

# “Sumak Kawsay or Buen Vivir”, an alternative development model in the Andean State?

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## INTRODUCTION

It is arguable that no other region of the world has experienced such an enduring colonial imprint as Latin America. The idea that colonialism still exists in some form within formerly colonized regions is examined in the work of postcolonial theorist Abdul JanMohamed. According to JanMohamed, colonialism does not necessarily end after direct governance over a country or region is ceded. Instead a hegemonic phase of colonization might begin, one which can last for an indefinite period of time in which “the natives accept a version of the



colonizers' entire system of values, attitudes, morality, institutions, and, more important, mode of production" (JANMOHAMED, 1985, p. 62).

It has been argued that this kind of hegemony has induced greater social inequality and creating an atmosphere that is not conducive to full democratic participation. In light of these social and democratic disparities, a new series of transformations have begun in Latin America. These changes, which are altering socio-economic, political and cultural models, have created a new state of mind, or *pensamiento*, in a number of countries throughout the region. States like Venezuela, Bolivia and Brazil are seeking alternatives in their own ways and with respect for their own political structures. Many Latin American states now have democratically elected leaders with a desire to uproot the *status quo*. Scholar Arturo Escobar considers these changes to be a postmodern approach to Latin America's current position within the global political economy. He uses terms such as post-liberal, post-developmental and post-capitalist to describe the political phenomenon that seems to be sweeping the region (Escobar 2010). Although there are significant structural differences, these countries share a common goal of developing an alternative to the prevailing occidental models of development and public policy.

One of the most noteworthy examples is the Republic of Ecuador, which has adopted an ideology of *buen vivir*<sup>1</sup>, or 'good living', as a national *pensamiento* based in pre-colonial indigenous concepts. More than just a mindset, these concepts have been translated to the social and political realm, both granting direct rights to the environment and declaring the Andean country a plurinational<sup>2</sup> state in Ecuador's 2008 constitution. It is an endogenous ideology, unique to Ecuador's regional context and based in the age-old indigenous Kichwa concept of *sumak kawsay* that has been brought to light after decades of strong anti-neoliberal protests from indigenous confederations. Ecuador's *buen vivir* has challenged the occidental public policy structure in a number of ways, but it has also met contention in its endeavors for alternative development. This challenge to an occidental model and its progress as an alternative development model are the key issues that will be explored in what follows.

This paper argues that, although redefining development in Ecuador has been no simple task, the neoliberal ideology is being challenged, in both theory and

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<sup>1</sup> The authors of this paper translate the "Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir" as 'National Plan for Good Living'. This paper will investigate further the concept of 'Buen Vivir' or 'Good Living' and how it can be implemented as a 'tool' for societal development and governance.

<sup>2</sup> The concept of "Plurinacionalidad" can be interpreted as the idea that there exists more than one predominant nationality within the Ecuadorian society: one's nationality can exist beyond established geographical borders. For instance, the kichwa nation has existed within Ecuador centuries before the establishment of occidental borders. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to this term as 'pluri-nationality'.

practice. Ecuador's new approach based on the concept of *buen vivir* could pave the way for future alternative models of general 'well-being' in Latin America. For the purposes of this objective, this paper draws upon data collected through government documents and semi-structured interviews to provide a detailed examination of *buen vivir* in Ecuador. It does so in two specific ways. First, we provide an overview of the Kichwa philosophy of *sumak kawsay*, which emphasizes the mutually-beneficial coexistence between the individual, society, and the natural world. *Sumak kawsay* is an ideology focused on complementarity, coexistence, and life in harmony, and in this way it offers a unique perspective on some of the most basic questions of development. Secondly, we explore how *sumak kawsay* has influenced Ecuador's new development model; challenging western ideologies of public policy, but at the same time must function within a broader occidental framework.

Overall, we conclude that in many respects Ecuador's approach to public policy can be considered a hybrid mixture of both Occidental and indigenous concepts, a 'harmonious coexistence' of elements from the European welfare state and the philosophy of *sumak kawsay*.

## METHODOLOGY

We utilized two primary methods of data collection: the acquisition of documents relating to Ecuador's new development model and interviews with key-respondents: government officials, political activists and people representatives of indigenous organizations.

### Collection of documents

In order to better understand the philosophical underpinning of Ecuador's development plan, it was collected a number of government documents relating to *sumak kawsay* and *buen vivir*. Ecuador's 2008 constitution (REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR, 2008) and *Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir 2009-2013* (SENPLADES, 2009) are the two central documents of the country's new development plan. Various documents by Ecuador's Council on the Development of People and Nationalities of Ecuador (CODENPE)<sup>3</sup> were also collected; these contain extensive information on the indigenous concepts that have formed the basis of Ecuador's *buen vivir* approach. Finally, we also considered two documents by Rene Ramirez Gallegos, Ecuador's National Secretary for SENPLADES, which challenge the idea of

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<sup>3</sup> CODENPE's *Sumak Kawsay* describes a number of Kichwa concepts and ideas related to development, and then compares them to the occidental or western idea of development. *Pachamama* focuses specifically on Ecuador's indigenous understanding of the natural environment, comparing it to the occidental world.

development as defined by neoliberalism and explain Ecuador's new development model based on different ideas of 'well-being'. Taken together, these documents provide a first-hand understanding of Ecuador's indigenous concepts, its outlook on development and how the Correa government plans to create an alternative model of development in Ecuador.

### Interviews

In order to complement primary sources and texts with additional information, qualitative interviews were conducted, following a semi-structured format which aimed to collect and analyze narratives from key respondents in both public institutions and other organizations deemed to be representative of different social groups in Ecuador. Qualitative interviews allowed respondents to share real life experiences (HAY, 2000), which shed light on the realities of daily life under Ecuador's new political changes.

An opportunistic and purposive approach was utilized in the interviewer's selection process, in order to identify respondents with different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, based on their roles and perspectives in the Ecuadorian society. Variables such as age, gender, ethnicity and level of education were assessed in order to ensure a diversity of respondents.

We used a pyramid technique that Hay (2000) defends as a strategy designed to first establish a level of trust with the respondent before beginning the interview with broader questions, and then following up with more focused, specific questions (in our case, the topic of Ecuador's new development model)

### Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and passages were organized into specific themes, previously defined with the support of the Objectives of *Plan Nacional del Buen Vivir*. All selected quotes were placed in a table-style format, containing the respondent's name, the quote (in Spanish), and an explanation of the quote in English. Passages were coded based on the "role" of the respondent (government officials, representatives of different social groups and political activists). This allowed us to preliminarily organize our data according the respondent and the themes relating to their discourse.

Once all data was organized, we carried out both a manifest and latent qualitative content analysis to determine which themes were discussed with the most frequency. Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) define the significance of content analysis, stating that such analysis is used specifically "to identify important themes or categories within a body of content, and to provide a rich

description of the social reality created by those themes/categories as they are lived out in a particular setting” (ZHANG; WILDEMUTH, 2009, p. 11). In this way, qualitative analysis “can support the development of new theories and models, as well as validate existing theories and provide thick descriptions of particular settings or phenomena” (ZHANG; WILDEMUTH, 2009, p. 11). Other concerns and subjects were revealed in the discourse of the respondents and showed other themes we hadn’t considered initially. The following list contains a short explanation of each theme found during the data analysis process:

- *Environmental Concerns* – Any statement which discusses Ecuador’s natural environment, environmental sustainability or conservation.
- *Energy Investment/Production* – Any statement discussing Ecuador’s domestic production of energy, fossil fuel or renewable.
- *Human/Indigenous Rights* – Any statement which discusses the rights and/or marginalization of the Indigenous population of Ecuador.
- *Influence of the Media* – Any statement discussing the media’s influence in Ecuador.
- *Foreign Economic Influence* – Any statement that discusses external economic or political influences on Ecuador, including foreign investment.



- *Tax System* – Any statement which directly relates to government tax reform and redistribution of wealth.
- *Socio-Economic Equality* – Any statement discussing the gap between rich and poor in Ecuador and/or efforts to reduce this gap.
- *Democratic Participation* – Any statement which discusses the general idea of democratic and civic participation of the citizenship in state affairs, including opportunities and inhibitions.
- *State Sovereignty* – Any statement which discusses the sovereignty of the state, lack of sovereignty, or the importance of sovereignty.
- *Education* – Any statement which discusses Ecuador's education system, its current state or future policies.
- *Healthcare* – Any statement which discusses Ecuador's health care system, its current state or future policies.
- *Plurinationality* – Any quote which discusses the idea of plurinationality, pluriculturalism, or the distinct population demographics of Ecuador.
- *Tourism and Service Industries* – Any statement which discusses Ecuador's service industry, including tourism, as an alternative to raw material production.
- *Natural Resources* – Any statement discussing natural resources, conservation of or exploitation.
- *Global Economic Participation* – Any statement discussing participation in the

global economy, more specifically the importance of diversification and regional trade.

- *Presidential Power/Power of Government* – Any statement discussing thoughts on changes in government power or presidential power since the arrival of President Correa.
- *Domestic Economy* – Any statement discussing domestic economic production, including energy production; also includes statements related to reinforcing the domestic economy.
- *Socio-Economic Issues* – Any statement discussing individual experiences regarding the situation of the Ecuadorian economy.
- *Violence and Crime* – Any statement discussing matters of crime, delinquency in Ecuador.
- *Infrastructure* – Any statement discussing state infrastructure, more specifically transportation reforms in Ecuador.

Having identified these themes, we then analyzed in which way the respondents used them in order to support, or reject, the Ecuadorian concept of development, environmental sustainability and cultural influences, as well as how these themes are being implemented as a public policy in Ecuador.

## ECUADOR NEW MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT

In the wake of Ecuador's citizen revolution, scholars have begun to examine the country's new model of development, as set forth in the 2008 constitution (REPUBLIC OF ECUADOR, 2008) and the government's new *Plan Nacional Para el Buen Vivir 2009-2013* (SENPLADES, 2009) development strategy. Catherine Walsh (2010), for example, describes a number of prominent development themes, including greater equality between ethnic groups, a strengthening of basic democratic rights, and the establishment of a sustainable economic system based on respect for the environment.

Alcadipani *et al.* (2012) highlights the symbolic and cultural differences that are still stigmatized in the concept of development. "Third world", "underdevelopment countries" or even the dichotomy North/South shows a kind of inferiority and how power arrangements are defined in globe. Trying to overcome this epistemological position, Ecuador's underlying concept of development can be traced back to the indigenous people.

It is grounded in the Kichwa term *sumak kawsay* which can be translated as *buen vivir* or "good living" (LORENZO, 2009; WALSH, 2010; GUDYNAS, 2011). However, this idea of good living is subject to many different interpretations. Catherine Walsh

has published a variety of articles that focus on the idea of *buen vivir* as a notion of 'collective well being'. In her view, *buen vivir* is the embodiment of a plurinational state in which concepts of liberty, autonomy, coexistence and social inclusion have fostered a form of social consciousness (WALSH, 2002; 2010). Other scholars have analyzed this concept primarily in terms of economic development, stating that previous neoliberal policies have failed to address significant poverty issues and that *buen vivir* is an answer to past failures (MARTENS, 2010; GUDYNAS, 2011). Others claim that this post-developmental attitude functions more as a means of producing economic and environmentally-sustainable measures while still maintaining the status-quo global political system (CARBAUGH; PRANTE 2010). Alberto Acosta places the idea in a more specific context, focusing on energy policies in his book *La Maldicion de la Abundancia*. Acosta describes the old neoliberal developmental system as a 'curse of abundance' in which the existence of significant oil reserves in Ecuador led to exploitation by transnational corporations which were empowered by global organizations such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (ACOSTA, 2009). Acosta's book highlighted how Ecuador's environmental policies could help both promote a healthy lifestyle and reduce the influence of foreign companies. These various approaches to explaining the concept of *Buen Vivir* have alluded to the same question: To what extent is Ecuador's new development model a possible alternative to occidental policies? Although it may be too early

to answer definitively, there are two broad areas where Ecuador's approach appears to be challenging the *status-quo*.

First, Ecuador has challenged the issue of development. Scholar Rene Ramirez Gallegos suggests that traditional occidental policies follows a development ideology that defines well-being strictly in economic terms, such as a country's per-capita income or purchasing power (RAMIREZ, 2010c). Ramirez states that in neoliberalism, the health of the economy is a primary determinant of the overall well-being of a state, but Ecuador has taken other factors into consideration. In his 2010 article on measuring happiness, Ramirez suggests that 'satisfaction of life' must be taken into consideration along with economic gains in order to determine the true well-being of an individual or a nation. For this reason, Ecuador has begun to measure individuals' 'happiness levels' in addition to economic gains (RAMIREZ, 2010c). Arturo Escobar also touches on the idea of development, suggesting that Ecuador has begun to move beyond normal development and into a period of 'post-development' (ESCOBAR, 2010). Escobar states that this idea of 'post-developmentalism' has become defined as *buen vivir*, which is an endogenous development model based on the philosophies and practices of Ecuador's indigenous population (ESCOBAR, 2010). According to both scholars, rather than taking for granted the current definition of development,

Ecuador's new model questions it entirely in an effort to determine a more expansive definition of *buen vivir* or well-being.

Traditional occidental policies have also been challenged by Ecuador's new perspective on culture. The idea of a pluri-national state is of particular importance to Ecuador, which has a large indigenous population that, Escobar argues, has not consistently been granted the same rights as other ethnic groups (ESCOBAR, 2010). As such, a great class divide has developed between the indigenous and *mestizo* populations, as cited in Harvey (2007) and later expanded by Escobar (2010). Thus, it is a primary objective of Ecuador's new alternative development model to decrease the class divide by increasing ethnic equality. Promoting an idea of pluri-nationalism, according to Bob Thomson, creates a 'plurality of vision' that offers a place for exchange, learning and mutual respect regarding other cultures and nationalities (THOMSON, 2011).

The following sections present this debate in greater detail, in order to construct the basis of our principal argument. The first part describes the underlying principles and concepts of *Sumak Kawsay*, showing the main differences between the occidental and the Andean perspectives. Next, we discuss how these indigenous concepts have been implemented as public policy with regard to both development and culture.

### Introduction to the Andean world perspective

Susan Strange (1999) provides an interesting perspective on how the current neoliberal global political system can be seen as a derivative of the European unitary state system. According to Strange, the Occidental world has created an inseparable bond between the *Westphalian* state-based international political model and the capitalist market economy. This bond, the basis for the occidental society, is evidently present in the current neoliberal global economy that prevails in the international community today. However, the current system "has failed to satisfy the long term conditions of sustainability" in a number of areas, including ecological and social relations (STRANGE, 1999, p. 346). The Correa government's new development plan aims to present an alternative to this model, one based on Andean concepts.

Ibarra-Colado's view provides support for the Ecuadorian government's development framework, since he defends an ideal model which combines indigenous ideology and local reality (IBARRA-COLADO *apud* ALCADIPANI *et al.* 2012). On the other hand, Alcadipani *et al.* (2012) believe that "management knowledge qua organizational praxis is thus intrinsically hybrid", and that "the question remains as to the degree to which some form of knowledge that is both indigenously generated and locale-specific really exists". While it is

indeed difficult to pinpoint specifics, Ibarra-Colado (2006, p. 468) also affirms that this type of “social engineering” has “become strategic knowledge for the maintenance and reproduction of colonial differences in the context of globalization”. This signifies not only the viability, but also the importance of taking into consideration local indigenous concepts when planting a development model on the national level.

In order to understand the basis behind this alternative, it is important to understand what the Ecuadorian government considers to be the ‘Andean World’, and how this world differs from traditional occidental concepts. Ecuador’s Council for the Development of Nationalities and People (CODENPE) has outlined some key concepts of both the Occidental world and the Andean world in order to better suggest the differences between these models. Drawing upon worldview criteria established in Habermas (1981) and further elaborated on by Vidal (2012), we carried out a comparative analysis of both the Andean and Occidental world based in the concepts directly outlined by CODENPE. Table 1 shows that the Andean model is grounded in very different concepts than the Occidental model traditionally maintained by past governments in Ecuador. The data in Table 1 highlights a number of themes, which are united by one distinctive feature: the idea that everything is treated as having life in the Andean world. As such, the natural environment



is not just a piece of land for human beings to exploit; it is a living, breathing entity in which human beings not only participate, but exist as necessary parts to maintaining universal structure. The world is not split between the anthropocentric society and natural environment, but rather is seen as a holistic environment which survives on coexistence.

Table 1: Comparison of the Occidental and Andean worlds by ideological concept

THEME	OCCIDENTAL WORLD	ANDEAN WORLD
Basis of understanding	Based on the mechanics of rationality.	Based on intuition and life-lessons over time.
Natural environment	Based on the conquering of territory and the separation of man from the natural environment.	Based on a mutual harmonic relationship where human beings are part of the natural environment.
Significance of life	Based on anthropocentrism, or the assessment of reality presented entirely through the human species.	Based on a Pachacéntrica philosophy in which the assessment of reality is presented through pachamama or 'mother earth'.
Use of Land	Land is seen as simply an object to be exploited for natural resources.	Land is seen as a living being which permits the continuance of life for all other beings.
Language Code	Language is reproduced through the written word, and contracts are formed.	Language is reproduced through the spoken word, which is the basis for agreement.
Knowledge structure	Knowledge is fragmented among society, where individuals focus on specific specializations.	Knowledge is integral and holistic, attained from understanding life as a whole, rather than focusing on a specialized field of study.
Dissemination of knowledge	Knowledge is transferred through an institutional system of education.	Knowledge is transferred through generations and is primarily centered on the study of agriculture.
Social structure	Based on the individual as the principal actor in society.	Based on <i>llakta</i> (the community) which is the driving societal force.

Measurement of time	Time is a linear concept, based on the past, present and future.	Time is cyclical, made up of one continuous space rather than the past, present and future.
Music	Expresses feelings between men and women, specifically.	<i>Taki</i> (music) expresses feelings for one's community and the natural environment.
Belief system	Religious based: God created the universe and all life forms Scientific based: Life was created on the basis of evolution.	Two Gods, one male and one female, gave birth to pachamama, or 'mother earth' which brought about existence.

Source: CACHIGUANGO, L. E. (2010), as cited in CODENPE (2011b) and adapted from CODENPE (2011b).

In this context, while the Andean world may somewhat correlate to Vidal's intersubjective worldview due to its focus on interpersonal relationships, it most accurately resembles a subjective worldview which "seeks to explore the nature of inner experiences, as science tries to understand the nature of the external world" (VIDAL, 2012). This is significantly different from the objective worldview also presented by Vidal (2012), which focuses on an individualistic perception of the world based entirely on what is tangible and known. Simply put, the Andean philosophy does not even recognize the idea that inert or lifeless objects exist within the world, and as such no one being has authority or dominance over another. It is truly a concept of peaceful coexistence, an ideology that, if implemented in its purest form, would indeed be viewed as a challenge to the current public policy framework that characterizes much of the occidental world.

### The Principles of 'Sumak Kawsay': Questioning Occidentalism

At the conceptual center of the Andean world is the Kichwa term *sumak kawsay*, which represents a societal and environmental balance.

Table 2: Basic Principles of "Sumak Kawsay"

Relationalism (d)*	The idea that everything is interconnected, and that every action by an individual creates multiple reactions. Everyone communicates with everything.
Complementing and Correspondence (d)	The idea that none of us are fully complete individuals; that we are all simply a part of the universe itself and that we need one another in order to survive. None of us are equal; rather, we are made to complement each other.
Justice and Equality (c)	The idea that multiple nationalities exist which contain their own cultures, ways of life, traditions, identities, knowledge and wisdom. Forms the basis behind the plurinational state.
Significance of the spoken word (c)	The idea that the spoken word still holds meaning and significance, and should be considered a cultural code.

Source: Adapted from CODENPE (2011b).

\* 'd' themes represent developmental, 'e' represents environmental and 'c' represents cultural significance.

According to Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca Céspedes, the indigenous philosophy signifies "complementing instead of competing, sharing instead of taking advantage, and living in harmony among all people in the natural environment" (cited in CODENPE 2011b, p. 29). CODENPE provides four basic principles for a society to function under the ideology of *sumak kawsay* (Table 2).

These principles form the basis for how to structure a society, and therefore a government, that embodies the sentiments and ideology of the indigenous Andean world. The first two principles challenge the idea of *development*, which is seen almost entirely through economic gains and rarely through social welfare. The ideas of relationalism and correspondence bring to light a new development discourse, focusing less on rational calculations and more on general 'well-being'. Development of the individual is also questioned by highlighting the importance of a collective, interconnected society. These development-related concepts will be discussed further in the next section. The last two principles call for a national re-structuring based on the importance of *culture*. Ecuador called into question the traditional occidental nation-state system when it declared itself a plurinational state in its 2008 constitution, by both challenging the traditional existence of states and promoting existing indigenous cultures in an effort to create a post-colonial society. These changes will be the subject of the following section.

Within these six concepts of *sumak kawsay*, we find two main ways that Ecuador's new political model calls into question the current neoliberal political framework. The following chapters describe each characteristic by drawing on government documents and personal interviews to examine its questioning of development, environmental sustainability and culture. This will help to gain a

better understanding of Ecuador's particular political model and the indigenous concepts that form its framework.

## DEVELOPMENT AS BUEN VIVIR

Ecuador's Secretary for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation René Ramírez Gallegos addresses how indigenous Andean concepts have begun to challenge neoliberal ideals by stating that "a '*buen vivir*' does not have to be seen only through GDP per capita" (RAMÍREZ, 2010c, p. 20). Concepts such as per capita income and poverty are precisely calculated and rationally-viewed under a traditional occidental framework, but Ecuador's particular model of development calls into question the prevailing definition of these concepts. Secretary Ramírez touches on the meaning of poverty, stating that "poverty is always referenced in terms of income and consumption, and does not take into account additional things like the topic of education, medical attention, etc." (RAMÍREZ, 2010c, p. 20). In his discussion of well-being, Ramírez focuses on the idea of reaching qualitative goals rather than simply taking rationally-calculated per-capita figures for granted.

What is the base of information in the neoliberal model? It is income and consumption, and with regard to social welfare they are only the minimum

social requirements to survive...we need to ask ourselves, for example, why is so much attention placed on GDP per capita or economic growth, when really these things don't tell us that much? (RAMÍREZ, 2010a, p. 8).

In light of this mindset, the Correa government has developed a policy framework that rejects an underlying occidental model and bases itself in indigenous concepts. This framework is known as *buen vivir*, and represents the way that the pure Andean philosophy of *sumak kawsay* has been implemented in the context of the prevailing global economy. In this chapter, I examine the Correa government's model of *buen vivir* as a challenge to the traditional occidental concept of development. I first present the general concepts of Ecuador's *buen vivir* development plan and use these to describe how the model has integrated indigenous Andean concepts into a European social democratic framework. From this examination of *buen vivir* in the context of its indigenous influence, I conclude that Ecuador's new development approach is a hybrid model based on endogenous Andean concepts, but remaining within an Occidental framework. This has created a 'harmonious coexistence' much like the coexistence described under the general principles of *sumak kawsay*.

### The extent of 'Buen Vivir's alternative development

Catherine Walsh suggests that while Ecuador's new development model is based on Andean philosophy, it also contains many similarities to the European welfare state. She states that "living well' also...takes meaning from the alternative visions of development emerging in the Western world" (Walsh 2010, 19). We might ask, whether *buen vivir* is essentially derived from a European model of human development within an occidental framework, or more of an endogenous Andean model representing a complete shift away from the status-quo. We argue that it is best viewed as a hybrid, constructed to fit – perhaps not so neatly – into the current global political framework but also containing a pragmatic approach to incorporating indigenous Andean lifestyles and philosophies in a more endogenous model. It can be considered a derivative of European models, but has its unique qualities as well. The following table outlines the principle objectives of *buen vivir* as stated in the country's official development plan.

Table 3: Main objectives of Ecuador's Buen Vivir as addressed in the Correa government's national plan

OBJECTIVES – NATIONAL PLAN FOR GOOD LIVING
Foster a cohesive and socially-integrated environment through diversity
Improve the educational capacities and potential of the citizenship
Improve the citizenship's overall health and quality of life
Improve environmental rights and promote environmentally sustainable programs
Maintain sovereignty, promote peace and foster greater Latin American integration

Promote stable, dignified and just work laws and provide work options for citizens
Construct and strengthen intercultural and public spaces
Affirm and strengthen plurinationalism and interculturalism
Guarantee individual rights and ensure a proper system of justice
Increase the ability of the citizenship to participate politically
Establish a socio-economic system based on sustainable development
Construct a democratic state based on the idea of 'good living'

Source: CODENPE (2011).

As can be seen, the Correa government's development plan focuses on a wide range of strategies designed to facilitate socio-economic change, ranging from social changes such as education, health care and affordable housing to changes in the collective mindset, such as a mutual recognition and respect for all cultures within Ecuador. According to government officials, *buen vivir* can be seen as a fusion between timeless Kichwa concepts and an occidental model of development. Vice Minister Rivadeneira describes it as "a mixture of some things that have been done in the past with other ideas that are completely new." In this way, Rivadeneira notes that *buen vivir* is designed to be incorporated within the current occidental global political framework.

The idea is not to replace the capitalist production system; it is a question of equilibrium...having a society that can of course have entrepreneurs, profit seeking...the ability for people to become richer monetarily speaking. But society should be based and centered on enjoying life...enjoying the best things in life,



family, enjoying the environment, enjoying relations with other people, other societies etc. (Rivadeneira, personal interview).

Seen from a market perspective, Ecuador's development model continues to ground itself within a capitalist framework. However, Rivadeneira notes that there is a distinct difference between the European welfare model and the United States model, stating that *buen vivir* has associated itself closer to a European form of social democracy that focuses more on social well-being than does the United States model. "To find the closest concept to [buen vivir] in the occidental world, it would be what the Europeans call 'qualité de vie' or quality of life. This differs much from the American perception of life...in the United States, life is about success; you have to be successful" (Rivadeneira, personal interview). Rivadeneira continues by explaining how *buen vivir* relates to the European idea of well-being:

For me, the closest concept I ever heard is this idea that in Europe some sectors of society, mainly the Scandinavians, have this notion that instead of working for 12 hours per day, they work from nine to five and that's it. After work they have time to enjoy their families...that's why Europeans tend to be more discreet. It is very normal to see the president of one of the largest banks in Switzerland riding a bicycle to the office, or taking the public transportation system.

Although *buen vivir* does function economically in a capitalist model, certain development strategies contain a more socialist approach, especially in regard to education and health care. To this end, Vice Minister Rivadeneira comments on how Ecuador's social policies function as *buen vivir*.

It's socialism. Two of the main pillars of this process are based on having the government develop and invest a lot of its budget on a good public education system and having a good public health system. These are the basis of the model...by far the government has spent the most on those two pillars. This government has spent more on these two pillars in 5 years than what all other governments have spent in those areas combined since we returned to democracy in the late 1980s.

From these examples we can see that much of Ecuador's social system based on a *buen vivir* has similarities to a social democratic European model. Despite these similarities, however, Ecuador's situation is unique because its model is based in the fundamental principles of *sumak kawsay*, which go beyond the occidental political-economic framework to suggest an entirely different lifestyle. Specifically, *buen vivir* is distinctive in its grounding in the indigenous concept of *sumak kawsay* in three ways. First, the political model is based in the idea that everyone must contribute their fair share, which reflects the indigenous concept

of complementarity. According to Vice Minister for Ecuador's Office of the Undersecretary-General of Science and Technology (SENESCYT) Hector Rodriguez, the country's taxing and redistribution policies are designed to 'complement' poorer, rural communities with wealth from richer, more urban areas. "The concept of taxes goes together with the idea of redistribution, the more you have, the more you pay," said Vice Minister Rodriguez (interview). Vice Minister Rivadeneira also comments on the way in which *buen vivir* has put into practice the Kichwa concept of complementarity:

This government's main objective is to develop a welfare system...which is basically a system in which you are free to do what you want, but if you are successful in society you have to contribute more to the society. For example if you are an entrepreneur and businessman and make a lot of money that is fine, but you have to contribute proportionately to that success (Rivadeneira, personal interview).

Secondly, the plan proposes the creation of a more collective, rather than individualistic, society. According to CODENPE, the government organization designed to represent Ecuador's indigenous population, the word *sumak* can be understood best in English as 'harmony' and *kawsay* as 'life' (CODENPE, 2011b). Thus, a direct translation of the concept can be rendered as 'life in harmony'. But, with

what must we live in harmony? CODENPE presents *sumak kawsay* as a lifestyle that maintains equilibrium among five important elements: the *ayllu* (family), the *llakta* (community), the *marka* (the population as a whole), the *mamallakta* (the country, or region) and the *pachamama* (natural environment). These Kichwa concepts comprise a societal structure focused on maintaining a balance in order to promote a “collective well-being” (CODENPE, 2011b). This is in sharp contrast to the occidental model, which stresses the importance of the individual. As Vice Minister Francisco Rivadeneira explains it:

Success [in its Occidental significance] means basically two things. The first is to be somewhat different, to step aside from society and to be better than the rest...to be somebody unique in society. And the other one is material power; the more material riches you have, the better you are, or the higher your status. Life is about having enough money to have the best house, the best car, the best clothes, live in the best neighborhood, having the money to travel, etc. That is the basis of the occidental model.

Material success, according to Rivadeneira, yields a sense of individualism specific to the occidental ideology and, although this can be considered the prevailing idea of development throughout much of the world, it is not the only possible one. This is contrasted with the Kichwa concept of relationalism, and the

ability to develop oneself through the community and society as a whole, according to Vice Minister Rivadeneira. "The basis [of *buen vivir*]... is that life should be about enjoying those special moments, developing your relations with society, with people, and living with what is necessary." This idea of collective well-being is an essential component to understanding the Kichwa lifestyle; the fact that individualist ideals do not exist among the five elements of *sumak kawsay* signifies that the Correa government's adaptation of the Andean philosophy could present a different socio-political structure to the current neoliberal framework based on an occidental model.

A third way that *sumak kawsay* has influenced the notion of *buen vivir* is a 'harmonious coexistence' based in the Kichwa principles of relationalism and correspondence. The Correa government translates this concept into *buen vivir* through the notion of society's level of 'happiness'. According to Secretary René Ramírez Gallegos, happiness or well-being, whether from the perspective of the individual or the society as a whole, is conceived as both an objective and subjective feature (RAMÍREZ, 2010c, p. 9). Objective features, according to Ramírez, are materialistic and denote such ideas as economic standard of living and freedom of the individual in regard to one's market purchasing power. Subjective features, on the other hand, can be perceived as one's overall quality of life, which is measured based on a variety of social factors including level of

education, amount of leisure time, environmental quality and public participation (RAMÍREZ, 2010c, p. 9-10). Based on this principle, Ramírez created a formula for measuring the happiness level of the Ecuadorian population, taking into consideration both objective and subjective factors. In a study, he concluded that a *buen vivir* cannot be attained solely by improving objective factors such as level of income, but must include these subjective elements that help determine an individual's overall satisfaction and quality of life (RAMÍREZ, 2010c, p. 52). Ramírez's findings suggest a close relationship between the more subjective components of quality of life and the key concepts of *sumak kawsay*. Ramírez introduces five important factors for understanding *buen vivir*, and these can be directly related to the 'peaceful coexistence' of the *sumak kawsay* philosophy. These measurements are presented in table 4 as relational comparisons to the indigenous Kichwa ideology under which Ecuador's development plan has been drafted. These specific measures provide concrete examples of key *buen vivir* concepts that can be directly linked to the country's indigenous belief system. On a communal level, the word *ayllu*, meaning family life, is realized as the importance of maintaining strong marital relationships, while the term *llakta* or community is understood through the importance of personal leisure time and general social interaction. On the national level we find that the terms *marka* meaning population, and *mamallakta* signifying a country or autonomous region are addressed through the plan's strong focus on cultural expression and the

right to public participation based on the concept of plurinationality. The term *pachamama*, which encompasses the world itself, is addressed in Ecuador's focus on sustainability with the overall goal of continuously improving the quality of the natural environment.

Table 4: Relationship between subjective measurements of a 'buen vivir' as defined by Ramírez (2010) and the indigenous Kichwa philosophy of 'sumak kawsay'

MEASUREMENTS OF BUEN VIVIR	KICHWA PHILOSOPHY
Amount of leisure, or free time	Time is not a mechanical concept which dictates society; "each life has its own space and time" within the natural environment (CODENPE 2011).
Quality of the natural environment	Sabiduría Pachacéntrica – human beings comprise, rather than compete with, the natural environment.
Quality of social interaction and relationships	Coexistence through Llakta (the community) and the belief that every being is interconnected and interrelated.
Satisfaction with one's civil status	The importance of Ayllu (family structure) and the notion that all beings are made to complement one another.
Satisfaction with public participation/ability to publicly assert opinions and viewpoints	Respect for social justice based on the recognition of multiple identities (plurinationality) and their right to participation within the mamallakta (country or nation).

Sources: Measurements adapted from Ramírez (2010b) and Kichwa concepts elaborated on from CODENPE (2011b).

Just as the basic principles of *sumak kawsay* dictate a lifestyle in constant harmonic equilibrium among the *ayllu*, *llakta*, *marka*, *mamallakta* and *pachamama*, the ideology of *buen vivir* as established by the Correa government suggests that an overall *bienestar* or well-being can be obtained through a strong participatory relationship with one's family, local community, population, country and the natural environment in which these societal elements exist.

The philosophy of *sumak kawsay* differs greatly from the occidental worldview that lies behind the current neoliberal global economic framework. Ecuador's government under president Rafael Correa has pushed a new development model of *buen vivir*, a set of policies based heavily on this indigenous philosophy and the principles behind it. The translation of indigenous philosophy to social policy, however, is "not without problems, inconsistencies and contradictions" (WALSH, 2010, p. 20). In the end, *buen vivir* is a plan that attempts to blend indigenous concepts based on *sumak kawsay* with the European social-welfare state. Ecuador's model is unique in the way it adapts what Vice Minister Rivadeneira considers the European model of 'qualité de vie', or quality of life, with Ramirez's subjective measurements of *bienestar*, or well-being. Socialist influences such as a stronger focus on education, healthcare and other social programs are combined with the timeless indigenous concepts of *pacha-centrism*



(preserving the natural environment) and plurinationalism. These two notions will be examined more thoroughly in the next two sections.

## PLURINATIONALISM WITHIN A SOVEREIGN STATE

We argue that the Correa government's development plan interprets the idea of culture as plurinationalism. This can be recognized in three facets: recognition of the existence of multiple cultures, acknowledgement of the right for all nationalities and cultures to be able to participate democratically and restructuring of its regional framework. This model has combined a socialist egalitarian aspect with a strong cultural component based on the country's multi-ethnic history. In what follows, we first describe the history of multicultural<sup>4</sup> recognition in the state of Ecuador and compare the Correa government's perception of pluri-nationality to the perceptions of some of the country's most prominent indigenous confederations. We then use collected documents and interviews to examine how Ecuador's three facets of plurinationalism are interpreted by the Correa government and perceived by the public. Discussing how the socialist concepts of equality combine with a greater emphasis on indigenous cultural expressions within Ecuador will provide a

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<sup>4</sup> "Multiculturalismo" can be interpreted as the idea that there exists more than one predominant culture within the Ecuadorian society. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to this term as 'multiculturalism'.

better understanding of how the Correa government's model of *buen vivir* can still be seen as a major shift from its traditional public policy framework based on indigenous concepts, while simultaneously remaining grounded within an occidental foundation.

### Understanding Ecuador's multicultural identity

Ecuador's shift toward recognizing the importance of its multicultural identity began with the indigenous movements in the early 1990s. Marc Becker describes these as corporatist in nature, creating organized alliances among indigenous organizations and "launch(ing) indigenous concerns onto the national stage" (BECKER, 2011, p. 53). Documents by Ecuador's CODENPE state that the 1998 constitution "demonstrated positive advances in recognizing equality," defining Ecuador as a "pluri-cultural and multi-ethnic state" and recognizing "for the first time the existence of indigenous people as an official part of the Ecuadorian state, unique and indivisible" (CODENPE, 2011d, p. 26). While the 1998 constitution did bring about a multi-culturalist sentiment, the idea of true pluri-nationalism was yet to be implemented. Article I of the 2008 constitution stated an intention to do so, declaring that "Ecuador is a 'constitutional state of rights and justice, social, democratic, sovereign, independent, unitary, intercultural, pluri-national, and secular'" (BECKER, 2011, p. 53-54).

Official definitions of what constitutes a pluri-national state are surprisingly similar between the Correa government and Ecuador's indigenous community. Table 5 provides a perspective on what constitutes pluri-nationalism according to both the Correa government and two of Ecuador's most prominent indigenous confederations.

Table 5: Comparing Definitions of Pluri-nationalism: Correa Government and Indigenous Confederations

Plurinationalism	Correa Government	Kichwa Confederation of Ecuador (ECUARUNARI) and Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE)*
Definition	"A recognizing of the existence of the diversity of people and nations native to Ecuador, as well as their culture within the country, as part of the country's coexistence and historical identity" (CODENPE, 2011c, p. 5)	"building a strong and sovereign state that recognizes and makes possible the full exercise of collective and individual rights and promotes equal development for all of Ecuador and not only for certain regions or sectors" (ECUARUNARI, 2007, p. 4 <i>apud</i> BECKER, 2011, p. 54).
Political Framework	"The plurinational state thrives when various people and nationalities unite under the same government and constitution" (CODENPE, 2011d, p. 65)	Plurinationalism should "strengthen a new state through the consolidation of unity, destroying racism and regionalism as a necessary prerequisite for social and political equality, economic justice, direct and participatory democracy, communitarianism, and interculturality" (ECUARUNARI and CONAIE, 2007, p. 5 <i>apud</i> BECKER, 2011, p. 54).

Source – \*Adapted from secondary sources.

It is evident that pluri-nationalism for both the Correa government and Ecuador's indigenous representatives suggests a need for both recognizing and promoting

Ecuador's multicultural heritage. In addition, both emphasize social and political equality and participation. We can also see that neither the Correa government nor indigenous representatives try to pull different ethnic communities away from the state through measures to promote autonomy, but instead promote more socialist ideals of equal participation and economic justice within the state itself. The idea is to integrate, rather than isolate, indigenous communities.

### Plurinationalism as egalitarianism

Ecuador's shift toward cultural awareness is one main aspect of its new plurinationalist state, but another prominent part of the country's plurinational agenda consists of unifying rather than fragmenting different nationalities. Ecuador's *Plan Nacional* develops specific objectives that seek to promote the construction of a plurinational society through the "overcoming of social and cultural inequality and guaranteeing that each person or collective group can both participate and benefit from the country's variety of cultural expressions and goods" (SENPLADES, 2009, p. 83). Some specific objectives include funding indigenous language projects and securing public space for cultural expression. But the Correa government has also focused on the issue of equality, adding both democratic and socio-economic components to a plurinational strategy what would otherwise be just a discursive statement on the existence of multiple

ethnic groups within the country. This adds a social-democratic aspect to the term in much the same way as Ecuador's overall *buen vivir* development model has fused indigenous concepts of *sumak kawsay* with a European social-democratic ideology. The following sections address both democratic participation and socio-economic equality, highlighting specific examples of how the government has perceived both as inherent aspects of plurinationalism.

### Democratic participation under ecuadorian plurinationalism

One example of how the Correa government is promoting a plurinational framework is its focus on democratic participation. Government consultant Eduardo Paredes states that this focus has primarily stemmed from the influence of Ecuador's recent indigenous and middle class movements, which began with the creation of the 2008 constitution. "We needed to create a system of political parties that actually represented the people," said Paredes. One of the primary ways in which the government has called upon direct public action in political affairs is through its recent increase in referendum voting. In Ecuador it is quite common to find graffiti painted on most street corners with one of two simple phrases: *vota si* or *vota no*. These phrases represent the opinions of individuals regarding past national referendums.



Figure 1: Referendum graffiti in the town of Ambato, Chimborazo province, Ecuador

Source: Author's personal archive.

Cariaco, representative of ECUARUNARI, described briefly the organization's view of plurinationality and contrasted it with how the current government has implemented it, suggesting that for a state to be truly plurinational, all sectors must be represented equally.

Plurinationality means to construct a new type of state, a plurinational state, but it also means that this construction needs to be plural, collective and participative among all sectors in the country, without concern for ethnicity or color. A monocultural state is one with only one language, most likely with only one type of culture, only one ideology, and therefore only one position.

For Cariaco and other indigenous representatives, plurinationality means more than just providing more referendums. The concept means allowing historically

underrepresented people their proper representation in legislative bodies and law-making assemblies.

Unfortunately right now the government doesn't want to listen. There still isn't plurinationality here, why? Because decisions are being made by only one person, only by the administration with its advisors. All mandates come directly from the government. This is not plural, this is not collective. On the other hand, you have students, workers, indigenous people, women, ecologists, a variety of groups. Ideally, all of those sectors would generate proposals, create debates and have some presence. But we still continue to live in a monocultural state; interculturality doesn't truly exist.

Nevertheless, a focus on increasing democratic participation throughout the country exists, and is a primary aspect of Ecuador's plurinational state.

### Regionalism in Ecuador's plurinational state

The notion of facilitating a plurinationalist state through improving socio-economic gaps has also derived from the Ecuador's long history of regionalism, in which certain areas of the country, primarily Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca, were given precedence in terms of investment and development, both economically

and socially. The term 'decentralization' in Ecuador's *Plan Nacional* describes plurinationality not as the creation of autonomous nations, but as the re-creation of the regional matrix in an effort to promote both the cultures of those regions and more evenly distribute socio-economic spending within the country. Thus, programs target previously ignored rural areas, especially locations with large indigenous populations (RAMIREZ, 2010b, p. 32). The government's new zoning agenda, or national territorial strategy, seeks to restructure the country based on eight different zones in order to properly develop the country based on the framework of its *Plan Nacional* (SENPLADES, 2009, p. 110). This new zoning process does not replace the country's current provincial framework; according to the Correa government, it will enable proper coordination and implementation of national public investment programs designed to increase long-term redistribution to historically underdeveloped areas.

This new regional framework will, for the first time, create administrative zones that cover all three geographical regions: the coast, the sierra, and the orient. According to Undersecretary Hector Rodriguez, the new regional framework is designed not to create autonomous regional entities, but to allow the national government to increase development based on the redistribution and diffusion of public investment. New administrative structures in each of these zones will allow the creation of annual budgets more relevant to each region rather than



the state in general, and promote proper distribution of social programs.

This is a regional process, we are working to create recognition for each community, and this means creating equilibrium between different communities and populations, and the territories in which they live...it is a process of planning that is much more integrative (Rodriguez, personal interview).

The *Plan Nacional* states that through new regional administrations, government investment will be dispersed more evenly throughout the country. However, the specific focus of these investment programs is not clearly stated. ECUARUNARI representative Cariaco disagrees with the manner in which public investment based on these zones is being implemented, discussing in particular the country's investment in education and transportation systems.

They say that they have created sixteen 'schools of the millenium', when there are more than twenty thousand educational institutions, many of which in our communities do not have classrooms, benches, proper teachers, blackboards, etc. There is still no help. I don't know how they are investing, or what has happened with the resources...and also with transportation, we still have to walk for hours, in very inconvenient circumstances. This is the indigenous population that they say they are helping, so for whom is this citizen revolution really working?

Improving social equality by redistributing more evenly the country's 'wealth' seems to be a driving factor behind creating a true plurinational identity in Ecuador. This idea of redistribution is very much a Socialist concept, yet it has been used in government discourse to describe a greater recognition for Ecuador's multicultural heritage (CODENPE, 2011d, p. 4). In the end, it seems that the Correa government has used the concept of plurinationalism as a discursive tool designed to justify the *Plan Nacional's* regional zoning program, rather than to place members of historically underrepresented populations in positions of regional power.

### Ecuador's plurinationalism

Examining the Ecuadorian case for plurinationalism, we find that the Correa government's perception of a plurinationalist state relates closely to Catherine Walsh's (2010) interpretation of the concept as a means of recognizing those populations who have historically been underrepresented. As defined specifically by Ecuadorian official Rene Ramirez Gallegos, a plurinational state must act "under a framework of rights that makes possible the idea of equality through diversity" (RAMIREZ, 2010b, p. 33). The Correa government has interpreted this as *buen vivir* through both the official constitutional recognition

of the plurinational state and efforts to promote social equality, in the form of both democratic participation and regional wealth redistribution.

Despite the conflict and contradictions that have been addressed in this chapter, the Correa government's pluri-national model has combined the egalitarian aspect of equality with a strong cultural component evident in the everyday lives of Ecuadorian citizens. It is this combination that makes Ecuador's *buen vivir* stand out from previous political models presented as alternatives to an occidental model of public policy. Analyzing the concept of *plurinationality* has helped shed light on the underlying philosophy of *sumak kawsay*, and examining how they both function as components in Ecuador's *buen vivir* has helped determine how the plan has been implemented in relation to the current global political system. Overall, we find that Ecuador's *buen vivir* model still functions through the prevailing neoliberal global political framework that exists today. It is evident that the government has focused its pluri-national efforts within a unitary state framework, and the idea of achieving 'equality through diversity' may exist only in the realm of discourse.

## SOME REFLEXIONS: LOOKING TOWARD THE SOUTH

It can be argued that since colonialism, most of the world has looked to the north for models of development and state growth. As a result, developed nations have tended to organize, prioritize and conceptualize frameworks for 'proper development' in the countries of the global south. The Occidental model spread quickly throughout most of the world, and its influence was driven so deeply into colonized regions that western customs, traditions and values still dominated those countries for decades after their independence. Some authors criticize this perspective, questioning the concept of development itself and also defending the need of considering the local reality in the global scenario.

In fact, all of this has been called into question by countries that seek a new development direction. This is evident in Latin America, a region that has experienced the consequences of dependency economics. Looking to the north had allowed for only one way of developing, and the recognition of only one dominant culture. According to Escobar, "Latin America was the region that most earnestly embraced neo-liberal reforms, where the model was applied most thoroughly, and where the results are most ambiguous at best. It was on the basis of the early Latin American experiences that the Washington Consensus was crafted" (ESCOBAR, 2010, p. 2). Thus, the global north had used this region as a

laboratory for new economic development and foreign investment tactics, testing the success and failure of different economic models through the issuing of loans that could only be used toward private sector development, and allowing trans-national corporations free reign to also experiment as they pleased in Latin America.

Now, this region of the world has become a laboratory by its own choosing. Latin America has begun to investigate, analyze and experiment with alternative development models that challenge the neoliberal model, calling into question ideas such as liberty, individual rights, unencumbered markets, and free trade. As we have seen, Ecuador has focused on its highly influential and active indigenous culture, drawing upon Kichwa concepts based on *sumak kawsay* to focus on the country's overall well-being. This change was the culmination of twenty years of protest from indigenous confederations throughout Ecuador, and it resulted in the creation of an entirely new constitution in 2008 and a more endogenous national development plan of *buen vivir* in 2009. Both of these documents lay out significant changes to the nation based on its own local context rather than one developed through the influence of foreign entities.

In this paper we have demonstrated the ways in which Ecuador has challenged its occidental past in two important ways. It has turned toward an entirely new

model of development, one that views 'well-being' as something that is not just measured in terms of per capita income and economic growth, but also in more qualitative measurements of happiness, health and knowledge. It has also developed an entirely different outlook on culture, recognizing its state as a pluri-national society for the first time, and focusing on reducing the socio-economic gaps have historically plagued the country. In this aspect, Ecuador has been one of the more radical reformers, pioneering an entirely new way of life based on the idea of *buen vivir* or 'good living' in order to both increase the democratic participation of its citizens and grant rights to entities that cannot speak for themselves. It is through Ecuador's national plan based on *buen vivir* that indigenous concepts are both introduced and publicly recognized as legitimate development ideologies.

However, as this paper also suggests, Ecuador cannot hope to accomplish its endeavors without abiding, at least to some extent, by the status-quo global political economy, one that is still dominated by occidental policies and ideology. Capitalism is still the driving economic force in Ecuador, and the concept of pluri-nationality, although significant, still exists within the occidental sovereign state model. Ecuador may have woken up from what President Rafael Correa has declared the "long neoliberal night" (BEBBINGTON; BEBBINGTON 2011), but it has not implemented its alternative development models completely anew.

It is very important to recognize these initiatives, unless the results seem contradictory. The first step is questioning the hegemonic model, followed by activities which counterbalance this model with other perspectives to propose alternative options for the formulation and implementation of public policy.

Apart from some contradictions, it can be said that the way in which Ecuador has challenged neoliberalism is based on strong indigenous concepts, as explored by Harvey (2007). Ecuador has chosen to focus on regionally-specific topics such as culture and pluri-nationality to facilitate a change to public policy while simultaneously adapting the Occidental framework of the European welfare state. It is a 'harmonious coexistence' of the Andean world and the Occidental world that makes Ecuador unique in its endeavors to challenge a status-quo development model. As I have shown, the concept of harmonious coexistence is evident in indigenous Kichwa culture, especially in regard to development and culture. The same indigenous ideology that has influenced complementarity and correspondence among different cultures in

Ecuador has also influenced the country's decision to fuse Occidental concepts with its indigenous Andean philosophy. While terms such as 'post-liberal', 'post-developmental' and 'post-capitalist' have been used to describe these alternative development projects in Latin America (ESCOBAR, 2010), it is still unclear which of

these, if any, accurately describe this new model. What is clear, however, is that Ecuador has set itself apart from traditional public policy frameworks through this harmonious coexistence. The neoliberal ideology is being challenged, in both theory and development practice. Ecuador's new approach based on the concept of *buen vivir* could pave the way for future alternative models of general 'well-being' in Latin America.

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## “Sumak Kawsay or Buen Vivir”, an alternative development model in the Andean State?

### Abstract

In recent years, Ecuador has experienced a change in governance challenging the traditional Occidental conception of development in culture. This change of ideology has transformed the public policy of the small Andean country, establishing the indigenous Kichwa concepts of “Sumak Kawsay”, “multiculturalismo” and “plurinacionalidad” as significant standards for governance under its new “Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir” development model. This paper draws upon data collected from government documents and public interviews to examine how Ecuador’s new model based on indigenous concepts has been translated into public policy. The results of this investigation show that, despite a strong government embracement of its country’s indigenous heritage through changes to public policy, Ecuador remains functioning within a highly occidental framework. Nevertheless, its indigenous concepts can provide an important context for analyzing alternatives to public policy in Latin America, especially within the Andean region. Understanding better how Ecuador’s *buen vivir* functions as an alternative to the status-quo Occidental framework based on its indigenous influence can help advance future research regarding alternatives to public policy models in Latin America.

### Keywords

De-colonialism. Sumak Kawsay. Ecuador’s Development Model.

## "Sumak Kawsay ou Bem-Viver", um modelo alternativo de desenvolvimento no Mundo Andino?

### Resumo

Nos últimos anos, o Equador experimentou uma importante mudança em sua governança, desafiando a tradicional concepção ocidental de desenvolvimento. Essa mudança de ideologia vem transformando a política pública deste pequeno país andino, estabelecendo que os conceitos indígenas *Kichwa* de "Sumak Kawsay", "multiculturalismo" e "plurinacionalidade" sejam referências para a governança pública, sob a égide do novo modelo de desenvolvimento do "Plano Nacional para o Bem-Viver". Este artigo se sustenta em dados coletados de documentos oficiais do governo e entrevistas exploratórias, para examinar como o novo modelo do Equador, baseado nos conceitos indígenas, foi traduzido em uma política pública. Os resultados desta pesquisa mostram que, em que pese o forte legado indígena desse país e os esforços em modificar a orientação da construção da política pública, Equador continua dentro da lógica ocidental. Outrossim, e também evidente que os conceitos indígenas promovem uma contextualização importante para a análise de alternativas possíveis de política pública na América Latina, especialmente na região Andina. Entender melhor como o "Bem-Viver" do Equador funciona como uma alternativa para o conceito ocidental de desenvolvimento, pode ajudar em futuras pesquisas de construção de modelos de política pública para a América Latina.

### Palavras-chave

De-colonialismo. Sumak Kawsay. Modelo de Desenvolvimento do Equador.

## “Sumak Kawsay o Buen-Vivir”, un modelo alternativo de desarrollo en el Mundo Andino?

### Resumen

En los últimos años, Ecuador viene pasando por un importante cambio en su gobernanza, desafiando la tradicional concepción occidental de desarrollo. El cambio de ideología ha transformado la política pública de este pequeño país andino, estableciendo que los conceptos indígenas Kichwa de “Sumak Kawsay”, “multiculturalismo” y “plurinacionalidad” sean referencias para la gobernanza pública, bajo el nuevo modelo de desarrollo plasmado en el “Plan Nacional para el Buen-Vivir”. Este artículo se sostiene en datos obtenidos en documentos oficiales del gobierno y de entrevistas exploratorias, para examinar como el nuevo modelo del Ecuador, basado en conceptos indígenas, fue traducido en una política pública. Los resultados de esta investigación muestran que, pese el fuerte legado indígena de este país y los esfuerzos en cambiar la orientación de la política pública, Ecuador sigue funcionando bajo la lógica occidental. Por otro lado, también es evidente que los conceptos indígenas promueven una contextualización importante para el análisis de alternativas posibles de política pública en América Latina, especialmente en la Región Andina. En este sentido, el entender mejor como el “Buen-Vivir” del Ecuador funciona como alternativa para el concepto occidental de desarrollo, abre oportunidades para futuras investigaciones en relación a modelos alternativos de política pública para América Latina.

### Keywords

De-colonialismo. Sumak Kawsay. Modelo de Desarrollo para el Ecuador.



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