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**Re-reading Amartya Sen from the Andes:  
Exploring the Ethical contributions of  
Indigenous Philosophies**

**Ana Estefanía Carballo**

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# Content

- 1. Introduction ..... 5
- 2. The emergence and consolidation of the Human Development Paradigm..... 7
  - 2.1. The ‘golden dream’ of development and its discontents ..... 7
  - 2.2 Eliding the impasse: the emergence of human centred development.....9
- 3. Contemporary trends of Human Development in Latin America:  
Sen and the policy understandings of Buen Vivir ..... 12
  - 3.1 ‘El Retorno del Indio’: Reframing the debate on development..... 12
  - 3.2 Exploring the connection between  
Indigenous philosophies and development policies..... 15
  - 3.3 Human Development and Indigenous Philosophies:  
Rethinking Sen’s Capability Approach ..... 18
    - 3.3.1 The ayllu in the Andes: recovering the communal dimension of development  
discussions..... 18
    - 3.3.2 Beyond sustainability concerns: the Pachamama and the Biocentric turn ..... 22
- 4. Conclusion ..... 25
- Bibliography..... 27

## Abstract

Over the last decade, the calls for Buen Vivir (BV)/ Sumak Kawsay (SK) that have emerged from the Andes have prompted a revival of interest in the indigenous philosophies of the region and their contributions to alternative development thinking. Both in academic and policy discussions, there is an emphasis on recovering Indigenous forms of knowledge to devise alternative paths to development. Yet, given the conceptual ambiguity of discussions of development, these efforts often appear to have 'blended' with more mainstream notions of development thinking, which are deeply ingrained in the region. This has been the case with the Human Development (HD) paradigm, built upon Amartya Sen's theoretical work. The HD offers a people-centred understanding of development that has been widely embraced by international institutions and national governments and which does not simply equate to the concerns within the SK/BV framework. Yet, in policy documents and development initiatives the ideas of SK/BV and HD have been linked and their differences blurred. This conflation has resulted in the emergence of an 'environmentally conscious' idea of development that pervades most current policy initiatives, what Catherine Walsh calls the 'HD *paradogma*' (Walsh, 2010). This paper argues that rather than rushing into tracing their parallels and similarities, SK/BV gives us the opportunity to push further the boundaries of HD. While the ethical questions that will be raised in this paper cannot be exhausted in the present scope of discussion, its analysis will identify both contradictions and potential avenues that could and should be further considered if we are to achieve a fruitful engagement between the ideas of HD espoused by Amartya Sen and those emerging from the Indigenous philosophies of the Andes.

# Re-Reading Amartya Sen from the Andes: Exploring the Ethical contributions of Indigenous Philosophies

## 1. Introduction

Over the last decade, the calls for a *Buen Vivir* (Spanish for 'Good Living') that have emerged from the Andean region have prompted a revival of interest in Latin American contributions to development thinking. *Buen Vivir* (BV), in itself a translation into Spanish, refers to a notion emerging from the indigenous philosophies in the region, that focus on a harmonic understanding of the life cycle.<sup>1</sup> Here, the idea of a Good Living not only takes into consideration the individual's wellbeing, but also that of the Earth and human communities as a whole. This notion has been present in the region for centuries, but it has stirred national politics and academic discussions in the region in the last few years, particularly around policy and academic discussions of development.<sup>2</sup> The multitude of socio-political changes associated with this idea, and more generally to the Latin American 'Left turn'<sup>3</sup>, have been perceived as a 'post-liberal project' (Arditi 2008), a quest for an 'alternative modernity' (Escobar 2010b) and a project of de-colonial thinking confronting the 'Colonial Matrix of Power' by exposing a geopolitics of knowledge historically benefiting the West (Mignolo 2011). This renewed interest in Latin American development thinking is most welcome in a discussion that has largely prioritised a Western/Eurocentric lens in its focus, and gives us a unique opportunity to explore and challenge the boundaries of mainstream notions of development. In this paper, we will take the opportunity to connect these ideas with perhaps the most successful of the mainstream notions of development discussions and practices: the Human Development (HD) paradigm.

The Human Development (HD) paradigm, closely linked to the United Nations Development Program and framed in Amartya Sen's *capability approach*<sup>4</sup>, has put a people-centred understanding of

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of translation is, in regards to notions coming from these indigenous philosophies and used in contemporary development discussions, a hotly debated issue. 'Buen Vivir' (in Spanish) and 'Sumak Kawsay' in Quechua are only the most well-known terms, that, as we will discuss later, could be understood in English as 'Good Living', 'Good Life' or 'Life in plenitude' and are commonly used to refer to these indigenous frameworks. In this paper, in general I will use either BV or SK, or SK/BV to refer indistinctly to these ideas as they are used by academics and policy practitioners. This by no means seeks to ignore the multiplicity of debates on the issue of translation (from the indigenous languages into Spanish or English), but rather is an attempt to direct our attention to more fruitful discussions, focused on these ideas. On a clear analysis of this particular issue, see (Gudynas 2014b).

<sup>2</sup> Discussions on whether BV/SK should be better understood as an alternative *to* development or as a development *alternative* abound in the literature. See, inter alia, (Vanhulst and Beling 2014; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014; Viola Recasens 2014; Gudynas and Acosta 2011b; Escobar 2010b; Acosta and Martínez 2009)

<sup>3</sup> Since the turn of the century, Latin America has seen a general trend of returning progressive/left wing political parties to office that has been referred as a 'Left Turn' or 'Pink Tide'. The list of cases is too long to be included, but among the most notorious ones we can observe Venezuela with the election of Hugo Chavez (1999-2013) and Nicolas Maduro (2013 – to date), Brazil with the election of Lula da Silva (2003-2011) and Dilma Rousseff (2011- to date), Ecuador with Rafael Correa (2007-to date) and Bolivia with the successive elections of Evo Morales (2006-to date).

<sup>4</sup> The *capability approach* to development is Amartya Sen's strongest contribution to development thinking as most notably shown in the growth and expansion of the HD in the last decades. Articulated in his extensive oeuvre, but more clearly and succinctly in his *Development as Freedom*, we will briefly discuss its emergence and main characteristics in the first section of this paper. (Sen 1999)

development to the forefront. Emerging in the 1990s, it has been since widely embraced by international institutions and national governments as a profoundly humanizing and transformative approach to development. It is this people-centred understanding that has sided with participatory practices of democracy and micro-entrepreneurial economic practices for development that have mushroomed all over the Global South, Latin America not being an exception. In general, contemporary projects and discussions of development assume - and rightly so - that moving towards a people-centred understanding of development is an advance from previous, purely economic-based notions. The Human Development Index (HDI) has virtually displaced exclusively GDP-based measurements of development, at least in development circles. Amartya Sen's work has been praised by development academics and practitioners, receiving unparalleled support from all over the world.<sup>5</sup> Given the conceptual ambiguity of discussions of development in general and the success that these ideas have had in spreading across the development field in particular, challenges to ideas of HD have often become incorporated into, or co-opted by what Catherine Walsh has called the *HD paradigm* (Walsh 2010, 16). This has also been the case in Latin America, where in recent years, policy documents and initiatives have linked and virtually equated HD to the ideas of BV. The conceptual lack of clarity characteristic of discussions of development has allowed both the indigenous epistemologies and the HD discourses present in the region to 'blend' into a sort of 'environmentally conscious' idea of development that virtually pervades current policy initiatives from government, international organisations and NGOs. Here, it is frequent to find Amartya Sen's work cited together with references to indigenous epistemologies. For example, in the National Development Plans of Ecuador, both of 2009 and 2013, connections to Amartya Sen's work are made in the definition of the principles around which BV is articulated.

As the mainstream understanding that guides international and national efforts to achieve development across the globe, engagement with the HD paradigm in general and Amartya Sen's work in particular remains of vital importance to advancing a transformative and emancipatory understanding of development, in Latin America and the rest of the world. Thus, the effort to connect this paradigm with the indigenous framework and understanding of BV should be praised. Yet, it is also necessary to resist the urge to rapidly incorporate the ideas of BV into an all-encompassing idea of HD, without a necessary reflection on the challenges and opportunities that these ideas bring to discussions on development. Specifically, it is necessary to avoid the co-optation of these philosophical contributions and rather take the opportunity to reflect and push further the boundaries of our ideas of HD. This paper takes this chance, and explores the ethical contributions that BV brings to an analysis of the limitations of HD, offering a re-reading of Amartya Sen's work from the Andean region that highlights their differences in an effort to advance on HD's and Sen's limitations.

These indigenous philosophies offer valuable contributions to re-think some crucial aspects of Western development thinking – in particular, around two main elements: (a) the role and the understanding of the community in pursuits of development and the good life, (b) the significance of the Earth and nature in considerations of sustainability and the vision of development as a unilinear process versus the cyclical ideas upon which the SK/BV framework is built. These particular ethical

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<sup>5</sup> Sen has received innumerable awards and recognitions from policy and academic institutions around the world. Perhaps more notable amongst these are his Nobel Prize in Economics, received in 1998, together with his Honoris Causa Doctorates, of which he holds over a hundred from Universities across the globe.

contributions will be engaged using indigenous notions often neglected in discussions of BV's relation to HD. Along these lines, exploring the notion of *Ayllu* (an indigenous word that could be translated as 'society or community') and its centrality to understanding the communal dimension of BV will allow us to further reflect on the political and social dimension of the project of development. It is the idea of *ayllu* within the SK/BV cosmivision which calls for an expansion of our understanding of community, and advocates for a notion of wellbeing and development that moves further away from purely individual considerations. It allows us not only to incorporate a necessary notion of environmental sustainability in discussions of development, but it also allows us to rethink other social and political implications of such a collective endeavour, by opening a clear space for community considerations within its framework. Further, the paper will explore the notion of *Pachamama* – central to understand BV's biocentric turn – to engage Amartya Sen's ideas on sustainability and to discuss ideas of development moving away from a more unilinear to a cyclical vision of the process.

The rest of the paper, thus, will be divided into two main sections. In the second section, it will discuss the emergence and consolidation of the HD paradigm, and Amartya Sen's role in the configuration of its theoretical framework. It will highlight the importance of the *capability approach* in order to understand the theoretical underpinnings of HD. In the third section it will discuss the emergence of the indigenous philosophies in global discussions of development, and their incorporation into development thinking and policies in recent years. In particular, it will make explicit the links with the HD paradigm, and the use of the SK framework for recent development policies. The paper will then conclude by arguing for the relevance of considering the ethical challenges discussed for constructing a holistic understanding of development based in the SK premises.

## **2. The emergence and consolidation of the Human Development Paradigm**

### **2.1. The 'golden dream' of development and its discontents**

In the decades that followed the end of the Second World War, the first theories of development were mainly formulated around ideas of transfers of knowledge and resources from the developed West to the developing nations of the Southern hemisphere. The goal was to assist them in 'catching up' with the advanced standards of social and economic indicators that existed in the Global North. These ideas, known as *Modernization theories* of development, emerging in the 1940s and 1950s, shared a linear, evolutionist view of development, an adamant belief in the unlimited possibilities of progress and the assumption that advanced Western societies were the standard for development strategies. As such, the vision of development linked to a modern vision of progress was a teleological one, articulated in a staged process that would take countries in the same path that North American and European countries took. This notion of development was dependent on economic growth and industrialization, and the agency of the process would lie with the national states: the international system was mainly seen as assisting the developing countries in creating the internal conditions necessary for the 'take off' of these countries, especially focusing on the role of

labour, capital and technology.<sup>6</sup> The expectation was that all countries following this path would eventually achieve the ultimate goal of development.

However, this optimistic view of the development process was short-lived, and Latin America was the context in which the first systematic criticism to these ideas started to emerge. In the late 1950s and 1960s, the Structuralist and the *Dependencia* theories of development came to challenge the main assumptions of the Modernization school. In the work of Raúl Prebisch, Celso Furtado, Enzo Faletto, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, André Gunder Frank, Theotonio Dos Santos and others, the focus shifted from the endogenous to the exogenous conditions for development, to explain the possibilities and failure of the 'take-off' of these economies to effectively occur.<sup>7</sup> These theories generally pointed to the inability of the Modernization school to account for the difficulties of the colonial legacy and the unequal international structures of trade that developing countries confronted in their path towards development. The most radical version of these critiques, theorized by the *Dependencia* school, combined the structuralist approach with Marxist orthodoxy. Their analysis emphasised the path dependency from the core (the Western, developed world) that was created by the social, political and economic structures of colonialism and the resulting structures of world trade which remained an unavoidable characteristic of the economic and social processes of development pursued by the periphery. As such, these theories pushed for different policy strategies than those of the Modernization theorists, and claimed the need to break this path dependency to effectively achieve development.

The intellectual power and clarity of these theories had a great impact at the national and international level in policy and academic discussions of development. At the policy level, their influence prompted the implementation of Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) national strategies and influenced the creation of international organizations focusing on the international economic structures for development (such as the creation of the UNCTAD)<sup>8</sup>. In academic discussions, by the end of the 1970s, Dependencia theories and different readings of the Structuralist position were central in debates around development. Both in receiving fervent support and vehement criticism, the debate was slowly leading to exhaustion. In 1985, David Booth published his "Marxism and Development Sociology: Interpreting the Impasse" in which he argued for the existence of an effective 'impasse' in the scholarship around development (Booth 1985). At a theoretical level, the early understandings of development were criticised for their pure economism, for neglecting the role of political struggle in their developmental strategy, and for a restricted nationalist focus in their discussions that relied heavily on nation states for the promotion of development (Munck 2010, 38). Slowly, the limitations of these first mainstream understandings of development were becoming more apparent, and a plurality of frameworks for understanding development was emerging, paving the way for the consolidation of the human centred approaches of development.

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<sup>6</sup> Some clear examples of Modernization theories of development include the works of (Rosenstein-Rodan 1961; Rostow 1990; Nurkse 1961; Lewis 1954).

<sup>7</sup> Some important examples of these theories are the works of (Prebisch 1986; Cardoso and Faletto 1974; Furtado 1964; Frank 1969; Frank 1966; Dos Santos 1970).

<sup>8</sup> The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was established in 1964.



## 2.2 Eliding the impasse: the emergence of human centred development

The limitations that the 'development impasse' debate<sup>9</sup> pointed out were not the only challenges to the linear notions of development associated to economic growth that both Modernization schools and its Structuralist and Dependencia critiques sustained. Many challenges to these ideas of development, in fact, emerged in the late 60s and 70s and were incorporated in the terms of the 'impasse debate'. Others remained at the margins of the discussions of development or were only incorporated decades later, some of which have only appeared under the mainstream development gaze only in recent years. The discontent with these early ideas of development appeared not only from academia but from committed political activists as well as from policy institutions. Critiques varied in range but focused on the agency, contents and strategies for development.<sup>10</sup>

Discussions of the content and goal of development questioning the narrow understanding of development that pure economic growth could provide were common earlier criticisms. In 1971, Robert McNamara, President of the World Bank declared the war on poverty and called for the need to 'dethrone GDP' from being the main indicator of development (McNamara 1973). On similar lines, the 1970s saw the emergence of the concepts of *Basic Human Needs* to expand the focus on economic growth with more social considerations (International Labour Office 1976; Streeten et al. 1981; Stewart 1985). This economist criticism expanded as well, shaping the idea of sustainable development and illustrating the limitations of industrialization strategies for development. In 1972, the Club of Rome published the influential report *The Limits to Growth* and in 1987, the Brundtland Commission from the United Nations published *Our Common Future*, both of which are milestones in the emergence of sustainability concerns in discussions of development (Meadows et al. 1972; World Commission on Environment and Development 1987). At the same time, critiques of the need to reconsider where the main agency of the development process lies received input from two different (and more often than not, mutually reinforcing) areas: the state-centric vision of development that prevailed in the earlier theories was under fire from those who claimed the need for the individual to take a stronger stance in the development process, and from those who pointed at the suitability of the market for leading such an endeavour<sup>11</sup>. In line with the neoliberal upsurge of the 1980s and 1990s, strategies of development pointed to the necessity of restructuring the economy to give a broader space for the market, in the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) across the global south. The publication in 1987 of the UNICEF report *Adjustment with a Human Face*

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, (Booth 1994; Corbridge 1990; Kiely 1995; Mouzelis 1988; Schuurman 1993; Sklair 1988)

<sup>10</sup> These discussions of the limitations of development are far from settled. In Latin America, examples of different criticisms to mainstream notions of development can be found in the work in Chile of Manfred Max-Neef and in the work of Enrique Leff in Mexico that was initiated in the early 1980s, but has continued to develop. (Max-neef 1986; Max-neef 1982; Leff 1986) Other examples can be found in the Post-Development critiques, very much associated to the work of Gustavo Esteva and Arturo Escobar in Latin America. (Escobar 1995; Escobar 1992; Esteva 2010) Importantly, I have argued elsewhere that other significant contributions to development thinking in Latin America can be found in Liberation Theology and Critical Pedagogy. (Carballo 2014)

<sup>11</sup> In Latin America, for example, Manfred Max-Neef argued for the necessity to consider the individual's role in the pursuit of development in what he termed 'Barefoot Economics' (Max-neef 1982). Similarly, while not directly concerning themselves in discussions of development thinking, Liberation theologians and educators from the Critical pedagogy school of Paulo Freire devised a central role of the individual in development processes (Carballo 2014). At the same time, the rise of neoliberalism and the consolidation of the Washington Consensus, pushed for a global agenda of market-based development policies that eroded the centrality of the role of the state. (Harvey 2007; Williamson 1990)

together with the acknowledgement of the most despairing results brought upon by the SAPs, brought the focus closer to the human-side of development.

The emergence of people-centred development, with a focus on the individual as 'means and ends' for development, offered the possibility to combine the critiques raised regarding the content and agency of development policies and thinking. As such, is not surprising that the Human Development initiative (HD), launched in the 1990s became the new mainstream perspective on development. Framed mainly in terms of the work of Amartya Sen, the Human Development paradigm enshrines a need for understanding it as being 'development of the people by the people, for the people' (United Nations Development Programme 1991, 13). Shifting the goals of and agency for development to the individual (and thus expanding those goals beyond economic growth), the HD approach became associated not only with strategies of political and economic empowerment of individuals, but also with the measurement of development achievements in multidimensional indexes, rather than ones based purely on GDP ratios. The 'radical' contribution of the HD, became, then, twofold: it moved away from a pure economist understanding of development – the one measured in GDP – and it moved away from a purely state-centred understanding of development to one where people become the agents of development. The people, not only the economy, thus, became the goal of development, and the people, not only the state, became the agents of development. The HD approach, originally tied to the United Nations Development Program, has become the clearest example of these people-centred approaches, with its influence expanding well beyond the UN to international development organisations, national governments and civil society organisations. This shift in development thinking can be framed in Amartya Sen's *capability approach*, as constructed in his extensive oeuvre, but most notably articulated in his *Development as Freedom*, published in 1999 (Sen 1999). Amartya Sen's work is located at a connection between politics, economics and philosophy.

In Sen's *capability approach*, the individual becomes the centre of development policy moving away from state-led processes of development and, at the same time, shifts the focus from economic growth. It is not only economic growth that matters for development, for Sen, the individual must be equipped with a set of capabilities that will liberate their agency to act and thus achieve development. In this manner, in Sen's perspective, the individual becomes the means and end of development. It is a process of individual empowerment that allows individuals to enjoy their freedom to choose and where individuals are set free to act. Within this framework, the expansion of freedom is not only seen as the removal of substantial unfreedoms, but as providing the space for individual to exert their individual agency.

'Attention is thus paid particularly to the expansion of the "capabilities" of persons to lead the kind of lives they value- and have reason to value. (...) Greater freedom enhances the ability of people to help themselves and also influence the world, and these matters are central to the process of development.' (Sen 1999, 18)

The expansion of individual freedom is therefore, the main aim and at the same time the principal means of achieving development. In his "Development as capability expansion", Sen argues for a notion of development that is articulated around the connection between capabilities and freedom, an approach that he would refine and clarify in further works. Sen begins this seminal article by calling for the need to follow Kant's precept of 'seeing human beings as ends in themselves, rather than as means to other ends' (Sen 1989, 41). In following that maxim, Sen argues for a human-

centred understanding of the ends and goals of development, but also states the need to recognize that human beings are, at the same time, the means through which these ends can be achieved. He further argues for the need to consider the richness of human lives, as the ultimate measure with which to evaluate social change. 'First, economic prosperity is no more than one of the means to enriching the lives of people. It is a foundational confusion to give it the status of an end. Secondly, even as a means, merely enhancing average economic opulence can be quite inefficient in the pursuit of the really valuable ends'(Sen 1989, 42). These two elements - taking human beings as means *and* ends, and the argument for the necessity to evaluate social change in more complete ways than merely economic growth – would turn out to be fundamental elements in the Human Development project pioneered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1990. It would also become central for mainstream development practices.<sup>12</sup> The richness of human lives is, in Sen's perspective, given by the *capabilities* that a person enjoys. These capabilities are, intrinsically, the individual freedoms to live the life they value.

Development is, in these lines, seen as the removal of several forms of 'unfreedoms', of barriers that prevent the individual from exerting their own individual agency and choice, in order to transform their reality. It is this reading of development that led the UNDP to elaborate their Human Development report in 1990 stating:

Human development is a process of enlarging people's choices.(...) But at all levels of development, the three essential ones are for people to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living. (...) Human development has two sides: the formation of human capabilities such as improved health, knowledge and skills - and the use people make of their acquired capabilities – for leisure, productive purposes or being active in cultural, social and political affairs. (United Nations Development Programme 1990, 10)

While the *capability approach* has expanded beyond Sen's work (so we cannot simply equate his philosophical work on development ethics with the implementation of practices of development on the ground), his understanding thereof permeates the HD development ethos, strongly influencing the conceptualisations of development used and providing the theoretical background to ideas of empowerment.<sup>13</sup> Following the launch of the first Human Development report in 1990, these people-centred approaches of development became pretty much the norm in all development agencies and in national governments, too. Progressively, these strategies have permeated most of the practices of mainstream development, where a people centred approach (either politically or economically grounded) is deemed as the fundamental means to achieve any real prospect of sustainable development. Either associated with the political empowerment of individuals (through the promotion of good governance or participatory democracy mechanisms that increase the involvement of citizens and the accountability of the state) or with the economic empowerment of the individuals (by providing mechanisms and tools that foster the entrepreneurship and creativity of the human being, creating ways that allow the citizens to join the market), the reliance on individual agency remains the keystone of mainstream development policy. Strategies of development speak of the need of increasing the role of the individuals to achieve the desired long-lasting effects of

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<sup>12</sup> In particular, it is the language of *capabilities*, tied to that of empowerment that has become a catch-all phrase, used by development programs and institutions all over the world.

<sup>13</sup> In particular, it's worth noting the work of Martha Nussbaum in the expansion of this approach. See, for example: (Nussbaum 2000; Nussbaum 2011)

development. Yet, how do these practices of HD articulate with ideas of SK in Latin America? In the next section we will discuss the contributions of indigenous philosophies to global discussions of development and clarify the space of their incorporation within the HD framework. In here, we will argue that such incorporation has not been comprehensive, and that in fact, certain elements of the SK framework have been left out, and it is precisely by recovering notions left out that we can expose and advance on the limitations of the HD framework.

### **3. Contemporary trends of Human Development in Latin America: Sen and the policy understandings of Buen Vivir**

#### **3.1 'El Retorno del Indio': Reframing the debate on development**

In 1991 Xavier Albó, published his essay entitled 'El Retorno del Indio' (The Return of the Indian) in a Bolivian anthropological Journal. There, Albó discussed the rise of indigenous social movements and political groups in South America in the 1970s and 1980s. His insightful survey of the events occurring across the region gave ample evidence of a phenomenon that, while it did not originally emerge in the 1980s, experienced a significant expansion in that social and political period. The 'Indigenous problematic' recovered its strength after decades in which social and political resistance was articulated mainly around the constitution of trade unions, syndicates and peasant organisations (Albó 1991, 299). From that period onwards, the indigenous roots of social struggles have had a stronger presence in public spaces, confronting the exclusionary politics of modern democracies in the region (Rivera Cusicanqui 2010).

The appearance of new indigenous social movements, and the consolidation of existing ones in the public sphere has been accompanied by a process of the recovery of the indigenous past and customs as central categories for the national politics of Andean countries (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990; Choque and Mamani 2001; Albro 2006; Orta 2001; Korovkin 2001; Fabricant 2010; De la Cadena 2010). The struggles of these social movements have not only focused on an expansion of democratic politics, but have more largely included an attempt to recover indigenous philosophical traditions and knowledge, once seen as synonymous with barbarism and 'incompatible with civilization and development'<sup>14</sup>. This irruption of indigenous knowledge in national politics historically dominated by social segregation – particularly built on the exclusion of the indigenous heritage – has brought forward an agenda of political, social and economic demands largely neglected in political discussions. These new concerns, perspectives and ways of knowing have been used 'to transform the limiting political precondition of 'pastness' to transcend a politics of irreconcilables through a dialogue between the state's multicultural legislation and the expressive, instrumental, and constructive potential of local cultural practice' (Albro 2006, 394). These indigenous epistemologies, institutions and traditions, historically relegated to an un-civilised past have made a fruitful and forceful irruption in contemporary politics. Transcending the boundaries that labelled them exclusively as remnants of the past, they have significantly altered the political universe of these countries, opening up spaces for an inter-cultural and inter-temporal dialogue of forms of knowledge

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<sup>14</sup> Sadly, these remnants of colonial politics are not buried in the annals of history, but have very recent examples, these words being used by Literature Nobel prize Mario Vargas Llosa in 2003 in a workshop in Colombia. (Albro 2006, 391; Vargas Llosa 2004)

which has profoundly shaped decision making processes and policy plans. Perhaps the most salient of these efforts to create a space for local traditions and indigenous philosophies in contemporary policy making, has been that of the *Sumak Kawsay* or *Buen Vivir* initiatives (analogous to the discussions of *Suma Qamaña* or *Vivir Bien*) which have spearheaded regional discussions on development. The recovery of a cultural heritage that was considered antithetical to the possibilities and projects of development – and which was displaced from the public sphere precisely in the name of such projects – and, particularly, its inclusion as an authoritative voice in recent development debates, has been one of the most enriching paradoxes for the field of Latin American contemporary critical thinking.

We can understand the *Sumak Kawsay* or the *Buen Vivir* as an integral vision of life that is ‘based on the communion of humans and nature and on the spatial-temporal-harmonious totality of existence’ (Walsh 2010, 18). The notion of SK can be found in other indigenous languages of the region, as its main features appeared to be shared by the original inhabitants of South America.<sup>15</sup> The most well-known of these are the terms *Sumak Kawsay* in Quechua, mainly used by the Ecuadorian government, and *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara, which is at the basis of Bolivian policy transformations. Fernando Huanacuni Mamani, an Aymara intellectual, analysed the indigenous philosophical roots of these terms and translated the idea of *Sumak* and *Suma* as ‘plenitude, sublime, excellent, beautiful’, and *Kawsay* and *Qamaña* respectively as ‘to live, or being, to co-exist’. Cautioning against a literal translation of these indigenous terms into Spanish, he indicated that they should be understood as the achievement of a ‘life in plenitude’ (Huanacuni Mamani 2010, 7)<sup>16</sup>. Importantly, the idea of plenitude transcends the consideration of humans as the exclusive centre. That is, the notion of SK is built on a cosmovision that includes the individual, society *and* the earth, underpinning a holistic understanding of development, one that leads to the good life. SK underscores the connection and the interrelation of humans with the Earth and nature and with each other, and on the necessity to achieve a harmonic co-existence, which is at the basis of the indigenous notion of a ‘life in plenitude’. This cosmovision is articulated around four different principles that highlight the relational orientation of the notion of SK/BV, and its spiritual, temporal and material dimensions (Walsh 2011; Macas 2014; Yampara 2004). These include the principles of relationality, correspondence, complementarity and reciprocity. The first, *relationality*, includes an ‘integral coexistence of the cosmos with all the constitutive variables’ (Walsh 2011, 54). In particular, it considers both the spiritual and intellectual aspects of life, together with a more material and productive vision of coexistence. The second principle, *correspondence*, refers to the correlation of the human and the extra-human, including the Earth and nature as a bearer of consideration in equal terms. *Complementarity* and *reciprocity* represent the more pragmatic side of the first two principles, and refer to the complementarity of all the aspects of our integral experience of life and the need to ensure reciprocity to every aspect of it (including the non-human sides). The four of them point towards a holistic vision of the life cycle, and an integral consideration of the multiple dimensions, material and spiritual, that are necessary for the achievement of the BV/SK. They also incorporate a universal and comprehensive understanding of the notion of community that includes considerations for the environment and the rest of the community in the achievement of development goals.

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<sup>15</sup> Buen Vivir/ Vivir Bien, are the Spanish translations of the ideas of *Sumak Kawsay* in Quechua, *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara, *Ñandereko* in Guaraní, *Shin pujut* in Awajún or the *Kyme mogen* in Mapuche, among others. (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014, 26)

<sup>16</sup> Own translation from the Spanish ‘Vida en plenitud’.

With these principles, the SK/BV has offered a framework from which to rethink contemporary efforts to pursue development plans and projects in the region, particularly in Ecuador and Bolivia. These ideas have been incorporated into a myriad of policy and academic contexts reframing the debate on the ideas, means and goals of development. While some see in it a project that is fundamentally distinct from that of 'development' and others merely a notion of 'alternative development', at the very least the SK/BV framework certainly opens up a space to question the boundaries that the project of development - or the process to achieve a 'good life'- entails.<sup>17</sup> Arguably, these ideas have been present in indigenous philosophies for centuries,<sup>18</sup> yet they made international headlines and entered with unusual strength and speed within mainstream discussions of development (both policy and academic oriented ones) after the ideas shaped long-ranging national political initiatives and policy reforms. Most notably, Ecuador and Bolivia reformed their National Constitutions to make reference to these ideas in 2008 and 2009 respectively. On the other hand, academic discussions have been stirred by several intellectuals and the concept has figured quite prominently in recent discussions of development studies.<sup>19</sup>

The ideas of a 'good life' built upon the Andean cosmovision transcend those of mainstream understandings of development and invite us to reframe the current development debate, to include new ethical considerations. For example, rather than pursuing an endless quest for an improvement in life conditions, the SK seeks to attain a 'Good Living', that is: the quest is to 'live well' rather than to continuously strive for 'living better'(Huanacuni Mamani 2010; Rodríguez 2014). This particular element clearly departs from the unilinear and unlimited vision of progress that has dominated discussions of development for decades and offers the possibility to re-question the means for development, particularly confronting the increasing awareness of the limitation of global resources. The focus is thus put on understanding the pursuit of the good life following an 'Ethics of sufficiency', rather than the 'Ethics of efficiency', that pervades developmentalist attempts to achieve material affluence and high levels of productivity (Acosta 2012). Further, the 'good life' that the SK/BV seeks necessitates a 'biocentric turn' that goes beyond UN sustainability concerns(Escobar 2010b; Escobar 2011; Gudynas and Acosta 2011a; Gudynas 2014a). Yet, so far these ideas have been associated with discussions of 'Sustainable Development' or Human Development – both in policy and in some academic discussions (Vanhulst and Beling 2014). Given the critical social conditions that the legacy of neoliberal governments left in the region - many of the Latin American countries experienced deep financial, political and social unrest at the turn of the millennium (Munck 2003, chap. 4–5; Panizza 2009), the governments' eagerness to transform these ideas into concrete policy actions is not surprising. Along these lines, the connections between the ideas of HD – which have already taken a

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<sup>17</sup> For a clear overview of these discussions see (Vanhulst and Beling 2014; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014).

<sup>18</sup> While they are broadly based in the Indigenous philosophies of the region, tracing the specific origin of these ideas has become somewhat a secular crusade amongst academics working on the topic. Some question the existence of the concept as such within the contemporary indigenous communities in the region, some speak of a newly-created concept, and some speak of a re-creation, or consolidation of principles that have existed for centuries. See for example, (Uzeda 2009; Huanacuni Mamani 2010; Altmann 2013a; Altmann 2013b; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara 2014; Viola Recasens 2014) for general discussions and overviews of the topic. While these notions can be found in some of the indigenous organisations' political documents already in the 1990s, the earliest systematic analysis of these issues can be found in (Medina 2001b; Medina 2001a; Viteri Gualinga 2002).

<sup>19</sup> The engagement with notions of Buen vivir/ Sumak Kawsay has expanded at a remarkable rate, not only in Latin America, but outside the region as well. See, for example, (Walsh 2010; Walsh 2011; Mignolo 2011; Escobar 2010b; Gudynas and Acosta 2011c; Acosta 2011; Gudynas 2011; Gudynas 2012; Radcliffe 2012).

strong hold in the region – and SK/BV have been quick and swift in the planning, implementation and discussion of the new policy initiatives. In the next section we will review some of these connections before exploring the ethical contributions to the HD paradigm that could be made from a more careful and comprehensive consideration of these indigenous philosophies.

### **3.2 Exploring the connection between Indigenous philosophies and development policies**

Indigenous social movements have come to ‘disrupt politics as usual’ (De la Cadena 2010), and the urgency to incorporate their demands and perspectives has created one of the most fertile spaces to envision and implement novel ideas and plans for development. These have come not just from the indigenous groups and social movements themselves, but also from International organisations, NGOs and national governments. Particularly, the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia – under Rafael Correa and Evo Morales respectively – have put forward initiatives that recover the indigenous past and knowledge in undertaking a strong transformation of the political landscape of their countries. From the Constitutional reforms of Ecuador (in 2008) and Bolivia (in 2009) to creating National Development plans in both countries or launching the failed Yasuni ITT international conservation project, as well as passing laws to protect the Rights of Nature, both countries have taken multiple steps that attempt to effectively use the philosophical resources of the SK framework to devise concrete policy measures. This move to link development discourses with SK has been a contentious one and several intellectuals have cautioned the terms of these incorporations (Huanacuni Mamani 2010; Freire Oviedo 2012; Kowii 2014). Yet, while in academic contexts controversies around the definition of these terms remain far from settled, the use of these ideas in Andean national politics’ discussions has brought them significantly closer to ideas of HD and the work of Amartya Sen than expected. Below, we will review some examples that illustrate these trends.<sup>20</sup>

A very clear example comes from the publication of the National Development Plans of Ecuador, both of 2009 and 2013. These plans that emerged as a result of the process of ‘Strategic Participative Planning’ envisioned in the Constitution of 2008 (arts. 279-280), were specifically designed to outline a roadmap for the achievement of the *Sumak Kaway* or Good Living in Ecuadorian politics. These impressive documents, developed during the implementation of some of the most innovative participatory democracy mechanisms, intended to propose ‘(...) a moratorium of the word “development” and the incorporation of the concept of Good Living in the debate’ (SENPLADES 2010, 18). Yet, throughout the document, and despite its attempts to part ways from previous notions and practices of development, several connections are made to Amartya Sen’s work and the ideas of Human Development. These reflect the desire to advance on the aspects of the Good Life that seek to ensure a ‘healthy flourishing of all individuals’ in the expansion of their freedoms and capacities. The plan puts forward the UNDP and Amartya Sen’s work as central, and states as one of the principles around which the SK is articulated the need for ‘Complying with Universal Rights and Promoting Human Capabilities’ (SENPLADES 2010, 21). In here, the multiple dimensions of the ‘good life’ are connected to the achievement of human development and the capabilities central to Amartya Sen’s

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<sup>20</sup> In here, the recollection of initiatives that connect the HD paradigm with initiatives following the SK/BV imperative is not intended to provide an exhaustive empirical analysis. Rather, these examples aim to identify and illustrate a trend that requires further theoretical reflection.

framework. Even when the focus is to try and expand beyond a pure economic analysis of development, and to ensure the ‘flourishing’ of all individuals beyond concerns of basic materials needs, the SK framework becomes restricted once it is framed in the language of HD.

Further, both in Bolivia and Ecuador the UNDP Regional offices have incorporated elements of the SK/BV into both their development programs as well as their Annual Development reports (United Nations Development Programme 2010; Programa de Pequeñas Donaciones 2012; United Nations Development Programme 2012). The Bolivian case is where the UNDP has more explicitly advanced reinforcing the theoretical connections between the HD paradigm – and Amartya Sen’s work therein – and the ideas of SK/BV. The National Human Development Report for 2010 highlights the necessity to connect the ‘Normative Horizons’ of the UNDP research in Bolivia, built upon Amartya Sen’s project, and the BV/SK ideas. For the report, both ‘frameworks converge in an ideal of development that transcends the material scope, and above all coincide in the principles of equality, respect and social recognition’ overcoming differences in the consideration of welfare (United Nations Development Programme 2010, 49–51)<sup>21</sup>. In Ecuador, the BV/SK framework has been used by the UNDP in the implementation of new projects and initiatives. Even when some of them have effectively expanded the focus of the work of the UNDP in the region to include new topics, strategies and practices of development, others simply incorporate the new terminology while continuing with previous practices.<sup>22</sup> The latter case can clearly be seen in the efforts to combine ideas of solidarity economics – present in the BV/SK framework – with the implementation of micro-entrepreneurial practices of development, such as that of microfinance (United Nations Development Programme 2012). Microfinance initiatives to alleviate poverty have been present in Latin America for decades and expanded at a remarkable rate between the 90s and early 00s (Berger, Goldmark, and Miller- Sanabria 2006). These practices have gone hand-in-hand with the consolidation of the HD concept in the region, in the promotion of economic empowerment based in the achievement of the individual capabilities that Amartya Sen so vehemently defends. While the success of microfinance projects in effectively reducing poverty levels is a matter of contention, it is clear that the nature of the projects relies on a marketised response that puts forward an individualistic idea of development (Bateman 2010). The UNDP’s efforts to connect these initiatives with the indigenous traditions reveal, at the very least, a shallow engagement with the ideas of SK/BV.

Other policy initiatives that trace the connections between these two frameworks are more directed to the necessity to quantify the advances made in the name of BV/SK. Frequently, these projects, which are an attempt to more clearly conceptualize and operationalize the ideas of BV advance together with those already established measurements related to the HD. Along these lines, we can see, for example the ‘Programa SIIDERECHOS’, an initiative to build Human Rights Indicators (HRI) that attempted to measure Buen Vivir policies (Waldmüller 2014). Another example can be found in the collaboration between the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative and the Bolivian government to implement new measurement tools to incorporate the BV/SK framework to their

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<sup>21</sup> Own translation

<sup>22</sup> For example, the UNDP Regional office in Ecuador has included new areas of work, such as the promotion of ideas of Intercultural Citizenship or the creation of ‘Biocorridors for Living Well’. (United Nations Development Programme 2013; Programa de Pequeñas Donaciones 2012)



analyses (Uzeda 2009). The necessity to establish metrics of compliance with the National development plans exposes a complicated relationship to liberal understandings of Human Rights that do not necessarily become easily incorporated within the SK framework. Even at a theoretical level, overt attempts have been made to provide a reading of the SK/BV in connection with HD (S  verine Deneulin 2012).

These are just a handful of examples that make the continuing attempt to connect SK and HD quite evident in a variety of contexts. Even if, in general, the connections are made mostly to argue for the necessity of going beyond a pure economicist understanding of development, in line with Sen's project, the risk of co-optation of the indigenous philosophies remains.<sup>23</sup> The work of national governments and international agencies for development that seeks to translate the indigenous mandate for a good life into concrete policies has, more often than not, rushed the incorporation of ideas into the notion of Buen Vivir/Vivir Bien for development, without a holistic consideration of their implications. In general in the region, the progressive, radical rhetoric from governments that seeks to recover the indigenous heritage so long neglected coexists with a continuation of 'business as usual' in promoting development policies that continue the extractivist focus of the past. Following on the productive agenda imposed in Latin America since the colonial times, recent decades have seen an expansion of what has been deemed a 'neo-extractivist' model of development, which has deepened the economic dependence on the exploitation and export of natural resources and raw materials (Giarracca and Teubal 2010; Svampa 2012; Svampa 2013). Despite the advances of progressive governments in the region and the stress on building a post-neoliberal agenda, the region appears to have moved from the Washington Consensus to a 'Commodities Consensus' that does not challenge, but rather incorporates discussions of indigenous philosophies within ideas of HD.<sup>24</sup> In exploring these trends in the development policies of Ecuador, Catherine Walsh speaks of a co-optation of the indigenous notion of SK in the policy understanding of Buen Vivir, and this in the establishment of what she notes as the *paradogma* of HD (Walsh 2010; Walsh 2011). The bandwagon effect of the rising influence of these indigenous philosophies – both in the cases of Ecuador and Bolivia – appears to be a widespread success in their use for development policies by institutions that do not necessarily incorporate all of the elements of the SK. This 'selective' and problematic use of some of the elements of the SK/BV framework has allowed for the paradoxical increase of the space for environmental and sustainability concerns in discussions of development, paired with an unparalleled rise in environmental conflicts, fuelled mostly by the deployment of new extractive projects in the region in the name of development.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example the discussions to expand measurements of development beyond economic growth both in the 2009 and 2013 editions of the plan. (SENPLADES 2009, 21–25; SENPLADES 2013, 28–29)

<sup>24</sup> The notion of 'Commodities Consensus' has been used by Maristella Svampa in reference to the increase of extractivist projects as the main revenue source for the consolidation of 'progressive' governments. These governments have expanded the social spending of their countries, following a progressive agenda focused on the expansion of economic rights and the reduction of poverty, based on revenues collected from the large scale export of primary products. However, the expansion of this social agenda has come at the partial or total expense of the environment in some regions of Latin America, giving rise to an unprecedented surge in environmental struggles. See, Svampa 2013. The trends connecting the new socially progressive agenda of development in the region with the expansion of extractive industries have been noted by many. Among others, see the edited collections on the topic by (Massuh 2012; Endara 2014)

<sup>25</sup> On the increase of environmental conflicts in the last decade see (Escobar 2010a; Petras and Veltmeyer 2011; Gudynas 2014c)

In discussing the often problematic connections that have been made between the HD and the indigenous philosophies of SK/BV, I do not wish to dismiss the possibilities of collaboration between these frameworks altogether. Rather than falling into on a dogmatic defence of their separation as diametrically opposed frameworks for understanding development and its ethical underpinnings, the reception that the indigenous notions of BV/SK have had in mainstream ideas of development should be praised. However, at the same time, it is necessary to avoid the urge to rush to ‘incorporate the lessons’ from these indigenous philosophies into a new solution, a new one-size-fits-all development plan, and to make full use of the opportunity that these alternative frameworks offer to re-question and challenge the boundaries of mainstream ideas of development. In this sense, the possibilities that the SK/BV offers to re-think the main assumptions of the HD are extensive, and cannot be exhausted in this paper. Nonetheless, in the following sections we will focus on recovering these ideas, as an attempt to overcome some of the HD’s limitations.

### **3.3 Human Development and Indigenous Philosophies: Rethinking Sen’s Capability Approach**

#### *3.3.1 The ayllu in the Andes: recovering the communal dimension of development discussions*

One of the strongest elements that these indigenous frameworks bring to development discussions is precisely the centrality of the communal dimensions in their analysis of what a ‘life in plenitude’ should entail. In traditional, indigenous philosophies, SK is based on an indigenous notion of community rooted in a territory. This notion of territory, rather than being one of a limited spatial understanding, is built upon the idea that a spiritual connection between the human being, the territory and nature is intrinsic to the notion of a good life. The community, thus, becomes a multidimensional entity, whose different aspects are deeply interrelated, in what is termed the *ayllu*.

The *ayllu* plays a central role in the history of the Andean peoples. Pre-dating the colonial period, it is a social institution which has been maintained (albeit with significant changes) throughout centuries and remains a key notion to understanding the multiple dimensions that the SK/BV entails. The *ayllu* is the basic form of communal social organization that can be found in the majority of the indigenous groups present in the Andes and has been referred by indigenous intellectuals as the ‘seed of the Andean political institutions and civilization’ (Choque and Mamani 2001, 202; Yampara 2004, 74; Rivera Cusicanqui 2010, 100). It is precisely within the *ayllu* where the ‘Good life’ - the SK/BV - can be achieved, and it is its multiple, interrelated dimensions that should be included in the consideration of wellbeing.<sup>26</sup> Within the SK framework both the human and extra-human elements included in the *ayllu* are essential to pursuing the good life, which is considered a communal endeavour. The notion thus prompts a different economic and political understanding of community allowing us to envision and discuss ideas of wellbeing beyond the individual to include not only social but territorial and environmental concerns. While, as we have seen, in general the notion of SK has been incorporated into policy and academic discussions, particularly in the promotion of Earth rights and the furthering of ideas of development exceeding a pure economic focus (as in Amartya Sen’s

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<sup>26</sup> Many have highlighted the centrality of the *ayllu* for the achievement of the *Sumak Kawsay*. See, for example (Yampara 2004; Uzeda 2009; Gudynas and Acosta 2011c; Altmann 2013a)

work), in general the community concept of *ayllu*, intrinsically linked to the holistic notion of SK, has remained largely neglected. Beyond a simple essentialisation of the concept, it is necessary to understand the paramount importance that the *ayllu* plays within the indigenous philosophies of the Andes, if fruitful connections with the HD are to be achieved.

The *ayllu* has intrigued scholars from various disciplines that have explored its different organizational, territorial, legal, political and spiritual dimensions. *Ayllus* have been mostly studied for their novel articulation of territoriality and spiritual life as well as for their administrative and political forms of organisation (Godoy 1986; Rivera Cusicanqui 1990; Harris 2000; Weismantel 2006). In fact, the *ayllu* plays a central role in these indigenous philosophies as a principle of organising social and economic life, both in the Quechua and Aymara traditions.<sup>27</sup> To some Aymara intellectuals, its principles of service, property and communal participation have served to maintain political institutions that differ from those enshrined in liberal democracies (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990). Despite the shift of meaning of the term throughout its history, two particularly strong social institutions in regards to economic organisation and production demonstrate the communal ethos that underpins the formation of *ayllus*. The first is the construction of a system of exchange upon the *ayni* or principle of reciprocity, which has been described as a Maussian gift, rather than a capitalist exchange (Weismantel 2006, 94). Here, institutions like the *Minga* – a form of collective work that is not remunerated but allows for the cooperation around specific initiatives – put forward an economic principle centred on the pursuit of welfare for the community, rather than the increase of productivity (Hidalgo-capitán 2012, 19; Altmann 2013a, 294). The second, which has evolved considerably to become of paramount importance in contemporary processes of land-titling, refers to the possibility of collective ownership. Property rights within the *ayllu* are conceived of in a communal dimension, often involving distinctive systems of ecological management.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, the notion of *ayllu* has a phenomenal evocative power, given its subsistence beyond the different historical periods, particularly the colonial domination and its subsequent legacies in the consolidation of modern states in the region (Rivera Cusicanqui 1990; Albro 2006; Weismantel 2006). The transformation and resilient persistence of this indigenous institution throughout the centuries has much more than the anecdotal value of the reproduction of a peculiar cultural pattern, it serves as a locus of geographic and imaginary resistance, as the collective space from which to re-think alternative processes of development. In national or regional politics, to speak of the *ayllu* goes beyond speaking of a communal property or a principle of political organisation: it refers to a communal ethos that is transversal to the indigenous cosmologies of the SK. The *ayllu* is a founding element to understanding ontological and epistemological differences that should not be lightly considered in the present scope of academic and policy discussions incorporating the SK/BV. The communal ethos enshrined in the *ayllu* is part and parcel of a *relational* ontology where the separation between human and nature and between individuals and their communities becomes much more diffused (Villalba 2013, 1430; Costoya 2012, 216). It is this notion of *ayllu* that is intrinsically tied to the role of the Earth and Mother Nature in conceptions of the good life, and as such, it adds new dimensions to the idea of community. It also emphasizes the consideration of the

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<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of these features see (Choque 2000; Choque and Mamani 2001; Untoja Choque 2001)

<sup>28</sup> John Murra made an extensive analysis of the singularity of the Andean *ayllus* ecological management and collective ownership, in what he termed the 'vertical archipelago' (Murra 2002, chap. 3). On the use of *ayllus* traditions for processes of land titling see (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013, chap. 2–3).

wellbeing of the community as a whole, rather than a perspective of atomised individualities whose wellbeing may or may not be achieved together with that of their societies. To Raul Llasag Fernandez, a Kichwa researcher at the University of Coimbra, this implies a primacy of the community above the individual, as he states 'In definitive, in the Andean world, the human being as an individual does not exist, because (s)he exists integrated to the community, outside of it there is non-existence or an incomplete one'.<sup>29</sup> This is a contentious point, and some argue that *ayllus* do not eradicate individualistic considerations, but that these are conceived 'through complementarity with other beings of the group' (Villalba 2013, 1430). Further, often the contemporary real-life subsistence of these communities is even farther apart from these idyllic perspectives. Nicole Fabricant's analysis is enlightening here. Beyond a simple 'romanticisation' of the concept that highlights the role of the *ayllu* as an 'imagined community' in Benedict Anderson's terms, she reminds us that the contemporary daily functioning of these *ayllus* is often prey to petty discussions of domestic politics, where individual interests take a stronger stance than what the philosophical principles of the indigenous cosmovision would indicate. Yet, she argues that it is precisely this tension between the 'romanticised vision' of the community and the individualistic desires of its members that pushes the transformative political agenda of the region (Fabricant 2010). And it is precisely what reminds us of the necessity to further reflect on the consequences of these strong-communal insights, with their emphasis on the spiritual interconnection of all beings, in discussions of development. The point is not to disregard the individuality of human existence but rather to emphasise and focus on the complementarity and reciprocity principles that are intrinsic to the SK/BV.

Arguably, it is this interconnectedness between all beings that has been brought into the discussions of Buen Vivir in the considerations of the Rights of the Earth and other sustainability considerations. Yet, the understanding of *ayllu* goes beyond that. It merges the necessity of understanding the lives of individuals within that of their communities, and to consider the spiritual, environmental and extra-human ties of human existence. In this sense, the focus on the promotion of individual capabilities as an expansion of freedom that the HD and Amartya Sen espouse – despite its advances from narrow, economist notions of development – falls considerably short of the ideas of the 'good life' for the SK framework. In the latter, community is understood as more than the communion of human beings, and ideas of wellbeing are necessarily expanded beyond the capabilities of individuals, even if these are based on sustainable practices. The principles that guide the SK cannot be separated from the community, cannot be achieved at an individual level. The goal of a good life, the *Suma Qamaña* or the *Sumak Kawsay*, cannot be understood outside the *ayllu*. It is fundamentally a social one.

It can surely be argued that Sen's project of *Development as freedom* and the HD paradigm is not purely individualistic. Sen builds his theory of the development of human capabilities (and thus, of the enlargement of freedom) upon a critique of the idea of homo economicus, which considers only individualistic behaviour as rational. Furthermore, as we will discuss later, he recognises later how fundamental social reasoning is in the path to achieving justice, and endorses even more strongly

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<sup>29</sup> (Llasag Fernandez 2009). This is echoed by one of the interviewees conducted by Marisol De la Cadena, in her analysis of Andean politics, when citing an indigenous teacher that argues: 'The community, the *ayllu*, is not only a territory where a group of people live; it is more than that. It is a dynamic space where the whole community of beings that exist in the world lives; this includes humans, plants, animals, the mountains, the rivers, the rain, etc. All are related like a family. It is important to remember that this place [the community] is not where we are from, it is who we are. For example, I am not from Huantura, I am Huantura' (De la Cadena 2010, 254). A similar point can be found in (Fernández Osco 2005).

ideas of social participation, embedded in participatory democracy, and has recently advocated for considerations of sustainability insofar as they affect the capabilities of future generations (Sen 2002; Sen 2010; Sen 2013). However, even when he affirms that society is a fundamental element in the enlargement of individual freedom, his perspective of society presents it as merely an instrument for achieving it (Stewart and Deneulin 2002). In this sense, the importance of society resides mainly in its instrumental value to the individual. Amartya Sen clarifies this point in responding to Peter Evans' (2002) critique of his approach and rejects his attempt to openly discuss it in terms of 'collective capabilities'. Instead, Sen (2002) opts for naming them 'socially dependent individual capabilities'. He goes even further in stating that 'the intrinsic satisfactions [of socially dependent individual capabilities] that occur in a life, must occur in an individual's life, but in terms of causal connections, they depend on social interaction with others'(Sen 2002, 85). Yet again, the source of connection between human beings is as a necessary step to individually achieve the goals of HD, and the achievement of these capabilities is an individual endeavour.

In equating freedom with capabilities (combining both social opportunities and individual capacities), Sen does not present an alternative to the individualistic liberal perspective of the human being, in which the individual remains the central focus. Of course, HD is a social project, in itself. It only happens within a society, and participation in the society is an intrinsic part of the process. Yet, the transformation, the achievement of 'development as freedom' or human development, occurs at the individual level and does not necessarily include a transformation of the communities to the same extent, nor does it open up the space for ethical considerations of the space and role of the Earth in the process and achievement of wellbeing. The achievement of these capabilities and rights, while they cannot be removed from a social context, occur at the individual level, and the goal is still built around the assumption of the individual becoming the empowered agent of their own lives. Admittedly, the consideration and space that collective issues have in discussions of development by the *Capability approach (CA)* is a contested topic. The issue of 'collective capabilities' has been a contentious one within the CA literature, and attempts at addressing it (not by Amartya Sen) have included several alternative concepts to open up these considerations and to respond to the charges of methodological individualism.<sup>30</sup> Yet not even the most critical of these perspectives open spaces for the ontological consideration of the community as having intrinsic value and thus, cannot simply accommodate the SK/BV communal concerns. The careful consideration of feminist concerns within the CA on the dangers of the primacy of groups and the collective over the individual has, in the end, resulted in an eminently individualist-focused analysis where the importance of group considerations remains restricted. The use of 'ethical individualism', of 'socially interdependent capabilities', of 'collective capabilities' as notions to account for communal considerations within Amartya Sen's CA simply reduces the communal concerns of HD to a level that cannot be compatible with the SK/BV's ethical underpinnings.<sup>31</sup> While social and communal considerations are not absent from HD academic and policy discussions, they do not give the necessary space for communities to become a central, fundamental aspect of what wellbeing is considered, let alone for an extended notion of community that sees the Earth and the territory as bearers of rights.

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<sup>30</sup> See, for example (Evans 2002; Ibrahim 2006; Severine Deneulin 2008; Stewart 2005; Qizilbash, Alkire, and Comim 2008)

<sup>31</sup> These are the notions used in discussions of collective capabilities by different advocates of the CA analysis, for example (Evans 2002; Robeyns 2005; Alkire 2008; Severine Deneulin 2008)

Here, then, is where we see the limitations of HD to incorporate the communal ethos of the SK framework and the fundamental space between them. It is the modern ontological separation between individuals and their communities that the HD assumes and employs, that cannot be easily framed within the indigenous pursuit of the SK. In the deployment of initiatives that connect the SK with the HD, the communal dimension and focus of the indigenous philosophies sit uncomfortably with the promotion of individual Human Rights and narrow understandings of sustainability with limited space for the considerations of Nature. Reflecting and recovering the value of the notion of *ayllu* within the SK framework may thus, help us to challenge the limitations and boundaries of mainstream development and confront the co-optation of these alternative notions into policy initiatives that perpetuate 'business-as-usual' in the region. To further this analysis, the last section on this paper will focus on discussing sustainability and environmental concerns.

### 3.3.2 *Beyond sustainability concerns: the Pachamama and the Biocentric turn*

While the communal concerns within the SK/BV framework have largely been side-lined in the connections made with the HD approach, discussions of the *Pachamama* or, more directly, of the centrality of including environmental concerns are quite common in comparison. The main contribution and impact that these indigenous philosophical frameworks have had has been seen in terms of the inclusion of concerns for the "Mother Nature". In fact, the reform of the Ecuadorian constitution in 2008 attracted international media attention across the world precisely because of its inclusion of Nature's Rights. The new constitution, approved by popular referendum, recognised the centrality of environmental concerns for the lives of the people of Ecuador and for the achievement of the Sumak Kawsay. These were eloquently included in the preamble of the constitution as follows:

We women and men, the sovereign people of Ecuador; Recognizing our age-old roots; wrought by women and men from various peoples; Celebrating nature, the Pacha Mama (Mother Earth), of which we are a part and which is vital to our existence, (...) Hereby decide to build: A new form of public coexistence, in diversity and in harmony with nature, to achieve the good way of living, the sumak kawsay. (República del Ecuador 2008, 15)<sup>32</sup>

Further, the constitution included a whole chapter that spelled out the Rights of Nature, starting with Art. 71 which recognized Nature's 'right to integral respect for its existence and for the maintenance and regeneration of its life cycles, structure, functions and evolutionary processes'. Even while environmental concerns in discussions of development are, of course, not exclusive to the SK/BV framework, it is the centrality that these play in the achievement of a 'life in plenitude' what has caught the attention of academics and policy practitioners of development. These ideas, so widely incorporated into the Ecuadorian Constitution, have filtered down to academic discussions and policy implementations of development in the region, where concerns for the environment appear to have taken a stronger stance. Yet, for a large part, these ideas have not come to radically challenge mainstream notions, but rather have become associated with the existing literature on sustainable development (Vanhuylst and Beling 2014). Environmental considerations, thus, have been framed within discussions of sustainability that argue we must ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy and reap the same level of welfare that current development patterns allow us. In other words, the vast implications of the consideration of Pacha Mama as Mother Nature, and of human beings as

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<sup>32</sup> I have selected the relevant excerpt of the preamble and re-formatted it. Highlights are from the original.

inherently connected to and part of it, have been restricted and condensed into a debate over the sustainability of the development project for the future.

Without a doubt, the welfare of future generations is clearly included within the SK/BV framework. It might thus be useful to explore what other elements can be brought to the analysis, highlighting the ontological differences and ethical contributions that can be made to the HD in general and to Amartya Sen's work in particular. Considerations of sustainability already were a growing concern within academic discussions of development from the mid-1960s, but it was only after the publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, in 1987 that they became widespread within the United Nations and mainstream discussions of development (Creech 2010). There, the Brundtland Commission brought forward environmental concerns as an issue of sustainability and care for future generations. It defined sustainable development as the process that 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, 37). The connections of the 'needs of the present' as well as those of the future with the necessity of preventing environmental degradation were clearly spelled out throughout the report, but became even more evident as a result of the discussions of the Earth Summit in Rio, in 1992. While the discussions on sustainable development have evolved well beyond the definitions of the Brundtland Report and the ones used within the UN, we will re-direct this discussion towards Amartya Sen's work.

Amartya Sen has addressed the issue of sustainability, including environmental concerns, as a matter of inter and intra-generational justice (Anand and Sen 1994; Anand and Sen 2000). Sen argued in one of his first interventions on the topic that amongst the most important reasons for the protection of the environment, is 'the ethical need for guaranteeing that future generations would continue to enjoy similar opportunities of leading worthwhile lives that are enjoyed by generations that precede them' (Anand and Sen 2000, 2030). The necessity to ensure distributive equity between human beings of different generations, thus, is the main driver for the quest of environmental sustainability. Importantly, this quest for distributive justice is of central importance not only for future generations (inter-generational justice) but also amongst the human beings of the current generation (intra-generational justice). This point was made to highlight that the level of development to be 'sustained' ought to also be equitably distributed amongst the people of current generations as we should not 'deny the less privileged today the attention that we bestow on generations in the future' (Anand and Sen 2000, 2031). Beyond ensuring inter- and intra-generational equality, Sen's main concerns with discussing environmental and sustainability issues have been related to ensuring that these are framed in the language of capabilities, rather than in more restrictive understandings of wellbeing. Along these lines, in his *The Idea of Justice* published in 2010, he argued for the necessity of reconceptualising discussions of sustainability as expanding the freedoms that people enjoy (of generations today and in the future) rather than focusing on needs or living standards, an argument that he would later develop more thoroughly (Sen 2010, 248–253; Sen 2013). 'There is cogency in thinking not just about sustaining the fulfilment of our needs, but more broadly about sustaining – or extending – our freedom (including the freedom to meet our needs)' (Sen 2010, 252). Sen advocates defining sustainability in terms of respecting the 'capabilities and freedoms' of future generations to overcome the more restricted ideas of 'needs' or 'living conditions' that other approaches sustain. For Sen, the crucial importance of this distinction lies in the possibility of highlighting, within the concept of Sustainable Development, the central role of individuals as agents,

as intrinsically able to make reasoned social choices within the realm of environmental sustainability. In other words, reframing the idea of sustainable development in terms of capabilities and freedoms, rather than needs and/or living standards, would precisely open the necessary space to include considerations for individual freedom (both of current as well as future generations) as a central feature of sustainability.

In general, seeing development in terms of increasing the effective freedom of human beings brings the constructive agency of people engaged in environment-friendly activities directly within the domain of developmental achievements. Development is fundamentally an empowering process, and this power can be used to preserve and enrich the environment, and not only to decimate it. (Sen 2010, 248)

According to his perspective, the protection of the environment in relation to issues of sustainable development would respond on the one hand, to the necessity of ensuring that future and current generations enjoy a sustained level of freedom to choose and make reasoned social choices; and on the other hand, to the moral responsibility attached to the possibility of making reasoned social choices. To Sen, '[s]ince we are enormously more powerful than other species, we have some responsibility towards them that links with this asymmetry of power' (Sen 2010, 251). The space that Sen gives to reasoned social choices –also over the decisions to ensure the conservation of the environment- within the definition of Sustainable Development - indicates a very interesting perspective. The inclusion of specific arguments addressing the necessity of ensuring *intra-* and *inter-*generational equity illustrates his more egalitarian inclinations and reminds us to ensure that we address current development challenges together with more long-term concerns. Yet, what is perhaps more remarkable, is the clear articulation of these sustainability concerns within his concerns for the expansion of individual agency and for the consideration of development as freedom. Development should be achieved in a sustainable manner, so as not to trump future generation's possibilities to expand their freedoms and capabilities. Rather than intrinsically assigning a valuation to sustainability considerations, these become relevant insofar as they may become a source of unfreedom for future and present human beings. This particular aspect has been praised as a possible way out from the imposition of our normative valuations of the consideration of nature that we bestow upon future generations, what has been defined as 'Environmental Domination' (Scholtes 2010). To Scholtes, 'in so far as it programmatically locates the processes of valuing nature and the formulation of environmental problems in the space of public deliberation and social value formation', Sen's capability approach offers a promising base for considering sustainability issues (Scholtes 2010, 303). The space for social reasoning (and inherent to it, of individual agency and empowerment processes) that the capability approach gives to considerations of sustainability becomes, then, a fundamental element. And importantly, one that allows us to clarify its relation with the SK/BV framework. Seen from this perspective, Sen undoubtedly gives a compelling and interesting view on considerations of sustainable development, which have echoed discussions of HD across the years. Yet, at the same time, it strongly illustrates the anthropocentric and instrumentalist view of the environment and of the consideration of nature within the capability approach. The relevance of ensuring environmental sustainability, in Sen's perspective, appears linked only to its instrumental value to ensuring and maintaining an equitable enjoyment level of the individual's freedom, of her possibilities for empowerment. The space given to Nature and environmental considerations in general, then, substantially differs from that conceived within the



SK/BV framework, and thus, only allows for a shallow connection between the SK/BV and the HD frameworks.

As we have mentioned, considerations of wellbeing have, within the SK/BV, a central role. In the indigenous cosmologies, these considerations are not only framed in terms of sustainability concerns, but are intrinsic to the achievement of a 'life in plenitude' on a material and spiritual level. The achievement of the Sumak Kawsay is envisioned within the *Pachamama* or Mother Nature to which all natural beings belong and in which they are connected (Medina 2001a). Nature appears portrayed as a giving and caring mother, as life in-itself (Chacosa 2014). It thus appears as ontologically indivisible from human beings and, as a result, environmental and sustainability concerns cannot be understood in or argued for in an instrumental manner: they are inherent to the idea of Sumak Kawsay, or of a good life. The SK/BV, then, cannot be articulated in a manner that is simply compatible with Amartya Sen's anthropocentric approach. Eduardo Gudynas and others have termed this view a 'Biocentric turn', whereby 'the good life of humans is only possible if the survival and integrity of Nature's web of life can be guaranteed'(Gudynas 2009a, 52).<sup>33</sup> It is the same *relational ontology* of the SK/BV framework upon which the ideas of ayllu are built that advocates for a more holistic consideration of Nature as having intrinsic value, and not only in relation to the fulfilment of the needs of present and future human beings (Villalba 2013, 1430; Costoya 2012, 216). The biocentric turn that the indigenous cosmologies advocate cannot be simply subsumed within a discourse of sustainability that purely instrumentalises nature.

While this is certainly not meant to indicate that Nature's resources cannot or should not be used for the reproduction of Human life, it does certainly indicate the need to revise the priorities of development. The SK/BV's notion of *Pachamama* should not come as an advocate for a return to a stone-age engagement with nature, but should remind us of the centrality that environmental concerns have for the achievement of a 'life in plenitude', beyond the anthropocentric considerations that Amartya Sen and the Capability approach may offer. The Biocentric focus of the SK/BV, thus, poses a challenge to the HD that can only be overcome if the connections between the two are made in a shallow manner. And it is precisely this shallow engagement that can explain the dynamics of the 'Commodities Consensus' in Latin America, where the increase of environmental concerns in discussions of development associated with the SK/BV has been accompanied by an increase in environmental conflict and degradation. If the connections between the HD and the SK/BV framework are to become meaningful in solving the pressing challenges that Latin America (and the world) face in terms of sustainable development, then reflecting on the contradictions between the Capability Approach's and the indigenous philosophies' conceptualizations of environmental sustainability becomes central.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper has sought to recover the valuable lessons from the recent irruption of Andean indigenous knowledge into discussions of development. Particularly, it has tried to use the opportunity to challenge the boundaries of the HD paradigm. In the first section, the paper has argued that the HD framed within Amartya Sen's work has become the most widespread mainstream understanding of

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<sup>33</sup> Own translation. See also (Gudynas 2009b; Acosta 2010; Escobar 2011)

development advancing over previous – narrower – notions of development. In analysing how the HD has often been linked – especially in recent policy initiatives – to the indigenous frameworks of SK/BV, I have argued for the necessity to resist the urge to quickly associate both frameworks and rather to reflect on the possibilities that these alternative framework offers. Separating the ‘Wheat from the Chaff’ in discussions of development has provided us with a space from which to further reflect on the boundaries of mainstream notions of development. In here, exploring the notion of *ayllu* has given us the possibility to further recover the communal dimension of the development endeavour. Further, the analysis of Nature’s central role in these indigenous philosophies manifest in the discussions of the *pachamama*-or Mother Earth have allowed us to reflect on the limits of sustainability considerations in Sen’s framework. While the ethical implications that these ideas offer cannot be exhausted in the scope of this paper, they identify both contradictions and potential avenues that could and should be further considered if we are to achieve a fruitful engagement between the ideas of HD derived from Amartya Sen’s work and those of BV emerging from the indigenous philosophies of the Andes.

In Bolivia, the *ayllus* have been given a growing space within policy initiatives (mostly as a result of the work of the National Council of *ayllus* and Markas of Qullasuyu founded in 1997). The *ayllu* has also been officially incorporated as a form of land ownership, and it has played a significant role in the process of land titling in Bolivia the last two decades. Often, *ayllus* have been given prerogatives at the local level of government, and have played an important role in processes of justice administration (Crabtree and Chaplin 2013, chap. 2). Celebrations and references of the *pachamama* abound in Bolivia and Ecuador contemporary life and policy discussions. From national laws to development programs and international projects, these have sparked the most varied initiatives across the Andes, where the revivals of Nature considerations appear to have reached new heights. Yet it remains necessary to move beyond a romanticised vision of these concepts and engage with the ethical challenges that they bring about.

If we would like to turn to these indigenous philosophies to discuss alternatives to achieve a transformative development, then, these indigenous notions enshrined in the SK philosophy should not be left aside. Rather, more than becoming an unquestionable element, they should remind us of the importance of the consideration of social and collective spaces of reflection in discussions of development, as well as the central role that nature plays, beyond simple anthropocentric and individualistic considerations of development. In revisiting the indigenous philosophies as a framework to reflect on collectives endeavour for development, they should help us reframe the debate in a more holistic manner. One that transcends the limits of sustainable development and advances the ideas of the HD paradigm in the achievement of an emancipatory idea of development as a social, collective and transformative endeavour.

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