

## ***Why Has the Socialism of Sumak Kawsay/Good Living Failed as a New Revolutionary School of Thought in Latin America?***

***¿Por qué fracasó el socialismo del *sumak kawsay*/buen vivir como nueva corriente intelectual revolucionaria en América Latina?***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Sumak kawsay* socialism, or good living socialism, is one of the three schools of political thought of *sumak kawsay* which first appeared in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The idea of good living is currently re-emerging in debates on how to build a new post-pandemic world. *Sumak kawsay* socialism, however, has remained on the sidelines of the political landscape and academic discussions. In its place, twenty-first century socialism has once again reappeared as the socialist proposal to create and organize a new system. This paper will analyze which practical and theoretical weaknesses and contradictions have led to the disappearance of good living socialism from political and intellectual debates. It concludes that intellectuals from different branches of socialism used *sumak kawsay*/good living as a “key symbol” to take advantage of the social, economic, political, and environmental situation in Ecuador and Bolivia in order to seize power.

**Keywords:** *Sumak kawsay*; good living; twenty-first century socialism; Ecuador; Bolivia.

### **RESUMEN**

El socialismo *sumak kawsay*, o socialismo del buen vivir, es una de las tres corrientes políticas del buen vivir que aparecieron durante la primera década del siglo XXI. En la actualidad, el buen vivir está volviendo a emerger con fuerza en los debates sobre cómo construir un nuevo mundo pospandemia, pero el socialismo del *sumak kawsay* ha quedado al margen del panorama político y de las discusiones académicas. En su lugar, el socialismo del siglo XXI vuelve a ser la propuesta socialista para crear y organizar un nuevo sistema. En este trabajo se analizarán las debilidades y contradicciones teóricas y prácticas que han llevado al socialismo del buen vivir a desaparecer de todo debate político e intelectual, llegando a la conclusión de que intelectuales de diferentes ramas del socialismo aprovecharon la coyuntura social, económica, política y ambiental de Ecuador y Bolivia para tomar el “símbolo clave” del *sumak kawsay*/buen vivir y llegar al poder.

**Palabras clave:** *Sumak kawsay*; buen vivir; socialismo del siglo XXI; Ecuador; Bolivia.

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## Introduction

Since the popularization of the term *sumak kawsay* at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and its later translation as “good living,”<sup>1</sup> various works and research have pondered its meaning, values, assertions and philosophy.

The concept’s rise was mainly driven by indigenous movements. They proved its potential to become an alternative to the Ecuadorian neoliberal developmentalism model, which had led to enormous economic, political and social instability for twenty-six years. In less than a decade, three branches<sup>2</sup> of the movement claiming to be *sumak kawsay* appeared: indigenous *sumak kawsay*, ecological good living and *sumak kawsay* socialism/good living socialism/republican bio-socialism.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1**  
 Main characteristics of the branches of *sumak kawsay*/“good living”

	Indigenous <i>Sumak Kawsay</i>	Ecological Good Living	“Good Living” Socialism
<b>Criteria for analysis</b>	Holism	Biocentrism	Economism
<b>Main objective as an intellectual movement</b>	Harmony and balance with nature and the cosmos	Environmental sustainability	Equality
<b>Main political objective</b>	Inter-cultural and pluri-national	Environmental sustainability	Equality
<b>Main intellectual influences</b>	Traditional Amazonian Indigenous thinking and Andean worldview	Profound ecology, traditional Amazonian Indigenous thought and Andean worldview	Twenty-first century socialism, neo-Marxism, eco-socialism, human development and sustainable development
<b>Development</b>	Alternative to development	Alternative to development	Alternative development

<sup>1</sup> There are numerous criticisms of this translation, as the most accurate transcription would be “life in fullness,” “full existence” or “life in harmony” (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017; Macas, 2010). Furthermore, many authors make a clear distinction between *sumak kawsay* and good living, as they represent different social, cultural, political and intellectual phenomena, despite the fact that some people use them as synonyms (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017). This paper will not address this debate and both concepts will be used interchangeably here, much like in the socialist school of thought, which will be analyzed here.

<sup>2</sup> Although three clear branches were formed during the first decade of the twenty-first century, they were not clearly established as such until 2012 (Hidalgo-Capitán, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout this work, *sumak kawsay* or good living socialism will appear in quotation marks. The reason for this is that the branch refers to itself as such, but, as will be explained in the conclusions, it is actually an alternative form of socialism of the twenty-first century, not a form of *sumak kawsay* or good living.

(continuación)

	<b>Indigenous <i>Sumak Kawsay</i></b>	<b>Ecological Good Living</b>	<b>“Good Living” Socialism</b>
<b>Economic model</b>	Self-sufficiency economy	Austere economy to care for life	Social and solidarity economy
<b>Use value/exchange value</b>	Use value	Use value	Use value is claimed, but most of its proposals are based on exchange value
<b>Value of nature</b>	Nature has spiritual value and energy ( <i>samai</i> ), so a balanced and harmonious relationship with nature must be established	Nature is a subject of law and a relationship of balance and harmony must be established with it	Nature is a source of wealth whose (sustainable) exploitation enables development
<b>Economic growth</b>	Considered to destroy nature	Growth and sustainability are incompatible, but there are countries that still need to grow in order to meet basic needs	Considered to be the way to generate wealth for the population
<b>Capital accumulation</b>	Considered to destroy nature and generate social divisions, selfishness and individualism	Considered to destroy nature and to be a source of social inequalities and conflicts	Considered to be a way to enrich the population and maintain equality
<b>Globalization</b>	Advocates a return to the local economies or markets	Advocates globalization of knowledge	Advocates economic globalization through competition in markets

Source: author’s elaboration.

During the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly, which included *sumak kawsay*/good living in the Constitution of Ecuador of 2008, there was a certain cordiality and balance of power among the three discourses (Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2020). However, with the arrival of socialist President Rafael Correa and the formation of a government which largely included representatives of republican bio-socialism, the contradictions and weaknesses of a discourse which combined developmental socialism based on Western modernity and indigenous identity discourse whose epistemology and worldview came primarily from the Ecuadorian Amazon began to emerge.

Today, it has been confirmed that good living was used by some socialist sectors as a political strategy in order to gain power in Ecuador (Lyll, Colloredo-Mansfeld and Rousseau, 2018; Pereira da Silva, 2020). Following the fall of Rafael Correa’s government, there is no longer any demand for this school of thought in Ecuador on a state level from any political viewpoint; instead, there has been a return to the original twenty-first century socialist discourse. In Bolivia, on the other hand, living well/*suma qamaña* continues to be present

by way of the government of Luis Arce, although the weight of these concepts has progressively lessened in Bolivian national politics since the approval of the 2009 Constitution.

The global Covid-19 pandemic, however, has given new impetus to good living and it is now a socio-economic concept to be considered for the post-pandemic world (Burchardt and Ickler, 2021; Hidalgo-Capitán, García-Álvarez, Cubillo-Guevara and Medina-Carranco, 2019; Piñeiro Aguiar and Polo Blanco, 2021).

The absence of “good living” socialism in current political discourses in Ecuador and its decreasing relevance in Bolivian discourses can be explained by analyzing the principles and theories which underpin “*sumak kawsay*” socialism as a school of thought. This paper will show some of the reasons why and how this school of thought should not be considered a form of *sumak kawsay*/good living, but rather simply an attempt to appropriate it as a “key symbol” (Zald, 1979). To this end, the main weaknesses, inconsistencies, contradictions and problems which surround the movement will be analyzed.

## Methodology

In order to carry out this work, an extensive bibliographical review was carried out. A recursive bibliography technique was applied and the results were filtered by means of a cross-referencing technique.

Thus, it was determined that the most relevant and cited works of “*sumak kawsay*” socialism come from the following authors: Félix Cárdenas Aguilar, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Fander Falconí Benítez, Mariano Féliz, Álvaro García-Linera, Marta Harnecker, François Houtart, Ana María Larrea Maldonado, René Ramírez Gallegos, Raúl Prada Alcoreza and María Nela Prada Tejada.<sup>4</sup> The importance of the National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES) and the Bolivian Ministry of Development Planning (MPB)<sup>5</sup> was also highlighted.

Therefore, all journal articles, books, book chapters and reports by these authors on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism appearing in the Web of Science, Scopus, Dialnet and ProQuest

<sup>4</sup> It should be mentioned that Atilio A. Borón and José Luis Coraggio are frequently cited in works on the socialism of “good living”. However, their contributions are always linked to the analysis of twenty-first century socialism or the social and solidarity economy, respectively. Two authors who also appear frequently are Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Marta Harnecker. Both authors have produced a very small number of works on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism, although they are frequently referenced. In fact, both authors have written very little on “good living” socialism. Given the scarcity of publications on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism, their works are transcendental.

<sup>5</sup> These authors are considered the main representatives of this intellectual trend and largely coincide with those of previous works, such as Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara (2017) or Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán (2020).

databases between 2006<sup>6</sup> and 2021 were analyzed. In addition, the results of the first fifty entries that appeared in Google Scholar using the names of these authors as keywords were examined,<sup>7</sup> for a total of 64 reference works (n).

**Table 2**  
 Works on “good living” socialism in scientific databases (2006-2021)

Author	Web of Science	Scopus	Dialnet	ProQuest	Google Scholar	Total
Cárdenas Aguilar, Félix	0	0	1	0	3	3
de Sousa Santos, Boaventura	0	0	0	0	1	1
Falconí Benítez, Fander	0	0	3	0	2	3
Féliz, Mariano	0	0	0	0	4	4
García-Linera, Álvaro	0	0	1	2	8	8
Harnecker, Marta	0	0	0	0	2	2
Houtart, François	0	1	4	0	3	4
Larrea Maldonado, Ana María	1	1	1	0	8	8
Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo	0	0	0	0	3	3
Prada Alcoreza, Raúl	0	0	1	0	6	6
Prada Tejada, María Nela	0	0	0	0	1	1
Ramírez Gallegos, René	2	2	8	1	16	16
SENPLADES	0	0	0	0	5	5

Source: author’s elaboration.

Through a comparative analysis of the work of these authors on “good living” socialism, their main lines of research were extracted and can be grouped as follows: achieving equality, creating a new model of post-neoliberal sustainable development, strengthening the role of the state as opposed to the market (and capitalism) and advancing towards full democ-

<sup>6</sup> In 2006, the so-called “Citizen Revolution” project began.

<sup>7</sup> Only the first fifty entries in Google Scholar have been analyzed because this platform has few options for limiting searches. As a consequence, a huge number of papers mentioning these authors appear in the body of their texts.

racy. As will be explained in the article, the existence of common lines of research does not mean that there is coherence or uniformity among the approaches of the different authors.

The works of these authors on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism have a generally propositional character. Discussions about alternative systems such as dissident ways of life, diverse social models and so on are particularly complex, as they cover a myriad of topics. For this reason, this paper will not question topics or aspects on which the representatives of this movement have not taken a stance. In other words, only what was actually said and how it was said will be analyzed, as will the intentional omission of issues (e.g. the omission of environmental consequences of androcentrism and its prevalence in public policies, the omission of LGBTQ rights in equality policies, the absence of contributions from indigenous intellectuals and the exclusive use of Western justification and the lack of legal, secular and linguistic analysis in some fields).

Lastly, the different stances on “good living” socialism are compared and contrasted through contemporary research and new studies which confirm inconsistencies in some of the different theoretical approaches.

### **Sumak Kawsay/Good Living Socialism?**

“Good living” socialism emerged as an intellectual branch within the socialist circles of the Alianza PAÍS coalition of political parties. This movement brought together more than thirty parties and social movements which were mainly united by a rejection of neoliberalism. Thus, socialists, social democrats, communists, *mariateguistas*, progressionists, ecologists, feminists, indigenists, indigenous and student movements and others stopped the continuation of the neoliberal model by democratic means.

During the Ecuadorian Constituent Assembly which approved the Constitution of Good Living in 2008, a certain sense of cordiality and balance reigned between the three branches of good living. However, Alberto Acosta’s resignation from the presidency of the National Constituent Assembly in 2008 marked the first recognizable detour from the way good living and the so-called Citizen’s Revolution were understood. His resignation was followed by the departure of political parties from the Alianza PAÍS coalition movement, as well as by successive clashes with indigenous, environmental, feminist and LGBTQ movements. The government headed by Rafael Correa subsequently became the only official representative of “good living” socialism, also known as “statist good living.”

In Bolivia, living well or *suma qamaña* followed a different process and did not result in such a striking rupture as in Ecuador. In the Andean country, the division between “living well” community socialism and the other branches of *sumak kawsay*/good living was less accentuated; the process by which environmental movements and certain sectors of the in-

indigenous movement withdrew their support for Evo Morales's government was therefore more gradual.

"*Sumak kawsay*" socialism has been an intellectual movement which has developed parallelly on a theoretical and practical level. This process has made it possible to test whether the theory could be translated into *realpolitik* and has highlighted the difficulties and weaknesses of the paradigm. This article analyzes the conception and articulation of discourse on "good living" socialism as a new socio-economic paradigm. It shows the relationship (or lack thereof) between the authors' proposals for the construction of "good living" socialism and exposes some of the theoretical and practical inconsistencies present. Some of the main theoretical weaknesses and contradictions of so-called "*sumak kawsay*" or "good living" socialism will be explained in eleven points below.

### 1) Lack of Consensus on What "Sumak Kawsay" Socialism is

There is no consensus when it comes to establishing what "*sumak kawsay*" socialism is. Some authors consider it to be a trend with its own identity (Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a), other intellectuals approach it as a form of socialism with some nuances of its own (de Sousa Santos, 2010), still others view "good living" socialism and that of the twenty-first century as the same thing (Borón, 2008; Díaz, 2010; Patiño, 2010), while others claim that it is a socialist strategy which has lost its good living content (Pereira da Silva, 2020) and, finally, others consider it to be "modern development in a neo-Marxist version" (Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2020: 181). In addition to these positions, there is that of Bolivian socialists, whose representatives generally speak of "community socialism" rather than of living well/*suma qamaña* community socialism (García-Linera, 2010, 2015).

The lack of consensus on what republican bio-socialism is or when to speak of it is due to insufficient theoretical effort thus far invested. Such an effort would be needed in order to differentiate this specific socialist trend from others.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this is that

<sup>8</sup> In order to verify existing scientific production on "good living" socialism and its equivalents between 2006 and 2021, a keyword search was carried out in the Web of Science (wos), Scopus, Dialnet, ProQuest, Latindex and Google Scholar databases. The keywords used were: "socialismo del buen vivir" OR "socialism of good living" OR "good living socialism" OR "socialismo del sumak kawsay" OR "socialism of sumak kawsay" OR "sumak kawsay socialism" OR "biosocialismo republicano" OR "republican biosocialism" OR "socialismo comunitario" OR "community socialism" OR "socialismo comunitario del vivir bien" OR "community socialism of living well" OR "living well communitarian socialism" OR "socialismo comunitario del buen vivir" OR "community socialism of good living" OR "good living communitarian socialism" OR "socialismo comunitario del sumak kawsay" OR "community socialism of sumak kawsay" OR "sumak kawsay communitarian socialism" OR "socialismo comunitario del suma qamaña" OR "community socialism of suma qamaña" OR "suma qamaña communitarian socialism" OR "suma qamaña socialism" OR "living well socialism" OR "socialism of suma qamaña" OR "socialism of living well".

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021, the wos database contained six results for the different keywords used. Scopus contained one result. Dialnet contained fifteen. ProQuest contained sixty-seven. Latindex did not contain any papers with these keywords. Google Scholar, on the other hand, presented thirty.



its very conception was accelerated by a desire to win votes from diverse ideological niches, such as indigenous identity and environmental concerns (mainly post-extractivist), to name a few. Thus, “good living” socialism appropriated the “key symbol” (Zald, 1979) and a “ventriloquism” exercise (Martínez Novo, 2018).

Zald (1979: 13-14) views the appropriation of “key symbols” as a phenomenon in which different political movements seek to appropriate material (flags, insignia, etc.) or immaterial symbols (ideas, concepts, etc.). Whether the key symbol represents a political reality and/or the true intentions of those who seek to assume it is not relevant, since its appropriation is solely used as a tool to mobilize citizen support and economic resources (Becker, 2008) in order to gain power (Zald and McCarthy, 1979).

When analyzing the proposals and values of republican bio-socialism, traditional indigenous Ecuadorian Amazonian thought, and the Andean worldview are found to not have contributed to socialist discourse in any way. *Sumak kawsay*/good living is actually totally unnecessary to the branch of socialism. Moreover, it is striking that *sumak kawsay*/good living socialism, republican bio-socialism, community socialism, living well/*suma qamaña* community socialism and good living/*sumak kawsay* socialism are used as synonyms. There is a common linguistic link between all these words, *i.e.* “socialism”, and “*sumak kawsay*”/“good living” is in some cases omitted.

In this context, it is logical that there are authors with different perceptions of what “good living” socialism is, because the concept is surrounded by a vortex of ideas, approaches, projects, and practices, in which political interests are mixed with pseudo-scientific academic studies<sup>10</sup> on a new school of thought.

## 2) Socialism and Sumak Kawsay: Two Complementary but Incompatible Terms

Lakatos (1983) explains that scientific research programs have a hard core and a protective belt, the former being immovable while the latter is made up of auxiliary theories which can be modified to protect the hard core.

<sup>9</sup> This issue has been previously rejected by authors such as Atawallpa Oviedo (2016), Ariruma Kowii and Lourdes Tibán (Redacción Plan V, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> On the one hand, many of the works on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism have been financed or edited directly by Ecuadorian government institutions during Rafael Correa’s term in office. For example, SENPLADES has been one of the main institutions that has financed and edited more works on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism. On the other hand, there are numerous works published in journals and books that do not peer review.

One of the main sources of information on “*sumak kawsay*” socialism can be found in the book *Los Nuevos Restos de América Latina: Socialismo y Sumak Kawsay* published by SENPLADES. This book contains “the most representative papers” of the *Foro Internacional Los nuevos retos de América Latina: socialismo y sumak kawsay*. However, some of the papers collected by this Forum —jointly organised by the National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES), the Institute for Higher National Studies (IAEN) and the Ministry of Policy Coordination (MCP)— are of an informative and/or propagandistic nature.



Socialism and the original *sumak kawsay* have two different hard cores which prevent unification. One theory must prevail over the other, which is socialism in the case of the socialism of “*sumak kawsay*”. Thus, good living/*sumak kawsay* has been relegated to a kind of modifiable, malleable and dispensable protective belt theory, devoid of most of its content. However, *sumak kawsay* only makes sense if it is analyzed as a philosophical or holistic political theory. If the term is dismembered, what is left are different values and visions which could belong to just about any other culture or theory.

Other authors have previously warned of the possible incongruence of combining socialism, born from European Modernity, and *sumak kawsay*, born from an indigenous Ecuadorian worldview. However, the positions of these authors have changed on three fronts: those who have been indulgent, because they consider both systems to be in agreement as they have certain points in common (Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2019); those who have judged them to be irreconcilable, as combining *sumak kawsay* with Western elements would detract from its true relationship with the indigenous multiverse and would act as a new form of colonization (Oviedo, 2016), and those who simply consider republican bio-socialism to be in fact a new form of modernist developmentalism (Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2020: 181). Socialism and *sumak kawsay* may be two concepts which complement and work to improve each other, but they are incompatible and cannot coexist in the same system. The inclusion of different indigenous thoughts in different progressive Latin American governments is a huge challenge. Although progress is being made, the dialectical materialism of socialist movements has not found an equilibrium with indigenous worldviews (Carrillo García, 2018; Oviedo, 2016).

*Sumak kawsay* is therefore part of the protective socialist belt through elements such as inter-culturality, pluri-nationality, democratic consensus and solidarity. However, at the hard core of *sumak kawsay*/good living are post-developmental approaches, which seek to promote local economies and put an end to capital accumulation and environmental depredation (Acosta, García-Macías and Munck, 2021). “Good living” socialism, however, is defined as a new developmentalist trend which seeks to generate greater wealth for the population (García-Linera, 2010; SENPLADES, 2012, 2013).

3) *Omission of Indigenous Intellectual Production and Exclusive Use of Western Justification*  
References to defenders of indigenous *sumak kawsay* are practically nonexistent in socialist literature at present. The reason for this may be that *sumak kawsay* is a mixture of indigenous, modern, Eurocentric and progressive cultures and knowledge (de Sousa Santos, 2010; Inuca Lechón, 2017) or a product of a “political economy of workers” (Félix, 2015).

Based on the argument that good living is not an exclusively indigenous Ecuadorian phenomenon, representatives of “good living” socialism interpret and reinterpret this term

primarily on the basis of socialist, eco-socialist, communist, Marxist and neo-Marxist ideas.<sup>11</sup> It is true that *sumak kawsay* responds to a mixture of cultures and knowledge coming from different parts of the world, but it is also true that it is a political concept developed by indigenous people (Inuca Lechón, 2017). Therefore, having claimed and defined *sumak kawsay* to be part of good living without having considered its origin and the works which were derived from its birth has resulted in the loss of content and much of the original meaning.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, a *sumak kawsay* discourse which does take its own origins into account has been built by a bio-socialist movement. It is a discourse in which what is understood by the term *sumak kawsay* has been defined by socialism.

#### 4) Republican Bio-Socialism as a Model for Alternative Development

The analysis of the proposals and demands of republican bio-socialism shows that it is clearly influenced by the approaches of human, sustainable and identity-based development and by a focus on the satisfaction of basic needs (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017).

Thus, references to “*sumak kawsay*” socialism as a development model are common in texts and speeches by republican bio-socialism representatives.

Ramírez Gallegos (2010b: 5), for example, defines *sumak kawsay*/good living as a new development paradigm for Latin America. Féliz (2015: 38) believes that “good living is a form of development beyond development, beyond capital”. Larrea Maldonado (2012: 31) explains that the Constitution of Ecuador overcomes the reductionist view of development as a means of economic growth and establishes a new approach in which human beings are at the center of development. Although Prada Alcoreza (2011b: 234) first states that development and living well are incompatible, he later states otherwise and presents living well as a form of plural development, a process which is more qualitative than quantitative and in which accumulation and industrialization are how to achieve harmony.

Furthermore, the famous statements in which Rafael Correa spoke of “infantile ecologists” and “stone throwers” to refer to ecological and post-extractivist struggles (Acosta, 2013) made it clear that Ecuador would continue down a path of economic growth. The political discourse on *sumak kawsay*/good living aimed to fight against neoliberalism and development policies; however, the original meaning of “good living” socialism was a reinterpretation of a form of post-neoliberal alternative development.

SENPLADES (2013: 29) explains that

<sup>11</sup> See methodology section.

<sup>12</sup> Martínez Novo (2018) explains that this has been a racist practice, as non-indigenous people are speaking for indigenous people.

good living requires an alternative metric based on an integrative, multidimensional and holistic perspective that goes beyond the limits of the traditional development perspective, integrating the environmental dimension and the need for sustainability, and other dimensions such as the search for happiness and human fulfilment, social participation and multiculturalism. To this end, six basic dimensions are proposed for the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the process towards Good Living in Ecuador.

However, the National Institute of Statistics and Census in Ecuador (INEC) states that, with current statistical techniques, good living cannot be measured, as it would lose part of its value. The variables to be measured (and the way to measure them) proposed to solve this problem are: democratic quality, health, education, sustainability, happiness, satisfaction of basic needs, free time, productivity and productive diversification and efficiency, among others (INEC, 2015; Larrea, 2010; Phélan, 2011; Ramírez Gallegos, Schobin and Burchardt, 2020). Moreover, the INEC (2015) recommends the use of previously developed indicators, such as the Democratic Human Development Index, the Sustainable Human Development Index, POLITY2 and the ecological footprint.

To date, “good living” socialism does not have its own indicator and “good living” is instead measured through techniques designed to measure other forms of development. This is problematic because the same indicator cannot be the basis for measuring two different paradigms.

##### *5) The Creation of a New Model of Accumulation Which is Environmentally Sustainable, but Not Really*

Republican bio-socialism seeks to modify the Ecuadorian productive matrix and accumulation model given its uncompetitive, unequal, and environmentally unsustainable characteristics (Larrea, 2014; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a; SENPLADES, 2012, 2013).

Ramírez Gallegos (2010c) therefore proposes the recovery of domestic industry and the strengthening of the primary export model in order to finance satisfaction of the population's basic needs. Prada Alcoreza (2014) and SENPLADES (2012, 2013) defend the same development strategy, arguing that competitive and ecologically sustainable industry can be built based on the extraction and transformation of natural resources (renewable and non-renewable). The strengthening of extraction industries is the preliminary step for the construction of an Ecuadorian “biopolis”. This “biopolis” would depend on the country's “bio” activities, especially the bio and nanotechnology industries, bio-knowledge generation, community eco-tourism services and agro-ecological products. Ecuador would therefore guarantee an accumulation model which would be environmentally sustainable and which would allow the country to compete in international markets (Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a, 2016).

Prada Alcoreza (2011b) also speaks of the importance of the role of the state as a governing body for the creation of an ecological industry as well as a supervisory body of all activities carried out to ensure the sustainability of the model, the redistribution of wealth and the development of the community economy.

These approaches present several problems on an ecological level:

- i.* Beyond the defense of extraction industries as a means for the generation of wealth, there is no clear and consensual production matrix model among representatives of “good living” socialism. This has given rise to different and at times even contradictory projects within the same branch of thought.
- ii.* Arguments in favor of sustainable extractivism are unfounded, as they contradict all evidence gathered by various environmental studies (Acosta, García-Macías and Munck, 2021; Ekins, Gupta and Boileau, 2019).
- iii.* Financing future sustainability through unsustainable methods has been proposed. This, regardless of whether the proposed objectives are achieved, is related to consequentialist ethics which justify the sacrifice of the present-day environment and the welfare of the current population in favor of future populations. This is ethically questionable.
- iv.* The justification of extractivism as a way to achieve development is neither sustainable nor new, as it has been a widespread strategy throughout the second decade of the twentieth century and continues into the present. Although extractivism could finance development, it does not usually lead to major changes in the productive matrix of underdeveloped countries. In fact it creates greater dependence (Gudynas, 2021; Reinert, 2007).
- v.* Entrusting natural resource management to the state (Prada Alcoreza, 2011b) does not guarantee the sustainability of extractivism. Raúl Prada Alcoreza holds the view that the state is upstanding, honest, sensible and knowledgeable. However, the very nature of a politician’s survival in political power depends on their short-term popularity and the exploitation of natural resources is a huge source of short term wealth. Corruption is also a constant plague in the spheres of power.
- vi.* The pursuit of development inevitably leads to the unsustainability of a bio-socialist model. One of the fundamental pillars in all development approaches is unlimited economic growth (López-Castellano, 2007), which, by definition, is unsustainable, as it is not possible to grow indefinitely on a planet with finite limits (Herrington, 2021).

To answer this, the bio-socialist accumulation project proposes unlimited growth through sustainable activities. However, the indefinite accumulation objective makes these activities unsustainable and the strategies they have put forward regarding extractivism, tourism, construction and so on are unsustainable.

Similarly, one of the characteristics shared by all “developed countries” is their negative ecological footprint (Global Footprint Network, 2021). Development creates countries which have an ecological impact which is greater than can be supported by their own territories and which is compensated only by a surplus produced by most “developing countries.”

- vii. A commitment to “bio-tourism” or “ecotourism” as one of the main economic pillars of the new accumulation model entails increasing dependency on activity which is extremely unstable and fragile in the face of possible external shocks (Fennell, 2020; Škarea, Riberio Soriano and Porada-Rochoń, 2021).

Moreover, the characteristics of this form of tourism have scarcely been defined. Ecotourism is defined as a form of “ethical”, “responsible”, “sustainable”, “inclusive” and “respectful” tourism (SENPLADES, 2013). However, these generic and vague qualifiers do not make it possible to define in real terms what is meant by “ecotourism” or “bio-tourism.” Similarly, SENPLADES (2013) explains that ecotourism is an alternative tourism which allows for the exploration of Ecuador’s natural landscape and diversity, as well as the country’s rural areas, cities and beaches. This approach, again, does not clarify what the difference between ecotourism and conventional tourism is.

It should also be borne in mind that, although the economic benefits of a well-planned tourism-oriented strategy are well-known, a plan must be drawn up to avoid driving the indigenous population out of their habitats and towards non-tourist areas, the gentrification and overcrowding of cities, the increase of house prices, the creation of precarious employment and the increase of local and global pollution.

- viii. The sustainability strategies offered by SENPLADES (2009, 2013) and the MPD (2007, 2015) based on renewable energies are not sustainable.

The way of life in “developed countries” requires huge amounts of energy, which at present comes mainly from fossil fuels. Renewable energy is incapable of sustaining current rates of production and the Western concept of well-being, as the energy return rates are much lower than those of oil (Valero-Capilla and Valero-Delgado, 2014), the main energy source in the developed world.

The mineral crisis must also be mentioned. Sonter, Dade, Watson and Valenta (2020) analyze nearly 60 000 mining projects and demonstrate that around 82 % of the mines studied extract raw materials critical for the manufacture of renewable technology. Wind turbines, solar panels, hydraulic plants and so on need minerals such as copper, lithium, platinum, cobalt, neodymium, tantalum and dysprosium, to name but a few, which have either already reached their global extraction peaks (copper and cobalt) or will do so in the next few decades (Valero-Capilla and Valero-Delgado, 2014). Sonter, Dade, Watson and Valenta (2020) also predict an increase in the environmental impact of mining linked to those renewable energy sources.

The production of renewable energy gives rise to the paradox that in order to produce environmentally friendly energy, one must resort to materials whose extraction damages the environment. Approximately 8 % of the mines which were studied are located in protected areas, 7 % in areas of special relevance to biodiversity, and 16 % in some areas of the world which thus far are still relatively free from human exploitation.

It should also be noted that the use of all these minerals to produce renewable energy infrastructure also competes with other sectors. The production of conventional, electric and hybrid cars, as well as that of the digital economy (like mobile phones, computers, satellites and fiber optics), among others, depend on these materials. Furthermore, the World Economic Forum predicts the imminent arrival of a fourth industrial revolution, which will be characterized by a robotization of the economy (Schwab and Malleret, 2020).

- ix. “Good living” socialism tackles the environmental problems caused by livestock farming in a palliative way (SENPLADES, 2013), without analyzing or debating whether this sector and its production are sustainable (Tian *et al.*, 2020) or even whether a diet based on animal products has consequences for the environment or people’s health (Ekins, Gupta and Boileau, 2019; IARC, 2018; Krizanova, Rosenfeld, Tomiyama and Gurdiola, 2021).
- x. At no time does the bio-socialist movement propose a social or cultural change in order to renounce human privilege in favor of the rest of nature, which is essentially what is perpetuating the unsustainability of the system (Kingsnorth, 2017).<sup>13</sup> Instead, it advocates the preservation of current models of consumption and production, as well as the imitation of developed countries’ way of life is called for, albeit from a socialist philosophy. Ecological sustainability will only be achieved by renouncing all privilege which has turned human beings into predators of their environment (Kingsnorth, 2017).
- xi. Ramírez Gallegos (2010a), Prada Alcoreza (2014) and SENPLADES (2012) are very critical of the selfish and competitive values promoted by the capitalist system which have led to the deterioration and destruction of the natural world. However, simultaneously, and contradictorily, their proposals aim at differentiating the Ecuadorian economy to become more competitive in international markets.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Some of the privileges enjoyed by billions of human beings but which cannot be enjoyed by all of humanity are, for example, the consumption of meat, fish and animal products; the excessive use of water; disproportionate energy consumption; tourism; the consumption of foods that are not in season, and the private possession of a motor vehicle.

<sup>14</sup> Ramírez Gallegos (2010a) considers that under “*sumak kawsay*” socialism a competition will develop between countries based on values that oppose those of capitalists, so that world trade will generate neither winners nor losers. SENPLADES (2012), for its part, does not pay attention to the international consequences of trade, but only seeks greater wealth for Ecuador and its citizens.



xii. Lastly, there is a contradiction in socialist discourse when talking about distribution, redistribution, satisfaction of basic needs and generation of wealth.

“Good living” socialism asserts that existing wealth, worldwide, is sufficient to solve the current problems of poverty and misery. Thus, with adequate distribution and redistribution, the population’s basic needs would be met. This is something which many authors define as the fundamental objective of the socialist system (Fé-  
liz, 2011; Harnecker, 2011; Larrea, 2014; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010c). The following questions then inevitably arise: why is it so important to continue to generate and accumulate wealth incessantly (regardless of whether it is produced sustainably or unsustainably) if the problem is actually distribution and redistribution? If wealth serves the purpose of creating well-being for people and meeting their basic needs, why is it necessary to generate more and more wealth?

Republican bio-socialism, despite having its intellectual basis in Marxist ideas, is influenced by capitalism and by the philosophy of living better—not living well (Oviedo, 2016)—, since references to wealth as an end in itself, which falls into the fetishism of the money commodity (Marx, 2017), are commonplace and easy to find.

#### 6) *Strong and Centralized State or Liberal and Decentralized State*

Republican bio-socialism calls for the construction, through citizen participation, of a strong state which guarantees respect for the environment, human dignity, freedom of choice, equality, satisfaction of basic needs, and so on. It also defends the role of the state as a regulatory body for the life of the population, responsible for its education and the management of common goods and their exploitation (Fé-  
liz, 2015; García-Linera, 2010; Prada Alcoreza, 2011a, 2011b; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a).

The case here of “citizen participation” deserves special attention. “Good living” socialism argues that citizen participation and permanent dialogue will inevitably lead to a new, fairer and better order. “Citizen participation”, which extends to companies, the state, neighborhoods, communities, families, schools and so on is understood to be intrinsic to the socialist democracy of the twenty-first century (Borón, 2008; Falconí, 2012; Houtart, 2008; Patiño, 2010). Therefore, the socialist school of thought believes that, through the generation of common spaces in which the population can participate, the state will recover its social and collective meaning and its usefulness for the common good (Fé-  
liz, 2015; García-Linera, 2010; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a: 66-67).

However, citizen participation is subject to the “general interest of the population”, which is defined and represented by the state. This is an enormous limitation, since it is the political leaders in charge who interpret “general interest” and, therefore, the real scope and meaning of citizen participation. Thus, this discourse greatly contradicts those elements which demand individual freedom and power decentralization in order to guarantee com-



munity and regional sovereignty as well as those who support and justify a classic model of the centralist state which plans people's lives.

There is the problem of how to build a socialist state. Today's nation-states have evolved from their role as monopolizers of violence and guarantors of private property (Tilly, 1992) and have emerged as defenders of capital interest. Much of the institutional fabric was built to respond to the incessant greed for capital accumulation. Escobar (2010) explains that the Ecuadorian state "do not seem to venture beyond alternative forms of modernization". Marino Félix (2015) also recognizes that, because of this fact in itself, this point of transition is controversial, and whether the current state model should be destroyed or transformed must be decided.

### *7) Incoherent Demand for the Use Value and Free Interpretation of the Social and Solidarity Economy*

As explained above, "*sumak kawsay*" socialism and its societal model seek to break away from the socio-economic principles which govern the capitalist system, such as selfishness and competition, which lead to exploitation, inequality and violence. It aims to recover use value supremacy rather than exchange value and to turn a social and solidarity economy<sup>15</sup> into the main form of economy in a republican bio-socialist system (Harnecker, 2011; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2017; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a).

However, the proposals of the bio-socialist economic model have become removed both from the predominance of use value and from the social and solidarity economy. Representatives of the movement advocate for an economic model based on the production of goods, national and international competitiveness, the generation of exchange values, environmentally unsustainable activities<sup>16</sup> (MPD, 2015; SENPLADES, 2013). Vertical power relations are established where the centralist and planning role of the state is recovered (Félix, 2011, 2015; Harnecker, 2011; Larrea, 2014). Despite the continual demands that the movement makes on the use value and on the social and solidarity economy, it goes against both approaches.

### *8) Exclusive Application of Economic Measures to Achieve Equality*

"Good living" socialism states that equality has to reach all spheres of life through the establishment of horizontal power relations. It favors citizen involvement, building gender equality and equitable participation in the productive and reproductive sphere, building a pluri-national and intercultural state, facilitating access to justice, improving access to public goods, redistributing wealth, guaranteeing the right to leisure, redefining and reassigning

<sup>15</sup> The principles of the social and solidarity economy include cooperation, solidarity, sustainability, the creation of democratic and participatory spaces, the existence of horizontal power relations, etc. (Coraggio, 2007; Villalba-Eguiluz and Pérez-de-Mendiguren, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> See point 5.

the ownership of the means of production and land (Ramírez Gallegos, 2010a, 2010c; SENPLADES, 2013; Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2020).

To achieve these objectives, bio-socialists support, as a preliminary step, the need to establish a new strategy for the generation and accumulation of wealth, the redistribution of wealth and the means of production, the establishment of a progressive tax system, the recovery of strategic sectors of the economy and control of the market economy (Le Quang, 2020). In other words, as a preliminary step in achieving “*sumak kawsay*” socialism, so-called “market socialism” must first be achieved—although it is more correct to speak of “state capitalism”—and an integral state<sup>17</sup> (García-Linera, 2010; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010c). Equality projects in society are completely dependent on economic reforms. This clearly follows a Marxist materialism approach. This approach is, to a certain extent, incorrect, since equality, as defined by its representatives, has numerous different branches which go far beyond just economic aspects.<sup>18</sup> Thus, equality in the terms defined by the movement requires a holistic approach, encompassing legal, institutional, educational, secular, linguistic, environmental and urban planning aspects.

Lastly, Ramírez Gallegos (2010a) believes that the achievement of an egalitarian social pact will favor the expansion of values such as solidarity, cooperation, mutual recognition, respect and otherness. However, although it has been demonstrated that egalitarian societies present less social conflict, they are not proven to be governed by all these values. Moreover, the existence of an egalitarian society is unnecessary for development.

### *9) Gender Equality Being Dependent on Economic Equality and the Omission of the LGBTIQ Community*

“*Sumak kawsay*”/“good living” socialism is, on the whole, in line with the approaches of socialist feminism, which considers capitalism, through its material conditions of production, to be to blame for gender inequality. Therefore, “good living” socialists propose combating inequality by way of combating class. They propose the abolition of hierarchies and forms of property which perpetuate the numerous wide-ranging systemic inequalities.

Most “good living” socialist proposals on gender equality are therefore directed towards the economic sphere, and gender-specific measures remain rare. For example, Ramírez Gallegos (2010c) argues that the achievement of equality must be based on the establishment of a new productive matrix and a new wealth generation strategy. In the short term, public policies should be oriented towards the redistribution of wealth and means of production, the establishment of a progressive tax system, the recovery of strategic sectors of the economy

<sup>17</sup> The integral state is that which is pluri-national, autonomous, communitarian and social under the rule of law (García-Linera, 2010: 17).

<sup>18</sup> SENPLADES (2009, 2013) and MPD (2007) offer a more realistic and multidimensional view of this same debate, although the majority theoretical positions in this trend point in the direction already indicated.

and the control and regulation of the market. Similarly, Larrea (2010) proposes the recognition of reproductive work as productive work to be a solution to the existing inequality in the care sector. On the other hand, Ramírez Gallegos, Schobin and Burchardt (2020) analyze the role of leisure in well-being and in the construction of good living. One of their conclusions is that it is necessary to reduce working hours and share care work.

In short, “*sumak kawsay*” socialism, based on socialist feminism, makes gender equality conditional on the end of the capitalist system. This is why it directs its proposals towards the establishment of a new regime of accumulation and property which would modify material conditions.

On the one hand, associating all problems related to gender inequality with capitalism is an erroneous approach, as these inequalities existed before capitalism (Cintas-Peña and García Sanjuán, 2019; Gibbons, 2020). On the other hand, this approach ignores the multiple facets of gender inequality and how equality can be advanced through measures which are not strictly economic. Lastly, it should be noted that throughout bio-socialist studies there are consistent references to different types of inequality, but inequalities which affect the LGBTIQ community have yet to be mentioned. Furthermore, Rafael Correa and Evo Morales have made homophobic statements (Página Siete Digital, 2015; Redacción Sociedad, 2020) which were not questioned by the movement. This casts a shadow of suspicion over the whole movement, as most bio-socialist representatives have publicly shown their support for Rafael Correa and Evo Morales and/or have worked for or with their governments.

#### 10) *Revolution and Revisionism*

Republican bio-socialism has encouraged and incentivized a citizen’s revolution (MPD, 2015; SENPLADES, 2012; Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2020), but the use of the term “revolution” is controversial, as there is no unanimity or consensus on its meaning and the practices it involves.

Following the works of Bakunin (n.d., 1870: 24-25 quoted by Maximov, 2016), it can be stated that the “*sumak kawsay*” socialists’ revolution aims to achieve “social revolution” through “political revolution” which is a “hypocritical and covert reaction” since it is only a revolution of the (bourgeois) elites which can lead to the construction of bourgeois socialism.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, Bakunin (n.d.) believes that a revolution which has been imposed (by the political sphere) cannot be considered a revolution and that it must be born from the

<sup>19</sup> Cuví, Machado, Oviedo and Sierra (2013) and Monje Vargas (2018) denounced in their work the authoritarian drift of Rafael Correa’s government and the neglect of certain issues affecting the population and demanded by social movements. Acosta (2013) calls Rafael Correa’s government “a new model of bourgeois domination”. The denunciations against this government have continued over the years in different works (Carrillo García, 2018; Lalander and Kröger, 2016; Sacher, 2017). Similar allegations have been made in the case of Bolivia (Lalander, 2016; McKay, 2017). Pereira de Siqueira (2018) describes Evo Morales’ government project as a “bourgeois revolution.”

population itself. Such revolutions are bound to fail, because they will inevitably generate reactionary forces which will prevent them. In the case of Ecuador, Rafael Correa's government experienced confrontations with indigenous, environmentalist and even socialist movements (Cuvi, Machado, Oviedo and Sierra, 2013; Monje Vargas, 2018; Wolff, 2018), as well as with the country's conservative and neoliberal factions. In Bolivia, meanwhile, the community "living well" socialism project experienced its most tense situation during the *coup d'état* in 2019 which saw conservative Jeanine Áñez take the presidency.

In any case, and although the revolution was not born from the population itself, the bio-socialist policy proposals are reformist. The recovery of the role of the state as the organizing and directional body of citizen welfare (Féliz, 2015; Prada Alcoreza, 2011b) and the continuity of a developmentalist economy (Féliz, 2015; Larrea, 2010; Ramírez Gallegos, 2010b) do not present any form of revolution (Gudynas, 2021).

The electoralist and populist use of the term "revolution" (Rodríguez Morla, 2021) and the influence of Marxist revisionist approaches (Bernstein, 1982), which have marked much of Latin American socialist discourse since the end of the Cold War (Granda Arciniega, 2020), claim that "good living" socialism, like the rest of the movements and paradigms influenced by twenty-first century socialism, has promoted measures aimed at improving the lives of the population, while in reality it has pursued market socialism and/or state capitalism. Changes in the form of ownership (Féliz, 2011; Harnecker, 2011; Larrea, 2014) and in social and cultural values (García-Linera, 2010; MAP, 2012; Patiño, 2010), according to Bakunin (2014), could be said to be revolutionary proposals (except for the fact that they did not come from the population), but only in a socio-cultural sphere.

### 11) *The Link between "Sumak Kawsay" Socialism and the Government of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales*

"*Sumak kawsay*" socialism is also called "statist good living" (Cubillo-Guevara and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2019; Vanhulst, Cubillo-Guevara, Beling and Hidalgo-Capitán, 2020), which is based on the link between the school of thought and the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia (and the parties Movimiento Alianza País and Movimiento al Socialismo, respectively).

Many of the main representatives of socialist "good living" have held positions in these governments or have been advisors to them. René Ramírez Gallegos was National secretary for Planning and Development, secretary for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, and president of the Council for Higher Education; Ana María Larrea Maldonado was undersecretary general for Planning for Good Living for SENPLADES; Fander Falconí was National secretary for Planning and Development and minister of Foreign Affairs; Álvaro García-Linera was vice president of the Pluri-national State of Bolivia; María Nela Prada Tejada was executive director general of the Port Services Administration; Raúl Prada Alcoreza was vice minister of Strategic Planning for the Ministry of Economy and Fi-

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nance, and Félix Cárdenas Aguilar was vice minister of Decolonization and Depatriarchy for the Ministry of Culture and Tourism. SENPLADES and the Planning and Development Ministry (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo), which were institutions under the governments of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales, respectively, also played an important role. It should also be noted that intellectuals such as Marta Harnecker and François Houtart have at some point shown their support for the government of Rafael Correa and/or Evo Morales and have also been linked to various left-wing movements in Latin America.<sup>20</sup>

The political link between representatives of “*sumak kawsay*” socialism and the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia has led, on the one hand, to the identification of “good living” socialism through the government policies of Rafael Correa and Evo Morales and, on the other hand, to an almost total absence of criticism toward these two governments.

Obviously, the fact that the intellectuals of this *sumak kawsay*, within a government whose aim it is to achieve it, implement policies which are contrary to the values, proposals and demands which they themselves have defined raises questions about the applicability, effectiveness and materiality of this school of thought. But this situation is further aggravated when, in addition, neither these actions nor cases of government corruption, human rights violations, limitations on civil rights nor use of state security forces for illegitimate interests are firmly criticized (CNN Español, 2018; Cuvi, Machado, Oviedo and Sierra, 2013; Miño, 2017). This not only raises doubts about the approaches and objectives of republican bio-socialism, but also leads to its being discredited and delegitimized.

On the other hand, the case of SENPLADES and MPB should be highlighted in particular, as they are the institutions responsible for drawing up the National Plans for Good Living (Planes Nacionales del Buen Vivir) (PNBV)<sup>21</sup> in Ecuador and the National Development Plans (Planes Nacionales de Desarrollo) (PND) in Bolivia, respectively. These documents have been fundamental in the construction of “good living” socialist discourse. They were presented as the basic guidelines for government action in order to achieve good living. All government policies *a priori* were conditioned by the guidelines outlines within them. However, while many of the policies applied in these countries were consistent with these plans and with bio-socialist principles, many others were not. Moreover, analysis of the implementation of the NPGL (PNBV) and the NDP (PND) shows that they were poorly implemented (García-Álvarez, 2016; Bohoslavsky, 2020).

All these factors have acted to blur “*sumak kawsay*” socialism as a school of thought, as in many areas it is impossible to draw the line between the socio-economic principles of

<sup>20</sup> Marta Harnecker collaborated with the governments of Salvador Allende in Chile, Fidel Castro in Cuba and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela; Atilio A. Borón is one of the organic intellectuals of the Argentinean Partido Comunista and has publicly shown his support for the Bolivarian government of Venezuela; François Houtart has been linked to the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua.

<sup>21</sup> Since 2017 “Planes Nacionales de Desarrollo”.

“good living” socialism and the discretionary policies of Rafael Correa’s and Evo Morales’s governments. Lenín Moreno’s succession to power (2017-2021), the discrediting of both Rafael Correa and his government and the current presidency of the conservative Guillermo Lasso have led to the abandonment of the bio-socialist discourse in Ecuador on a state level. Moreover, the socialist movement is banking on twenty-first century socialism. At a local level, however, there are proposals which vindicate *sumak kawsay*, the most representative example of which is that of the Sarayaku people (Martínez Suárez, Yolanda and Agra Romero, 2019). In Bolivia, on the other hand, living well/*suma qamaña* is still present in discourse through the Movimiento al Socialismo Party, although its presence in discourse and policies has lessened in recent years. This follows the departure of figures such as Álvaro García-Linera, Félix Cárdenas Aguilar and Evo Morales himself from the Bolivian government.

## Conclusions and discussion

*Sumak kawsay* as a political discourse was born in a turbulent social, economic and political context, after twenty-six years of neoliberalist policies which governed Ecuador. By presenting itself as an alternative to neoliberalism and developmentalism, *sumak kawsay* gained popularity among the people and in academia. Socialist intellectuals, who took advantage of this boom and their influence in various electoral niches, created, at least discursively, a theoretical branch of their own: “*sumak kawsay*”/“good living” socialism or republican bio-socialism.

However, the scarce theoretical development around this form of socialism or “good living” has given rise to a socio-economic trend with a disjointed and, in many respects, incoherent discourse, which presents as contradictory and with structural theoretical weaknesses. Among these, the following stand out: the lack of consensus when defining what “*sumak kawsay*” socialism is; the lack of complementarity between socialism and *sumak kawsay* under the same scientific paradigm; the practically absolute omission of indigenous intellectual production; the development of a new model of accumulation which is environmentally unsustainable; the contradictory construction of a strong central state and liberal and decentralized state; the incoherent vindication of use value and the free interpretation of a social and solidarity economy; the material analysis of all forms of inequality; the omission of equality for the LGBTQI community, and the electoralist use of the concept of revolution.

Furthermore, the direct link between the representatives of the movement and the Ecuadorian and Bolivian governments has generated enormous confusion as to what “good living” socialism is, although some theoretical principles put forward have been allowed to be put into practice. It is practically impossible to discern in many areas whether “good



living socialism policy” is being implemented or whether it is a discretionary Ecuadorian and Bolivian government policy.

“Good living” socialism being converted into a “statist” movement was the catalyst for these contradictions and structural inconsistencies. The socialist proposals of the twenty-first century have taken precedence over socialist discourse in Ecuador, given their greater theoretical strength, the greater number of intellectuals dedicated to their study and their greater popularity in Latin America. In Bolivia, on the other hand, “living well” socialism is still present on an institutional level; its discursive and political weight, however, has gradually decreased since the 2009 Constitution was approved.

“Good living” socialism is a revisionist attempt to produce a concept of indigenous origin which has not managed to coherently combine the benefits of socialist proposals with those of good living. Instead, this trend has been relegated to a form of symbolic appropriation to attain governmental power and subsequently hold on to it. This paradigm is not alien to the Latin American reality, since progressive trends and their governments have, for years, been incorporating indigenous approaches into their proposals. However, the differences in the worldviews and epistemologies on which they are based are hindering the relationship and balance, giving rise to neo-colonial practices.



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