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Buen vivir (good living): *Glocal* genealogy of a Latin-American utopia for the world

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This article aims at offering a genealogical reconstruction of the contemporary Latin-American *buen vivir* discourse. *Buen vivir* emerges at the turn of the century in a context of global political contestation around the prevailing development model, at the intersection of multiple actors, discourses, and struggles. Our analysis disputes the ethnocentric character often attributed to *buen vivir* outside Latin-America, as an allegedly indigenous discursive product. This article shows, instead, that *buen vivir* rather constitutes a prime example of *glocal* discursive articulation in search for alter- and post-developmentalist utopias; a cultural-political experiment that holds valuable lessons for global debates around alternative socio-ecological futures.

Keywords:

Buen vivir; genealogy; (post)development; Latin America; ecology; discourse.

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1. Introduction

Buen vivir, understood as a contemporary cultural, social, and ecological regulatory ideal, is a discourse that has found anchorage in public and academic debates in the last two decades (Vanhulst, 2015), particularly in the field of development studies (Hidalgo-Capitán, 2011). It can be broadly defined as a community-oriented cultural paradigm of social organization, based on a form of life that maintains a relationship of respect, harmony, and balance with everything that exists, understanding that everything is interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated (Huanacuni, 2010). Three dimensions are usually considered as central to *buen vivir* discourse: harmony with oneself (identity), with society (equity), and with nature (sustainability) (Cubillo-Guevara, Hidalgo-Capitán, & García-Alvarez, 2016).

While rooted in the cultural tradition of the indigenous peoples of the Andean-Amazonian region, as a contemporary discursive construction, *buen vivir* is framed within global debates around alternative forms of development and alternatives to development (Vanhulst, 2015; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014, 2017). In this regard, *buen vivir* is part of a global field of social, political, and academic debates, and enters a dynamic of cross-pollinations with other "discourses of transition" – a term subsuming discourses advocating a whole-societal transformation towards global social and ecological sustainability, breaking away with the inherently non-generalizable model of social organization of the modern West, which has, however, become globally dominant (Beling et al., 2018; Escobar 2011).

This article enquires about the origins and evolution of this contemporary Latin-American discourse which goes under the rubric of *buen vivir*[1], thereby seeking to elucidate the question about the allegedly idiosyncratic character of *buen vivir* and about its relevance to broader international social and environmental debates.

Given that our interest is understanding *buen vivir* as an emerging discursive phenomenon, rather than as a concept with abstract meaning(s)[2], in the following we will focus mainly on two aspects: (1) a spatial axis of political-institutional context analysis (both at the territorial and global levels) of the emergence of *buen vivir*, which contributed to a structural readjustment of political forces in the Andean-Amazonian region, giving place to *buen vivir* as a discursive and political innovation (De la Cadena, 2010; Altmann, 2013a); and (2) a temporal axis, that is: the phases of emergence and consolidation of *buen vivir* as a discourse proper, thereby highlighting the involvement of diverse political and social actors.

To this end, we will adopt a methodological approach of historically embedded "critical discourse analysis" (Fairclough, 1995; Seantel, 2013; Wodak, 2001). Implicit here is thus the starting hypothesis that the *buen vivir* discourse did not emerge or evolve through diffuse social interaction, but rather through the deliberate action of concrete agents with specific goals, drivers, and socio-cognitive frameworks, and embedded in a specific power matrix. The genealogical approach (Foucault 1975) and the "approach of critical discourse analysis" converge in their framing of discourses as meaning structures resulting from the contingent interaction of multiple actors in a specific and power-laden spatiotemporal context (Fairclough, 1995; Seantel, 2013). We therefore focus on studying the relevant historical phases where the socio-political and cultural contexts have opened windows of opportunity for certain agents to

(re)construct the discourse of *buen vivir* as a function of their own worldviews and interests. In this article we thus seek to account for the discursive coalitions and for the clearest points of intersection among (trans)territorial flows and structures that unveil how *buen vivir* emerged and evolved. But, more importantly, into the future, such intersections constitute potential docking points for strategic and deeper discursive articulations towards the construction of civilizational alternatives that are socially and ecologically sustainable (Beling et al., 2018).

2. Political and social context of emergence and mainstreaming of *buen vivir*

Given that the emergence and mainstreaming of the *buen vivir* discourse happened in Latin America – particularly in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Nicaragua and El Salvador –, it would be logical to conclude that the local and regional context must have been determinant to this outcome. However, taking into account that, at the same time, the emergence and evolution of *buen vivir* has taken place alongside a process of strong global (economic) embeddedness of the region, a proper analysis of the overarching global/international context cannot be sidelined from the study of *buen vivir* as a discursive phenomenon.

2.1. Global context (*outside-inward influences*)

Basing on a broad literature review, it is possible to highlight at least the following eight contextual factors at the global level as laying the groundwork for the emergence and subsequent mainstreaming of the *buen vivir* discourse:

a) The emergence of the awareness about the ecological predicament and of the "socio-ecological sustainability" imperative as of the late 1960s. Historical landmarks in this regard

were the UN Earth Summits (Stockholm – 1972, Rio de Janeiro – 1992, Johannesburg – 2002, "Rio+20" – 2012), and the Brundtland Report *Our Common Future* of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), which canonizes the concept of "sustainable development". This concept then re-emerges with renewed urgency and is reframed as a civilizational challenge in the global public sphere in the early 21st century, particularly in correlation with the public mainstreaming of anthropogenic climate change as the one catalytic environmental challenge.

b) The "cultural turn" and the consolidation of "multiculturality/ interculturality" as a global discourse from the 1970s onwards. This was linked to the struggles of ethnic communities for recognition and for the acceptance of their cultural difference, which led to the coining of the concepts of "development with identity" and "ethnodevelopment" in the Declaration of San José on Ethnodevelopment and Ethnocide in Latin America (UNESCO, 1981), and feature historical landmarks such as the ILO Convention 169 (ILO, 1989), the publication of the Report *Our Creative Diversity* by the UNESCO Commission for Culture and Development (1996) and the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of the United Nations (2007).

c) The revival of inquiries into the idea of the "good life", banished from the field of Western political philosophy since the Enlightenment in favour of the alleged axiological neutrality of the liberal concept of "justice" (Sandel, 2010). Explanations for this rebirth are manifold, including the decreasing marginal utility – of material affluence or even its decoupling from subjective happiness[3] – so-called "Easterlin paradox" (Easterlin, 1974) – , the post-

materialistic turn (i.a. Inglehart, 1997), the insertion of identity into politics, driven by the New Social Movements, etc.

d) The contemporary critiques and the build-up of an international agenda in the search for alternatives to the "ideology of development" in the face of cumulative evidence of chronic crises in the sociopolitical, environmental, and economic fronts (persistent poverty, growing inequality, accelerating ecological degradation, etc.) sharpened with the generalization of neoliberal policy frameworks worldwide from the 1980s onwards. Historical landmarks of this critique of development include the publication of the report *What Now? Another Development* by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (1975), which calls for an "alternative development" or "other kind of development", and that of *The Development Dictionary. A Guide to Knowledge as Power*, coordinated by Wolfgang Sachs (1992), the main reference of the intellectual current of post-development. Furthermore, such critiques have led some intellectuals to advocate for the "right not to develop" (Agostino, 2004). Hybridizations can also be observed with the mentioned societal critiques derived from the ecological boundaries of the biosphere; for example, with the idea of "ecodevelopment" as conceptualized in the prelude to the UN Conference on the Human Environment – Stockholm 1972 –, embedded in the Founex Report (De Almeida, 1971) and theorized by Ignacy Sachs (Sachs, 1974).

e) The de-stigmatization of the political left after the Cold War, and the diversification of "successful" development pathways, with the emergence of large state-managed economies on the world stage, a prime example being the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China

and South-Africa) (Arsel & Ávila-Ángel, 2012). This has made it possible for progressive politics to become credible, viable, and desirable alternatives to neoliberalism.

f) The crisis of Westphalian Nation-States, which, in the aftermath of the neoliberal globalization of the 1990s and 2000s, have severely shrunk their capacity for regulating their national economies and attending to the social demands of their population, rather becoming subject to the constraints imposed upon them by the global market (Crouch 2004; Wolin 2008).

g) The irruption of collective actions and alternative social movements articulated at the global scale against diverse forms of injustice and oppression, which have in the celebration of the 2001 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre their central milestone. The forum popularized the slogan "another world is possible" (World Social Forum, 2001), and established itself in successive editions as the world's main critical stage against neoliberalism and neoliberal globalization. Other milestones in the recent history of alternative social movements are the so-called "Arab Spring" between 2010 and 2013 (Roberts et al., 2016), the protests of the "*Indignados* movements" and "Occupy movements" in Spain and the USA in 2011 and in France in 2016 (Hessel, 2010; Sampedro, 2011), or else the movements against a "democracy without capacity for choice" (Pleyers & Capitaine, 2016).

h) The economic crisis starting in 2007, which promoted an anti-neoliberal rhetorical turn, and the emerging reframing of the West as an "anti-model" (Beck, 2015), giving way to extensive diagnoses of a socio-economic and socio-ecological "multiple crisis" in the West (Brand, 2015) and of a "civilizational crisis" in Latin America (Escobar, 2011).

*2.2. Local Context (*inside-outward *influences)*

At the local level[4], in Latin-America, at least five contextual factors can be identified which allow to understand the emergence and consolidation of the *buen vivir* discourse in diverse territories. These factors are the following:

a) The return of democracy to the region from the 1980s onwards, following distinct periods of military dictatorship in most countries, and preceding the heyday of the social and economic neoliberal model in the 1990s, which was followed, in turn, by a slow restructuration and reorganization of civil society and of the capacities for collective action in the 1990s and 2000s (Acuña y Vacchieri, 2007).

b) The debate around the historic and political meaning of the commemoration of the 500 years of the "discovery of America" in 1992 (Bernecker, 1996). This debate gave way to a greater recognition of the identity and collective rights of the indigenous peoples of Latin-America (or *Abya Yala*, the Kuna term with which the indigenous peoples have come to identify the region), including the right to political participation. Latin American indigenous movements thus eventually became important political actors at the national level (Yashar, 2005), which led to the inclusion of the above-mentioned rights in the national constitutions of over fifteen Latin-American countries.

c) In the 1990s and 2000s, the social struggles of waged labourers of the public and private sectors, of peasants, indigenous, afro-descendants, students, urban collectives, ecologists, women (Seoane, Taddei y Algranati, 2006) led to the emergence of post-neoliberal, post-colonial, post-developmental, and post-patriarchal utopias in most countries in the region. An important milestone in the intellectual development of such utopias was the inaugural

manifesto of the Latin American Group of Subaltern Studies in 1995 (Castro-Gómez & Mendieta, 1998) and the 1998 creation of the informal think tank "Modernity/Coloniality Group" (Lander, 2000; Mignolo, 2007).

d) The building of subaltern electoral coalitions among alternative social movements (workers, peasants, cooperative associates, indigenous, afro-descendants, ecologists, feminists, liberationists, solidarity-oriented, etc.), with the participation of representatives of the indigenous movement in some countries, especially in Ecuador with Alianza PAIS (PAIS Alliance) (Dávalos, 2014), and in Bolivia, with the party Movimiento al Socialismo (Movement to Socialism, MAS) (Zuazo, 2008), both prime examples of so-called party-movements who successfully challenged the political establishment.

e) The "left turn" of many Latin-American governments after the turn of the century (Bajoit, Houtart & Deuterme, 2012), drawing on the impulse provided by the "Bolivarian Revolution" in Venezuela (1999) and the arrival in office of the Brazilian Partido de los Trabajadores (Workers' Party, PT) in 2003. These events launched a "post-neoliberal" political line which extended throughout the region to most Latin-American countries[5].

The above global and local contextual elements provide a solid basis for inquiring into the convergent forces which, both at the global and local levels, have contributed to the emergence and mainstreaming of the *buen vivir* discourse.

3. Genealogical reconstruction of the emergence and mainstreaming of *buen vivir*

In order to engage with the history of the *buen vivir* discourse, this genealogical analysis will be divided into four phases: (1) incubation and emergence, which gathers the precedents of

buen vivir as a political discourse; (2) prelude to the constituent processes, where the hybridization of the discourse is analyzed; (3) constituent processes, which deals with the institutionalization of *buen vivir*; and (4) post-constituent phase, which witnesses a boom in the literature on *buen vivir* and a diversification of its (partially contradictory) appropriations by multiple political and social actors. This genealogical analysis is aimed at demonstrating that the emergence and rapid spread of *buen vivir* as a contemporary discourse are not due to diffuse social interaction, but rather to the active fostering of concrete discursive agents, giving place to a handful of discursive strands with dissimilar implications for the political and cultural transformation potential of *buen vivir* within and beyond Latin-America.

3.1. Incubation and emergence of buen vivir (before the year 2000)

While it is not possible to speak of the existence of *buen vivir* as a discourse before the year 2000[6], a variety of inputs stemming from diverse currents of thought (besides indigenous ones) and academic disciplines can be identified as invoking values, regulative principles, and arguments which are prefigurative of the *buen vivir* discourse. Noteworthy examples in this regard are the thinking of Peruvian politician and intellectual José Carlos Mariátegui (1928), who combined Marxist theory with the traditions and the particular ethnic-territorial trajectories of Latin-America; or that of the Ecuadorian Vladimir Serrano (1992), who uttered the thesis that an "indigenous cosmogony" could contribute to overcoming the dichotomy between industrial economy and ecology, an idea much in line with the "ecodevelopment" proposal of the 1970s (Cortez, 2011).

In addition, decades-long developments in the indigenous world further prepared the social breeding ground for the emergence of *buen vivir*. The cross-fertilization of the indigenous movements with peasant-socialist identities (particularly in the 1920s and 1930s) in Ecuador, for instance, and their diversification alongside communist, but also catholic and protestant identities during the second half of the 20th century, as well as the re-assertion of indigenous political and identitarian demands in the 1970s, contributed to a potentiated creativity, resilience, connectivity, and political strength of the indigenous movement (Altmann, 2013a, Yashar, 2005).

Last but not least, during the 1990s, the multiple socio-economic and political crises of neoliberal projects region-wide were instrumental in paving the way for the emergence of a new cultural and political project.

It is in this context of growing sociopolitical influence of the indigenous world that, in the mid-1980s, early elaborations of the concept of *buen vivir* are essayed in cooperation with European anthropologists. The works of Philippe Descola on the Achuar concept of *shiir waras* in 1986, Bartomeu Meliá on the Guaraní *ñande reko* in 1988*,* Elke Mader on the Shuar *penker pujustin* in 1996*,* Carlos Viteri on the Amazonic-Kichwa *sumak kawsay* in 2003, all being similarly translated into Spanish as "*buen vivir*" (living well but also as "life in harmony", make out the most prominent examples (all cited in Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a).

This unprecedented interest in the indigenous world and their way of life is no coincidence. In the context of a global legitimacy crisis of the idea of development, the development sector – being widely criticized as centralistic and paternalistic – undertakes a process of self-exploration and a quest for revalidation that necessarily ought to come from the

final recipients of international development funding, thus giving way to a paradigm shift that can be rhetorically synthesized in the replacement of the term “development aid” by that of “development cooperation”.

The most relevant episode in this period, insofar as it accounts for the first attempt at political articulation of the emerging *buen vivir* discourse, was the 1992 formulation of the *Amazanga Plan* (A. Viteri et al., 1992) for the management of the natural resources in the indigenous territories of Pastaza by the Organización de Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza (Organization of the Indigenous Peoples of Pastaza, OPIP), with funding from the Italian NGO Terra Nuova (New Land) and the Danish NGO Ibis. This plan, which was initially shaped after the concept of “ethnodevelopment” promoted by international development cooperation agents in the Ecuadorian Amazon, implied a reaction against the reification of nature as implicit in the Brundtland-concept of “sustainable development”. This led the indigenous peoples gathered under OPIP to retrieve their vision of the future from their own traditional identity, thus establishing *sumak kawsay* as an idealized version of their way of life, in open opposition to the idea of sustainable development, but implicitly also to that of ethno-development.

In hindsight, this proved to have kick-started a process by which, with the help of intellectuals and indigenous leaders from the Amazonian region, *sumak kawsay* was diffused as *buen vivir* and as an alternative to the Western idea of development throughout the region, especially in the Andean area of Ecuador and Bolivia (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a).

Thus, until the dawn of the 21st century, the discursive emergence of *buen vivir* was marked by the *outside-inward* influences mainly of the Catholic Church, academia and the

European development cooperation, which accompanied the soul-searching process of indigenous intellectuals inquiring into their own way of life, giving rise to *sumak kawsay* or what we have elsewhere termed the "primordial *buen vivir*" (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2018). At the same time, and taking into account that this process of incubation and emergence of *buen vivir* as a political discourse was conducted by subaltern social actors with no links to the traditional political elites of Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, the process can be safely characterized as bottom-up, reaching the elite-layers only in the later phase analyzed in the following section.

3.2. Prelude to the constitutional processes in Ecuador and Bolivia (2000 - 2005)

By the early years of the 21st century, however, the discourse of *sumak kawsay* or "primordial *buen vivir*" had clearly transcended the scope of the Amazonian political sphere and started spreading into political and academic circles in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, drawing on the increasingly powerful regional process of indigenous self-assertion. The reworking of the cultural traditions of Latin-American native peoples is taken as a stepping stone to articulate a civilizational critique in the framework of the abovementioned self-reflection process of the West around the development discourse. A 'creative tension' emerges between diverse currents prioritizing ethnic, territorial, or ecological elements. *Buen vivir* thus becomes a paradoxical discursive product: the indigenous cultural heritage, which had been (and is still) often considered as mutually exclusive with the paradigm of development, is now re-framed as key to the renewal of the latter (Carballo, 2015).

A first historical milestone in this context is the dissemination of Carlos Viteri's well-known text "Visión indígena del desarrollo en la Amazonía" ("Indigenous View on Development

in the Amazon") in 2000, backed by Ecuadorian economist Alberto Acosta (2002), who explicitly links *buen vivir* to the design of alternatives to currently dominant unsustainable ways of life. Adding to this, the indigenous Amazonian *kichwa* town of Sarayaku produces their *Libro de la Vida* (*Sarayaku Book of Life*) in 2003, describing their daily way of life as organized according to the logic of *sumak kawsay* (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a).

That same year, in the framework of a citizen consultation process by the name "Diálogo Nacional 2000" ("National Dialogue 2000") in Bolivia, the German GTZ and the *Federación de Asociaciones Municipales de Bolivia* (Bolivian Federation of Municipal Associations, FAM-Bolivia) jointly drove two programs titled *Suma Qamaña* and *Ñande Reko* under the direction of Bolivian philosopher Javier Medina in 2001 and 2002. In this framework, part of the Aymara intellectual elite, led by Simon Yampara and Mario Torrez from the Centro Andino de Desarrollo Agropecuario of Bolivia (Andean Center for Agricultural and Livestock Development, CADA) developed the concept of *suma qamaña* and started propagating it in Bolivia and throughout Latin-America (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a). Furthermore, in 2003 the German GTZ organized an international seminar on "indigenous development models", which gave way to the region-wide dissemination of early attempts at defining *buen vivir*, under the indigenous terms *suma qamaña*, *ñande reko* and *sumak kawsay*.

Likewise, around the same time, in Peru in 2002, engineer Grimaldo Rengifo started researching and theorizing about the idea of *allin kawsay* (also translated into Spanish as "*buen vivir*") as an indigenous conception of wellbeing, in the framework of the Proyecto Andino de Tecnologías Campesinas of Peru (Andean Project of Peasant Technologies, PRATEC), and with funding from the Belgian NGO Broederlijk Delen (Brotherly Sharing) and the Swiss NGO

Tradiciones para el Mañana (Traditions for Tomorrow) (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a).

Overall, the intertextual network emerging from the abovementioned Ecuadorian (Viteri, 2000), Bolivian (Yampara, 2001; Medina, 2001, 2002) and Peruvian (Rengifo, 2002) inputs form the backbone of the later development of a political discourse under the label of "*buen vivir*" in Latin-America. This is the work of local actors, and account for the *inside-outward* flows dominant in this phase. However, the fact that virtually all these initiatives had the support of foreign actors renders the importance of outside-inward influences visible, as well.

The growing tide of *buen vivir* now starts permeating the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, whereby *sumak kawsay* is included in the Strategic Plan of the Consejo de Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas del Ecuador (Ecuadorian Council of Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, CODENPE) in 2003, and in the educational strategy of the Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi (House of Wisdom Intercultural University, UIAW) in 2004 (Altmann, 2013b). Moreover, by 2006 *buen vivir* made it into the Government Program of Alianza PAIS, which is largely to be credited to Alberto Acosta and other mestizo-intellectuals close to the Ecuadorian indigenous movement (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a). *Buen vivir* also permeates the Bolivian indigenous movement, which manages to insert the Aymara concept of *suma qamaña* into the campaign program of MAS in 2002 (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a).

This phase in the discursive development of *buen vivir* is characterized by the agency of intellectual elites close to the grassroots, whereby unlike the previous phase, the bottom-up

streaming of *buen vivir* into more or less formal political networks starts becoming apparent. To be noted, however, is that the eventual assimilation of *buen vivir* by the formal partisan political sphere is a result of the political organization of historically subaltern groups, even though in this phase their political influence is still marginal as compared to that of traditional political elites.

3.3. Constituent processes in Ecuador and Bolivia and ensuing institutional and programmatic materializations (2006 - 2009)

After Evo Morales' MAS and Rafael Correa's Alianza PAIS were elected into office in Bolivia and Ecuador, respectively, both countries set to reform their national constitutions, starting in 2007. This phase is thus mainly characterized by the protagonist role of the State over the process of discursive articulation and dissemination of *buen vivir*, as well as by a tension between two main forces: a 'decolonial strand' coming from the indigenous world and the grassroots, on the one hand, and a reformist strand represented by state agents exerting pressure to adapt *buen vivir* to the dominant structures, frames, and policies, on the other. (Vanhulst & Beling, 2017; Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015a)

During this time, both the Bolivian and the Ecuadorian governments took ownership of the concepts of *suma qamaña*, which was translated into "vivir bien", and of *sumak kawsay*, hereinafter labeled "*buen vivir*", and introduced them into their official development programs under the names *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo. Bolivia Digna, Soberana, Productiva y Democrática para Vivir* Bien, 2006-2011 (*National Plan for Development. Dignified, Sovereign, Productive, and Democractic Bolivia for Living Well, 2006-2011*) (Ministerio de Planificación del

Desarrollo, 2007), in Bolivia, and *Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2007-2010. Planificación para la Revolución Ciudadana* (*National Plan for Development 2007-2010. Planning for the Citizen Revolution*) (SENPLADES, 2007), in Ecuador.

The Bolivian and Ecuadorian indigenous movements also included both concepts in their proposals to the respective Constituent Assembly[7]. The convergence of interests arising between the MAS-government in Bolivia and the administration of Alianza PAIS in Ecuador and their respective indigenous constituencies allowed for the concepts of *vivir bien* (*suma qamaña*) and *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay*) to be adopted as regulative ideal in the new constitutions (Asamblea Constituyente de Bolivia, 2009; Asamblea Nacional Constituyente de Ecuador, 2008). These constitutional reforms, together with the official development plans in Bolivia and Ecuador (Ministerio de Planificación del Desarrollo, 2007; SENPLADES, 2007, 2009) are unequivocal indicators of the institutional mainstreaming of *buen vivir*, as well as its incipient dissemination in social and ecological debates beyond the region (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014)

Besides the state and the grassroot (especially indigenous) movements, academic intellectuals[8] – mainly Latin-American but also European ones – did also play a major role in this mainstreaming process (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014), as did local and international environmental NGOs, such as Acción Ecológica (Ecologic Action), Pachamama Alliance, Oilwatch, or else the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund.

The most important institutional innovation from the constitutional reform process in Bolivia is arguably the recognition of the country as a "Plurinational State", While the new Ecuadorean constitution is probably best-known for the recognition of legal "rights of nature", which later also attained legal status in Bolivia.

In general lines, what follows from the above is that this phase was dominated by *inside-outward* discursive flows, insofar as the new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia have become references at the global scale. At the domestic level, the dominant direction in discursive transfers appears to be *top-down*, with political representatives in the constituent assemblies functioning both as *decision-making* and as *meaning-making* elites[9].

However, taking the fact into account that, at this point, the political leadership in both the MAS and Alianza PAIS administrations included many representatives from the grassroots, displacing the traditional political establishment (De la Cadena, 2010), this phase could be also understood as a process of institutionalization permeated by a *bottom-up* influence from the grassroots onto the otherwise conservative political elites.

3.4. Post-constituent phase (2010 - ongoing)

After the new constitutions were passed in Ecuador and Bolivia, there is a boom of literature on *buen vivir*, in which intellectuals, politicians, media-persons from Ecuador and Bolivia, but also from the rest of Latin-America and from abroad participate in the process of discursive production and reproduction, which thus becomes increasingly de-localized. At the same time, however, at the territorial level an increasingly intense struggle for the appropriation of *buen vivir* began to unfold.

Indeed, in the case of Ecuador, while the Confederación de Nacionalidades y Pueblos Indígenas del Ecuador (National Confederation of Ecuadorian Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples, CONAIE) (under the brand-new presidency of Marlon Santi, one of the protagonists in the emergence of the "primordial buen vivir" at Sarayaku) finally decided to fully embrace *buen*

vivir as an emblem of the nationally organized indigenous movement, together with the rights of nature, embraced, a 2008 conflict around the new legislation on water and mines sparked a political fracture with the government, which would thereafter grow steadily larger. This meant that indigenous organizations were increasingly marginalized from key policy processes and most important projects, for example, the ground-breaking Yasuní-ITT initiative[10], which elevated Ecuador to an ecological champion in the international sphere (Espinosa, 2015). This eventually led to a formal breaking off relations between the two sides in 2010.

On the other hand, at the level of the state, many of the key figures of *buen vivir* like Alberto Acosta, former president of the Ecuadorean Constituent Assembly and former minister of Energy and Mines, and Mónica Chuji, former Secretary of Communication and spokesperson for the Ecuadorean government, distanced themselves from a government perceived as increasingly autistic and disconnected from the grassroots.

Thus, at the governmental level, *buen vivir* was increasingly framed in a conciliatory fashion vis-à-vis established views of development, as becomes apparent, for example, in the two versions of the *Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir* (*National Plan for Buen Vivir*) *2009-2013* and *2013-2017*, prepared by the National Secretary of Planning and Development (SENPLADES, 2009, 2013). The continuation of the extractivist economic model geared toward petroleum-exports was justified with the argument that "more extractivism is needed to finance the transition out of extractivism", allegedly allowing time for a transformation of the productive matrix that remains elusive.

Meanwhile, in Bolivia, the war for the appropriation of *buen vivir* (in Bolivia, *vivir bien*[11]) was waged mainly within the MAS administration itself, which split into two wings: a socialist

wing led by Bolivia's Vice President Álvaro García-Linera, who promoted the resignification of *buen vivir* / *vivir bien* as "Andean community socialism"; and an indigenist (or indianist) wing led by Chancellor David Choquehuanca (later substituted by Fernando Huanacuni), who sought to remain true to the indigenous meanings of *suma qamaña*. At first, the Bolivian indigenous movement aligned itself with the indigenist wing of the government, but as government policies became increasingly biased towards Andean community socialism to the detriment of *suma qamaña*, with the concomitant reduction of indigenist postulates to rather ritual and folkloric aspects, the former alliance between government and indigenous movement started to deteriorate. Indigenous support to the Morales administration became increasingly polarized between the unionized coca-peasants ('*cocaleros'*) and the communitarian indigenous groups ('*comunarios'*), particularly around the emblematic TIPNIS conflict. The conflict emerged around a government plan to pass a highway across a protected natural area and autarchic indigenous territory, TIPNIS. The 'cocaleros' would benefit from the highway, which would allow them to gain easier access to markets. Yet 'comunarios' argue that it would create a structural incentive to extend coca-plantations into the park, forcing a massive exodus of the indigenous communities settled there. (Perrier-Bruslé, 2012).

This context of political confrontation between the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia, on the one hand, and a coalition of indigenous movements and environmental groups, on the other, caused a discursive diffraction of *buen vivir*. Most scholars converge in conceptualizing such diffraction as a tri-partition of *buen vivir* into three discursive streams[12]: and indigenist, a socialist, and an ecologist/post-developmental stream (Le Quang & Vercoutère, 2013; Cubillo-

Guevara, Hidalgo-Capitán and Domínguez-Gómez, 2014; Vanhulst, 2015, Vanhulst & Beling, 2014).

In terms of the direction of discursive influences in this phase, the blooming of indigenist literature about *buen vivir* can be regarded as a bottom-up flow derived from demands for territorial autonomy and/or identitary differentiation, where such identity is often conceived in a rather essentialist way (Vanhulst & Beling 2014). This gravitation of the grassroots notwithstanding, the fact that the "indigenist *buen vivir*" is largely a product of indigenous intellectual and political leaders[13], which would equally validate interpretations framing it as a (partly) top-down process driven by meaning-making elites.

The indigenist strand of *buen vivir* does not seek to exert influence beyond the local sphere, but rather focuses in avoiding exogenous interferences in their own territories – in particular, European influences, which are typically framed as colonial. This strand has a tight link with the indigenous movements, although readiness (to variable degrees) to bonding with other subaltern groups when devising opportunities for collaboration is apparent. This implies a search for epistemic affinities extending to both Latin-America and other regions of the world, as is the case with *ubuntu* in Africa, *swaraj* and *svadeshi* in India, *gawis ay biag* in the Phillipines, or *sansaeng* in Corea (Cubillo-Guevara e Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015b).

The literature matching the socialist strand of *buen vivir*, in turn, can be clearly viewed as a sign of *outside-inward* influences, insofar it constitutes an attempt to assimilate globally circulating (neo)Marxist and neo-Keynesian discourses[14]. This strand is tightly linked to (and dependent on) institutional politics, and only open to hybridation with established proposals in

international political discourse. This also indicates a *top-down* dynamic of discursive production and reproduction, where the political establishment features as main protagonist.

In the case of the ecologist and post-developmentalist *buen vivir* strand, discursive agents are prominently scholars and social activists from almost every Latin-American and from some European countries[15]. This literature is also dominated by outside-inward influences: to be observed here is a local anchorage of a global discourse around the innovative character of the Ecuadorean and Bolivian constitutions, though certainly bandwagoning a solid local intellectual production. *Inside-outward* influences are thus by no means negligible, particularly at the academic level, where scholars like Alberto Acosta or Eduardo Gudynas have been pivotal in the international dissemination of *buen vivir* (Vanhulst & Zaccai, 2016).

Of the three discursive strands of *buen vivir* identified, the ecologist/post-developmentalist current is the one which has received the most academic attention and has had the most fertile cross-pollination with other visions for fundamental social transformation. Insofar academic scholars and environmental NGOs are its main discursive carriers, the discursive production and transfer process is eminently *top-down* in nature, with a prominent role of meaning-making elites.

4. Conclusions

From an international policy-sphere perspective, *buen vivir* is often fetishized as a monolithic, exotic, and romantic – if not hopelessly naïve – approach that vaguely relates to welfare conceptions, maybe adding a multicultural or ethnic hype; the main challenge being how to operationalize it into (hopefully quantifiable and) generalizable indicators. The purpose

of this article has been to dispute both of these tokens. Indeed, on the one hand, it shows that *buen vivir* is neither a neo-ethnodevelopmental discourse pouring indigenous worldviews into the global public sphere, nor a lineal analogous to any quantifiable Western conceptions of wellbeing that can be seamlessly assimilated into existing bureaucratic structures and rationalities. Rather, by means of its genealogical reconstruction as a spatiotemporally situated discourse, this article has shown that *buen vivir* is rather to be understood as a '*glocal*' field of contention whose (limited) discursive variations can be traced back to concrete agent-constellations and struggles, in a context of global and local contestations around the prevailing model of development. This has evident far-reaching implications for any attempt at operationalizing *buen vivir* and for the fate of its transformative potential.

Insofar the complexity behind the emergence and dissemination of *buen vivir* as a glocal discursive process is understood, the potential and limitations of various discourse coalitions in the search of alter- and post-developmentalist utopias become apparent. Our analysis underpins the conclusion that the main value-added of *buen vivir* comes neither from its "retrotopian" significations (Bauman, 2017) nor from its (in)efficacy as a government program, but rather from its politically and culturally subversive character, which produces an epistemic break with dominant languages and mind-frames, with open outcomes. Our analysis shows that, as a contemporary discourse, *buen vivir* cannot be reduced to its origins in the traditional indigenous cosmologies. Instead, even while it remains heavily influenced by the latter, it has forked into distinct discursive currents emphasizing diverse goods, as prioritized by the various social groups performing the function of discursive articulation. Hence, attempts to portray every interpretation of *buen vivir* that deviates from (a rather reified view of) the indigenous

world as a “distortion of its original meaning” or as “epistemic extractivism” (Grosfoguel, 2016) does leap service to the goal of fostering a wider socio-ecological transformation, as do attempts at merely assimilating it to conventional notions of wellbeing. Instead, a focus on identifying the conditions under which the idea of *buen vivir* can generate broader convergences (or not) towards transformative pathways challenging the status quo – or else generate mild reformist approaches with a status-quo-stabilizing effect – would serve to push forward the transition to a fairer and more sustainable world (an example is developed at length in Beling et al., 2018). By helping to identify such conditions as a macro-societal real-life experiment in the context of the Andean-Amazonian region, *buen vivir* can offer relevant insights for global debates about alternative socio-ecological futures.

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Endnotes

[1] In the framework of this article, the Spanish term "*buen vivir*" refers exclusively to this Latin-American discourse, which is not to be conflated with a broader global debate about competing conceptions of the good life.

[2] For an analysis focusing on the diverse meanings of *buen vivir* from a genealogical perspective, see Cubillo-Guevara, Hidalgo-Capitán & Domínguez-Gómez (2014), Hidalgo-Capitán & Cubillo-Guevara (2017), and Cubillo-Guevara et al. (2018), while the present article focuses on the agency dimension. These analyses differ from etymological and from archeological approaches to *buen vivir* or good living in diverse spatiotemporal coordinates.

[3] An empirical verification of this argument for the case of Ecuador can be found in Guardiola & García-Quero (2014).

[4] Insofar the cleavage most relevant to our argument in this article is "global vs. local", the concept of "local" is used to indistinctly designate regional, national, and sub-national spheres, unless indicated otherwise.

[5] Venezuela – 1999/; Brazil – 2003/2016; Panama – 2004/2009; Dominican Republic – 2004/; Uruguay – 2005/; Honduras – 2006/2009; Peru – 2006-2011; Chile – 2006/2010 y 2014/; Bolivia – 2006/; Argentina – 2007/2015; Ecuador – 2007/; Nicaragua – 2007/; El Salvador – 2007/; Paraguay – 2008/2012; Guatemala – 2008/2012; Costa Rica – 2014/; Mexico – 2018.

[6] Before the concept of *buen vivir* (*sumak kawsay* in Kichwa) became a political discourse on a national or even global level, there are, nevertheless, some uses of the concepts *alli kawsay*, *sumak kawsay,suma qamaña*, and other denominations in the Andean and Amazonian areas of today's Ecuador, Bolivia, and Peru, as well as in the Paraguayan and Bolivian lowlands. Apart from the use of *buen vivir*, as good governance by the Quechua chronicler Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala (1615) in the 17th century in the Viceroyalty of Peru, the first documented references date from the mid-20th century. Indeed, the term *alli kawsay*, understood as a virtuous or good life already appears in 1939 and 1940 in a newspaper published by the Federación Ecuatoriana de Indios (Ecuadorian Federation of Indians, FEI) and in 1947 in a schoolbook created by the FEI with the support of Catholic missionaries. The term *sumak kawsay*, understood as beautiful life, appears in 1986 in other pedagogical materials for bilingual schools, a joint project of the Ecuadorian government, the Confederation of Nationalities and

Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (CONAIE) and the German development cooperation (Inuca, 2007). Finally, the *suma qamaña*, understood as the desire for a good life, is referred to in the Aymara matrimonial ritual (Yampara, 2004). Nonetheless, all of these uses of these terms are vague and imprecise and no one is referred to a specific way of life.

[7] In Bolivia, *Propuesta de las Organizaciones Indígenas, Originarias, Campesinas y de Colonizadores hacia la Asamblea Constituyente* (Pacto de la Unidad, 2006), while in Ecuador it goes by the name of *Propuesta de la CONAIE frente a la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente. Principios y lineamientos para la nueva constitución del Ecuador. Por un Estado Plurinacional, Unitario, Soberano, Incluyente, Equitativo y Laico* (CONAIE, 2007).

[8] Standing out among these are the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, the Spanish lawyer Rubén Martínez Dalmau from the Centro de studios Políticos y Sociales (Center of Political and Social Studies, CEPS), the Uruguayan ecologist Eduardo Gudynas from the Centro Latinoamericano de Ecología Social (Latin-American Center of Social Ecology, CLAES), or the Argentinean anthropologist Salvador Schavelzon from the Consejo Latinoamericano de las Ciencias Sociales (Latin-American Social Science Council, CLACSO) – the latter being particularly relevant for the Bolivian case.

[9] A conceptual distinction between two types of elites appears necessary to make sense of the discursive-formative developments in this phase: while decision-making elites are endowed with conventionally understood power to make collectively binding decisions, meaning-making elites are a special type of elites who exert influence as discourse-shaping persons drawing on their symbolic, cultural, social capital, regardless of their economic or political power. This applies both to persons and to organizations which are conventionally accorded hermeneutic or interpretative authority (Assadourian & The Worldwatch Institute, 2010).

[10] A detailed genealogy and assessment of this iconic political initiative can be found, inter alia, in Arsel & Ávila-Angel (2012), and Calligaris & Trevini Bellini (2015).

[11] Terminological digression: While the internationally widespread translation for the Ecuadorean version (buen vivir) is “good living”, the Bolivian “vivir bien” has been used distinctively translated as “living well”.

[12] For a detailed account of the discursive markers in each of the three strands, see Cubillo-Guevara et al. (2018).

[13] In Ecuador, the leading exponents of the indigenous strand of *buen vivir* are kichwa-Ecuadorian indigenous leaders, such as Luis Macas, Luis Maldonado, Nina Pacari, Blanca Chancosa, Mónica Chuji, Ariruma Kowii or else Floresmilo Simbaña, as well as indigenous intellectuals, amongst which Pablo Dávalos and Atawallpa Oviedo (Hidalgo-Capitán, Guillén & Deleg, 2014). Similarly, in Bolivia the field is dominated by Aymara indigenous leaders and thinkers such as Fernando Huanacuni (2010), David Choquehuanca (2010), Elisa Canqui (2011), Simón Yampara (2011), and Mario Torrez (2012), as well as non indigenous but indigenist intellectuals like Xabier Albó (2009), Rafael Bautista (2010), Raúl Prada (2011), Javier Medina (2011), or Josef Estermann (2012). Eminent Peruvian contributors are likewise of indigenous origin, as illustrated by the cases of Javier Lajo (2011) and Grimaldo Rengifo (2012). With the exception of Albó who is Spanish and Estermann who is Swiss, both theologians, all the other authors of this current are Ecuadorians, Bolivians and Peruvians; although Dávalos and Oviedo have been trained in France and Medina in Austria and Germany.

[14] The main authors in this discursive current are politicians and intellectuals with close ties to Alianza PAIS, in the case of Ecuador (i.a. René Ramírez, Ricardo Patiño, Pedro Páez, Fander Falconí), or to MAS, in Bolivia(Álvaro García-Linera, Félix Cárdenas; María Nela Prada, etc.), but also diverse Latin-American (José Luis Coraggio, Vicente Escandell, Atilio Borón, Valter Pomar, Mariano Féliz, Marta Harnecker, Rosario Murillo, etc.) and European scholars (Francois Houtart, Boaventura de Sousa Santos, Katu Arkonada, Losu Perales, Mattieu Le Quang), many of which were invited by the governments in Ecuador and Bolivia to participate in international seminars and publications on *buen vivir* (SENPLADES, 2010; Farah y Vasapollo, 2011; Arkonada, 2012; Le Quang y Vercoutère, 2013).

[15] Worthwhile mentioning among the Latin-American exponents are especially: Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas, Maristella Svampa, Miriam Lang, Edgardo Lander, Arturo Escobar, Gustavo Esteva, Leonardo Boff, José Luis Corragio and Aníbal Quijano. Prominent voices in the Ecuadorean national discursive sphere are, in addition, among others, Esperanza Martínez, Dania Quirola, Patricio Carpio, Magdalena León, Fernando Vega, Margarita Aguinaga, and Rafael Quintero; and in Bolivia Elisa Vega or Dunia Mokrani (Acosta & Martínez, 2009; Lang & Mokrani, 2011; Lang, López & Santillana, 2013). Among the Europeans, outstanding inputs came from José María Tortosa, Koldo Unceta, François Houtart, among others.