by the town priest."*



## FULL OF CHANGES

During the pandemic, a lot of work was done with video calls, looking for ways to give each other hope and talking about everything but the pandemic. In order not to leave the association's and school's facilities abandoned, Susana

came to live at Kusi Kawsay during this time. *"This year is a year full of changes,"* she says with a mischievous smile. *"I could earn more financially by working in the public sector, but I have taken on the challenge of projecting Kusi Kawsay."* The challenges, between digitization, the constant risk of commercialization of culture and a constant proactive attitude to achieve advocacy are enormous. *"We are making many changes. Financially, as the state currently pays nothing and parents' contributions cover less than 20 percent of the expenses, we are trying different ways to become more independent from the solidarity aid that currently allows us to function."* There are different ways to support the school; there are many parents who participate and work in the school's chores. *"These changes are not easy,"* explains Susana. For many years, everything has worked thanks to outside support. This is something they want to change now. Another idea to generate income is to offer professional training for teachers in this fusion education. Another vein, according to Susana, could be to offer online courses in Andean music, since the music teacher,

Juan Abel, a former student of Kusi Kawsay, is a genius.

Kusi Kawsay could also be translated as a place where young people can fulfill themselves.

## MESSAGES TO THE FUTURE

- To see the future, one must also look back or, in other words, to know where to go it helps to know where I come from, having a reference of cultural identity.
- To live cultural identity not as a return to the past but in the "I", surrounded by the "here and now".
- Awakening creativity and strengthening cultural identity leading to a life in harmony - the main task and responsibility of any education - if it does not fulfill this, it should not be called education.

# Almanac of the Future

The text was elaborated, based on conversations in situ by Jorge Krekeler (coordinator of the Almanac of the Future - facilitator of Misereor on behalf of Agiamondo) in November 2022. A big thank you to Susana Bolivar and Iñakapalla Chavez, collaborators of the Kusi Kawsay Association, as well as to Nelba Mendoza, Sarita Franco and Miriam Pacco of the Kusi Kawsay Andean School. Thanks to Nicole Maron for generating the previous link.

Authors: **Jorge Krekeler**  
[jorge.krekeler@posteo.de](mailto:jorge.krekeler@posteo.de)

Design: **Ida Peñaranda - Gabriela Avendaño** Photographs: **Association Kusi Kawsay and Jorge Krekeler**  
Translation: **Ida Peñaranda – Olaf Niemtschik**

Contact information regarding the documented experience:

**Asociación Kusi Kawsay**  
**Susana Bolívar - Iñakapalla Chávez**

[www.kusikawsay.org](http://www.kusikawsay.org)

[info@kusikawsay.org](mailto:info@kusikawsay.org)

[https://twitter.com/kusi\\_kawsay](https://twitter.com/kusi_kawsay)

<https://www.facebook.com/Kusi-Kawsay-208957755818431/?ref=ts>

With support of:

**MISEREOR**  
IHR HILFSWERK

Edition: **January 2023**

[www.almanaquedelfuturo.com](http://www.almanaquedelfuturo.com)



CC-BY 4.0, other licenses may apply to logos, individual images and text (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> . 21.06.2018)