Sumak Kawsay and Clashing Ontologies in the Ecuadorian Struggle towards De-coloniality

Progressive mobilization, romanticized constitutional reforms and local conceptions of *Sumak Kawsay / Alli Kawsay* in Ecuador

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes and problematizes the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation in practice of the indigenous conceptualization *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* that originally is a conceptualization of a lifestyle in indigenous communities in Ecuador. The concepts were included in the new Constitution of Ecuador in 2008 that was ratified during progressive constitutional reforms under the former president Rafael Correa and with the support of the indigenous movement. Methodologically, by focusing on the implementation in practice, this ethnographic field study also examines *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* as a conception of a lifestyle on local community level among indigenous peoples in two different regions of the country. More specifically, in the provinces of Imbabura in the northern Andean highlands and the Amazonian Pastaza. By applying a comparative approach, the research objective of this thesis is to study how these conceptions are perceived, interpreted and practiced on local community level and how similarities and differences are shaped by connotations of territoriality. The central findings of the study illustrate how many challenges and dilemmas linked to the implementation in practice of the values and visions of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* are grounded in the country’s continuous reliance on extracting natural resources as an important revenue to finance social welfare. Another central finding is that different socio-political, cultural and spatial factors contribute in shaping local perceptions, interpretations and how *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* is practiced on local community level among indigenous peoples.

Keywords: Indigenous peoples, Ecuador, Sumak Kawsay, Buen-Vivir, De-coloniality, Territoriality.
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Introduction

In 2008 during the presidency of Rafael Correa, the new Constitution of Ecuador was ratified through a referendum with over 80% approval and with support from the Indigenous movement in Ecuador, a social movement that has been called one of the most powerful and best organized social movements in Latin America (Becker, 2011, xii). The new Constitution from 2008 has been described as the hitherto most radical constitution in the world that defines the country as a Plurinational and Intercultural state1 (Lalander, 2014, 150). Ecuador is the first country in the world to recognize the specific rights of nature2 with Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir3 as guiding principles (Gudynas, 2011, 443-44). These concepts are the backbone of the new Constitution that came to the core of contemporary politics in Ecuador during the presidency of Correa. With support of the Indigenous movement these concepts were inscribed in the new Constitution. However, after the ratification of the new Constitution, different processes have generated a variety of different perceptions and interpretations of the concepts with implications on the implementation processes in terms of discrepancies and gaps between constitution and implementation of politics (Lalander, 2016, 633). From this point of departure, this study deals with the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir in practice and the discursive struggle based around the different definitions of the concepts.

Sumak Kawsay became a political concept in early 1990s where it developed in the community of Sarayaku in the center of the Ecuadorian province of Pastaza in the Amazon and later appeared the Plan Amazanga in 1992. Sumak Kawsay is originally an Indigenous ethical and moral conceptualization of a lifestyle that originates from ontologies and worldviews that are rooted in a holistic cosmovision. These ways of apprehending the world understand nature spirits as constant mediators between humans and the non-human sphere including animals, mountains, rivers and other spiritual entities (Altmann, 2019, 8). In other words, epistemologies and ontologies that challenge and

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1 Plurinationality recognize the existence of several different nationalities within Ecuador whereas Interculturality is a process of interactions between cultures where relations within institutions and between cultures are constructed based on equity, respect and a de-colonial discourse (Walsh, 2009).
2 The new Ecuadorian Constitution includes a chapter that is called Rights of Nature and is a constitutional protection of the environment/Mother Nature/Pachamama. It acknowledges that nature has its own rights to exist and maintain its vital cycles and ecosystems without human interference (Tanasescu, 2013, 847-848).
3 The concept Sumak Kawsay in Kichwa language is originally from indigenous ontologies that is rooted in the cosmovision of indigenous peoples. ‘Sumak’ is translated as harmony and plentitude and ‘Kawsay’ is translated as life, coexist. The most common translation is ‘life in plentitude/vida en plentitude’ whereas ‘Buen-Vivir’ can be translated as ‘Good Life’ or ‘Good way of living’ (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 52-54). I will use the terminology Kawsay/Buen-Vivir to refer to both concepts. As will be illustrated later in the empirical and analytical chapter of this thesis, Alli Kawsay is a concept that have been described as an Andean conception from the northern Highlands that is more commonly refered to in daily life experiences whereas Sumak Kawsay is an aspiration of an idealized life/utopia to be constructed. This will be further discussed and analyzed in this thesis.
collide with Western rational and secular thought. In this study, I will emphasize and argue that we need to recognize that these epistemologies have suffered from colonial domination in terms of imposed ways of Eurocentric\(^4\) thinking. More specifically, this refers to the subalternation of indigenous knowledge systems. That is why this is also a case of the recognition of marginalized knowledges that have been negated throughout history through forced and imposed Western and Eurocentric knowledge production (Dussel, 1993; 1996). Through the achievements by the indigenous movement in Ecuador, these epistemologies and ontologies that have been marginalized and suppressed have now gained recognition on national and international level. In other words, the indigenous movement in Ecuador can be described as both a political and epistemic struggle in terms of the right to self-determination and their culture, language and cosmovision (Escobar, 2011; 2015).

From a critical standpoint, this field study departs from the assumption that, even though colonialism as a formal political system seized to exist with the independence of the nation states in Latin America, it does not imply that the structural and persisting legacies of colonialism have disappeared. Rather, as Walter Mignolo points out, these legacies still exist in contemporary society in ways of thinking and cultures and knowledge (Mignolo, 2007, 471). When the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano introduced the concept of ‘coloniality’, he stated that: “if knowledge is colonized, one’s task is to de-colonize knowledge” (1991, 11). That is, the discursive effects of colonization, e.g. its imaginaries, social constructions, dominance and violence that is justified through the logic and rhetoric of modernity (Mignolo, 2011, 45-46). In contemporary society the logic of modernity can be found in dominant perceptions of development and progress. And for example, in the classification of cultures as either developed or underdeveloped that can be traced back to the conquest of Latin America in the 16\(^{th}\) century when the European forced and imposed Christian theology and later secular and rational philosophy through colonial domination (Mignolo, 2007, 470-471).

In contemporary society, it is possible to identify these legacies in development projects such as oil exploration in the Amazon that creates conflicts and destruction on indigenous sacred territories. It is today, in the words of Carlos Viteri Gualinga: “an unequal and epistemological war that is expressed in the exploitation of oil” (2003, 85). From this point of departure, this study has a critical de-colonial approach that is both analytic and programmatic in the sense that it seeks to not only the re-construction of subalternatized knowledges and languages, but also because de-linking from the coloniality of power means moving away and beyond the post-colonial to de-coloniality (Mignolo,

\(^4\) Eurocentric view/Eurocentrism is understood as the knowledge form of modernity and colonialism. That is, the idea that the Western world situate themselves as the center of the world and is the ‘developed’ and ‘rational’ part of the world that is consequently being seen as superior to ‘underdeveloped’ parts of the world that needs to be civilized and developed (Dussel, 1993).
For the indigenous movement in Ecuador, *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* as a political concept is bound up with a de-colonial discourse that developed around the concepts of Plurinationality and Interculturality (Altmann, 2016, 55). Therefore, these two concepts also constitute two important elements that are closely linked to the implementation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*.

However, while the guiding values and principles of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* constitutes the main objective to reconstruct the state, society and relations between citizens and nature based on indigenous knowledge and traditions, there still exist challenges and contradictions due to different definitions and visions of how to implement them in practice (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017, 32). For instance, Lalander and Lembke points out that, the last ten years of environmental politics show apparent tensions and contradictions between resource governance, welfare policies and the constitutionally recognized rights of nature (2018, 2). This has generated situations where original supporters have been calling attention to contradictions between the government’s policies and the commitments to the principles of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* (Bretón Solo de Zaldívar, 2017, 196).

Since the establishment of the new Constitution from 2008, the concepts *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* now encompass a variety of interpretations with different meanings. What these interpretations only seem to have in common is to improve the quality of life by promoting harmonious relationships between humans and the environment but with different strategies (Zamosc, 2017, 93). In other words, the concepts have now become a source of contention in a discursive struggle that is based on the definitions of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. Departing from previous research three dominant and divergent understandings of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* have been identified that can be categorized in three simplified categories: Indigenous-culturalist, Post-developmentalism/radical ecologist and Eco-socialists/statist⁵ (Capitán-Hidalgo & Cubillo Guevara, 2014; Villalba Eguiluza & Etxano, 2017; Lalander & Cuestas-Caza, 2017). Departing from these simplified categories, it is necessary to acknowledge that these different interpretations have evolved within different epistemic communities⁶ (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 51).

Without going further in the discussion of the origins and meanings in this chapter, this study emphasizes the significance to understand *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* as a concept that emerged and exist in particular contexts and thus is in permanent construction (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017,

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⁵ These three simplified categories are further described and discussed on page 19.

⁶ Epistemic communities are described by Javier Cuestas-Caza as networks of knowledge-based communities. For instance, scientific communities, a group of professional specialists etc., where the members of these communities share knowledge expertise, values or shared ways of apprehending the world (2018, 51-52).
55). It is also important to acknowledge that *Sumak Kawsay* is originally a local and territorial concept that refers to the everyday life experiences among indigenous peoples in Ecuador before it was included in the new Constitution from 2008.

Methodologically, by focusing on the implementation processes after its inclusion in the new Constitution from 2008, this ethnographic field study will also examine *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* as a conception of a lifestyle on local community level among indigenous peoples. There are several reasons for this, but particularly a specific aspect that is linked to the academic debate and refers to epistemological and ontological issues of knowledge extraction and contradictory uses in environmental politics. Since the establishment of these concepts in the new Constitution, the interest for academia to engage in the discussion and potential contributions in dealing with the current socio-ecological crisis of the world of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* has grown substantially. More specifically, in the debate, issues especially emerge around the translation of *Sumak Kawsay to Buen-Vivir*. In this process, there are risks connected to the simplification or reduction of content of these concepts that originate from the indigenous movement that invisibilize the movement and people as political actors (Altmann, 2019, 12). Therefore, in the words of Philipp Altmann: “a theoretical reflection on *Sumak Kawsay* that does not take into account its necessary local character will always turn into a de-colonial colonization” (2017, 757), which illustrate the importance and motivation of this field study to examine these practices on the field.

**Aim and Research Questions**

With the background outlined above, the last decade illustrates many challenges that are linked to the implementation in practice of the values and visions in *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* while respecting the constitutionally recognized rights of nature. Departing from previous research, the last decade has generated a variety of different interpretations and understandings of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. This do not only contribute to a confusion in the academic debate, but also entails implications on the implementation process in terms of contradictions and lack of clear definitions and thus discrepancies in terms of gaps between the new Constitution and the implementation in practice.

From this point of departure, the purpose of this field study is to analyze and problematize the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* and the specific rights of nature in practice. Since the concept originally is a local conception of a lifestyle that emerged as a political concept in the Amazon during the early 1990s (Altmann, 2017) that is in permanent (re-)construction (Viteri Gualinga, 2003), this thesis will also study local perceptions and interpretations on local community level in two different regions of Ecuador. The main reason for this
A comparative approach is because the concepts originate from day-to-day experiences of indigenous peoples before they were incorporated in the Constitution, where this study departs from the assumption that it is significant to recognize that perceptions and interpretations are shaped by history, culture and relation to territory. In other words, how historical events such as conditions of material and relations of power shape culture and relations to territory (Eriksen, 2018, 328). From this point of departure, the research objective is twofold but interconnected.

The study is based on two months of ethnographic fieldwork in the province of Imbabura in the northern Andean highlands and the Amazonian province of Pastaza. The work is primarily based on interviews and different forms of participatory observations, but also a critical reading of the literature and other relevant documents such as official statements, policy-documents etc. This thesis is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir in practice? How are these expressed in times of post-implementation of the new Constitution from 2008?
2. How is Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level among Kichwa-indigenous peoples?
3. What differences and similarities can be identified between the northern Andean highlands in the province of Imbabura and the Amazonian province of Pastaza and how are these related to connotations of territoriality such as historical, spatial and cultural factors?

In the post-2008 phase, a specific challenge relates to the practical and institutional implementation of the values and visions of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir that are included in the new Constitution of Ecuador. In practice, these issues can be identified in what Rickard Llander (2016) calls the ‘Ecuadorian resource dilemma’. This dilemma is connected to the country’s reliance on resource extractivism as an important revenue in welfare distribution while at the same time respecting the constitutionally recognized rights of nature and the principles of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir. In this light, the first research question (Q1) is grounded in the argument that, while the visions and values are reflected in the new Constitution, there still exist discrepancies and gaps between these visions and the implementation in practice. In this light, this study will further analyze and problematize how these issues are played out in practice and expressed by various actors in contemporary environmental politics in Ecuador.

See geographical locations on the map provided in Appendix A with the provinces marked in red.
Whereas the first research question deals with the practical implementation of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir from a constitutional and political perspective, the other two research questions (Q2 and Q3) deal with how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level in a comparative approach. This field study departs from the assumption that Indigenous cultures in Ecuador are not homogenous even if they are of the same nationality, e.g. Kichwa nationality. This study recognizes that many factors, including political and historical processes, contribute in shaping culture and perceptions of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir. For instance, different political-economic shifts in Ecuador have impacted Andean and Amazon regions in different ways. In the Andes, agricultural livelihoods have been undermined by the state, whereas Indigenous Amazonian territory in Pastaza have been impacted by oil extraction activities (Quick, 2018, 760).

It shall also be emphasized that these areas have different natural environments, e.g. mountains vs. jungle. Since many indigenous worldviews see the natural world as an integral part of their culture (Escobar, 2015) it illustrates the importance to think of how these impacts shape relations to territory. From this perspective, this study will apply a holistic understanding of territory with the theoretical concepts of ‘territoriality’ and ‘place’ as important analytical components to identify and analyze how these relations contribute in shaping perceptions and interpretations of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir on local community level.

With this contextualization the outline of the thesis is as follows. To begin with, the theoretical and analytical de-coloniality framework will be outlined that provide the study with important perspectives of how to understand modernity from a critical perspective and its implications on how to think of colonial domination from a historical and epistemological perspective. The last section of this chapter will discuss the analytical components of ‘territoriality’ and ‘place’ in order to outline the analytical approach to identify how different factors shape cultural perceptions. The next chapter will present and discuss previous research that have been identified as important in order to resolve the research questions. This chapter is followed by a background chapter that discuss the indigenous movement and how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir ended up in the new constitution. Thereafter, the results will be presented in a chapter that is separated in three sections. The first section deals with the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation in practice whereas the following sections deal with how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level in my simplified highland-Amazonian comparison. Then these findings are analytically discussed where the de-coloniality and territoriality/place framework will be applied in order to analyze and problematize how history, culture and spatial factors shape perceptions of Sumak
Finally, these findings will be discussed followed by a short chapter with some of the most important conclusions of this field study.

Theoretical and analytical framework

In this chapter of the thesis I will present and discuss the theoretical and analytical framework. Departing from a critical standpoint, this study accepts the assumption that even though colonialism as a formal political system seized to exist with the independence of the Nation States, it does not mean that structural and persisting legacies of colonialism have disappeared. Rather, in contemporary society we need to think of colonial domination from an epistemological and ontological perspective that is linked to centuries of colonization of indigenous knowledge systems and their ways of apprehending the world (Escobar, 2011; 2015). That is why the indigenous movement in Ecuador needs to be seen in the light of the struggle for their language, culture and worldview that have suffered from marginalization where their histories have silenced through colonial domination (Dussel, 1993). From this view, the indigenous movement in Ecuador can be understood as a political in terms of the rights to autonomy and self-determination and also an epistemic struggle in terms of the rights to their culture, language and worldview. In other words, de-colonizing the state of Ecuador and the de-colonization of knowledge production.

In order to approach ways of how the imposed and forced ways of apprehending the world still persist in contemporary society through the legacies of colonialism, it is necessary to critically re-understand the history of modernity in order to understand how relations of power and dominance was established through the conquest of the Americas in 16th century (Dussel, 1993). This will allow for de-colonial thinking and the reconstitution of knowledge production and history (Escobar, 2015). From this view, this study deals with a case that is closely linked to de-colonization in practice within political and epistemological dimensions. That is why the first part of this chapter will discuss how we can re-think the history of modernity to understand how these legacies still prevail in perceptions of culture and knowledge. One of the central assumptions is connected to the idea that modernity did not begin with the French Revolution, The Enlightenment and later the Industrial Revolution. Rather, modernity began with the conquest of America which challenge the dominant and Eurocentric views of how to understand modernity as exclusively an European phenomenon (Dussel, 1993;1996).

In this context the concept of ‘coloniality’ becomes important and refers to the constitutive and darker side of modernity that reproduce discursive implications of the colonization of imaginaries and practices through the rhetoric and logic of modernity (Mignolo, 2007, 464). **Sumak Kawsay** can be considered an important concept in the de-colonial struggle of the indigenous movement in Ecuador.
and articulates resistance against the totalitarian discourse of Western hegemonic knowledge production. In this context, the critical theory of de-coloniality becomes an important analytic approach as a response to political, social and cultural domination that was established by the Europeans.

Re-thinking modernity

The point of departure in this theoretical and analytical framework relates to our understanding of the history of modernity that will provide the thesis with important philosophical perspectives. Departing from a critical perspective, this thesis does not understand modernity as exclusively an European phenomenon. Rather, modernity began with the conquest of America the 16th century which challenge the dominant views of the Eurocentric understanding of modernity (Dussel, 1993; 1996). In this section I will with the help of Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano explain why this is an important philosophical assumption that will lay the analytical foundations for the de-coloniality framework of this thesis. In this context, it is particularly important to emphasize that this understanding of history opens up for ways to think of colonial domination from an epistemological and ontological perspective. That is, the colonization of indigenous knowledge and ways of thinking. During the indigenous movement in Ecuador, these ontologies have gained recognition after centuries of marginalization with *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* as central concepts that have gained national and international recognition after the inclusion in the new Constitution from 2008. To proceed with the critical understanding history and modernity, the quote below from Enrique Dussel provides a good point of entry:

Modernity is, for many (for Jurgen Habermas or Charles Taylor, for example), an essentially or exclusively European phenomenon. In these lectures, I will argue that modernity is, in fact, a European phenomenon, but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity that is its ultimate content. Modernity appears when Europe affirms itself as the "center" of a World History that it inaugurates; the "periphery" that surrounds this center is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery (and of the role of Spain and Portugal in the formation of the modern world system from the late fifteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries) leads the major contemporary thinkers of the "center" into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. If their understanding of the genealogy of modernity is thus partial and provincial, their attempts at a critique or defense of it are likewise unilateral and, in part, false (Dussel, 1993, 65).

In the paragraph above, Dussel offers a critical view of modernity where Europe constitute itself in a process of self-definition with Latin America that affirms Europe as the center of the world. As noted, this challenge the dominant view of modernity as exclusively an European phenomenon. What is
important here is that, modernity originated from medieval Europe, but modernity was born when Europe was in a position to pose itself against ‘the Other’ in a dialectical relationship. In other words, through actions of exploring, conquering and colonizing what the Europeans called the ‘New World’ and today the ‘Third World’ (Dussel, 1993, 65-68). This view offers a re-interpretation of the history of modernity that does not only imply a change in the description of events, it is also an epistemic change of perspective (Escobar, 2007, 189). From the point of moving away from Eurocentric ways of thinking that have contributed to the misrecognition of non-European knowledges that have been described as inferior and uncivilized that needs to be reconstituted and thought of differently (Dussel, 1993, 65-66).

With this understanding, it is possible to say that the domination of ‘the Others’ outside Europe is a necessary dimension of modernity. That is, without the European colonization of the South, modernity and Europe would not be the same, Europe created itself through colonizing the South. In this thesis it is particularly important to understand that the dominant relationship that was imposed and established by the Europeans included the process of marginalizing and subaltern indigenous knowledges and cultures (Escobar, 2007, 184). These actions of domination were justified through what Dussel call ‘the irrational myth’ which is grounded on the assumption that European cultures understood themselves as superior and had a mission to civilize and develop the rest of the world (Dussel, 1996, 51). This is illustrated in a quote from Friedrich Hegel:

    And the English have undertaken the weighty responsibility of being the missionaries of civilization to the whole world (Friedrich Hegel cited in Dussel, 1996, 51).

The understanding of the European as being superior with a civilizing responsibility, led to the justification of genocidal violence through the irrational myth of modernity. The Other was seen as immature, barbarous, and underdeveloped which justified both physical and epistemic violence. This argument can be summarized in the following five points:

(1) European culture is the most developed culture and thus superior to all other cultures in the world.
(2) Other cultures should abandon their barbarity by means of a civilizing process.
(3) If the Other oppose the civilizing process it is just and necessary to use violence in order to defeat such opposition.
(4) The colonizer who colonize the Other is innocent because he exercises violence and power as a duty.
(5) The victims of modernity (e.g. the extermination of Indians) are responsible for their own victimization (Dussel, 1996, 51-54).
This myth can be uncovered in two central aspects according to Dussel. The first is hidden in the emancipatory concept that he calls the “fallacy for developmentalism”. That is, the idea that the rest of the world should follow the path of Europe’s modern development that ultimately would open up for new possibilities of human development. This also included converting to Christianity and later secularization through the rational discourse in science and philosophy that developed later in Europe (Dussel, 1993; 1995). From this view, it becomes evident that these processes also implied that modes of thinking were imposed through and illustrate that we are dealing with epistemic and ontological implications for the colonized. This act is described as ‘epistemic violence’ by Mignolo (2007) and is linked to the irrational myth that justified violence as part of the civilizing process (Dussel, 1995, 136). These legacies can still be found in contemporary society in dominant ways of the ideas of development and progress that can be described as ‘the underside of modernity’ (Dussel, 1996) or as ‘the darker side of modernity’ (Mignolo, 2007). This implies that modernity has a constitutive side where persisting legacies and structures that marginalize alternative knowledges and ways of living still prevail in contemporary dominant development discourse.

**Modernity/Coloniality**

Departing from the background outlined in above, modernity can be understood as an epistemological frame that is inseparable with the European colonial project (Escobar, 2004, 11). Since the 70’s, the idea that knowledge is also colonized and therefore needs to be de-colonized has been expressed in various ways and disciplines. One of the groundbreaking contributions in this debate came from the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano who introduced the concept of ‘coloniality’ (Mignolo, 2007, 451). Coloniality is the constitutive side of modernity and the underlying logic of Western thought (Quijano, 2007, 169). Also described as “the darker side of modernity” and “the invisible and constitutive side of modernity” by Walter Mignolo (2007; 2011). Departing from the idea that coloniality is the constitutive side of modernity, it is possible to say that, there cannot be modernity without coloniality. Coloniality incorporates colonialism and imperialism, but goes beyond them (Escobar, 2004, 13). It is, in the words of Mignolo: “the site of enunciation that reveals and denounces the blindness of the narrative of modernity from the perspective of modernity itself” (2003, 2). That is, the darker side of modernity that exist in structural and persisting legacies of colonialism with both material and intersubjective effects. It refers to the discursive implications of colonization and its imaginaries, practices, social constructions, dominance and violence (Mignolo, 2007, 464). In other words, modernity and coloniality are the two sides of the same coin, thus modernity/coloniality.

From this point of view, it is possible to say that, if coloniality is constitutive of modernity, then there cannot be modernity without coloniality. An important contribution from Quijano was that he linked
coloniality of power in the political and economic sphere with the ‘coloniality of knowledge’ (Mignolo, 2011, 44-45). From this perspective, it is clear that when we speak of coloniality, we must recognize that colonial domination has an epistemic dimension (Burman, 2012, 105). For Quijano, coloniality and coloniality of knowledge is still operating in contemporary society. As he puts it: “coloniality still is the current global pattern of power that has permeated every area of social existence and constitutes the most profound and effective form of social domination both material and intersubjective” (2000, 2). Thus, today we see coloniality without colonialism that reproduce itself through the ‘coloniality of power’, that can be described as a global model of power that was established with modernity/coloniality. This global model of power works through what Quijano calls a social and universal classification of the world’s population that is based around the idea of race, labor and capital that was established with the Conquest of America (Quijano, 2007, 168).

In Latin America, race as a social classification of differences was based around supposedly different biological structures between colonizer and the colonized as a way to justify and structure the relations dominance and control. In other words, it produced new historical identities such as Indians, blacks and mestizos. These social relations were configured as relations of domination. The European identity was created as the dominant subject whereas the Others as subordinated and dominated (Quijano, 2000, 533-534). This was a way for the colonizer to gain legitimacy to the social relations of domination that were imposed through race and racial identity as instruments of social classification. The dominated peoples were situated in inferiority and as a result their cultural practices and knowledge were considered inferior (Dussel, 1996, 51). For Quijano, this is how “race became the fundamental criterion for the distribution of the world population into ranks, places, and roles in the new society’s structure of power” (Quijano, 2000, 535). These assumptions relate to the ideas of how hierarchies and dominant roles were established by the colonizers based on domination, exploitation that was grounded in capitalism and the idea of Western rationality.

When Europe had put themselves in the center of global capitalism and history, it allowed them to impose its colonial dominance in Latin America that incorporated them into its model of power. With these new intersubjective relations and identities that were being established, it also allowed the Europeans to colonize knowledge production. The colonizers forced the colonized to learn the dominant culture since the Europeans imagined themselves as the moderns of humanity that implied adapting Christian theology and later the rational and secular view of science and philosophy (Quijano, 2000, 538-543). From this view, racism is not necessarily the color of one’s skin. Rather, racism is the possibility to control knowledge to make the ‘Other’ inferior. When the ‘Other’ is classified as the inferior you have the ability to control them. From this view, modernity/coloniality
has a civilizing rhetoric connected to Western understanding of civilization, development and modernization (Mignolo, 2007, 2011). This leads to one of the most important aspects of the discussion in this section. More specifically, in the context of the civilizing rhetoric is where the darker side of modernity appears. That is, the hidden side of the logic of coloniality that includes inequalities, racism, injustices and the marginalization and negation of subaltern knowledges that express itself in contemporary society in terms of globalization and other development projects such as oil exploration and mineral extraction in rural areas in the Amazonia and other areas.

One of the most central critiques to the rationality of modernity is the “exclusionary and totalitarian notion of Totality, that is a Totality that negates, exclude, occlude the difference and the possibilities of other totalities” (Mignolo, 2007, 451). In other words, other epistemologies and ontologies that are non-Western are negated by the logic of coloniality that works conceptually. It has the effect that it makes one believe and accept that the world is accordingly, e.g. the understanding of economic development and progress based on the extraction of natural resources as necessary and common sense. Assumptions that are grounded on Western science and philosophy which illustrate how the logic of modernity has the power to control subjectivity and reproduce structures that marginalize and subaltern alternative perceptions of what development and progress means. That is why Walter Mignolo points out that, modernity rationality is engulfing while at the same time defensive and exclusive to the ones that do not accept and adapt to its logic and totality (Mignolo, 2007, 452-455).

Understanding modernity and its constitutive effects allow for the reconstruction of silenced histories, knowledges and languages that permits for the de-colonization of knowledge.

De-coloniality and De-linking

When Quijano introduced the concept of coloniality, he stated that, if knowledge is colonized we must de-colonize knowledge. To continue with this discussion, it is important to emphasize that the critique of Totality does not lead us to post-coloniality, but to de-coloniality. In order to de-link from the colonial matrix of power we need to engage in what Mignolo calls an ‘epistemic reconstitution’. This means that we need to reconstitute ways of thinking and living that the logic and rhetoric of modernity has rejected through its Christian theology and secular/rational worldview. This study deals with these epistemologies that have been neglected and excluded through colonial domination but now seeks the reconstitution and justice for their histories and ways of apprehending the world that challenge and collide with Western rational thought. That is why de-coloniality and Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is

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8 A clear example of this is the strict separation between human and nature in Western rational ways of thinking. However, in the Indigenous ontologies that this study deals with, humans are interconnected with the non-human sphere and the natural world where animals and other natural elements function as spiritual mediators as will be illustrated later in the analysis.
both a political and epistemic project as a response to the persisting legacies of colonial domination. From this perspective, de-coloniality is operating through geo- and body politics. That is, politics that are inscribed in knowledges and bodies whose histories and ways of apprehending the world have been silenced through colonial oppression (Mignolo, 2007, 452-454). To engage in this epistemic reconstitution Mignolo has introduced the concept of ‘border thinking’. Some clarifications are needed here.

Reconnecting to the idea of Eurocentrism and the dialectical relationship introduced by Dussel where Europe constitute itself to ‘the Other’. Mignolo (2007) explains that, in this process, Europe and modernity have invented an exteriority. That is, the outside that is has created to create itself. From these borders of the exteriority exist other knowledges that belongs to the subalternized. Thus, border thinking does not irrespective of modernity but function rather a response to it. Therefore, “border thinking is the epistemology of the exteriority; that is, of the outside created from the inside” (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006, 206). From this perspective, border thinking involves thinking from the borders of epistemology. In other words, from the perspectives of alternative knowledges and ontologies that introduce other cosmologies into the hegemonic discourse of Western modernity such as the ones that are articulated in the indigenous movement in Ecuador. Importantly, these knowledges are not located outside modernity, but in its exteriority. It is as Mignolo puts it: “an outside invented by the rhetoric of modernity in the process of creating the inside” (Mignolo, 2007, 471). This is where de-colonization of the mind shall begin - thinking from the exteriority of modernity. From the histories and knowledges that have suffered from colonial domination but through the indigenous movement in Ecuador have now gained recognition through the achievements that demand the rights and recognition for their culture, language, cosmovision and ways of living.

Place and Territoriality

Reconnecting to the aim of this study, one of the central objectives is to identify and analyze similarities and differences in how Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level between two different contexts in a simplified highland-Amazonian comparison. In order to resolve the comparative research question (Q3) of this thesis, this study departs from the assumption that it is significant to recognize that historical events such as conditions of material resources, relations of power and other factors shape cultural relations to territory (Eriksen, 2018, 329-330). Since cultural practices are interconnected with specific territories, it motivates that we need to think of how different connotations of territory and place contribute in shaping perceptions and interpretations of Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir. From a philosophical point of view, this assumption is linked to the idea that our embodied existence has a strong connection to a
specific ‘territory’ or ‘place’ that contribute in shaping cultural practices and worldviews (Casey, 1993, 23). The philosopher Edward Casey puts it simply when he states that:

(...) to live is to live locally, and to know is first of all to know the places one is in (1993, 18).

In anthropological studies, the concept of place is closely linked the study of how cultural practices are interconnected with the physical places and the natural environment. This radically local dimension implies that we need to think of place and culture from a holistic view connected to socio-political structures and material conditions. Escobar points out this relationship in more detail when he states that:

It is important to highlight the emplacement of all cultural practices, which stems from the fact that culture is carried into places by bodies — bodies are encultured and, conversely, enact cultural practices (Escobar, 2004, 143).

This is particularly central in this study because the ontologies of the indigenous peoples include a holistic cosmovision that connects nature and humans in spiritual relationships (Escobar, 2015). From this cultural understanding of place and territory it is significant to recognize that physical environments are closely linked to epistemological and ontological dimensions of cultural practices (Escobar, 2015, 13-14). That is why connotations of territoriality becomes a central concept to understand how different factors contribute in shaping perceptions and interpretations of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir. Johannes Waldmüller and Philipp Altmann provides a wide but good point of entry in how to understand and think of the concept of territoriality:

Territoriality from a wide and holistic perspective is defined as the totality of knowledges, practices, discourses, imaginaries, identities and material that the persons produce or reproduce in relation to the territory they seek to control. These knowledges and practices have different shapes such as legal/juridical political, discursive, symbols, strategies and cultures (Waldmüller and Altmann, 2018, 8).

This holistic understanding of territoriality also highlights its local character in terms of being closely linked to specific territories that are loaded with history and meaning. In this study, it is particularly important to consider how local practices are carried out in contact with the natural environment since many indigenous worldviews see the natural world as an integral part of their worldview that they load with meaning and culture (Escobar, 2015). This way of apprehending the world can be described as a socio-ecological-spiritual entity that connects humans, animals and the non-human sphere such as mountain, rivers, lakes, forests and other natural elements in spiritual relationships (Waldmüller and
Altmann, 2018, 9). Arturo Escobar refers to these kind of ontologies as ‘relational ontologies’. That is, ontologies that include spiritual relationships with the non-human sphere and thus eschew the division between nature and culture, also described as cosmovision (Escobar, 2011, 139). This cosmovision informs how human, the non-human and universe are all connected in one unity that is founded on an interconnectedness with the natural world.

Escobar (2004) points out that, this relational understanding of the natural world contrast and collide with dominant Western ways of apprehending of the world. For example, the philosophy of Western rational and scientific discourse has a dualist worldview that is based on a strict separation between human and nature. That is why it is important to acknowledge that different the visions and values of these distinct worldviews can clash in struggles over natural resources which illustrate the significance to consider how decisions are justified in these conflicts. Reconnecting to the definition of territoriality provided by Waldmüller and Altmann, the assumption that territory can be thought of from a legal and political perspective also implies that territory is always politicized. That is why Arturo Escobar points out that, many struggles for the defense of territories and cultural differences can be understood as epistemological and ontological struggles (2015, 13). This discipline refers to political ontology that involves thinking over struggles over natural resources as ethno-territorial:

The perseverance of communities, commons, and the struggles for their defense and reconstitution – particularly, but not only, those that incorporate explicitly ethno-territorial dimensions— involves resistance and the defense and affirmation of territories that, at their best and most radical, can be described as ontological. Conversely, whereas the occupation of territories by capital and the State implies economic, technological, cultural, ecological, and often armed aspects, its most fundamental dimension is ontological (Escobar, 2015, 20).
Previous research

In this chapter I will present and discuss the previous research that I have identified as important contributions within the research field that informs this field study with knowledge and perspectives that are necessary in order to resolve the research questions. The literature that will be discussed in this chapter is linked to the academic debate of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* and research that deals with challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation in practice. One of the most important contributions to the research field is a systematic literature study by Antonio Luis Hidalgo-Capitán and Ana Patricia Cubillo-Guevara (2014) who systematically studied an extensive amount of relevant research that deals with different interpretations of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. The authors identify three dominant categories of current thought on the subject that will be described in detail in this chapter. My intention is not to challenge these categories but rather accept them as simplified categories of current thought within the research field.

In the following study, Rickard Lalander and Javier Cuestas-Caza (2017) departs from these categories and further problematize the intellectual debate and the implementation in practice. Interesting and important aspects are highlighted link to the process of epistemic extractivism which is a phenomenon that Cuestas-Caza (2018) further problematizes in a bibliographic and ethnographic field study of *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. The ‘extraction of knowledge’ from a distance is also analyzed and problematized by Philip Altmann in a study where he describes the use of the concepts by the academic discourse as: “a well-intentioned appropriation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*” (2019, 1). In the study, differences and similarities of how the academia respectively “the inventors” are contrasted. Issues are raised and critically discussed about the extraction of knowledge that according to Altmann can be described as an act of colonization of the indigenous movement and its actors.

Three (simplified) categories of current thought on *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*

In this section I will discuss the three simplified categories of current thought of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* in more detail. As noted above, Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara (2014) have undertaken extensive bibliographic searches for literature in the debate of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* where they identify six central debates: its meaning, translation, origin, cultural referent and the relation with development. The authors conclude that the intellectuals that participate in these debates do so from different cultural paradigms: Andean worldview, modernism, or post-modernism. These are

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*Alli Kawsay is a concept that often is described as a conception that exist in northern Andean highlands of Ecuador. This will be further discussed and problematized in this chapter.*
summarized in three different (simplified) categories: Indigenous/culturalist category, Post-development/radical ecologist and the third Socialist-statist (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014, 26-28). However, it shall be emphasized that in practice, actors can show elements that belong to more than one of the categories. The simplified categories are summarized in the table below:

| Table 1. Three simplified categories of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017, 9). |
|-------------------------------------------------|--|-----------------|--|
| **Epistemology-ontology** | Indigenous-culturalist | Post-developmentalistic/radical ecologist | Eco-socialist/statist |
| Ancestral knowledge and practices (Andean/Amazonian) | Post-modernism | Modernity |
| **Terminology** | Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay | Buen-Vivir/Good Life | Buen-Vivir/Vivir-Bien, Human development, Sustainable development, Bio-socialism |
| **Position toward “development”** | Alternatives “from” and “for” | Alternatives “to” development | Alternative development |
| **Principal agents** | Communities and nationalities | Society | State |
| **Strategies** | Communitarian (re-)construction | Post-extractivism, Participatory transformation, Degrowth | Governance, Transformation of production |
| **Nature** | Expansion of communitarian principles, Kawsak Sacha/Selva Viviente/Living Forest, Pachamama/Mother Earth | Strong sustainability, Biocentrism/Ecocentrism | Pragmatism, Soft sustainability, Anthropocentrism, Eurocentrism |

The first category, the Eco-socialist/statist, is characterized by the political use of the concept that relates to social justice and welfare distribution with less focus on environmental and cultural aspects. Much of these contributions are associated with the politics of the government of Rafael Correa. These principles have been described as models of alternatives within development with the state as principal agent. The principles are linked to forms of ‘eco-socialism’ with a focus on welfare distribution which has contributed to creating tensions in the state’s commitment to the constitutionally recognized Rights of Nature (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014). That is why this category has attracted much critique that is linked to its pragmatic approach and defense of
extractivism as a model of development (Gudynas, 2011; Acosta, 2011). In this category, the
terminology of Buen-Vivir is commonly used, rather than Sumak Kawsay. As illustrated in the table,
this category is influenced by modernity with an anthropocentric view of the natural world in which
human beings are superior to the natural world.

The second category of thought, ‘Post-development.radical ecologist’, is characterized by ideas of
preserving nature and biodiversity to deal with the socio-ecological crisis in the world with the
contribution of indigenous knowledge and traditions. That is why this category considers Sumak
Kawsay/Buen-Vivir as an alternative to development (Acosta, 2010a). Like the previous category, Buen-
Vivir is more commonly used in terminology rather than Sumak Kawsay. It has described as an utopia
to be constructed which assumes the participation of the citizens not only in the implementation
process, but also in the definition process. Furthermore, it has an ‘eco-centric’ view that is opposed to
an anthropocentric approach. In this sense, this category perceives Buen-Vivir as a critical paradigm to
Eurocentric modernity that is characterized by global capitalism and anthropocentric views of nature
that have contributed in creating the ecological crisis and climate change. In general, this category of
thought has a critical stance against how the government of Rafael Correa used the concept in
extractivist policies and is primarily concerned over sustainability and the rights of the indigenous
peoples (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014).

The third category, Indigenist-culturalist, or “Pachamamista”, is characterized by self-determination
of the indigenous peoples and the importance to acknowledge spiritual elements from the Andean
cosmovision (Pachamama and other spirits, myths, legends and rituals in indigenous cultures). In this
category the terminology Sumak Kawsay is used rather than Buen-Vivir because the intellectuals from
this category argue that the latter is a concept that is (re-)filled with Western elements that does not
have any relation to ancestral indigenous culture and knowledge (Macas, 2010; Maldonado, 2011;
Oviedo, 2011). Therefore, it has a critical view of the translation from Sumak Kawsay to Buen-Vivir
where they argue that many symbols and codes are lost in the translation process. The fundamental
ideas of this category of thought are linked to the creation of harmonic relationships between humans
and nature, based on a socio-economic that is interconnected with the non-human sphere in spiritual
relationships and include thoughts of de-colonial thinking, communitarianism, justice, solidarity,

Problems emerging around the translation and different ontological matrixes

Departing from these categories described above, Rickard Lalander and Javier-Cuestas-Caza (2017)
have undertaken an ethnographic study in which they analyze and problematize the intellectual debate
of *Sumak Kawsay*/*Buen-Vivir* as well as the implementation of these values in practice. An important aspect they highlight concerns the translation from *Sumak Kawsay* to *Buen-Vivir*. The translation is described to contribute to a simplification and a reduction of content in which many significations are lost. For instance, for the Indigenous/culturalist category, *Sumak* translates ‘harmony’ or ‘plenitude’ and *Kawsay* translates ‘life’, ‘coexist’. Thus, a common translation is ‘life in plenitude’ (vida en plenitud’ or beautiful life (vida hermosa) whereas *Buen-Vivir* translates ‘Good life’, or ‘Good way of living’ (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017, 36-37). This is further problematized in a literature and ethnographic field study in the province Imbabura by Cuestas-Caza (2018) where he departs from the question: are *Sumak Kawsay* and *Buen-Vivir* the same? According to the author, the answer to his stated questions is: no, *Sumak Kawsay* and *Buen-Vivir* are not the same.

This answer is based on three arguments: there is an imprecise translation, they have different epistemology and they have different ontology. For instance, he points out that, if we consider a similar translation of *Buen-Vivir* it could be Alli Kawsay in Kichwa. This term in Kichwa express the aspiration to improve the quality of life in the interdependence with other human beings in the environment that also include [forced or imposed] cultural notions and learned cultural notions such as money, the market and capital. The other argument is linked to the fact that the concepts have different epistemology. For instance, for the Socialist-statist category of thought, the concepts were turned into a political project that was accepted for its novelty and intellectual base but in practice it turned out as a new model of development based on ideas of eco-socialism and sustainable development (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 53-56).

Furthermore, for the Post-development/radical ecologist category, *Buen-Vivir* is conceived as a critical concept against capitalist modernity. It is inspired by and use some elements of Andean thought and combine them with deep ecology, de-growth, eco-feminism among others that ultimately overshadow the epistemological content of the term in Kichwa. The third and last argument relates to the ontological dimension of the issue. Cuestas-Caza conclude that both the ontological matrix of the categories of Eco-socialist/statist and Post-development/radical ecologist are located in the West. He explain this phenomenon as: “they share the Western DNA” (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 58). Academics and politicians use the ideas as to criticize conventional developmentalism but based on Western episteme. He concludes that, under these three differences it is possible to identify a process of ‘cognitive extractivism’ that he calls ‘epistemic neocolonialism’ linked to the use of indigenous concepts. Thus, the Eco-socialist/statist and Post-development/radical ecologist categories of thought remains to the developed under the hegemony of Western intellectuality. Finally, Cuestas-Caza points out that, *Sumak Kawsay* for the Indigenous/culturalist category of thought is an ancestral Andean
conception of life that still can be found in many communities of the Ecuadorian Andes (2018, 60-62).

This translation and possible epistemic extractivism is an aspect that is further problematized in a study by Philip Altmann (2019) where he points out that much of the academic discussion is separated from the original proponents of the concept and the indigenous movement in Ecuador. In the study, the arguments of Altmann is inspired by a discourse analysis of the history of the concepts (Altmann, 2016) that focus on key actors that engage in the translation within the academia and ‘the inventors’ understanding of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir. He points out that the translation can be understood as a necessary effect but raises questions to that happened to the original and the fact that the indigenous history is excluded. Through his analysis he outlines and contrast central meanings. A summary of the main ideas from each category of thought is summarized in the table below.

Table 2. Summary of the two “different” interpretations of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir (Altmann, 2019, 2-9).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Buen-Vivir in the academic discourse</th>
<th>Buen-Vivir (Sumak Kawsay) for the ‘Inventors’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Buen-Vivir as a concept refers to living in harmony between humans and nature.</td>
<td>(1) Sumak Kawsay is a place-based concept that is inseparable from the territory where it was developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Buen-Vivir is considered an open concept that is in permanent construction. It’s inspired by indigenous practices and beliefs but not the indigenous movement. Buen-Vivir is enhanced by non-indigenous ideas related to de-growth, radical ecologism etc. Therefore, Sumak Kawsay is nothing more than a local and reduced variant of a supra-local concept.</td>
<td>(2) Sumak Kawsay is an open concept. That is, it is based on indigenous worldview and philosophy, but it is open in the sense that it integrates external ideas that fit the framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Buen-Vivir rejects the idea centrality of economy and the idea of a linear development.</td>
<td>(3) Sumak Kawsay is a political concept that is linked to the struggle for autonomy and power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Buen-Vivir can function as a concept to rethink Western ontology and epistemology.</td>
<td>(4) Sumak Kawsay is based on communitarian thinking that includes the non-human sphere in spiritual relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the appropriation of the concept by the academic discourse rests on the assumption that there is a need to critique to existing society and its dominant structures. The act of colonization of knowledge occurs when knowledge is extracted from its context and theorized into Western concepts that implies an essentialization of the concept and the invisibilization and colonization of the
movement and people as political actors. This raises questions and issues related to inconsistencies in the understanding of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* on behalf of the academia. For instance, Altmann points out that, *Buen-Vivir* in the academic discourse would never (in theory) allow the extraction of natural resources, whereas *Sumak Kawsay* could (in theory) allow such things under the control of local communities. The appropriation of the concept delegitimizes and invisible much of its content and history (2019, 10-13) which has been one of the driving forces of this study to examine these issues on the field through interviews and observations.

In the discussion above it is possible to identify a few issues that deserves to be further problematized. Many of them can be identified in the different versions of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* that have emerged when people from different epistemic communities participate and contribute to the debate. Two major issues are identified as central in this study that will be further analyzed and problematized. The first refers to the pragmatic approach by the state in which many contradictions have emerged in practice due to the state’s continuance to rely on extractivism. A discrepancy between the constitutionally recognized rights of nature and implementation in practice is identified with the guiding principles of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. However, further issues emerge due to the different interpretations of these concepts that also deserves to be further problematized in this study. The second aspect refers to the epistemic extractivism where indigenous concepts are combined with theories that come from Western epistemologies and ontologies.
Methodology

In this chapter I will present and discuss the methodological approach including important remarks about the philosophical assumptions of this study. I will also discuss the data collection process and details about the material that was gathered during two months of fieldwork in Ecuador. Furthermore, the chapter include a critical discussion of my role as a ethnographic researcher linked to ethical and subjective issues throughout the research process. Thus, this chapter deals with aspects related to both theoretical and practical issues related in the process of conducting ethnographic research on the field. Methodologically, this study is based primarily on interviews and participatory observations during two months of fieldwork in Ecuador, but also a critical reading of the research debate and qualitative analysis of relevant documents such as official statements and policy-document. However, the most important sources of empirical material have been gathered from first hand sources in interviews and my observations that have contributed to a greater understanding of the context of the research problem.

In order to resolve the comparative research question (Q3), the methodology has a comparative component that will be further described in this chapter. Finally, it needs to be emphasized that this field study only provides insights within its limits. Since I was only able to stay in Ecuador for about two months, I recognize that my conclusions are limited to the material presented in this study and reserve myself from making larger generalizations outside the empirical material. Furthermore, the comparative approach should be considered as a simplification. It shall also be noted that the persons I interviewed do not represent the whole communities in which they live in, but the many of them have academic knowledge and political experience that provide the material with valuable insights.

Philosophical assumptions

Since the research problem of this field study deals with epistemological and ontological issues, some clarifications about the philosophical assumptions are necessary. This study departs from social constructivist worldview and thus recognize the existence of multiple constructed realities while realizing that there is a physical world in which people ascribe meaning to physical objects such as mountains, rivers, lakes among others. The world is as Arturo Escobar puts it, ‘made up of multiple worlds and multiple ontologies’ (Escobar, 2015, 15). This is particularly important in this study because it deals with worldviews that come from indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that collide and challenge Western ways of apprehending the world. That is why this field study has a qualitative and ethnographic research approach in order to study and problematize how people ascribe meanings to issues, phenomenons and concepts. From these philosophical assumptions, it provides the
ethnographic study with an ‘inductive analytical lens’ in order to study cultural perceptions of physical places and objects and how these are interconnected in human and spiritual relationships (Creswell, 2013).

Methodological approach

The research design of this study has an ethnographic qualitative approach where data has been data from multiple sources such as previous research and other relevant documents such as the national development plans. However, the main method for collecting data was through interviews and observations on the field because the study is dependent on getting insights from the people, I interviewed in order to resolve the research questions. That is, to identify and problematize challenges and dilemmas associated with implementation process and to study how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is perceived, interpreted and practiced on local community level. This research design of this field study likewise has a comparative component in order to study similarities and differences in how Sumak Kawsay is perceived, interpreted and practiced in two different regions of Ecuador. There are several reasons for this. The first reason refers to the fact that this study has identified a notion of reductionism and simplification in the debate about Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir. The second is linked to the previous reason and refers to the assumption that indigenous cultures are not homogenous, not even within the same nationality such as Kichwa peoples. This study intends to nuance this discussion.

The last and perhaps the most important reason is connected to the importance to problematize how historical events such as conditions of material resources and relations of power shape historical processes and relations to territory (Eriksen, 2018). Departing from the assumption that different geographical areas have been prioritized and subject to different integration processes in urban and rural areas, it has both material and discursive effects on the people living in that specific area. That is why this departs from what Eriksen (2018) call a ‘comparative historical approach’ that emphasize the need to take history into account when comparing contrasts and similarities between cases and cultures. According to Eriksen, this approach makes it easier to avoid the research to be operated within a fixed framework and focus on the importance of understanding how culture and outcomes are shaped by how processes unfold in time. Thus, the need to take in space and time into account in the research approach when problematizing different perceptions and interpretations of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir on local community level.
General aspects about the fieldwork

The fieldwork was conducted between the 30th of January and 4th of April 2019 in Ecuador. More specifically, in the northern Andean highlands in the province of Imbabura and in the Amazon in the provinces of Pastaza and Napo. The main reasons for this choice was mainly due to practical concerns, e.g. having access to contacts through my supervisor Rickard Lalander, but also because of the comparative research approach in which I will discuss similarities and differences in how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level. In total I made two trips to each region except Napo where I only was once. Each visit was approximately 1-2 weeks. In Imbabura I spent most of my time and conducted fieldwork in Otavalo, Cotacachi, La Calera and Punkuwayku. In Pastaza I did most of my fieldwork in Puyo, Canelos and a few visits to communities in the surrounding area. The fieldwork also included several trips to Quito, which is the capital of Ecuador, where I was invited as an associate researcher at Simón Bolívar Andean University (Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar).

Interviews

The interviews were semi-structured and open-ended which allowed a high degree of flexibility during the interviews. Before the interviews I had prepared bullet points with topics and themes that I had identified as interesting or problematic and wanted to ask and discuss with the informant. In order to open up for flexibility, open-ended interviews gave space for further discussions of aspects and perspectives I considered important and interesting that led to follow-up questions. My intentions were always to intervene as little as possible in order to let the participants share their views while at the same time guiding the interview in a direction accordingly to the purpose of the study. Because of the different backgrounds of the participants I always prepared myself carefully before the interviews and asked myself questions such as: who is this person? How can this person contribute to ‘filling the gaps’ in relation to the research questions?

It shall be noted that some of the interviews were improvised without background checks because a few times I travelled to communities or visited offices without knowing people in those specific places that in some cases led to interviews or conversations. However, in these cases I always initiated the interviews with asking questions of their background. Moreover, in some cases I talked with a participant for a while and then later asked if we perhaps could make an interview. All the interviews were carried out in Spanish while taking notes and recorded with audiotaping that was later transcribed with the help of native Spanish speaking people. Even though many people I interviewed had Kichwa as their native language, the majority of the people I met understood and spoke Spanish fluently with the exception of some elderly people.
Observations

In this field study, my own experiences through observations are perhaps one of the most important sources of contextual understanding of the research problem. In other words, to complement the material that was gathered through interviews, field observations and participatory observations that I experienced are important sources for my own understanding of the context and daily life experiences. It shall be emphasized that in some cases I was more active and integrated the participatory observations and sometimes less active and had an external role. The observations included living together with Indigenous peoples where I participated in the daily work (La Minga) such as working with agriculture, cooking and serving food at the local market, making and painting handcraft and other activities. These observations also included sharing everyday life experiences where I got to know many of the people I met and became friends with their families.

By sharing everyday life experiences, I also got a deeper understandings of the struggles related to daily life such as food scarcity, bad harvests, unemployment, poverty, culture loss among others. But perhaps most importantly I got to experience many positive things during my observations that is connected to how community thinking and solidarity was expressed in the daily lives between families and neighbors. Furthermore, it shall be noted that the majority of observations were conducted in Punkuwayku in the province of Imbabura and Canelos in the province of Pastaza. In summary, my observations can be described as serving the purpose of forming my own understanding of the context and experiences that constitutes an fundamental component of the methodological approach of this field study. As Cresswell (2013) simply puts it, observations on the field makes it possible to reflect about the issues that are being investigated from a perspective that is not possible from a distance.

Selection and description of participants

The selection of informants of this field study was firstly based on practical concerns, i.e. access to contacts in the field. Since my supervisor Rickard Lalander has conducted research in the country for several years I got the possibility to get in contact with many people through him. I also got in contact with informants through people I met during my stay in Ecuador. Many times, I asked people that I met or interviewed if they knew someone I could talk to about further questions of topics that led to further meetings and/or interviews. The so called ‘snowball effect’ in field work. Because of these practical circumstances I met people from different backgrounds and sectors of society. For example, the people I interviewed included historical leaders of the indigenous movement, scholars, politicians, local leaders in communities such as Canelos and Punkuwayky and also various people that lived in cities and communities, both indigenous and non-indigenous. Therefore, I had to prepare carefully
between the interviews and consider how a specific person could contribute with perspectives to resolve the research questions. For instance, I did not ask a white mestizo that lived in central Quito how *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* is practiced at local community level in indigenous communities. In total 19 interviews were carried out; a detailed list can be found in the appendix.

**Ethical and moral considerations**

Because of the nature of the research approach of this field study, the research process involved many sensitive aspects that are connected to ethical and moral considerations and important scientific rules in the process of conducting qualitative research. For instance, informed consent, aspects of confidentiality and important cultural considerations. Before I started the interview, I always informed about the purpose of my study and why their perspectives were valuable. This was a very important part of the process because it was during this time much of the trust with the participant was built. On some occasions I first met a person and got to know her or him, and later we decided to make an interview. In my perspective, this approach was preferable because interviews that were relaxed and had an open-ended strategy that gave the interview a good ‘flow’ where many new interesting themes and aspects came up out from the discussion. I always informed the participant that they could withdraw at any time and did not try to force anyone to participate or ask leading question that would give the answer ‘I was looking for’. I also informed of the possibility to stay anonymous and how I was going to store the data and then delete it. Furthermore, during the interviews I always tried to be very sensitive to cultural and religious differences with great respect towards the participants answers and understandings of phenomenons.

**Critical self-reflections**

Since this study departs from a social constructivist philosophical perspective some important remarks need to made that are linked to my own bias and reflexivity. I recognize the impossibility to reach a complete state of objectivity as a researcher. My interpretations will always be biased somehow since we interpret phenomenons and meaning with our pre-existing knowledge and cultural background. It would be naive to think otherwise in an interpretative field study as this one. However, as Cresswell (2013) explains, this important process is something that needs to be recognized and accepted as a researcher. Explanations of how and why phenomenons are interpreted in certain ways is an important way of dealing with subjectivity and will be considered in throughout this study. Moreover, I also needed to consider my own background and position in society. For instance, me being a white male from Europe with access to social welfare and high education is something inevitable and linked to power structures. It is of course a very particular situation when a white male from Europe arrives in a
place that has a history of colonial domination and genocidal violence such as Canelos and Punkuwayku.

As Lembke et al. (2019: forthcoming) explain, many sites are marked by historical injustices and power struggles that contributes to challenges in taking active positions in questions. For instance, my own understanding and sympathy for the unjust and terrible act of colonial domination. I tried to deal with this by reflecting upon my own standpoints in topics and discussions we had during interviews. Since many of the people I met had had negative experiences in terms of their ancestors being dominated by the colonizers. I was very careful and tried to be as respectful as possible when dealing with these issues. I also dealt with this by sharing thoughts of my worldview and understanding of history and political processes. In summary, I recognize that my interpretations and conclusions will be somehow ideologically affected because it is an inevitable part of qualitative research. To deal with these aspects, I recognize the importance of describing how my interpretations were made and being open and critically assess my own perceptions of my pre-existing knowledge and ideological and political standpoints.
Background

In this chapter I will briefly discuss some important and relevant aspects of the socio-political context of the research problem that begins with a short overview of the Indigenous movement in Ecuador followed by a brief discussion of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* how the concepts ended up in the new Constitution of 2008 through the contributions by Alberto Acosta and other main persons. Finally, the last part is a short discussion about the National Development Plans (NDP) that are prepared by the state institution National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES) that include the governance principles and visions that are planned to be implemented over the next for years, e.g. visions and values of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* (SENPLADES, 2010).

The Indigenous Movement in Ecuador

Since the Spanish conquest of the Americas in the 16th century and the establishment of coloniality of power, the indigenous peoples of Ecuador have experienced relations of domination and inequalities through imposed models of development and ways of thinking (Quijano, 2000). As a response to this historical colonial oppression and marginalization, the indigenous movement in Ecuador emerged as the most prominent and consequential social movement in Latin America since the 1980s (Yashar, 2005, 23). The movement has been described as one of the best organised social movements in the world (Becker, 2011; Lalander, 2016) and as one of the most successful throughout Latin America (Jameson, 2011, 63). One of the central demands of the social movement refers to the social injustices that have prevailed colonial domination including equal rights and inclusion. In other words, the recognition of different nationalities and cultures within Ecuador. That is, the demand for a Plurinational and Intercultural state with the possibility to establish local autonomies in the struggle against dominant economic and political forces (Yashar, 2005). Since the social movement emerged in the 1980’s, several achievements have been made, including constitutional reforms and legalization over territories that are considered ancestral lands of the Indigenous peoples.

Several political organizations have played a major role in this movement. However, Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) has been described as the most influential (Becker, 2011; Altmann, 2013). When CONAIE was formed in 1986, the organization unified the different indigenous groups in Ecuador and marks a significant year in the movement. It is in quantitative terms the largest organisation on the basis of fourteen indigenous nationalities from the highlands, Amazon, and the coast (Becker, 2011, 9). Since the formation, CONAIE has pursued
various actions\textsuperscript{10} that have gained national and international attention that have contributed in shaping the political discourse of Ecuador (Yashar, 2005). Many of the demands that have been put forward are linked to acts of legislation of their ancestral territories to protect them from extractivism of natural resources and constitutional reforms that reflect the plurinational and multicultural reality of Ecuador and its citizens, i.e. the recognition of several nationalities and cultures within the country (Becker, 2011). The struggle for the establishment of Ecuador as a plurinational state with the right to autonomous self-determination has since its formation remained as one of the central demands of the Indigenous movement (Altmann, 2016, 164). After Rafael Correa was elected in 2007, progressive achievements have been made in terms of a new Constitution that embodies elements of the principles put forward by the movement linked to plurinationality and interculturality. However, there still exist much disagreement and lack of clear definitions on the meaning and realization of Ecuador as a plurinational intercultural state in practice (Jameson, 2011, 63-6).

The Discourse of Sumak Kawsay and The New Magna Carta of 2008

\textit{Sumak Kawsay} became a political concept in Ecuador during the 1990s through the indigenous movement in Ecuador (Altmann, 2019, 7). Originally it was first used in the Amazonian province of Pastaza by local Indigenous organizations. Particularly in the Kichwa-Sarayaku territory and later in the Organization of Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza (OPIP). The historical Kichwa-Sarayaku leader Carlos Viteri Gualinga together with his brothers Alfredo, Leonardo and Froilán were among the first who intellectualized the conception of \textit{Sumak Kawsay} where the concept of development do not exist and thus emerged as an alternative to the idea of development (Lalander and Lembke, 2018, 5). However, \textit{Sumak Kawsay} for the people of Sarayaku (sarayakuruna) mainly included a systematization of how to manage territory-community-natural resources relations on local community level. It was not until approximately ten years later in 2000 the concept was introduced in the ethnographic fieldstudies by Viteri Gualinga about visions of development as an alternative to the occidental vision of development (Altmann, 2016, 55). In 2003 he published his path-breaking ethnographic field study which has been considered as one of the most important contributions to the conceptualization of \textit{Sumak Kawsay} on the basis of local knowledge that has been transmitted through generations (Altmann, 2015, 179).

In 2003, the local organization in Sarayaku published a manifesto that was directed against the struggle against oil exploitation and other natural resources in their community in the book that is

\textsuperscript{10} An important example is ‘The March’ (la caminata) in 1992 that started in Puyo in the province of Pastaza in Amazon. 13 days later the march reached the capital of Quito, the numbers of participants had grown to approximately ten thousand peoples (Becker, 2011).
called ‘The book of the life of Sarayaku to defend our future’\(^{11}\) (Sarayaku, 2003, 1). During this period of time, the mestizo economist Alberto Acosta\(^{12}\) promoted the concept in public and referred to Viteri Gualingas texts and *Sumak Kawsay* as “a possible alternative to capitalism” (Acosta, 2002, 46). In 2007 Acosta was elected as chairing president in the National Constitutional Assembly that had the task to elaborate the new Constitution of 2008 and published several key conceptual works on *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*. Acosta has contributed with some of the most important contributions within the ‘Post-developmentalist/radical ecologist’ category of thought. According to various sources, Acosta has been described as one of the key persons in incorporating *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* through his important contributions (Waldmuller, 2014, 1-2).

On September 28, 2008, the new Constitution was approved with a wide margin during the presidency of the charismatic leader Rafael Correa who claimed his political views to the left. He famously declared that Ecuador was a new nation where the constitution promised to finally bring an end to the neoliberal policies that had contributed in creating inequalities and the shifting wealth from marginalized groups in society (Becker, 2011, 47). Since the ratification of the new Constitution it has gained international recognition due to its progressive strategies in terms of safeguarding the natural heritage in the Amazon through the constitutionally recognized Rights of Nature. And of course, the incorporation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir* that also have gained substantial interest in the academia within and outside Latin America. However, the newly elected president Lenin Moreno has expressed critique against the new Constitution and especially *Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir*, saying that it does not deal with the problem of reducing poverty in society. This was followed by the closing down of related agencies and the erasing of the concepts in public policy such as the National Development Plans that will be further described in the next section (Altmann, 2019, 5-6).

**Sumak Kawsay / Buen Vivir in The National Development Plans (2009-2021)**

The National Development Plans (NDP) are prepared by the state institution National Secretariat for Planning and Development (SENPLADES). SENPLADES is the administration and coordinating institution that establish policies and objectives in Ecuador. Every presidential term a new NDP is presented that sets the governance principles and visions that is planned to be implemented over the next four years (SENPLADES, 2010). These NDPs are important because in these specific documents

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\(^{11}\) In Spanish: ‘El libro de la vida de Sarayaku para defender nuestro futuro’.

\(^{12}\) Alberto Acosta was the former energy minister in the Correa government and later elected president of the National Assembly with the role to construct a democratic society where he pledged to work under the principle of *Sumak Kawsay* and published several important works on the issue and was the person who drafted the new Constitution of 2008. Later on, Acosta resigned and ‘broke up’ with Correa (Becker, 2011, 50-51).
it is possible to identify the values and visions that promote the implementation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* and the construction of the Plurinational and Intercultural state of Ecuador from the perspective of the state. The NDPs also include the visions and values of economic development and strategies of progress which is particularly interesting for this study due to the possible clash between values and visions of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* and development. During the presidency of Rafael Correa (2007-2017), three NDPs were prepared in total\(^\text{13}\) whereas during the presidency of newly elected Lenin Moreno one NDP has been prepared. In this study, it is particularly relevant in this study to consider how the concepts *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* and the constitutionally recognized Rights of Nature are reflected in the NDPs and if these values and visions change over time. Further details about how *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* are reflected in the NDPs are presented in the paragraph below.

Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo Guevara (2018) have conducted a quantitative and qualitative study that examine the frequency of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* in the NDPs and how they were framed, e.g. the visions and values associated with the concepts. In short, in the NDP that was prepared for 2009-2013 the concepts became the central and guiding principles of national public policies that included different visions of ‘well-being’ and ‘good life’ that was inspired by indigenous knowledge and traditions. This was during the celebratory period of time after the new Constitution was ratified. The NDP of 2013-2017 the concepts were associated with new meanings and referred to as ‘socalism of good living’, in which sustainable development and equity was emphasized through the distribution of resources in welfare policies. This was the period of time that the government attracted much critique because of its pragmatic approach and the combination of indigenous concepts with principles that legitimizied the extraction of natural resources. Finally, when newly elected president Lenin Moreno the NDP of 2017-2021 was prepared and does not include the concept of *Sumak Kawsay*, whereas *Buen-Vivir* is mentioned, but Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo Guevara concludes that it is not a central concept in comparison with the previous NDPs. This simplified overview over how the concepts have been reflected in the NDPs show how the concepts went from being very central in public strategies to barely not being mentioned (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo Guevara, 2018, 45-53). The political economist Albert Hirschman commented this as the following:

> Between 2007 and 2017 we have witnessed the rise and fall of Good Living in the national planning of development in Ecuador (cited in Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo Guevara, 2018, 18).

\(^{13}\) Due to the new political circumstances and new legal Constitutional framework a new NDP was presented three years after the 2007-2010 NDP (SENPLADES, 2010, 3).
Empirical material

This chapter constitutes the part of the thesis where the empirical material will be presented and discussed in a descriptive way. In order to not confuse the reader, the chapter is structured according to the research questions. Starting with RQ1 that deals with the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* and the constitutionally recognized rights of nature in practice. The following two subchapters are linked to RQ2 and RQ3 that examine how *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level in two different chosen regions. Since this field study has a comparative approach, the empirical material from the Amazonian Pastaza is presented in the first subchapter whereas the empirical material from the province of Imbabura in the northern Andean highlands is presented in the following.

The Ecuadorian Resource Dilemma

The brief discussion in the background section about the NDPs illustrate how the frequency and the visions and values associated with *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* have shifted over time. It is also possible to identify some tensions and possible contradictions between the commitments to the rights of nature and the promotion of ‘eco-socialism’ and ‘bio-socialism’. For instance, the pragmatic approach of the state has attracted critique when the interpretations of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* have been combined with principles of ‘eco-socialism’. One of the possible reasons linkes to that might ve conenbecause these principles focus on social justice and welfare distribution, but less on environmental and cultural aspects while promoting resource extractivism. The original interpretations of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* challenge the dominant understanding of welfare, common good and development, and likewise the pragmatic approach applied by the government towards the constitutional rights of nature and other human values. However, as Lalander (2014) points out, the country’s reliance on extracting natural resources has contributed in creating contradictory and paradoxical decisions and outcomes. This refers to what Rickard Lalander calls ‘the Ecuadorian Resource Dilemma’. The failure of the Yasuni-ITT project is a prime example of how this dilemma turned out in practice.

In 2007, Rafael Correa presented a project that included the suggestion to keep the country’s biggest oil reserves in the ground. The area is located in the Yasuni National Park in the eastern Amazon of Ecuador. The project initiated with the idea that the world’s leading countries should compensate Ecuador with half of the revenues that could have been extracted for leaving the oil in the ground in the light of a co-responsibility for protecting biodiversity and combating climate change (Lalander and Lembke, 2018). However, in 2013 the project was dismantled by president Correa because
Ecuador did not get the economic compensation they asked for from the international community. Correa stated the following in a broadcast on national television in 2013:

The world has failed us (...) I have signed the executive decree for the liquidation of the Yasuni-ITT trust fund and with this ended the initiative (...) it was not charity that we sought from the international community, but a co-responsibility in the face of climate change (The Guardian, 2013, 1).

After the project was dismantled, Correa approved and gave green light to the decision to extract oil from specific areas within area that originally was planned to be protected through the Yasuni-ITT initiative. It shall be noted that Correa lost the support from many of his original supporters during his first time in presidency. The decision to end the initiative signalled according to Gudynas (2014) that the progressive politics was replaced with the reorientation towards extractivism. When Correa introduced the Yasuni-ITT initiative it was welcomed by many that emphasized the need for the International community to take co-responsibility due to the rich amount of biodiversity and natural heritage in the Yasuni National Park and surrounding areas. However, there are also critical voices that express the idea that, Correa knew from the beginning that he would not get the economic support he was asking for. In an interview with Luís Román Chávez who is a leather craftsman and previously involved in local politics in Cotacachi, he expressed the following about the issue:

It does not mean very much, it [Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir] is an electoral tool that today can be found in the Constitution, but it does not have a conceptualization that works in practice. There are too many contradictions. Regarding the rights of nature we can for example see how Correa managed the Yasuni ITT project where he called on the international community to deliver economic compensation for leaving the oil in the ground (...) but in my opinion I think he never thought that it would work. But he gave an impression that it would work. But in the end it was only an electoral trick, a demagogic trick (Luís Román Chávez, Interview, Cotacachi, 4 February 2019).

Román Chávez express the issue of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir as not having a conceptualization that works in practice. Rather, there are too many contradictions and was used as a ‘political trick’ in the political mobilization by Rafael Correa. Román Chavez is not alone in this standpoint as we will be illustrated in the next paragraph. These critical views are also expressed by Mario Conejo who is recently elected mayor of the city of Otavalo in the province of Imbabura:

Correa spoke very nicely and said that, no, we are not going to exploit the Yasuni but the developed countries need to contribute economically in order to not exploit the Yasuni. When they said no, Correa said that, well then, we have to exploit the territory because of the nature of reality. But in my opinion
this was just a game to play with the conscience of the world (Mario Conejo, Interview, Peguche, 2nd April 2019).

The failure of the Yasuni ITT project is just one example of how contradictory decisions and paradoxical outcomes have emerged in the environmental politics of Ecuador throughout the presidency of Rafael Correa (2007-2017). Lalander and Lembke (2018) conclude in their study that, the last ten years of environmental politics show apparent tensions and contradictions between resource governance, welfare policies and the constitutionally recognized rights of nature. The authors identify these contradictions between the principles of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir and the idea of ‘living in harmony with nature’, and the rights of the State to exploit natural resources as long as the incomes are used for the common good. The country’s reliance on resource extractivism to finance welfare appears to be a dilemma which contributes in creating these contradictory arguments and outcomes. Conejo further expressed his critical view of the challenges linked to resource governance and the constitutionally principles of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir and the rights of nature:

It is a very romantic constitution. Because the reality that existed before the new Constitution from 2008 was ratified has not changed much, it remains the same, and therefore the ones who dreamed of the realization of the new Constitution is a product of the mobilization. And for the lawmakers who dreamed and thought about the realization of the new beautiful and romanticized Constitution, they said that there is no Constitution like the one we have in Ecuador because of the rights of nature. However, in practice they give the green light for mining (Mario Conejo, Interview, Peguche, 2nd April 2019).

Conejo express a rather critical standpoint when he calls the new Constitution as ‘beautiful and romanticized’14. From the view of of Conejo, it is possible to identify a discrepancy between the new Constitution and the implementation in practice that is grounded in the ideas that their definitions do not have a conceptualization that works in reality. This reality can be put in relation to the fact that Ecuador is relying on resource extractivism that collide with the principles of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir and the Rights of Nature. Leonardo Viteri Gualinga is a historical spokesperson of the indigenous movement and one of the Viteri Gualinga brothers who intellectualized Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir during the 90’s. During an interview in Puyo, he expressed his views on the issue of the implementation processes linked to the NDPs:

14 In an interview with Walter Canelos (a local leader in Canelos, Pastaza) he stated likewise: “(...) the words in the new Constitution are very beautifully written, but what happens now?” (Walter Canelos, Interview, Canelos 20 March 2019).
This concept [Sumak Kawsay] is a concept that originally is a concept of everyday living for us, we have transferred this philosophical concept to the national text in order for the plans, programs, projects of the public institutions and the state will become policies and management practices in all public institutions. Then, in this context, we achieved that through the recognition of Ecuador as a Plurinational and Intercultural state as declared in the constitution [from 2008] in which the principles of Sumak Kawsay can also be found. They have also been inserted in the national plan of good living, as they have called in the last 10 years. Currently the new is called the National Development Plan and now the challenges is that the institutions and authorities have to understand the importance and the content of these concepts and apply them in society. Because the concepts are there [in the new Constitution] (Leonardo Viteri Gualinga, Interview, Puyo, 9 February 2019).

As Leonardo Viteri Gualinga points out, the concepts are there, but challenges still remain in terms of the public institutions to understand and implement them. An important aspect that Leonardo Viteri Gualinga emphasize, is the fact that Sumak Kawsay is originally a concept of everyday living but has been transferred to the new Constitution of 2008 through the achievements of the Indigenous movement in Ecuador. The fact that these concepts and ideas have been inscribed in the Magna Carta of 2008 is seen as a positive achievement. Moreover, in the translation process many significations are lost. This is something that is emphasized by Miguel Ángel Carlosama who is a historical leader in the indigenous movement in Ecuador when he expressed the following concerns:

The rise of this debate and incorporation of Sumak Kawsay in the new Constitution can be seen as a seed that can spread to many sectors of the Ecuadorian society. But in the last decade in the Ecuadorian case, I don’t know if it’s good or bad intention on behalf of the government, but in the National Development Plans, Sumak Kawsay function as a guiding principle but unfortunately it remains literal in the sense of only being a literal translation of Kichwa thought translated to Spanish. That is, there is no holistic view [cosmovision] and therefore the translation reduce much of its content. And from my view, what also is missing is the understanding of Sumak Kawsay as a project against the capitalistic system that is unjust, selfish, individualistic, imposed under forced conditions to dominate. That is why there is a part of the history of Sumak Kawsay that has not been constructed, and we are not constructing it either (...) but imagine, it is not only a philosophy, it is constitutional, which means that there exist a philosophy, including the legal facts, but it is necessary that the national assembly promote a law, a law to concretize Sumak Kawsay. The language, the traditions, the vision of our worldview etc. That is what we need, that is definitely what we need. (Miguel Ángel Carlosama, Interview, Punkuwaykuy, 27 February 2019).

Many people agree with Leonardo Viteri Gualinga and Miguel Ángel Carlosama on the idea that the incorporation of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir in the new Constitution can be seen as a positive achievement but remains to be implemented in his view. The issue around the process of translating
**Sumak Kawsay to Buen-Vivir** is emphasized which is linked to the assumption that many of the ideas and principles within the concept are grounded on a holistic cosmovision that refers to everyday life experiences of indigenous peoples on local community level. This chapter has illustrated some of the challenges and dilemmas. One of the central is linked to the assumption that the concepts include a conceptualization that is difficult to implement in practice because the country still relies on revenues from extracting natural resources. Another challenge in implementing these visions and values in practice are linked to the assumption that the conception of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* originally emerged from indigenous ontologies. Thus, translating these principles and visions into national context implies that many symbols and codes were described to be lost in the translation process.

**Sumak Kawsay in the Amazonian Pastaza**

In this part of the chapter I will present and discuss the empirical material that is linked to RQ1 and RQ2, i.e. the research objective that is to study how *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level. In the first part I will go present and discuss the empirical material from the Amazonian Pastaza followed by the empirical material that deals with the the Andean highlands in Imbabura.

**Sumak Kawsay, Sarayakuruna and ‘Development’**

One of the most important contributions to the conception of *Sumak Kawsay* is the famous and path-breaking ethnographic field study by Carlos Viteri Gualinga who is originally from the community of Sarayaku in Pastaza. This study has been described as one of the most important contributions within the research field and therefore constitute important empirical material in this thesis. In the study, he has systematically studied how *Sumak Kawsay* is perceived and interpreted in Sarayaku. In the first pages of the thesis, Viteri Gualinga described *Sumak Kawsay* as the following:

*Sumac causai* is ‘*buen vivir*’ or ‘beautiful life’. It is a concept that has a connotation of what the *sarayakuruna* (Kichwa people of Sarayaku) conceive as the ideal meaning of life. It is a concept formed by two words: *sumak*: the good, the beautiful, the harmonic, the perfect and *kausai*: life, existence. The connotation of this phrase relates to an ideal condition of existence without deficiencies or crisis. The concept is intimately associated with a spatial component (territory) and a moral, ethical, and spiritual order, on the basis of individual, community and natural beings. In this context, *sumak kausai* is not static, but rather a process based on a system of relationships based on the individual, family and community which is exercised in various activities of daily life. The *sumak kausai* as the ideal of a harmonic life for the *runa* (the person) implies: territoriality, knowledge productivity and an intimate relation with the cosmos and *sacha* (jungle), abundance of species, fertile soils, healthy water, agricultural diversity, solidarity in social relations, reciprocity, sharing and the exchange of goods and a
relationship of respect with places and entities of the transcendent sphere of the jungle (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, 46-47).

The paragraph above describe how *Sumak Kawsay* is understood as a socio-ecological entity in which the background is a worldview that understands nature spirits as mediators between all living beings through a cosmovision. This worldview also includes animals, the jungle/forest, rivers, land and other spiritual entities. The communitarian organizing of the community is described to be based on the principles of solidarity, reciprocity and sharing between the people living there. It is also possible to identify how *Sumak Kawsay* is defined by the relation between a territory and the habitats who live there. From this view, *Sumak Kawsay* can be described as a conception that is closely bound up with a specific territory. One of the most central findings in the study describes how the dominant Western conception of development do not exist in the worldview of the *sarayakuruna*:

In the case of the *sarayakuruna* [Kichwa people of Sarayaku] in the province of Pastaza in the Ecuadorian Amazon, in whose cosmovision and the understanding of the meaning of life and the ultimate goal of human effort and knowledge, the concept of development does not exist. The conception of a linear process that establishes a previous and posterior state does not exist, i.e. between sub-development and development respectively, as is the case in societies of a European framing. Neither do the concepts of wealth and poverty exist, as an axis of accumulation or lack of material belongings or access to social services. There is an integrating vision of what the mission of human ambition should be, which consists of the search and creation of material, environmental and spiritual conditions to achieve and maintain *sumak causai*, which is the ideal of a ‘Good way of Living’ or ‘harmonious life’ (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, ii-iii).

The paragraph illustrates how ideas of development and progress (as understood in Western ways of thinking) do not exist. Neither does the concept of progress as understood in Western epistemology. Rather, the ideal of a ‘good life’ is based on material, environmental and spiritual conditions that are interconnected in order to achieve and maintain *Sumak Kawsay*. The distinct visions and understandings between Western thought and Andean thought are further described:

There exists an integrated vision which is to seek and create the material, environmental and spiritual conditions to reach and maintain sumac kausai. For this reason, it is inappropriate and unethical to apply the paradigm of development on the Amazonian nationalities, because it implies the introduction of an ideology that contrast with our sumac kausai. That would be a form of colonization of the imaginary. This shows how two different visions, the development as a Western paradigm does not correspond to the vision of ‘good way of living’ of the *sarayakuruna* and as a consequence the

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15 *‘Sarayakuruna’* means Kichwa people of the community Sarayaku in Pastaza in Kichwa language.
concepts either. The development and the idea of progress constitute values linked to the history of Eurocentric imaginary who seek to dominate nature with a quantitative rationality that contrast enormously from the parameters in the sumac kausai (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, iii-iv).

In the paragraph above Viteri Gualinga express how the Western idea of development does not correspond to the vision of ‘good way of living’ for the people of Sarayaku. Thus, it could be possible to say that these are two distinct ways of understanding what a ‘good life’ implies. Importantly, Viteri Gualinga points out that, it would be a colonization of the imaginary to apply these understandings of development on the Amazonian nationalities because it implies an introduction of an ideology that contrast with the vision of Sumak Kawsay in Sarayaku. The process of introducing these ideas on the Amazonian nationalities can be found in the struggle against oil exploration in the Amazon that the people of Sarayaku have experienced throughout history. That is why Viteri Gualinga call its: “an unequal economic and epistemological war, that is expressed in the exploitation of oil” (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, 85). The struggle against oil exploration is closely linked to Sumak Kawsay. Because if their land is contaminated, there cannot be Sumak Kawsay. As Viteri Gualinga points out, “there is no sumac causai without sumac allpa” (Viteri Gualinga, 1993, 150). This is described in more detail below:

In our long journey to the sumac allpa [land without evil] we have to come face to face with the chikan (foreigner), the unknown, strange and hostile world that threatens to annihilate our sumac sausai, our ‘harmonious life’ on which the chikan also depend. For this reason, at a time and in a space in the future, a life dedicated to correcting the errors now being made will become more and more necessary. We and they, runa and chikan, must renew our journey toward the same sumac allpa (Viteri Gualinga, 1993, 150).

Territoriality and the vision of a Socio-Ecological-Spiritual Entity

From the previous section, it is possible to identify that the understanding of territory and place must be seen on the basis of cultural and spiritual perceptions where the non-human sphere works as mediators. This worldview is rooted in a holistic cosmovision that is based on the idea of having harmonious relationship between human, nature and the spiritual world which is an important vision of Sumak Kawsay. Manuel Shiguango, a Kichwa from Archidona who is a local leader in his community and works at the local environmental agency in Napo, he described his perceptions of territoriality:
For us, the meaning of territoriality is a whole, its complete, it's everything, the economy, the social, the cultural, the natural, the spiritual. Everything is connected. (Manuel Shiguango, Interview, Tena 20 February 2019).

This holistic view of apprehending the world and connotations of territoriality create relationships of social-spiritual-natural interconnectedness that is bound up with physical places. These relationships are fragile and can be affected negatively by external threats or imbalance. In an interview with Tito Merino, who is a historical leader of the indigenous movement in Ecuador and has published several intellectual works on the issue, explained the sensitivity of these relationships in more detail:

The Sumac Allpa is a space where different forms and types of life interact, including the spirits. There are many myths and stories where our ancestors convert to animals such as tigers and anacondas after they die and continue to live in our territories. Therefore, it is very important that we maintain the land in Sumac Allpa. For us [the Kichwa people of Pastaza], the land is an element that is fundamental for Sumak Kawsay to exist. For example, many of our people have lost their territory or live in extreme poverty or suffered from oil contamination. But we who have still been able to maintain the land in Sumac Allpa continue to survive and live according to our principles. Therefore, the land is related to life, if there is no land, there is no life, and without life there is no Sumak Kawsay (Tito Merino, Interview, Puyo, 8 February 2019).

In the quote above it is illustrated how important it is to have access to their land that needs to be free from contamination and is referred to as Sumac Allpa (land without evil, e.g. oil contamination). Tito Merino also explain how territory is interconnected with Sumak Kawsay in spiritual relationships where their ancestors continue to live in animals. Thus, if their land is contaminated or taken away, this will affect their ancestors because without land, there is no life, and without life, there is no Sumak Kawsay. From this view, the importance of having access to land free from contamination becomes evident with the concept of Sumac Allpa. Leonardo Viteri Gualinga is an important spokesperson of the indigenous movement in Ecuador. In an interview with Leonardo in Puyo, he described Sumak Kawsay from a cultural and daily life experience perspective:

What is Sumak Kawsay for us? In cultural terms, in terms of daily life, it is an internal term, it’s not an isolated term and it is not only about having access to material things. Sumak Kawsay for us involves the practice of tangible rights such as culture, language, our worldview, but it's also strictly related to the abundance of nature and our territory. The abundance of not having a contaminated jungle that allow us to live in Sumak Kawsay. That is, Sumak Kawsay for the individual, the community as a whole and our nationality [The Kichwa indigenous peoples]. Within those relations it also involves the
spiritual part and the natural world that has to be in complete relationship and harmony to guarantee the
Sumak Kawsay (Leonardo Viteri Gualinga, Interview, Puyo, 9 February 2019).

Leonardo Viteri Gualinga describe how Sumak Kawsay is an integral term that is linked to their
culture, language, and worldview which is connected to nature and their territory through spiritual
relationships. Like his brother Carlos, he emphasizes the need to have their land free from
contamination in order to live in Sumak Kawsay. From this holistic and interconnected worldview, an
oil contamination in their lands would have both physical and psychological impacts.

Sumak Kawsay, Sumac Yachay and the communitarian lifestyle

In the previous section some principles have been identified that describes how Sumak Kawsay
include a series of relationships that are interconnected with the natural world, spirits and specific
territories. Another central vision of Sumak Kawsay is the communitarian way of organizing a
community that include specific principles and guide social relations between family and members of
a community. The central principles in this context are linked to egalitarian and collective
comunitarian principles based on solidarity. Tito Merino described in an interview how this plays out
in practice on local community level through the practice of mingas (collective work):

The Sumak Kawsay begins with the individual and the construction of family relations and the relations
within the community based on solidarity. For example, if there is a family that suffers or need help,
the neighbours come to help them with the help they need. That is what we call ‘the system of mingas’
(un sistema de mingas). If a family does not have a house, or a new family arrives, people get together
and help each other in ‘la minga’. For example, cut wood and build the house together. This is
organized with the help of the leader (el curaca) who is the elder and the shaman of the community
who is there watching everything. The curacas are the leaders of the community, not elected, but leader
by nature because they are the elders with knowledge and wisdom (Tito Merino, Interview, Puyo, 8
February 2019).

The system of collective work ‘la minga’ is an ancient indigenous tradition that is based on the idea of
collective work for the good of the community where most of the people have the obligation to
participate. As will be illustrated in the next section, this kind of collective work is also an important
part of organizing the local community among indigenous peoples in the province of Imbabura. In the
following quote Tito Merino further describes a specific vision of Sumak Kawsay of how to think of
material goods and sustainable use of natural resources from a communitarian perspective:
Sumak Kawsay has a lot to do with Sumac Yachay (conocimiento de la vida / knowledge of life) that is related to the education of future generations. Sumac Yachay has to be viewed in relation to ‘good practices. These practices are not valued in the national development plans because they have more interest in economic corruption. For example, there are many entrepreneurs who want to transform wood into furniture. For them, dead wood is money. But for us it is considered as a loss. For us this mentality is “bread for today and hunger for tomorrow”. If we cut down all the wood and exterminate the species, we cannot have Sumak Kawsay for future generations. We fight for these generations. You have to have a balance, but the market does not have this sensibility. For example, if we find a mine, we take some and buy what is necessary (...) but if a colonel find the mine, it is gone in a week and all the money goes to one person. Therefore, an important vision of Sumak Kawsay is the equitable distribution of the benefits. For me, for him, for her, for them, for all. Fair distribution is very important. Another example, if a tree has fruits that feed the animals, if we cut down that tree, the animals will not have any food. We are interconnected with the life of all creatures of this planet. That is why we take what is necessary to keep on living our lives in this moment and for future generations, not to satisfy our material satisfactions and accumulate money, like the selfish capitalist. That is why an important vision of Sumak Kawsay relates to use resources with justice and equity and the distribution of these resources within the community (Tito Merino, Interview, Puyo, 8 February 2019).

As illustrated in the quote above, Sumak Kawsay is a conception that is closely linked to the local way of organizing the community based on egalitarian principles and sustainable use of natural resources. He also describes how many values in Sumak Kawsay collide with the idea of material and monetary accumulation and address critique against the capitalistic systems way of viewing natural resources in terms of resources to transform in monetary values (as found in the dominant Western anthropocentric worldview). This section has illustrated how the collective communitarian principles contribute in organizing the individual, family and community that are rooted in a cosmovision that connects the social-ecological-spiritual entity through harmonious relationships. However, it has also illustrated that these relationships are fragile in terms of disturbances such as contamination or loss of territory. Another important aspect is the role of the elders that is described to possess the knowledge that is required to lead a community as the local kuraka (leader).

Kawsak Sacha / Selva Viviente / Living Forest

The project Kawsak Sacha (Selva Viviente/Living Forest) originally initiated in Sarayaku as a project to attain international recognition against oil exploration and to combat climate change while respecting the rights of the indigenous peoples. One of the founders, Patricia Gualinga who is still one of the main spokespersons of the project described it as following: “Kawsak Sacha implies a change from the paradigm that sustain the current economic model, it is the change that the planet needs and that a small community as Sarayaku is implementing” (Radio Encuentros, 2019, 1). One of the central
demands of the project is to get a legal and universal declaration of the Amazon as a sacred territory and considered as a biological and cultural patrimony of the Kichwa Peoples in Ecuador (Sarayaku, 2016, 1-2). In an official document written by José Gualinga who is ex-leader of Sarayaku and brother to Patricia Gualinga, the project Kawsak Sacha is described as a living forest and sacred territory where all beings are interconnected in a social and spiritual world:

“Kawsak Sacha (The Living Forest) is a proposal for living together with the natural world that grows out of the millennial knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples who inhabit the Amazonian rainforest, and it is one that is also buttressed by recent scientific studies. Whereas the western world treats nature as an undemanding source of raw materials destined exclusively for human use, Kawsak Sacha recognizes that the forest is made up entirely of living selves and the communicative relations they have with each other. These selves, from the smallest plants to the supreme beings who protect the forest, are persons (runa) who inhabit the waterfalls, lagoons, swamps, mountains, and rivers, and who, in turn, compose the Living Forest as a whole. These persons live together in community (llakta) and carry out their lives in a manner that is similar to human beings. To summarize, in the Living Forest, the economic system is an ecological web; the natural world is also a social world. Kawsak Sacha, understood as sacred territory, is the primordial font of Sumak Kawsay (Buen Vivir, “Good Living”). Not only does it provide a home for all of its inhabitants, it also emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually revitalizes them. In this way it regenerates the Indigenous Peoples who live in community with these sylvan selves. That is, the Living Forest nourishes and augments life” (José Gualinga, 2016, 1).

The project is described as ‘the primordial font’ of Sumak Kawsay and closely connected to the constitutionally recognized rights of nature based on a vision for living in harmony based on ancestral knowledge, while at the same time being a proposal for the whole world to mitigate climate change. Through various initiatives by indigenous peoples from Sarayaku, Kawsak Sacha has reached the international discourse and thus made achievements in gaining recognition and attention. For example, Patricia Gualinga has delivered a speech during the COP23 meeting in Bonn. Another example is when some members of Sarayaku, including Nina Sirén Gualinga, brought a sacred canoe that was constructed in the community of Sarayaku to Paris when the international community gathered to sign the Paris Agreement. In an interview she stated the following about the initiative:

My name is Nina Sirén Gualinga, and I am here with a delegation from Sarayaku. And Sarayaku is situated in the Ecuadorian Amazon. And we have brought a canoe all the way to Paris, here to the COP, with a message of peace, of hope, and a proposal called Kawsak Sacha. That means “The Living Forest.” And it is a proposal to make sure that nature’s rights are being respected, indigenous peoples’ rights are being respected, and also a way to combat climate change (Nina Sirén Gualinga, Democracy Now, 2016, 1).
The project is described to not only guarantee the rights of the Indigenous peoples, but also to combat climate change with the support of the international community. During my first week in Puyo together with my supervisor Rickard Lalander we made a field trip to visit the historic leader Antonio Vargas who has been president of the organization CONAIE and important spokesperson of the indigenous movement. During the interview we talked about Sumak Kawsay and then he stated that they are now working with the project Kawsak Sacha. We asked if it was not the project of Patricia Gualinga and the community of Sarayaku and he responded the following:

Sarayaku began with this Kawsak Sacha, but deep down it’s not just Sarayaku. We who live in the forest are all Sacha because we are living beings in the forest, and it's all living, everything that is the forest is life for us (...) Patricia can talk as an individual person, one thing is personal, the other is a form of the Kichwa nationality in Pastaza. Then, in our last congress in Canelos we decided that Kawsak Sacha is not only for these persons, it's not from Sarayaku, Kawsak Sacha is for everyone of us that live in Pastaza (Antonio Vargas, Interview, Union Base, 3 February 2019).

Later we found out that the last congress was held in August 2018, a couple of months earlier. Thus, Kawsak Sacha initiated in Sarayaku but is now described as a project for all people living in Pastaza by the organization Pastaza Kikin Kichwa Runakuna (PAKKIRU) that is an organization for the Kichwa Peoples of Pastaza. From the document of the declaration, authored and signed by Antonio Vargas himself, Kawsak Sacha is described as the following:

It’s our life, our vision, our knowledges, our principles and values, our freedom and joy, our Sumak Kawsay (...) it's our territory, our trees, rivers, our natural medicine, the exchange, a good dialogue, we live and work together, in unity (...) We understand that it is difficult for much people to understand our cultural-spiritual relationship with nature, and the importance for us that it is maintained in harmony to have social and territorial stability. We remember that the Indigenous peoples have lived in the forests of the Amazon since thousands of years and that our way of thinking and living together have made it possible to maintain the biodiversity and the reciprocity of life and its forms an expression. That is why we say that the Indigenous peoples are the guardians of the tropical forests (Antonio Vargas, Nacionalidad Originaria Kichwa de Pastaza, 2019, 2).

In the quote above, a close relation to nature is described that can be identified in their socio-ecological-spiritual cosmovision where the non-human sphere works as spiritual mediators. The congress where the decision was taken last August in 2018 was held in Canelos which is a community that is located approximately two hours south east from Puyo. When travelling to Sarayaku by foot and canoe you usually take the route through Canelos. A couple of weeks after the interview with Antonio Vargas I got the possibility to travel to Canelos a few times where I got to know a family that
I spent some time with. One day, the mother of the family Ernestina and her husband Miguel, introduced me to some local leaders. Even though these interviewees do not have the same advanced understanding of theoretical concepts as for example Tito Merino and Leonardo Viteri Gualinga, their perspectives are important because they are the link between the people living in their community and the leaders of Canelos that take part in local decision-making. When discussing *Sumak Kawsay* and *Kawsak Sacha* with these leaders they confirmed what Antonio Vargas had told me and Rickard. That *Kawsak Sacha* was a newly decided proposal for all of the Kichwa Peoples of Pastaza. In an interview with Walter Canelos, a local *kuraka* (leader in Kichwa) in a community in Canelos, he stated the following:

There are for sure people that can speak about these ideas better than me. But what I can say about this is that we have to defend the Amazon and our ancestral lands. And now we have decided that *Kawsak Sacha* is the declaration of our sacred lands to protect them from destruction to live in peace and harmony in our sacred territory. *Kawsak Sacha* is the living forest. Everything is connected, the land, the forest, the animals, our rivers, everything (Walter Canelos, Interview Canelos, 20 February 2019).

Valerio Mayancha is another local leader in another community in Canelos who joined the interview with Walter Canelos, expressed the following when I asked him about *Kawsak Sacha*:

It is simple. We can’t live in *Sumak Kawsay* if we don’t have *Kawsak Sacha*, a living forest. Here in Canelos we have everything. We have water, air, trees, food and chicha\(^\text{16}\). We have everything here. But our territories. But if we don’t protect our lands we will not have a *Kawsak Sacha* (Valerio Mayancha, Interview, Canelos 20 February 2019).

Departing from the descriptions of *Kawsak Sacha* in this chapter, it describes how the concept is closely linked to *Sumak Kawsay*. It also illustrates a very close relation to the natural world through the socio-ecological-spiritual entity that was described in the previous section. Whether these projects (the project that initiated in Saryaku and the one that initiated in August last year after the congress in Canelos) are separated is beyond this thesis to provide any answers. But what can be concluded is that they include many principles and ideas that are related to each other.

**Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir in the northern Andean highlands**

*Sumak Kawsay* became a political concept during the 1990s with the rise of the indigenous movement in Ecuador. During this time, it was particularly connected to the struggle of local organizations in the

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\(^{16}\) Chicha is a fermented and traditional drink usually made from corn or fruit in this Amazonian area.
Amazonian province of Pastaza that linked the concept to political demands (Altmann, 2019, 7). This is why some researchers such as Cuestas-Caza (2018) and Whitten and Whitten (2015) make the distinction between Sumak Kawsay as an Amazonian concept and Alli Kawsay as an Andean concept from the northern highlands in Ecuador such as the province of Imbabura (Altmann, 2019, 7). This distinction can also possibly be linked to the assumption that, even though the indigenous Kichwa peoples in Pastaza and Imbabura belong to the same nationality, they live in different parts of the country with conditions that are specific to the physical and historical place where they live. For instance, different political-economic shifts in Ecuador have impacted Andean and Amazonian regions in different ways. In the Andes, agricultural livelihoods have been undermined by the state, whereas Indigenous Amazonian territory in Pastaza have been impacted by oil extraction activities (Quick, 2018, 760).

These different factors contribute in creating different socio-political conditions that have different effects on daily life practices on indigenous peoples. Javier Cuestas-Caza (2018) has conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the province of Imbabura with important contributions to the research field of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir and Alli Kawsay. One of the central statements is that: “Alli Kawsay combines inherited and learned cultural notions such as the money, the market, and capital” (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 54). It shall be emphasized that, ‘learned’ cultural notions can also be viewed as forced or imposed. Drawing from the conclusions of the study, Alli Kawsay is described as a concept that relates to day-to-day actions and the pragmatic and everyday life of Kichwa communities in northern Ecuador that is linked to different material and socio-political conditions. José Benjamín Inuca Lechón (2017) make a similar statement where he points out that, Alli Kawsay gives practical meanings to life, whereas Sumak Kawsay is an aspiration, or an ideal of a beautiful life, that can be visioned in the horizon (2017, 174-175). This way of understanding Sumak Kawsay as an aspiration was also expressed during a conversation with Condor Carlosama (son of Miguel Ángel Carlosama) when he described Sumak Kawsay as the following:

I think you can understand Sumak Kawsay as something to be envisioned as an aspiration of your life. Like a rainbow for example: if you go too close it will disappear. But remains as a vision of your beautiful aspirations in life that you can vision from a distance (Condor Carlosama, Interview, Punkuwayky 3rd of April 2019).

Sumak Kawsay and Alli Kawsay in the city of Cayambe

Guillermo Churichumbi (2014), who is currently the mayor of the city Cayambe in Imbabura, has conducted ethnographic fieldwork during his studies at the university. The findings from the study
constitutes important contributions to the research field and was described by research Pablo Ospina in a discussion as a rather unique study because of its systematic approach in this region of the country. In this ethnographic study, Churichumbi (2014) has systematically theorized how *Sumak Kawsay* and *Alli Kawsay* is perceived and interpreted in the daily lives of indigenous peoples in the city of Cayambe. In other words, it is a detailed investigation where specific cultural practices have been intellectualized and theorized from day-to-day experiences and aspirations among indigenous peoples in Cayambe. More specifically, the study examines how daily life expressions relate to the meanings associated with the dominant concepts of ‘development’, ‘progress’ and ‘well-being’. In these contexts, it is also considered how the informants associate and use the words of ‘*Sumak*’ (harmony, plentitude) and ‘*Alli*’ (good) with other words than ‘*Kawsay*’ (life, coexist).

Throughout the analysis it is also emphasized how the expressions are associated with natural elements (e.g. land, water, rain, plants etc.) and/or with material and spiritual factors. An important conclusion is that the indigenous peoples in the city of Cayambe barely do not refer to the expression *Sumak Kawsay* in everyday life. Instead of *Sumak*, the terminology *Alli* is used as a general term when explaining positive aspects of persons, animals and plants such as the quality of water and the success or failure of their harvest. For the informants, *Kawsay* refers to life, existence and coexistence and to other people in the family and community, as well as the land, mountains, hills and water. When something is bad or negative, the expression *Mana Alli* is used and refers to something that can negatively affect the relation and coexistence between people and nature.

What is specifically important and interesting in the conclusions from this study, is that Churichumbi (2014) demonstrate through his findings that the Indigenous peoples in Cayambe have adopted the dominant idea of development and progress in their vision of *Alli Kawsay* and *Sumak Kawsay* and their daily life experiences. For instance, progress and development are associated with material factors such as the development of infrastructure and modern comforts where many of the indigenous peoples work to save money in order to finance their children's education on universities among other examples. From this view, the conventional meanings of development, progress, welfare and material wealth have been integrated in their local discourse but adjusted according to their local social and natural environment in which they live and combined with material and spiritual relations between family and the community (Churichumbi, 2014, 99-103).

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17 In the study, the results are primarily based on the knowledge and information provided by local leaders/presidents of local communities in Cayambe where the sources of meaning are based on their daily life experiences within their local families and communities (Churichumbi, 2014).

18 *Alli* translates ‘good’ in Kichwa.
Sumak Kawsay / Alli Kawsay as a local communitarian conception

During my field studies in Imbabura I got the opportunity to live together with the family of Miguel Ángel Carlosama who is a former president of his local community of Punkuwayku that is located outside Ibarra in central Imbabura. During the 90’s Carlosama was politically involved and was an important spokesperson in the Indigenous movement in Ecuador. When we discussed Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir from a general perspective, that is, how it ended up in the new Constitution in relation to how it is practiced at local community level, he commented the following:

These conceptions are totally different. The Sumak Kawsay, or Alli Kawsay as we usually refer to here [in the Andes], has not been translated into national knowledge. It is originally a conceptualization that is very local based on ancient traditions that has survived colonial oppression. I use to say that, in theory the ideas of Sumak Kawsay has been translated into the national development plans and been constitutionally recognized. But in terms of daily lives, Sumak Kawsay is practiced between families and neighbours through different ancient traditions. However, in the reality of the daily lives it does not exist a theoretical conceptualization, in practice yes, but there is no systematized conceptualization of the practices. If you ask someone in this community, they will not know what you mean with your question about Sumak Kawsay. But it exists in the practices of the daily lives of the Indigenous people living in this community. It [Sumak Kawsay] has been transferred orally through generations and generations through our traditions. Sumak Kawsay is a conception of the local and collective community life with respect to all living beings including plants, animals and mountains. This is something you will understand when you come and live with us (Miguel Ángel Carlosama, Interview, Punkuwayku 27 February 2019).

As illustrated in the quote from the interview with Miguel Ángel Carlosama, Sumak Kawsay is referred to as a tradition that exist in praxis but lack theoretical terminology because it has been transmitted orally through ancient practices. Some of which will be discussed in more detail later on in this subchapter. In the paragraph it’s also possible to identify the local character of the conceptualization from the view of their cosmovision, i.e. it involves families, the community but also other living beings through their holistic cosmovision such as animals, plants and natural elements such as mountains. In an interview with Magdalena Fueres who is president of the committee of women in UNORCAC19 she expressed her interpretation of Sumak Kawsay as a conception that include communitarian values and practices that include coexistence between all living beings in the environment:

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19 UNORCAC is a non-profit organization founded in 1977 in order to promote the reduction of discrimination and poverty, primarily among Indigenous people, located in Cotacachi in the Imbabura province (UNORCAC, 2019).
*Sumak Kawsay* is life in plentitude, that is how we translate it, in which you have a harmony between the family, nature, the community. Where we have enough food, harmony between the family and with our animals, because for us, our animals are part of the family as well. It also includes having access to clean water, to communicate with the water, with the rain, with the Pachamama [Mother Earth], with the trees or the birds. All that is *Sumak Kawsay* for us. But I think that for the white mestizo, *Sumak Kawsay*, or *Buen-Vivir* [Good Life] for them, is to have a car, a lot of money, a big house and live in luxury and material accumulation. That is not the same as our *Sumak Kawsay* (Magdalena Fueres, Interview, Cotacachi 3rd March 2019).

For Magdalena Fueres, *Sumak Kawsay* from a general perspective is ‘life in plentitude’, that includes communitarian thinking with the family and other members of the community. But it also means access to clean water and to frequently communicate with animals and natural elements in the holistic cosmovision. This communication with non-humans is a practice that I observed among other members of communities I visited, especially elders. For instance, during a morning walk with Lola Carlosama who is the wife of Miguel Ángel Carlosama, we walked with their cows to a different feeding place. During the whole walk she talked with the cows in Kichwa. When I asked about what she talked about, she said it was everything from food to how beautiful the day was. She also used to speak with their flowers in their garden. This holistic cosmovision is an important element of *Sumak Kawsay*. Miguel Ángel commented this very briefly:

*Sumak Kawsay* goes beyond money. It is the nature, the holistic thought that creates the relation between the beings that do not talk, but for sure is alive. It [the cosmovision] is with us everywhere, it is together with us, living together with us, the mountains, rivers, nature, the beings that are under the earth and above the earth. We are all connected in the same world (Miguel Ángel Carlosama, Interview, Punkuwayku 27 February 2019).

The cosmovision expressed provides a perspective of reality that involves an interconnectivity with nature spirits as mediators which contrast the strict separation between human and nature as found in Western ways of thinking. Nature is sees as another living being together with animals and humans. This way of apprehending the world constitutes an important practice and is an important component of how *Sumak Kawsay* is practiced at local community level in daily life experiences. The ideas are based on a harmony between all beings that is maintained through sustainable use of resources and solidary thinking between family and neighbours. During my stays with the Carlosama’s family I got to experience how this notion of solidarity thinking with the neighbours was expressed in their daily lives. One day we gave corn and leftovers to their neighbour, the other we received potatoes from another. This ancient tradition is based on the idea of ‘give and receive’ (*randi randi/dar y recibir*)
which contrast from the idea of ‘give and take’. It can be described as a permanent solidarity thinking that relates to maintaining a harmonious relationship between families and community members. This also include the practice of ‘La minga’, which basically means collective work that benefit the whole community. Magdalena Fueres describes this way of community thinking as a vision of *Sumak Kawsay*:

> For example, when I plant something in my garden and make the harvest, I will give some of it to my neighbour because he might not have this kind of fruit or vegetable. And for example, when I need help building a house or when I am sick, he will come and accompany me and help to build my house. So in my view, this practice that relates to harmonious relationship is also included in the *Sumak Kawsay* and goes beyond economic and material issues. It is a form of ancient solidarity that have been passed on from earlier generations (Magdalena Fueres, Interview, Cotacachi 3rd March 2019).

This solidarity way of thinking is a central part of the daily lives of many of the people I met that is based on ancient traditions that have been passed on by older generations which will be further illustrated in the analysis of this thesis.

**Sumak Kawsay / Alli Kawsay and the resistance against colonial domination**

An important part of the collective way of thinking and living is the practice of ‘mutual help’ (ayuda mutua) among the members of the family and community. This can both be done between separate households but also with the whole community when the members gather to construct something that will benefit the community. In the practice of *La minga* (collective work) there are often roles structured according to age and gender. For instance, men usually do the heavy work whereas women cook food and look after the children or do work in their land/garden. But everyone is included and involved in some way. In an interview with Miguel Ángel Carlosama, he described this ancient practice as being very important for his ancestors during the colonial oppression in which his parents suffered:

> I am giving you a testimony of our history. I am speaking from the views of the Indigenous that suffered: my parents. I did not suffer. By my parents suffered from the exploitation of the hacienda system. Then from my perspective, I can say that *Sumak Kawsay*, or *Alli Kawsay* for us, constitute a form of resistance against the oppressive colonial and capitalistic system. Because *Sumak Kawsay* existed in the community, even though the communities were imposed by the Spanish conquistadors. After the Spanish have colonized us, invaded us, they proposed a way of living, the city council and the community. Then we had to adapt to this system and their way of thinking to construct the community and the city council which originally is not ours. The original for us is in this community is the
collective system of life based on reciprocity and mutual help. From my point of view, this permitted
that we could resists and survive the imposed colonial system based on capitalism and exploitation.
Today, capitalism is in our blood, but our local way of life in our community still function as a form of
resistance (Miguel Ángel Carlosama, Interview, Pukuwayku 27 February 2019).

Miguel Ángel Carlosama describe *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay* as a form of local resistance against
imposed systems and ways of organizing the community that originally was imposed by the Spanish
colonizers. In this way, one could say that these traditions and practices based on solidarity and
mutual help that have survived colonial oppression allow for a local de-colonial resistance. Another
example that could be linked to colonial resistance was expressed in the interview with Magdalena
Fueres that she told me that another vision of *Sumak Kawsay* for her is not being dependent on other
people, to have something on her own. In this case she referred to food sovereignty:

> Another vision of *Sumak Kawsay* in my perspective is that it also refers to having food sovereignty and
food security. The food sovereignty is something of our own, something made by me, and it does not
make us dependent on other people which I also think is an important theme of *Sumak Kawsay*. I have
the possibility to exchange my food in my community, but I can also come here [to the market] every
week (Magdalena Fueres, Interview, Cotacachi 3rd March 2019).

In the perspective of Magdalena Fueres it is important not being dependent upon another when talking
about food sovereignty which can also be interpreted as a form of de-colonial resistance in terms of
not being ‘economically dependent from outside’, as she expressed it during the interview.

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20 Magdalena Fueres is also one of the main persons who initiated a local market in central Cotacachi with
ecological fruits and vegetables through the organization UNORCAC that take place every week in the center of
the town with the aim to empower local producers, mainly indigenous women.
Analytical discussion

In this chapter the analysis of the thesis will be presented and is structured according to the research questions that will allow the analysis to systematically analyze the empirical material without the risk of confusing the reader. The first section deals with the aim of the thesis to analyze and problematize the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir in practice. The following sections are linked to the other two research questions that examine how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level in two different two different regions. In this part of the analysis I will first begin with the analysis of respectively provinces followed by an analytical discussion of the differences and similarities between these two different contexts.

Progressive mobilization, Contradictions and Clashing values in environmental politics

Reconnecting to the research objective of this field study, some challenges and dilemmas have been identified that will be analyzed and problematized in this analytical chapter. Departing from the moment when the progressive Constitution of 2008 was ratified during the presidential term of the newly elected and charismatic leader Rafael Correa. During this period of time time, there was a celebratory tone in contemporary politics in Ecuador with the support of the indigenous movement. However, the last decade has made many challenges and dilemmas visible that are linked to the process of implementing the values and visions stated with Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir. After the constitutional reforms, Correa’s relations with the indigenous movement included many tensions. However, shortly after the new constitution was ratified, the government of Correa and the indigenous movement increasingly attracted tension in their relation due to different visions over how to realize and implement the social and economic strategies that were constitutionally recognized (Becker, 2011, 46-47). Many of these tensions are connected to factors such different and clashing interpretations of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir.

The failure of the project Yasuni ITT is a prime example when many of these tensions intensified. During the political campaigning of Correa, in 2007 the Yasuni ITT put forward as a suggestion that would keep Ecuador’s biggest oil reserves in the ground based on the idea that the international community would support Ecuador with half of the revenues that could have been extracted from the reserves. This idea was grounded on the belief of a co-responsibility of the world to protect the biodiversity in the Amazon while combating climate change (Lalander and Lembke, 2018). It is of
course difficult to know whether Correa himself believed that the initiative would work in practice or whether it was a project to fuel his political campaign with the progressive approach. However, many of the informants of this field study do consider the initiative as an ‘electoral tool’ or ‘a way to play with the conscience of the world’ as expressed by Conejo and Luís Román. Furthermore, some addressed the content of the new Constitution, saying that it is very nicely written with beautiful words and so forth, but lack a conceptualization that works in practice. Conejo described it as a romanticized constitution that include contradictions that contribute to the failure of implementing these values and visions in practice. Either way, the failure and dismantling of the Yasuni ITT project constitute an important event in this analytical period that contributed to further tensions where the majority of the original supporters (including the indigenous movement) called out contradictions between the government’s policies and the commitments to the principles of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir.

In this context, many challenges to implement these values and visions is due to the contradictory interpretations that was generated that are linked to what Rickard Llander (2014) call the Ecuadorian resource dilemma. When Ecuador did not get any economic compensation from the international community in order to ‘leave the oil the ground’, Correa gave green light for oil drilling. An event that signalled that the ecologically progressive politics was not directed toward extractivism that contributed in further tensions between the indigenous movement and the Correa government. More specifically, this contributed to contradictions between resource governance, welfare policies, the constitutionally recognized rights of nature (Lalander and Lembke, 2018, 9). For instance, much of the critique was directed against the interpretation and translation of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir as a form of ‘eco-socialism’ and ‘bio-socialism’ that focused on social justice and welfare distribution, rather than environmental and cultural aspects. The government applied an approach that included principles linked to ‘soft sustainability’, ‘pragmatism’ that clashed with the visions and principles in the constitutionally recognized rights of nature and Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014, 26-28).

This pragmatic approach to the constitutionally recognized rights of nature and Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is illustrated in the NDPs where it is stated that: “It is not about keeping our natural heritage untouched or frozen in time, which would be an impossible task. It is about protecting it at adequate levels” (SENPLADES, 2010, 21). During this period of time, many of the original supporters including the indigenous movement called attention to these contradictions and the concepts of Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir now encompassed a variety of interpretations with different meanings (Zamosc, 2017, 93). Some argue that Sumak Kawsay and Buen-Vivir are not even the same concepts due to the
fundamental differences that are grounded in the assumption that they emerge from different ontological matrixes (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 57). From this view, many of the challenges and dilemmas in terms of implementing the visions and values in practice can possibly be linked to issues around the translation from *Sumak Kawsay* to *Buen-Vivir* and transferring these ideas into national context. This was emphasized by both Leonardo Viteri Gualinga and Miguel Ángel Carlosama, who pointed out that these are ideas and principles that originally come from our day-to-day experiences that have been passed on by older generations.

When translating concepts from different languages and ontologies, many symbols and codes have been described to end up in a simplification which ultimately reduce its content and meaning such as the holistic cosmovision. An issue that was expressed by several informants. The incorporation of these values and principles in the new Constitution from 2008 is considered a great achievement by many, but they remain only literal translations that are combined with contradictory principles from other organizing principles such as ‘eco-socialism’ and ‘bio-socialism’. It is important to emphasize that many of the visions in *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* are based on the cosmovision that see nature and the non-human sphere as constant mediators. This holistic vision constitutes a clear example of a conception that is difficult, if even possible, to translate and transfer into the NDPs of the country. As emphasized by many of the informants and previous research, it is important to acknowledge that the original visions and values in *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* originate from the daily life of indigenous peoples in local communities which means that there is also a challenge emerging around scale.

In summary, it can be argued that the Ecuadorian resource dilemma contributed in creating tensions and contradictory approaches by the state. Applying a pragmatic approach in order to continue its reliance on extracting natural resources in order to finance welfare distribution that would benefit society as a whole. When attempts were made to translate *Sumak Kawsay* to *Buen-Vivir* and incorporate the ideas in the new Constitution, much of the content was reduced or even interpreted in distinct ways in relation to the original interpretations. The progressive approach by the charismatic leader Rafael Correa with the support of the indigenous movement had initially a celebratory tone but regrettably ended up in paradoxical situations for the state and the challenges and dilemmas of how to implement these values and visions in practice became evident. Many of these issues are linked to the translation process of the concepts that also raises questions of how ideas that originally come from indigenous everyday life experiences are combined with principles that originate from Westerns ways of apprehending the world. With this background, the motivation to study *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* as a local place-based concept from indigenous ontologies becomes clear in order to understand how these visions and values are understood on local community level where they originate from.
Sumak Kawsay and Kawsak Sacha: a political, ontological and de-colonial struggle

One of the main objectives of the progressive constitutional reforms is connected to the process of de-colonizing the country in terms of political, economic, social, cultural, epistemological and ontological with the contribution of knowledge and traditions of indigenous peoples (Lalander and Lenza, 2018, 48). When Sumak Kawsay became a political concept in the beginning of the 90’s and inserted into a de-colonial discourse of the indigenous movement (Altmann, 2016) it became a concept that is linked to both a political and epistemic struggle. Political in terms of the central demands such as autonomy and self-determination in a plurinational state and epistemic in terms of the recognition and rights to their culture, language and worldview that introduce alternative epistemologies and ontologies in the hegemonic discourse of Western modernity. After centuries of colonial domination that include the subalternization and silencing of knowledges and indigenous histories (Escobar, 2010) these ontologies have now gained recognition during the indigenous movement that have led to constitutional reforms. As Miguel Ángel Carlosama stated in an interview: “Sumak Kawsay is not only a philosophy from the indigenous peoples, it is now also constitutional”.

A prime example of how this political and epistemic struggle plays out in practice can be found in the fight against oil exploration in the Amazon and more specifically in the province of Pastaza. In these struggles corporations and the state justify their appropriation of land through the logic of modernity (e.g. legitimizing decisions on the basis of conventional ideas of development and economic growth that justify the extraction of natural resources). In the words of Carlos Viteri Gualinga: “it is an unequal epistemic war that is expressed in the exploitation of oil” (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, 85).

Indigenous peoples in communities such as Sarayaku in Pastaza, articulate de-colonial resistance upon their worldview and terminology where Sumak Kawsay and Kawsak Sacha has become two central concepts to defend their land from oil contamination. The process of introducing or imposing these ideologies is described by Carlos Viteri Gualinga as a form of colonization of the imaginary where the concept of development from Western discourse correspond to Eurocentric imaginary that seek to dominate nature and knowledge production. From this view, we can analyze how conflicts over natural resources allow us to identify how distinct worldviews clash when development projects introduce ideologies and principles that contrast and collide with the principles of Sumak Kawsay and Kawsak Sacha.

In more detail, these clashes between distinct visions are grounded in the values and principles that make up their worldviews that construct different relationships with the natural world. These struggles can also be described as ‘ethno-territorial conflicts’ that involves economic, cultural, ecological aspects - but its most fundamental aspect is ontological (Escobar, 2015, 20). From an anthropocentric
and Eurocentric perspective, natural resources are treated as raw materials that are exclusively for human use whereas the worldview that can be identified in the concepts of *Sumak Kawsay* and *Kawsak Sacha* see the natural world as made up of living beings in communicative relations that include the non-human sphere. In the declaration of the Amazon in Pastaza as *Kawsak Sacha/Living Forest*, these relationships are described as an ecological web where the natural world is also a social world (Jose Gualinga, 2016, 1).

From this view, the fragile relationships between nature-territory-culture-spirituality illustrate how important aspects of these struggles can be linked to epistemological and ontological dimensions. The ethno-territorial conflicts that this study deals with illustrate how the indigenous peoples in Ecuador articulate anti-colonial epistemic resistance, or de-colonial resistance that seek to de-link from the colonially of power in order to break the maintained hierarchy of knowledge that was established with the conquest of the Americas (Mignolo, 2007). In other words, these struggles include the explicit formulation of alternatives to the imperial and totalitarian epistemology that colonialism enforced that allow us to (re-)think and (re-)conceptualize the stories that have created unequal relationships between ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ cultures and knowledges (Dussel, 1993).

**Sumak Kawsay / Alli Kawsay and Territoriality**

Reconnecting to the purpose of this study, this section will outline the analysis of how *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level in my simplified Highland-Amazonia comparison. In this section I will proceed with a general analytical discussion about the concepts and how they are linked to day life experiences and how connotations of territoriality contribute in shaping perceptions and interpretations. In the following section, I will go into more detail with concrete examples of similarities and differences. To begin with, it is significant to emphasize the distinction between *Sumak Kawsay* and *Alli Kawsay*. Departing from the assumption presented by Cuestas-Caza (2017) and Whitten and Whitten (2015), *Sumak Kawsay* is originally an Amazonian concept from Pastaza whereas *Alli Kawsay* is an Andean concept from the northern highlands in provinces such as Imbabura where this study was conducted. It is possible to argue that these are distinct concepts with different meanings. For example, *Alli Kawsay* refers to the pragmatic everyday life of indigenous peoples that combines inherited and learned cultural notions such as money, market and capital (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 54). This description is further illustrated by Guillermo Churichumbi when he argues that indigenous peoples in the concerned region have integrated conventional meanings of development and progress in their vision of *Alli Kawsay* (2014, 101).
This distinction can possibly be linked to factors that involves socio-political factors linked to territoriality, e.g. relation with land and history (Waldmüller and Altmann, 2018). For example, indigenous peoples from northern Ecuador have lived more integrated with the white mestizo society and closer to the state, whereas many indigenous peoples in the Amazon have lived more isolated (Lalander and Lembke, 2018, 25). It needs, of course, to be emphasized that these kinds of intercultural processes are dynamic and highly complex. For example, Tito Merino explained in an interview that today many indigenous peoples of Pastaza live in urban areas even if they often return to their original communities further in the Amazon. He explained this process as living in “two different systems” where they had to adapt to the life in the city, i.e. applying a pragmatic lifestyle as found in Alli Kawsay. Another factor that could possibly be linked to this distinction is that different political-economic shifts have impacted these regions differently. For instance, in Imbabura, agricultural livelihoods and interests have been undermined by the state whereas the Amazonian Pastaza territories have been impacted by oil extraction activities (Quick, 2018, 760).

This possible also be connected to the assumption that, in general indigenous peoples in the Amazonian Pastaza refer to their land as territories whereas the indigenous peoples have land-plots for agricultural use (Lalander and Lembke, 2018, 25). These differences was also illustrated in the empirical chapter of this thesis where several of the informants from Pastaza talked about territories whereas for example Miguel Ángel Carlosama and his family own a small piece of land that they have for agricultural use. In Pastaza many of the informants also emphasized the importance to have autonomy and self-determination in their territories, whereas this would be a more difficult task in Imbabura because in many places the indigenous peoples live in areas that are integrated with mestizo society. With this analysis of the concepts and their connection to connotations of territoriality, it can be argued that many factors contribute in shaping perceptions, interpretations and how Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is practiced at local community level. In the next section, I will go into more detail with a few concrete examples of identified similarities and differences that further illustrate how connotations of territoriality contribute in shaping these in respectively province.

**Sumak Kawsay / Alli Kawsay: local place-based conceptualizations**

With the point of departure in the previous analytical section, the local character and dimension of Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay should be emphasized in the discussion of how it is perceived, interpreted and practiced at local community level. There are several reasons for this, but the first and most perhaps most important is linked to the fact that these conceptions originate from indigenous daily life experiences as many of the informants argued. That is why, in the words of Philip Altmann: “a theoretical reflection on Sumak Kawsay that does not take into account its necessary local character
will always turn into a decolonial colonization” (2017, 757). Secondly, from this local daily life experience perspective, it is important to understand *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay* as an internal concept in terms of daily life. It involves the practice of indigenous rights such as culture, language and worldview that is closely linked to the abundance of nature and a specific territory where the non-human sphere are interconnected with the individual and the community in spiritual relationships that needs to be in harmony, e.g. free from contamination.

The concept of *Sumac Allpa* (land without evil) is a prime example of how territory and place are integral terms of these relationships. In this concept, land and space is described to be a place where all beings interact including the spirits with myths that informs how ancestors continue to live in animals. In these visions and ideas, it is vital that the land where they live is kept in harmonious relationship. The vital characteristics of this state was described by Tito Merino when he said that: “land is related to life, if there is no land, there is no life, and without life, there is no *Sumak Kawsay*”. From this view, *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* can be described as a local place-based conception of a lifestyle that is inseparable from its territory (Altmann, 2019, 3). Another important vision of *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* is that the traditions, knowledges and practices have been transferred orally through generations that have survived centuries of colonial domination. Thanks to important contributions from persons such as Carlos Viteri Gualinga (2003) and Guillermo Churichumbi (2014) among others, these knowledges and traditions have been systematically intellectualized through field studies. This implies that many of the indigenous peoples in Imbabura and Pastaza have praxis in terms of living according to ancestral knowledge and traditions but lack the terminology. Many of these traditions are expressed in the collective and communitarian lifestyle and will be exemplified in the section below.

**Community thinking**

One of the most central visions of *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* identified in this field study are expressed in the collective communitarian thinking among the family and members of the local community. This refers to the concept of *ayllu* (family-community) in which everyone is included in principles that are linked to the coexistence in harmony with nature through specific principles and values (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, 52). This collective communitarian way of thinking and organizing the community is based on egalitarian principles, reciprocity and fair distribution among the community members in various ways. The egalitarian thinking can be expressed in practices such as ‘*randi-randi*’ (dar y recibir / give and receive) that is grounded in the vision of fair distribution and solidarity. For example, when living with the Carlosama family in Imbabura, Pankuwayky, this was expressed in relationships and practices with the closest neighbors such as giving and receiving food or helping
neighbors. It is important to emphasize the distinction between the idea of ‘give and receive’ from ‘give and take’.

This kind of solidarity is also expressed through the practice of ‘la minga’, which means collective work that benefits the whole community. For example, Magdalena Fueres gave an example when she said that, if she is sick, her neighbor will accompany her. Or if she needs help building a house, a neighbor with knowledge and strength will help her out. And if she has plenty of food, she will share with her neighbours. Same kind of collective and solidarity thinking was expressed in several examples from Pastaza. For example, the practice of la minga. Tito Merino gave the same example as Magdalena Fueres (building a house) and emphasized the importance for all in the community to contribute. If a new family arrives, people get together and build the house together with the help of the local kuraka (leader). This tradition is based on ancestral indigenous knowledge where the leader and the elders have important roles. Many of these collective and communitarian ways of organizing the local community can be described to be quite similar in both provinces, but of course closely linked to its context and place, e.g. jungle vs. agricultural landscapes with mountains. The principles are in both places based on collective and communitarian thinking grounded on solidarity and egalitarian principles.

Cosmovision and Territory

Another central vision of Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay identified in this study is the holistic cosmovision. This worldview understands nature spirits as constant mediators between humans and the non-human sphere including natural elements such as rivers, trees mountains (Altmann, 2019, 8). This cosmovision is rooted in a worldview that eschew the division between human and nature that challenge and collide with Western ways rational thought (Escobar, 2015). An important component of this worldview is the spiritual understanding of reality that creates a socio-ecological-spiritual entity made up by relations between the individual, family, community and the natural world. It is in the words of Leonardo Viteri Gualinga, “an internal vision of Sumak Kawsay that is strictly related to the abundance of nature and a specific territory based on harmonious relationships”. The concept of Sumac Allpa (land without evil) described by Carlos Viteri Gualinga and Tito Merino further illustrate how the conception of Sumak Kawsay is closely bound up with territory.

\[\text{21 Also described by Tito Merino as Sumac Yachay (conocimiento de la vida / knowledge of life) that is passed on to future generations through the elders in the local community.}\]
Through this concept, territory is described a space where different forms of life interact that needs to be kept in balance, i.e. free from oil contamination and such. Because, in the words of Tito Merino: "(...) without land there is no life, and without life there is no Sumak Kawsay”.

In the descriptions of the project Kawsak Sacha, this holistic understanding is also illustrated. For instance, the forest (the Amazon) is described as being made up of living beings, including the non-human sphere, that are interconnected in an ‘ecological web’ with spirits. A similar holistic understanding of reality was an important vision of Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay for the informants from Imbabura. For example, Magdalena Fueres described the importance to communicate with the rain, trees and birds. Something that I observed when working with the Lola Carlosama (wife of Miguel Ángel) when she talked with their cow and with flowers in their garden. This communication (and other factors) was described to create relations between beings that do not explicitly communicate such as mountain, rivers, the land and was an important vision.
Discussion

The indigenous movement in Ecuador emerged as a response of resistance to centuries of colonial domination that have included genocidal violence, exclusion, racism and above all the subalternization and marginalization of indigenous knowledge and history (Escobar, 2010). Through various progressive achievements, the movement has been called one of the most powerful and best organized social movements in Latin America (Becker, 2011, xii) and the most prominent and consequential in Latin America since the 1980s (Yashar, 2005, 23). When Sumak Kawsay was inserted into a de-colonial discourse of the indigenous movement in the early 90s (Altmann, 2016) it emerged as a powerful indigenous concept in the struggle against oil exploitation in the Amazon that have since then articulated de-colonial resistance from the indigenous peoples of Ecuador. Through the achievements of the social movement these epistemologies and ontologies that have been subject for colonial domination have now gained recognition on both national and international levels. The constitutional reforms in 2008 is a prime example of a concrete achievement that include the recognition of the rights of the indigenous peoples and the inclusion of Sumak Kawsay as the backbone of the new Constitution. However, as illustrated in this study, many challenges and dilemmas have been identified and problematized that are linked to discrepancies and gaps in the implementation in practice grounded in the discursive struggle around the definitions of the concepts and the Ecuadorian resource dilemma.

In this study I have argued that these issues need to be seen in the light of the political mobilization by the former president Rafael Correa. A president that during the campaign promised to bring an end to decades of neoliberal policies with support from the indigenous movement. However, the last decade witness of contradictory outcomes between resource governance, welfare policies and the constitutionally recognized rights of nature with Sumak Kawsay/Buen Vivir as guiding principles (Lalander and Lembke, 2018, 2). The failure of the Yasuni ITT project illustrate a prime example of how this play out in practice. Some of the informants of this field study have argued that this was just a political trick, while other have called it a product of the mobilization and a romanticized constitution with no conceptualization that works in practice. After the dismantling of the project the pragmatic position of the state became evident and new meanings became associated with Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir that referred to eco-socialism and bio-socialism (Hidalgo Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara (2019, 51). This could be argued is just another word for pragmatic sustainable development that relies on extracting natural resource in order to finance social welfare and legitimized through the idea of what Lenin Moreno described as ‘ending poverty once and for all’.
Another central problem that has been problematized in this study is linked to the translation process where issues especially emerge around the translation from Sumak Kawsay to Buen-Vivir. As emphasized throughout this thesis, the conception of Sumak Kawsay is originally a conceptualization of a local community lifestyle in indigenous communities that is grounded in a holistic cosmovision (Altmann, 2017; 2019). In the process of translating these codes and symbols much of its original content is reduced or simplified (Lalander and Cuestas-Caza, 2017, 36). Something that was emphasized by several of the informants of this field study. A process that also contribute in invisibilizing the indigenous movement and the people as political actors (Altmann, 2019, 12). Since these conceptions originate from everyday life practices of indigenous peoples, the values and visions of Sumak Kawsay are difficult to transfer and translate into national context and implement through the NDPs. It could be argued that many of the challenges and dilemmas identified in this field study are related to problems linked to the process of translation these concepts into the political and academic discourse. This argument is based on the assumption that we are dealing with worldviews that originate from different epistemic communities (Cuestaz-Caza, 2017) with ontologies that clash with distinctive ways of Western ways of apprehending the world.

Reconnecting to the second (but interconnected) research objective that deals with how Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is interpreted, perceived and practiced at local community level. This thesis has identified some central findings that illustrate how this conception can be described as a local place-based conception of a communitarian lifestyle. A lifestyle that is guided by central principles such as solidarity, fair distribution of resources, mutual help through collective thinking the system of la minga (collective work that benefit the whole community). A central vision of this communitarian lifestyle is the interconnectedness through the holistic cosmovision that create a social-ecological-spiritual entity. An understanding of reality that connects humans with the non-human sphere such as animals, mountains, rivers trees and other natural elements.

The (simplified) comparative approach of this study has illustrated how different connotations of territoriality contribute in shaping perceptions, interpretations and how Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir is practiced at local community level. To begin with, Alli Kawsay can be described as an Andean conception among indigenous peoples in Imbabura. Although, Whitten and Whitten (2015) understand Sumak Kawsay as an Amazonian concept, it is described by (Inuca, 2017) as an aspiration, or an ideal of a life that can be visioned in the horizon that can be found among the indigenous peoples in Imbabura. A similar perception was described by Condor Carlosama from Punkuwayky with the rainbow example. The analytical discussion of this thesis has illustrated how different factors may contribute in shaping connotations of territoriality. For example, how the two
different regions have experienced different socio-political impacts such as agricultural livelihoods undermined by the state and impacts from oil extraction activities, different integration processes with mestizo society and the natural environment such as agricultural landscapes surrounded by mountains versus the Amazonian rainforest.

Many of the examples that have been analyzed and discussed in this thesis show how the indigenous peoples in both Imbabura and Pastaza have managed to maintain their cosmovision and many ancestral indigenous traditions and practices that have survived colonial domination. After centuries of colonization these cultures have survived and transformed in contact with modernity which makes these kinds of comparative approaches difficult to generalize due to the multifaceted and complex nature of these integration processes. However, what can be concluded is that these epistemologies and ontologies articulate de-colonial resistance as a response and resistance to the colonial domination that is still expressed in contemporary society through the logic of modernity (Mignolo, 2007). One of the central standpoints of this thesis is that we need to understand these struggles from both a political and epistemic point of view. It is, as Carlos Viteri Gualinga pointed out, an unequal epistemic war that is expressed in the exploitation of oil (2003, 85). That is why this political and epistemic struggle is a de-colonial project that once and for seek to de-link from the coloniality of power.
Conclusions

In this thesis I have analyzed and problematized the challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* in practice after the new Constitution of Ecuador was ratified in 2008. Methodologically, by focusing on the implementation process after its inclusion in the new Constitution, this study has identified several challenges and dilemmas that are linked to the Ecuadorian resource dilemma issues of translating concepts that originate from indigenous worldviews that originate from local lifestyles. The Ecuadorian resource dilemma is grounded in the country’s continuance reliance on extracting natural resources to finance social welfare. Consequently, the last decade shows how contradictions and tensions have become evident between resource governance, welfare policies while respecting the constitutionally recognized rights of nature and the visions and principles of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. This is illustrated in the failure of the Yasuni ITT project during the presidency of Rafael Correa. After the inclusion of the concepts and the dismantling of the project, new meanings became associated with the concepts linked to principles of eco-socialism and bio-socialism that have been identified in the pragmatic approach by the state. A central issue in this context is connected to the process of translating *Sumak Kawsay* to *Buen-Vivir* where much of its original content is reduced, simplified or lost when translating principles and ideas that originate from indigenous ontologies with worldviews that challenge and collide with Western rational and secular thought.

These concepts originate from daily life experiences among indigenous peoples which illustrate the importance to understand these concepts as a lifestyle on a local communitarian level that organize relations within communities. Both between humans and natural elements. As Philipp Altmann points out, these concepts can be described as local place-based conceptualizations that are grounded in a holistic cosmovision. A holistic worldview connects humans with the non-human sphere in spiritual relationships based on the idea of having harmonious relationships. Knowledge systems that are based on ancient indigenous traditions of egalitarian principles such as fair distribution of resources, mutual help through the systems of *mingas* (collective work), *randi-randi* (give and receive).

Knowledge that originate from traditions and knowledge that have survived centuries of colonial domination by Western hegemonic discourse. From this study’s comparative and simplified comparison, this field study has illustrated how different connotations of territoriality contribute in shaping perceptions and interpretations of *Sumak Kawsay/Alli Kawsay/Buen-Vivir*. Different socio-political shifts such as undermined agricultural interests in the highlands and the development of oil exploration projects in the Amazon are two examples of events that have contributed in various and
complex ways. But also how the natural environment and integration processes contribute in shaping perceptions and interpretations.

Reconnecting to the research objective of this thesis, the central findings linked to challenges and dilemmas associated with the implementation in practice of the values and visions of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* are grounded in the Ecuadorian resource dilemma and the process of translating *Sumak Kawsay* to *Buen-Vivir*. It can be argued that these processed connected to these issues have contributed in creating different interpretations of *Sumak Kawsay/Buen-Vivir* in the pragmatic approach by the state. It shall also be emphasized the role of academia in the creation of different interpretations of the concepts. Since the inclusion of the concepts in the new Constitution, the researchers have been inspired by the indigenous conceptualization to deal with the socio-ecological crisis of the world. This approach raises important questions of possible acts of colonizing the indigenous movement and its people. As Javier Cuestas-Caza points out, research should be based on real coexistence and mutual learning (2017, 62) because a theoretical reflection without considering the local character of *Sumak Kawsay* would only turn into a de-colonial colonization (Altmann, 2017, 757).

The indigenous movement in Ecuador is a clear example of a struggle that seek to finally de-link from the coloniality of power and the persisting and structural legacies of colonialism that still exist in ways of thinking about cultures and the idea of progress and development. The struggle articulates de-colonial resistance against the totalitarian notion of Western hegemonic discourse. As emphasized thought this study, this struggle needs to be understood as both political and epistemic. Political in the sense of their right to self-determination and their land. And epistemic in the sense of the right to their culture, cosmovision and language. The Ecuadorian economy still relies on revenues from extracting natural resource. The defense of indigenous territories and culture is still a struggle that is expressed in the development projects that contribute to environmental degradation.

As I am writing the last words of this thesis, the struggle of the indigenous Huaoranis against oil exploration projects in their territory is currently on going and protests are taking place in the city of Puyo in Pastaza where I spent much of my time writing and conducting ethnographic fieldwork. It is important that academia work together with these peoples in their struggles in research.
References


Gualinga, Jose (2016). Kawasak Sacha – Living Forest A proposal of the Kichwa people of Sarayaku for a new protected areas.


Interviews

- **Miguel Calapi**
  Interviewed in his home in the community of La Calera, Cotacachi, 26 February 2019.

- **Rosa Canelos**

- **Walter Canelos**
  Interviewed in central Canelos. 20 March 2019.

- **Condor Carlosama**
  Interviewed in his home in Punkuwayku, 2 March 2019.

- **Miguel Àngel Carlosama**

- **Raúl Cevallos**
  Interviewed in his home in Turuku outside Cotacachi, 29 March 2019.

- **Mario Conejo**
  Interviewed in his home in Peguche outside Otavalo, 2 April 2019.

- **Luis Román Chávez**
  Interviewed at café Rio Intag in central Cotacachi, 4 March 2019.

- **Magdalena Fueres**
  Interviewed in her office at the market Jambi Mascara in central Cotacachi, 29 March 2019.

- **Leonardo Viteri Gualinga**

- **Alejandro Mayaprua**

- **Federies Inmunola Molina**

- **Tito Merino**
  Interviewed in the office of Pachakutik in central Puyo and in his home in Union Basé 2 February 2019 and 22 March 2019.

- **Valerio Mayancha**

- **Manuel Shiguango**
  Interviewed in his office at the local environmental protection agency in central Tena, 11 February 2019.

- **Peter Ubidia**
  Interviewed in the restaurant La Casa del Turista in central Cotacachi, 28 March 2019.

- **Antonio Vargas**
  Interviewed in his home in Union Basé outside Puyo together with Rickard Llander, 3 February 2019.

- **Ernestina Corina Vargas**
  Interviewed in her home in Canelos, 12 March 2019.

- **Miguel Leonidas Cuj Vargas**
  Interviewed in his home in Canelos, 12 March 2019.
Appendix A

A map over Ecuador. The provinces marked in red is where the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted:

Imbabura in the northern Andean highlands and the Amazonian Pastaza.