

# Sumak Kawsay Between Western Post-development and Andean Philosophy\*

[English Version]

Sumak Kawsay  
entre el postdesarrollismo occidental y la Filosofía Andina

Sumak Kawsay  
entre o pós-desenvolvimento ocidental e a filosofia andina

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## Abstract

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**Objective:** this review article suggests a state of the art approach to the philosophical, ethical, and phenomenological conception of the Sumak Kawsay concept in Kichwa Ecuadorian language in order to shed light on the dark areas in the contemporary discussion of the said concept. **Method:** a qualitative content analysis was carried out to group and systematize roughly 120 academic articles, book chapters, master's theses, and doctoral theses on the Sumak Kawsay concept from 2008 to 2018. **Results:** seven macro ways to interpret the Sumak Kawsay concept were identified, namely:

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a) as a way of life; b) as a post utopia; c) as an input of the Good-Living; d) as a neo-extractivism experiment; e) as an Andean Philosophy issue; f) as a political discursive construction; and g) as a decolonial device. **Conclusions:** the Sumak Kawsay concept has positioned itself in the national and international intelligentsia discourse as well as in the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement discourse; particularly as a political, cultural, and decolonial project that can and must be achieved. The Sumak Kawsay interpretation as a way of life and is perhaps the most important one since it connects the Westernist interpretations with the ones of the culturalism style.

**Keywords:** Alternative development; Post-development; Decolonization; Sumak kawsay; Good living; Kichwa people.

## Resumen

**Objetivo:** este estudio de Revisión propone una aproximación al estado del arte de la concepción filosófica, ética y fenomenológica del término en idioma kichwa ecuatoriano del Sumak Kawsay, a fin de iluminar ciertas áreas oscuras en la discusión contemporánea del concepto. **Método:** se realizó un análisis cualitativo de contenido que agrupó y sistematizó aproximadamente 120 artículos académicos, capítulos de libros, tesis de maestría y tesis de doctorado sobre Sumak Kawsay de 2008 a 2018. **Resultados:** se identificaron siete formas macro de interpretación del Sumak Kawsay: a) como forma de vida; b) como utopía post; c) como insumo del Buen-Vivir; d) como experimento neodesarrollista; e) como elemento de la Filosofía Andina; f) como construcción discursiva política; y, g) como dispositivo decolonial. **Conclusiones:** el Sumak Kawsay se ha posicionado en el discurso de la intelligentsia nacional e internacional, así como, en el discurso del Movimiento Indígena Ecuatoriano, específicamente como un proyecto político, cultural y decolonial que se puede y debe alcanzar. La interpretación del Sumak Kawsay como forma de vida es quizás la interpretación más importante puesto que ésta conecta las interpretaciones de corte occidentalista con aquellas de tipo culturalista.

**Palabras-clave:** Desarrollo alternativo; Postdesarrollismo; Descolonización; Sumak Kawsay; Buen Vivir; Pueblo Kichwa.

## Resumo

**Objetivo:** este estudo de revisão propõe uma abordagem do estado da arte da concepção filosófica, ética e fenomenológica do termo na língua Kichwa equatoriana do Sumak Kawsay, a fim de iluminar certas áreas escuras na discussão contemporânea

do conceito. **Método:** foi realizada uma análise de conteúdo qualitativa que agrupou e sistematizou aproximadamente 120 artigos acadêmicos, capítulos de livros, dissertações de mestrado e teses de doutorado sobre Sumak Kawsay de 2008 a 2018. **Resultados:** sete macro formas de interpretação de Sumak Kawsay foram identificadas: a) como modo de vida; b) como uma pós-utopia; c) como insumo do Bem-Estar; d) como experimento neodesenvolvimentista; e) como elemento da Filosofia Andina; f) como construção discursiva política; e, g) como um dispositivo decolonial. **Conclusões:** o Sumak Kawsay posicionou-se no discurso da intelligentsia nacional e internacional, bem como, no discurso do Movimento Indígena Equatoriano, especificamente como um projeto político, cultural e decolonial que pode e deve ser alcançado. A interpretação de Sumak Kawsay como um modo de vida talvez seja a interpretação mais importante, pois liga as interpretações ocidentalistas às de tipo culturalista.

**Palavras-chave:** Desenvolvimento alternativo; Pós-desenvolvimento; Descolonização; Sumak Kawsay; Bom-Estar; Povo Kichwa.

## Introduction

In the field of social sciences, both in theory and in practice, the term development has become an unfocussed and even contradictory one. The mistakes are questioned and accepted, in the name of development, although the reasons neither for their preservation nor for their relations with modernity/colonialism are also questioned. Within this context, the search for alternatives to development, or beyond development, apart from Eurocentric thinking, has become an increasingly common issue. Recently, this search has been supported by the decolonial turn (Mignolo, 2006) and the Epistemologies of the South (Sousa-Santos, 2009), which have set the stage for the rise of two concepts of national and international relevance Buen-Vivir (BV) and Sumak Kawsay (SK).

The interest to investigate both concepts, mainly by the scholars working on the Development Studies (DS) and the Critical Studies of Development (CSD), has taken off due to their inclusion in the Constitution of Ecuador of 2008. In its preamble, it makes explicit its intention to "build a new way of citizen coexistence, in diversity and harmony with nature, to reach Good Living, the Sumak Kawsay" (National Assembly, 2008, p.21).

However, the BV and SK ethical, cultural, political, and practical interpretations of their meanings, as well as their forms of implementation in society have been diverse. In the last 15 years, several authors have undertaken the complex task of giving meaning to the SK neologism (Viteri-Gualinga, 2002, Cortez, 2010, Kowii, 2011, Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015b; Altmann, 2013b, Oviedo, 2014). Throughout this process, the SK is a "utopia under construction" for the most optimistic (Acosta, 2011) or an "Andean utopia" (Estermann, 2013). Whereas for others, it turns out to be an "invented tradition" (Sánchez-Parga, 2011; Viola, 2014). Therefore, the debates with respect to the SK concept are open (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014), and it would be an unfinished dynamic concept (Guzmán & Polo, 2017) and a category in permanent construction (Viteri-Gualinga, 2002 Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a).

To this regard, within the context of the ancestral knowledge reevaluation and the intellectual critiques of modernity/colonialism, a state-of-the-art approach of the philosophical, ethical, and phenomenological conception of the concept Sumak Kawsay in the Ecuadorian Kichwa language is presented. This is done in order to shed light on the dark areas in the contemporary discussion of the aforementioned concept. It is necessary to clarify that this article is a state-of-the-art SK concept rather than a state-of-the-art BV since the working

hypothesis states that both are different concepts, despite their unavoidable link. This review article is precisely one of the key issues that leads to problematizing the differences between SK and BV concepts.

## Methodology

A qualitative content analysis was carried out in order to accomplish this framework. It included the review of 120 academic article and several book chapters as well as undergraduate, masters, and doctoral theses. With respect to the academic articles, a Google *Scholar* search of the "*Sumak Kawsay*" concept was conducted from 2008 to 2018. The scope of this research is focused on Ecuador; the Aymara language "*suma qamaña*" concept has not been considered.

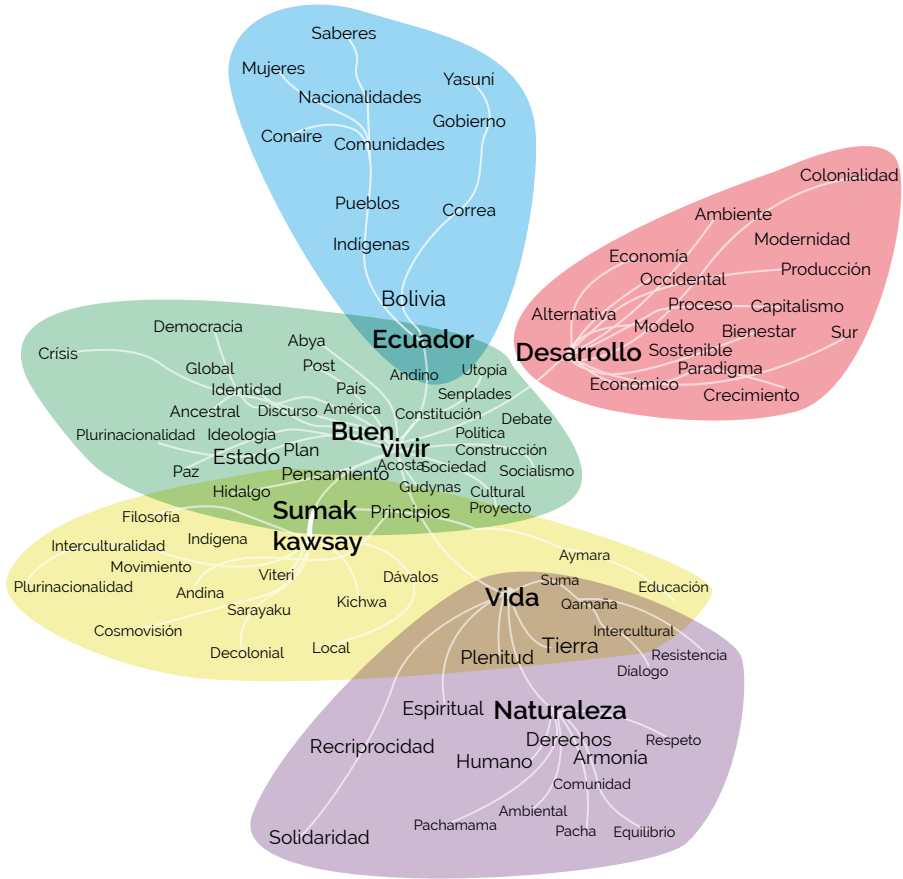
The final literature sample was selected considering the relevance given to the SK concept within the text. It means to discuss on its meaning or to confront the harsh translation as BV. Those articles mainly focused on the BV as a post-development alternative that only mentioned the SK concept as the BV translations were discarded. The Iramuteq 0.7 alpha 2 software was used for the content analysis and similarity analysis.

## Results

The presence of concepts mostly appearing in academic texts was evidenced. As shown in figure 1, the following terms stand out: good (5322 times), living (6016 times), sumak (3522 times), kawsay (3689 times), development (3924 times), social (2766 times), Ecuador (2572 times), life (2531 times), nature (2255 times), indigenous peoples (1800 times), rights (1462 times), and towns (1364 times) among others.



Figure 2. Analysis of similarity of concepts related to SK



Source: Author's

Regarding the treatment and the conceptualization of the SK concept within the texts, the approach was varied. There is no consensus regarding the SK's economic, cultural, political, and practical interpretations. The SK has been a complex concept to define (Bretón-Solo, Cortez & García, 2014, Viola, 2014) which has resulted in an open debate regarding its meaning, translation, origin, cultural reference, relationship with development, and historical momentum (Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara, 2014). The literature review led to the identification of at least seven macro ways of SK interpretation as follows. It is worth noting that these methods of interpretation are not antagonistic; instead, they are sometimes used as a complement within the texts.

## Sumak Kawsay as a Way of Life

From a phenomenological perspective, SK concept represents a way of life (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014; Ramírez-Cendrero, García and Santillán, 2017; Altmann, 2017), particularly, an indigenous way of life (Cubillo-Guevara, 2016; Gonzáles & Husain, 2016) which would have been present for hundreds of years and which would have remained valid nowadays. In dialectical reading, this concept represents another way of life (Guandinango & Carrillo, 2013, Waldmuller, 2014, Zondi, 2016) different from the euro-american one. This means the SK, unlike the western model, is focused on the community and on the reproduction and care of life (kawsay) (Álvarez, 2014, page 113), which, for example, would be related to the proposals of the Care economy and feminist economics (Vega-Ugalde, 2014). Cubillo-Guevara (2016) maintains the idea of the Amazonian origin of the concept and points out that:

The concept of *sumak kawsay*, or good living, refers to an ancestral social phenomenon existing today: the way of life of the Ecuadorian Amazonian indigenous peoples (Kichwa, Achuar and Shuar), based on the search and maintenance of harmony within oneself, with the community and with other beings of nature in the heart of the Amazon rainforest through the combination of spiritual and material elements (127).

Now, the search and maintenance of a way of life in harmony has been a concern of the original Amazonian peoples, and the *Kichwa* peoples from the Sierra Andina as well. The difference is that the conceptualization has not only occurred on the SK concept, but also on the expression *Allí kawsay* (good life / well live), which can be interpreted as the SK everyday-empirical dimension. The Yuri Guandinango's ethnographic work, carried out in the *Kichwa* communities of Cotacachi canton, which are located in the province of Imbabura in the north of Ecuador, showed that in the communities investigated, it is not common to use *Sumak Kawsay's* concept. Instead, the inhabitants mentioned that in daily interactions the use of the expression *allí kawsay* is preferred. This shows "the expectations of life are linked with ethics, production, consumption, family and community interrelations, spirituality, participation in internal and external decision making, and education levels among others"(Guandinango, 2013, p.96).

In a later work, Guandinango & Carrillo explain that *allí Kawsay* reflects "the integrality and desire to improve the quality of life in interdependence with the beings of the environment" (2013, p.9). Another ethnographic work was ca-



ried out within the territory of the *Kichwa-Kayambi* peoples by Guillermo Churuchumbi (2014) through in depth interviews with leaders. His results showed that the expression SK is scarcely used in everyday life and the concept "Alli" (good / good / good) is used instead "as a generalized use for natural and human behaviors affecting positively the Kayambis communities (...). '*Alli kawsay*' means good life, living well, being well and good living or good coexistence between people and beings of the world " (Churuchumbi, 2014, pp.97-98).

Finally, the Benjamín Inuca's doctoral research (2017a, 2017b) traces in historical documents the appearances and interpretations of the AK and SK concepts since the 1940s, both in the Sierra and in the Ecuadorian Amazon. Inuca (2017a) analyzes the text *Ñucanchij yachana* by Lola Díaz Salazar from 1986 and concludes that in the said text:

The daily actions were categorized within *alli kawsay*: *alli maillashca*, *alli micuna*, *alli ruraj*. On the other hand, when they suggested an attitude of life, perhaps a spiritual one, as a possible imaginary, as a way of life to achieve, they wrote as *sumak kawsay*. *Alli kawsay* was a pragmatic category of good life. It was the practice of good life, while the *sumak kawsay* was an ideal. It was the thought-feeling or the Kichwa spirit of the beautiful life (p.167).

The evident relationship between *alli kawsay* and *sumak kawsay* has led some authors to combine both concepts in the expression: "*sumak alli kawsay*" (Andrade, Cáceres & Vásquez, 2014; Polo, 2017), in order to express the idea of a life good practice that can be reached through daily actions without losing sight of the horizon of an ideal harmonic life. In any case, it could be synthesized to the daily life of the AK and the SK ideal as the representation of an Andean-Amazonian way of life that seeks the material and spiritual balance with the Pacha and its elements, a "cosmocentric" way of life (Manosalvas, 2014).

### **Sumak Kawsay as a "Post- Utopia"**

A constant in academic publications is to address the SK concept from post-development, poststructuralist, and post-capitalist currents. In this way, from the "post" reading (still western) of the economy and ecology, the SK represents a new concept to understand the relationships between man, nature, and society (Dávalos, 2008). As a result, the SK has been widely interpreted as an alternative to development discourse (Hernández, 2009, Acosta, 2010,

Houtart, 2011, Radcliffe, 2012, Caudillo, 2012, Pérez-Morón & Cardoso-Ruiz, 2014, Cubillo- Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a, Cuestas & Góngora, 2016, García-Macías, 2017, Chassagne, 2018) and also as an alternative to capitalism (Altmann, 2016, Sigüenza & Ponce, 2018).

As an alternative to development, SK has been linked mainly to the search for harmony with nature (Roa-Avedaño, 2009, Gudynas, 2012, Latta, 2014, Haidar and Berros, 2015), which is why SK becomes a biocentric concept for several authors (Endara, 2014, García-Macías, 2017, Haidar & Berros, 2015). Later, the idea of SK as harmony with nature would be extended to interpret it as harmony with other human beings (Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015b, Cubillo-Guevara, Hidalgo-Capitán & Domínguez, 2014; Doukh ,2017; Zondi, 2016), and, finally, harmony with oneself (Cubillo-Guevara, 2016; Doukh, 2017). These results in understanding SK as the search and maintenance of the harmonic triad: individual harmony, harmony with the community, and harmony with nature. An interesting issue of the harmonic triad of SK is its proximity to the conception of Intercultural Peace, which involves the defense of balance with oneself (Internal Peace), with others (Social Peace), and with nature (Paz Gaia) (Kárpava & Moya, 2016, p.67).

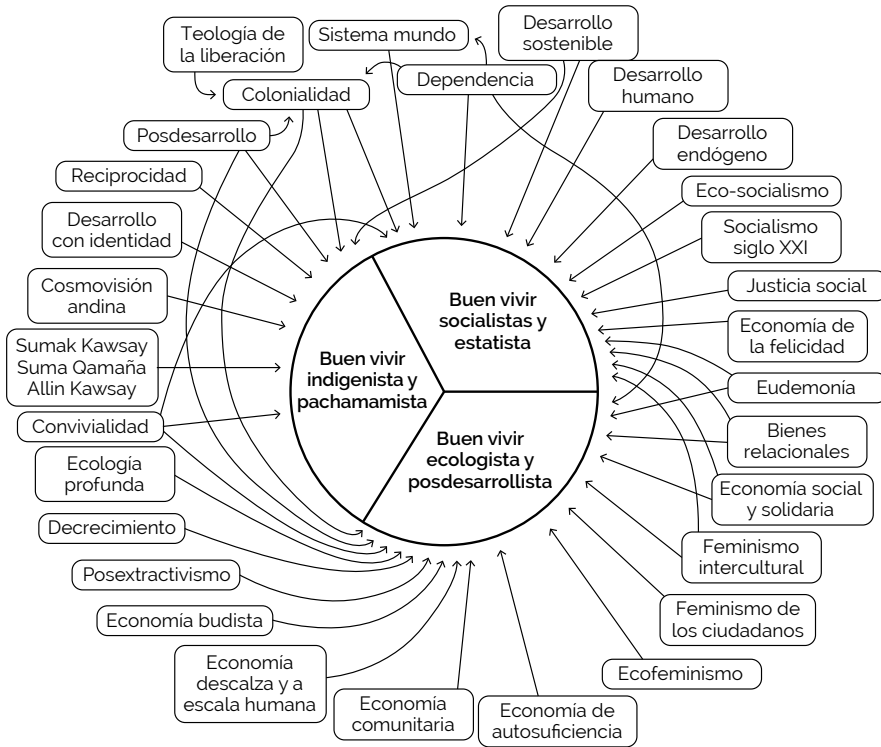
However, it is important to point out that the SK interpretation as an alternative to development is related to the theoretical construction of a utopia (Endara, 2014). From the 1990s' cultural critiques of development and capitalism, there was not only an economic and environmental crisis, but a civilizing crisis was also unveiled. (Estermann, 2012, Álvarez, 2014, Gómez-Muller, 2018), in particular, the civilizing crisis of the western modern society model (Manosalvas, 2014). Under this context, the reconstruction of the meaning of life (Houtart, 2011) has gone through the search for new references away from Eurocentric limits and beyond the Aristotelian eudaimonia. To this respect, the KS has not only been presented as an alternative for development, but it has also been presented as an alternative to the civilizatory crisis (Caudillo, 2012), as an Andean utopia (Estermann, 2013), and as a historical horizon loaded with memory and hope (Inuca, 2017a) to which the peoples of Latin America (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014), and the peoples of the world could aspire.

## **Sumak Kawsay as an Input of the BV**

The KS understanding as an alternative for development or for capitalism has been mostly indirect. That is to say, BV has been commonly regarded as an alternative for development, and SK has been regarded as a BV synonym. Several authors have stated that it would be a reductive translation of SK semantic depth (Vanhulst, 2015), a harsh translation (Fitz-Henry, 2015), or a loose translation (Chassagne, 2018). For Llasag (2009), "the literal translation is an error, because SK concept does not necessarily mean good living" (p.114). Some authors have accepted that it is an inadequate translation, but it is useful as a starting point (Brown and McCowan, 2018). The most prudent ones have argued that a careful translation is required (Barranquero-Carretero, 2015) in order to consider the different codes and symbolic meanings of each culture to avoid falling into reductionist simplifications (Lalander & Cuestas-Caza, 2017).

The doubt about the translation has served as a basis for several texts to analyze the BV and SK as two concepts from different ontologies (Alonso-González & Macías-Vázquez, 2015; Villalba, 2013) and different epistemologies. That is, the SK has started to be separated from the BV in order to understand them as two different concepts (Vanhulst and Beling, 2013, Vega, 2014, Oviedo, 2014, Cortez, 2014, Manosalvas, 2014, Alaminos & Penalva, 2017, Cuestas-Caza, 2018). This fact has allowed the SK concept to be considered as an input in the construction of a post-development BV (Alaminos and Penalva, 2017, Belotti, 2014, Villalba, 2013) which would absorb from several epistemological sources, and one of them would be the SK (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017).

Figure 3. The intellectual springs of good Latin American living<sup>1</sup>



Source: Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara (2017, para.18)

Figure 3. shows the systematization of the different currents of thought that nourish the BV concept. This fact has turned the post-development BV into a kind of "postmodern collage" (Cubillo-Guevara *et al.*, 2014), and its intellectual liquidity has been one of the arguments to consider it as a more versatile and promising concept than the SK (Vanhulst and Beling, 2013). Of course, it is also easier to be internationalized and de-indigenized. In this sense, Belotti (2014) warns that "to absorb the ancestral Sumak Kawsay within a hybrid conceptual category, resulting from a mixture with the Western theoretical products - essentially anthropocentric - (...), could be considered as a kind of intellectual arrogance" (p. 46).

1 In the original figure, there was an error in the term "Sumak Kawasay", which is why it was corrected and written as Sumak Kawsay.

## **Sumak Kawsay as a Neo-developmental Experiment**

A fourth way of interpreting the SK concept (related to the previous one) has been as an experiment (Gerlach, 2017), specifically as an experiment in the planning and implementation of public policies in Ecuador between 2008 and 2017. When considering the SK as synonymous with BV, the SK has also been interpreted as the manifestation of the actions of the Ecuadorian government. Álvarez (2014) explains that SK's lack of understanding allowed the government of the Citizen Revolution to win the semantic battle, implying that the SK was the same as BV and that both represented the public policies deployed by the government of Rafael Correa. Unlike the SK, understood as a utopia, the interpretation of the SK as an experiment has highlighted the material dimension of the SK and its relationship with the contradictory mining, oil, and agribusiness policies (Morocho, 2017), theoretically based on the idea of the triple harmony but empirically based on the idea of neoextractivistas (Bretón-Solo, 2016, Domínguez, Caria and León, 2017).

The abysmal difference between the rhetoric and the Ecuadorian governmental practice has resulted in the SK being considered as an "invented tradition" (Sánchez-Parga, 2011, Bretón-Solo *et al.*, 2014, Bretón-Solo, 2017, Domínguez *et al.* 2017), as a possible "amoeba concept" (Viola, 2014), or as an "empty significant" (Domínguez *et al.*, 2017). This strong criticism has been frequently accompanied by report of the lack of empirical evidence that would support the existence of KS (Bretón-Solo *et al.*, 2014; Viola, 2014) understood as the three harmonies achievement. In this way, the BV usage of its institutional version has meant a wearing down of the SK concept (Alaminos and Penalva, 2017).

The idea of Alaminos and Penalva (2017) summarizes the above, by mentioning that

The Institutional Good Living appears (...) as a centralized management of the transition process towards the achievement of an alternative model that qualifies or breaks with the community and environmental aspects of the Sumak Kawsay or even contradicts them, inscribing the political project of the Citizen Revolution within the developmentalist or neoextractivist paradigms " (2017, p.152).

## Sumak Kawsay as an Element of the Andean Philosophy

From culturalist positions, the KS has been considered as a relational and key element within the set of concepts and knowledge that make up the Andean Philosophy (Estermann, 2012, Kowii, 2011, Lajo, 2008, Macas, 2010, Ortiz, 2009), or of the Andean Cosmivision (Sánchez-Ramos, 2012; Guandinango and Carrillo, 2013; Latta, 2014). In this regard, Llasag (2009) points out that in the Andean philosophy "Sumak Kawsay is a system of life that allows the harmony of nature (...), it is a form of conception of the world that gives rise to a model of life, and which is governed by certain principles (...)" (pp. 114-116), namely: relationality, correspondence, complementarity and reciprocity.

According to Ortiz (2009), the SK should be understood as a principle and part of a philosophy of life that is derived and associated in turn as specific and historical forms of social, economic, territorial, political, and cultural organization of the ancestral peoples. The SK "guides the way of life. It establishes the relationships between people based on egalitarian, community, and reciprocal principles; it feeds on dialogue with nature and its spiritual dimension" (Ortiz, 2009, p. 79). According to Lajo (2008), the SK is not an isolated concept, but it is built on three pillars: Allin Munay (want-feel good), Allin Yachay (think-know well), and Allin Ruway (do-perform well), as part of the recovery of the balance of the Andean world or order. In this sense, for Lajo (2008), the SK is the product of acting, feeling, and thinking, both in a complementary and proportional fashion. For the same author, the SK has an aesthetic connotation because "Sumak" is an adjective that determines what is beautiful. In this regard, Macas (2010) points out that:

*Sumak*, is the fullness, the sublime, excellent, magnificent, beautiful, and superior. Kawsay, is life, is being. However, it is dynamic, changing, it is not a passive issue. Therefore, *Sumak Kawsay* would be life in fullness. Life in material and spiritual excellence. The magnificence and the sublime are expressed in harmony, in the internal and external balance of a community. Here the strategic perspective of the community in harmony is to achieve the superior (p. 14).

For Kowii (2011), SK also means the fullness of life and is related to Pakta Kawsay (balance), Wiñak Kawsay (creativity), Samay (serenity), and runakay (knowing how to be). Additionally, the KS has a close relationship with the chakra, with the allpamama, which is the place

(...) where life and food flourish, with the care and upbringing of animals, with the party in collective work (...), the sweet or beautiful life of the Andean peoples

(...) proposes an austere world and diverse, in balance with nature and with the spiritual world "(Roa-Avenida, 2009, p. 17).

In this way, the concept of SK would escape from an exclusively rationalist structure to be located in a philo-poetic sphere that would illuminate other meanings beyond a reductionist BV; in this sense, the semantic richness of the SK (being-existing beautifully or the fullness of being-existing) "invites us to imagine horizons where the aesthetic component is determinant in the organization of socio-economic relations that seek the harmonization of existence" (Endara, 2014, pp. 104-105). This interpretation maintains the idea of KS as an Andean utopia; however, it has been part of the arduous criticism of the lack of empirical evidence.

### Sumak Kawsay as a Political Discursive Construction

The SK as a discursive political construction is inevitably related to the evolution of the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement (MIE), which was understood as a social movement (Sánchez-Parga, 2010, Altmann, 2013a). According to Inu-ca (2017a), the "semantic construction" of the SK is long-standing and could be traced back to around the middle of the 20th century as part of the discourses of the indigenous social movement of the time. In this sense, following Inu-ca (2017a), we could contextualize at least four moments in which the collective action framework of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement has been confronted with the hegemonic knowledge (Table 1). As a result of each *yachay tinkuy* (encounter -confrontation of knowledge), there has been a social change, a change that has involved the discussion about the different forms and aspirations of life.

Table 1. Yachay Tinkuy MIE

Yachay Tinkuy	Approximate periods	Collective Action Framework	Preponderant Social Organization	Organizational approach
<i>Riccharimui:</i> Awakening of thought and culture. Community awareness	1920-1970	Classism	Ecuadorian Federation of Indians (FEI)	Trade unions
	1970-1990	Classism, ethnicism	ECUARUNARI	Communes

Yachay Tinkuy	Approximate periods	Collective Action Framework	Preponderant Social Organization	Organizational approach
<i>Jatarishun: the uprising, the action, the practical and intellectual struggle</i>	1990-2000	Plurinationality	CONAIE	Peoples and nationalities
<i>Kawsaypura: convergence, investment between cultures</i>	2000-2008	Post-development and Interculturality	FENOCIN	Peoples, nationalities Confederations
<i>Sumak Kawsay: convergence and confrontation for full life</i>	2008-actual	Self-determination, (Re) creation of full life, Decoloniality, Emancipation	CONAIE FENOCIN ECUARUNARI	Ayllu, Confederations

Source: Author's based on Inuca (2017a) and Sánchez-Parga (2010)

For this work, the analysis of the most recent stage is a matter of interest, the sumak kawsay yachay tinkuy, that is to say, the time of the knowledge encounter around the SK that would begin approximately in the year 2008 with the incorporation of the SK (translated as BV) within the new Constitution of Ecuador. It is worth highlighting the contradiction in which the MIE fell after the inclusion of the SK in the Magna Carta. On the one hand, although the MIE considered the inclusion of the SK and the recognition of its culture as a conquest after a prolonged struggle, it is also true that in the pre-constitutional debate, the negotiations diluted the idea of the SK to make way for the construction of the concept of the BV from the political-constitutional point of view (Padilla, Moyano & Padilla, 2017).

In this sense, Carmel (2014, as cited in Cubillo-Guevara, 2016) emphasizes that although CONAIE and the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of the Ecuadorian Amazon (CONFENIAE) made outstanding contributions on the BV, in practice their proposals along with other ecologist and feminist proposals were ignored in the definitive writing of the constitutional text. According to Cubillo (2016), when the MIE proposed the SK as a development model, the Political Movement Alliance Country usurped the concept transforming it into



BV to incorporate it into its speech as an omnibus concept. Once emptied of its indigenous content, it could be filled with a new post-neoliberal content.

Four years later in 2012, the new political project of the CONAIE devoted an entire section to conceptualize the SK and understood it as a way or system of life (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador [CONAIE], 2012), "which proposes to guarantee the life of human beings in harmonious relationship with nature" (CONAIE, 2012, p.15). In addition, it is considered as a principle proper to the philosophy of the Kichwa peoples (CONAIE, 2012, p.15). In the document SK translates as "life in a state of fullness, with material and spiritual excellence" (CONAIE, 2012, p. 15). In addition, the text states, "Alli Kawsay is good living and this is a different concept to Sumak Kawsay" (CONAIE, 2012, p.16). For the CONAIE (2012), the SK as a philosophical principle is articulated with the principles of other peoples and original nationalities, and its conceptualization may be congruent with other expressions in other native languages.

At present, despite the perspectives that speak of a weakening or distancing of the MIE due to disagreements of its members, internal conflicts, and a critique from the bases to the distancing of the fundamental values (Padilla et al., 2017), the SK is still present in the speeches of the main organizations of the MIE. For example, in the strategic axes of FENOCIN, the "Construction of Socialism and Sumak Kawsay" appears. In addition, a strategic objective is proposed: "To promote the construction of socialism in accordance with the ancestral principles of Sumak Kawsay at all levels of FENOCIN and of Ecuadorian society in general" (National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous and Black Organizations [FENOCIN], 2018, p.7). One of its goals is to train 100% of the foundations of FENOCIN in socialism and sumak kawsay in five years (FENOCIN, 2018). In the case of CONAIE, the SK has been mentioned in several bulletins and resolutions of its Assembly. Generally, calls for decision-making and actions have been aimed at guaranteeing the fulfillment of a true Plurinational State and the fulfillment of the *Sumak Kawsay* (CONAIE, 2015).

### **Sumak Kawsay as Decolonial Device**

One interpretation, which is related to the SK version as a discourse, is the interpretation of SK as an emancipating concept of indigenous peoples and nationalities (Inuca, 2018), and it is inscribed within a decolonial discourse (Altmann, 2016). In this context, the locus from which the SK is enunciated has enormous political and symbolic importance, that is, from the social periphery of the world periphery, from the historically marginalized native peoples (Tortosa, 2009), who are invisible and delegitimized by the elites in power and

now claim recognition and participation advocating for respect for difference (Roa-Avendaño, 2009, p.16). Indigenous peoples and nationalities (not only from Ecuador) have demanded for decades "the recognition of collective territories, of other belief systems, other forms of administration of justice, in general, other ways of understanding and assimilating the world" (Roa-Avendaño, 2009, p.16). In this regard, for Cortez (2011), the processes of anti-colonial resistance and decolonial struggles have found their voice in the constitutional SK as a counterpart to the subalternization of non-western ways of life. The visibility of the KS has implicitly represented the visibility of the indigenous peoples and nationalities of Ecuador.

The incorporation and recognition of SK in the constitution and in the international political-academic arena could be interpreted as a genuine act of

Political and epistemic insurgency (...) -both for the indigenous and Afro peoples and for the population as a whole- that really draw a decolonial horizon. It turns around what we have understood as a State and the logics and signifiers that have sustained such understanding (Walsh, 2008, p. 143).

In the same sense, Tirso (2016) emphasizes that the implementation of SK is a decolonial act and epistemic disobedience which has contributed (and can do more) to the process of de-westernization and epistemic justice.

A priori, the SK would be presented as an element of an epistemic disruption. However, if it is focused on the state superstructure, it highlights the locality of the concept as a tool to fight against the State. For Altmann (2017), the decolonial character of SK discourse resides in its radically local nature, that is, as a specific daily local reality that opposes Western abstract and universalizing ideas such as State, society, or public sphere. The same author emphasizes that the production of "locality" in itself is a political act and potentially decolonial. This is because when indigenous organizations claim territorial autonomy to build an alternative state and society, literally from below, they reject, implicitly or openly, the colonial logic of the nation-state (Altmann, 2017, p. 754).

In other words, if the State is understood as a product and producer of coloniality, the decolonial turn, implicit in the location of the SK, would represent a break with the territorial logic of the State (Altmann, 2017, p. 754). The construction of territorial autonomy, within which SK is also built, would position indigenous organizations as decolonial actors, who, although acting locally, always have global effects (Altmann, 2017, p. 754).

Thus, the inclusion of the SK in the 2008 Constitution would show that the transcendental reality was "to transform the State understood as a structure-institution of exclusion and domination of a model imposed on an entity re-conceived from its own realities and pluralities" (Walsh, 2008, p.150). Therefore, plurinationality, interculturality, and decoloniality are intimately linked as

elements that help to overcome coloniality (Jo, 2013). In fact, the three concepts are "necessary complements, accomplices in the re-imagination and refoundation that move towards a new way of living" (Walsh, 2008, p.150). This new form of coexistence, the SK, is positioned as the duty-be of the new Intercultural Plurinational State. However, the process centered on life, capable of displacing capitalism and transgressing the colonial matrix still in force, is an arduous and continuous process (Walsh, 2008) which has not ended with the visibility of the SK.

## Conclusions

The different interpretations on the KS presented here show the level of interest and discussion that has awakened the concept inside and outside of Ecuador. In recent years, the SK has not only positioned itself in the discourse of the national and international intelligentsia but also as part of the discourse of the Ecuadorian Indigenous Movement, specifically as a political, cultural and decolonial project that can and must be achieved. The way of life that would represent the SK-AK is perhaps the most important interpretation since it connects the most Westernist interpretations (as a post utopia, as an input of the BV, as a neo-developmental experiment) with those more culturalist (as an element of Andean Philosophy, as a political discursive construction, as a decolonial device).

On the one hand, the existence of a way of life that complies with the SK harmonies and with the capacity to become a new and real alternative to development, to capitalism, and to the civilizatory crisis has been discussed from the Western perspective. This discussion has oscillated between how to incorporate SK into post-development theoretical liquidity and what have been the results of the failed Ecuadorian public policy experiment of the last decade.

On the other hand, cultural ideas have defended the idea of a SK-AK. This has been popular since 2008, and it has historically been present for decades to a greater or lesser extent in the texts, practices, and speeches of the indigenous peoples of the Amazon and the Ecuadorian Sierra. Thus, as a way of life and taking into account the principle of complementary duality (yanantin) of the Andean Philosophy, it would be possible to understand that there was a variant of the kawsay that is related to the daily actions that build the good life (Alli Kawsay), and another variant that suggests an attitude of life, as a possible imaginary of the beautiful life to be achieved (Sumak Kawsay).

The differences between Western and culturalist interpretations have had at least two results: a) a greater problematization about the distortion and cooptation of the BV on the SK, to the point of understanding them as concepts

coming from different epistemologies and ontologies; and b) a reevaluation of Andean thought, as part of a process of struggle against linguistic coloniality, knowledge, and power.

Consequently, it is important to question to what extent SK-AK constitute a global alternative. As noted by Viola (2014), the accelerated process of internationalization of the SK is an example of the risk of trivialization of the concept, "since the potential value of the sumak kawsay resides precisely in its local character, that is, in its roots in a concrete sociocultural context, and this obviously cannot be automatically exported together with the concept" (p. 68).

Finally, following Álvarez (2014), one would have to ask to what extent the semantic struggle (Western vs. culturalist, BV vs. SK) is just a screen to distract the gaze on the real strategies of state power aimed at erecting "symbolic walls (...) to prevent the (...) indigenous people from entering and positioning their word." (p. 113). These and other questions will allow us to continue with the debate on the Sumak Kawsay and Buen Vivir from different and renewed perspectives.

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