

**SUMAK KAWSAY IN ECUADOR:
THE ROLE OF COMMUNITARIAN ECONOMY AND THE EXPERIENCE OF
THE RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SARAYAKU (ECUADORIAN AMAZONIA)**

Abstract

This paper analyzes the concrete experience of a communitarian economy (Sarayaku) from which empirical evidence may be drawn to enhance debates around development, post-development, and *sumak kawsay*. Some forms of land exploitation and social organization in rural communities such as this may better illustrate the communitarian economy and can provide solid and specific clarification of certain aspects of *sumak kawsay*. Analysis of these realities and their theoretical implications within current debates about development are the contribution of this work. In particular, the analysis of Sarayaku allows, first, to identify a non-capitalist economic rationality; second, to show some conditions of biocentrism; and, third, to verify the difficulties of translating these experiences to different territorial environments. On this basis, we conclude with the difficulties of maintaining the communitarian economy, its social organization and its form of land exploitation in rural communities in the future.

Key word

Development, *sumak kawsay*, communitarian economy, Sarayaku

1.- INTRODUCTION

Discussions throughout the previous century around the terms and conditions of development fostered what became known as post-developmental approaches; specifically, the post-developmental notion of 'de-growth' came to acquire prominence within heterodox streams of Development Economics.¹ The eventual overcoming of the Washington Consensus (WC) view allowed for the start of a fruitful period that saw the revival of traditional debates about development, including the role of the State, the effects of international insertion, and national control of natural resources. Along with the recovery of such traditional topics, other important aspects were also brought into question, such as the prevailing notion of development, identified by some scholars and social activists as the expression of a Western worldview, heir to Enlightenment thinking and 19th-century European positivism and, ultimately, responding to the expansion and legitimization of the capitalist economic system. In this way, the traditional heterodoxy of Development Economics was overwhelmed by a new heterodoxy which denounced not a particular form of development (capitalist development) but rather development itself.

As part of these discussions, certain experiments carried out in Latin America (namely the Bolivian and Ecuadorian processes) become relevant. While the revitalization of development as a specific challenge in Latin America may feature its own particularities (most notably the strength of popular and anti-neoliberal indigenous movements), there are elements in these Latin American experiences that connect with broader discussions on post-development: a) the involvement of indigenous populations in the pursuit of alternatives (whether alternative development or alternatives to development) injects something of an ancient (pre-Western) worldview that may attend to the challenges of development (inequality, environmental destruction, poverty, dependence) very differently; b) traditional issues of heterodox Development Economics, such as national control of natural resources and the role of nationalization, constitute part of the theoretical background and policy instruments of the current processes; and c) the experience of nations such as Ecuador allows one to observe (and draw conclusions about) the scope, limitations, and possibilities of development models that are being inspired, at least partially, by post-developmental thinking.

¹ Arturo Escobar, Serge Latouche, Gilber Rist, or Wolfgang Sachs, among others. Many of these proposals were developed some time ago, including some very remote antecedents such as Ivan Illich or Ignacy Sachs, but they have gained special prominence within current debates around post-neoliberal development.

In this sense, the Ecuadorian experience of *sumak kawsay* (SK) – or good living – becomes relevant to the debate. Indeed, within the framework of the "citizens' revolution" of President Rafael Correa, important changes are now being carried out in Ecuador. These changes seek advances within a post-neoliberal model of development, the features of which have not yet been fully defined. SK, proclaimed as an inspiration for those changes, now faces the emerging contrast between its theoretical genealogy and its consideration of measures taken. In fact, many specialists have pointed out a gradual distancing of the specific economic policy practices of the Ecuadorian Government from the original inspirational principles of SK (Acosta, Martinez and Sacher, 2013; Breton, 2013; and especially, Economics, 2013; Villalba, 2013).

Following this claim, we have found compelling elements of analysis in the Ecuadorian process – particularly in cases of communitarian economy that respond to ancestral patterns of exploitation of the land and social organization. Analysis of these experiences is especially relevant to answering the following questions: To what extent do these experiences represent strategies that go beyond the capitalist conception of development? To what extent do these experiences permit a biocentric perspective that goes further than the standard anthropocentrism of development? To what extent can these experiences nurture strategies for action in a context of increasingly urban societies (or, to the contrary, in a context that is only rural and peasant in scope)?

In order to attempt to answer these questions, the experience of the communitarian economy in Sarayaku, located in Ecuador's Amazon region, will be analyzed. Sarayaku is among the most emblematic of the indigenous communities living within Ecuador, due to their ongoing resistance to oil exploitation in their territory (Ortiz, 2015), as well as their continued adherence to traditional socioeconomic and political organization.² In addition,

² In 1996, part of the territory of Sarayaku was given for oil exploration without having consulted its inhabitants. Subsequently, in 2003, the community of Sarayaku lodged an international claim in the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) alleging violation of their collective rights and asserting that they should have been consulted before the conduct of oil operations within their territories, according to internal legal provisions and those of Convention 169 of the International Labour Organization concerning the Collective Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The Commission, in its judgment of June 27, 2012, found the State liable for violating rights to consultation and cultural identity in allowing private oil exploration activities to take place without popular consultation. This statement was made public in September 2014, and the community received apologies from the Ecuadorian State. Financial compensation is currently being processed. Sarayaku has been home to several indigenous leaders – outstanding as representatives in the Confederation of Ecuadorian Amazon Indigenous Nationalities (COFENIAE), created in 1980, and Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (CONAIE), created in 1986, or as indigenous

Sarayaku is the community where the social practices instituted as SK were studied for the first time, when the Amazonian *Kichwa* anthropologist Carlos Viteri Gualinga studied and systematized the social practices of the Sarayaku people (Viteri, 2003). From these and other studies related to indigenous communities in the Serrania of Ecuador, the term *sumak kawsay* was disseminated, and this notion went from being descriptive of the social practices of the *sarayakuruna* and other indigenous communities to become consecrated as the core principle of the new economic model embraced by Ecuador in its Constitution of 2008. In this way, case-study analysis of the Sarayaku experience may allow us to identify specific aspects of SK which may deepen the current debate on post-development, its limits and its possibilities.

Definition of the main characteristics of the communitarian economy is subject to academic and political debate in Ecuador, due to three contesting positions. Firstly, an ecological version (Acosta, 2012) posits that the communitarian economy is related to the sustainable use of resources, and the primacy of relations of solidarity and reciprocity. Secondly, the indigenist outlook offers a more radical view, in the sense that territories are seen to form essential ecological units (water, jungle, land) that must be harmoniously integrated with humans and other living beings. Thirdly, the developmentalist version considers communitarian economy to be part of a set of alternative activities in which work and subsistence are the social priority, rather than the accumulation of capital (García, 2013a; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014). This discussion will be analyzed later in the section related to the theoretical framework.

Starting from the historical and social configuration of this representative indigenous community, this research aims to enrich the analysis of SK as it is here expressed. That objective will be carried out from a central area of focus: the relationship between the communitarian economy and the conception of SK, both from a theoretical view and from the study of the practices and perpetuation of the material conditions of life in the Sarayaku community (through semi-structured interviews with community leaders in the field). Most definitively, *the main aim of this paper* is the analysis of a concrete, current experience of communitarian economy from which empirical evidence may be drawn to enhance ongoing debates around development and post-development. In particular, we believe that some forms of land exploitation and social organization in rural communities serve as illustrative

politicians and intellectuals, such as Marlon Santi, President of CONAIE in 2007-10, or Carlos Viteri Gualinga, assemblyman for the ruling party and author of several works on Sarayaku.

experiences of communitarian economy and can provide a solid and specific approximation of certain aspects of SK. Analysis of these realities and their theoretical implications within current debates about development are the contribution of this work. It is necessary to emphasize that this research does not attempt to deepen the analysis of political and social demands from the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, especially from CONAIE; such a dimension would exceed the paper's objectives, even though that movement has been recognized as among the most important in the Latin American region.³

The article begins with an overview of the current state of development studies, especially the debates over post-development and the place that SK occupies within them. Subsequently, the role of communitarian economy in the conception of SK will be analyzed, and the case-study experience of Sarayaku will be explored. Finally, the results and implications of our study will be systematized.

2.- THEORY: THE CURRENT DEBATE AROUND DEVELOPMENT, ALTERNATIVES TO DEVELOPMENT, AND POST-DEVELOPMENT

The years following the WC stage in debates about development, showed a gradual recovery of reflexive impulses vis-à-vis Development Economics, especially strengthening the heterodox and contentious proposals crystallized in the World Social Forum of Porto Alegre (first edition in 2001) and the anti-globalization position that "another world is possible". Such post-developmental analysis and proposals of 'de-growth' also gained prominence with the revival of heterodox positions regarding neo-liberalism, its sequels (post-Washington Consensus), and other legitimizing approximations of the status quo (such notions of human development). Certainly, the cumulative advances in global awareness around the environmental limits of human economic activity, and the systematization and increasing elaboration of theoretical proposals on the role of Nature in human life (Ecological Economics), have contributed to the increasing diffusion and acceptance of post-developmental approaches (Riechmann, 1995; Escobar, 1996 and 2010; Roca, 2007; Leff, 2008; Martínez Alier, 2009). In recent years, therefore, development debates have been attending to the increasing stature of post-developmental proposals, in particular as "alternatives to" development.

³ A wider approach to indigenous thought as related to social, political, and economic demands can be found in Altmann, 2013; Becker, 2008; Hidalgo-Capitan *et al*, editors, 2014).

Post-developmentalism can be understood as the confluence of several streams of thought: fundamentally, the philosophy of post-modernity; the socio-historical and anthropological critiques to development; and environmental critiques of the effects of economic growth on Nature. Thus post-developmentalism converges with feminism and radical environmentalism to reject both the orthodox theories of development and proposals derived from alternative approaches -- including Marxist theories, traditionally hegemonic among heterodox approaches to development.

First, the critique of modernity by Ivan Illich (1997) questioned the benefits that the modern world might extend to all countries, especially non-Western countries. Illich saw underdevelopment not as an insufficient standard of living (as it was understood in the post-war period), but as a way of consciousness, a mental state in which social needs are turned into commodities that most of society aspires to, but never reaches. For Illich, struggling against the universality of values and concepts, it was not necessary to establish universal utopian rules (as have been generally sought in development). Instead, he proposed that the aim should be the establishment of formal conditions for a process that would allow any community to continuously choose its own attainable utopia. Thus, local particularities would not be diffused or liquidated by the universalism of development, or by those concepts that represented emancipatory and utopian longing, such as national liberation, socialism, or revolution.

Second, since the 1980s, development has been approached with increasing skepticism, due to associated failures now impugned and labelled as chimerical. The dream of development became a nightmare to some authors who viewed development as Westernization, a Eurocentric imposition upon the wider world. Socio-historical critiques to development branded it a religion or modern belief system (Rist, 1997), an invented story (W. Sachs, 1992), a cultural expression compressing a set of economic and social practices proper to Western capitalist countries into a legitimizing discourse for said practices (institutional, ideological, academic). In short, critics saw it as the universalization of capitalist development. From an anthropological perspective, the concept of development was criticized as the cultural and conceptual expression of Western colonialism; hence the need to decolonize the collective conception of development (Escobar, 1995) and to understand that a (perceived) cultural poverty need not be considered true poverty (Shiva, 1988). All these authors denounced the imposition of a (Western) Eurocentric vision of

development upon the rest of the world -- a vision identified with modernity and presented by Western discourse as superior to tradition.

Thirdly, post-developmentalism also relies on analyses derived from complaints about the environmental effects of development on Nature. Contributions such as bioeconomy (Georgescu-Roegen, 1975) or eco-development (Sachs, 1980) converge in such analyses to highlight the impossibility of infinite economic growth on a planet with physical limits, forcing us to rethink economy in terms of the biosphere; that is, to contemplate the physical and environmental repercussions of human activity, in a move toward biocentrism, a recognition of the inherent value of all forms of life. In this way, Nature becomes subject to values as well as rights (Acosta, 2010, Gudynas, 2015).

From these sources of inspiration, post-developmentalism can be considered through four key aspects. First, post-developmentalism represents a Copernican shift in perception and attitudes toward development, destined to become a dominant discourse of Western modernity rather than persecuted longing within development studies. Post-developmentalism is primarily a reaction to modernity; therefore, the key to post-modernist condemnations of development are their very identification with modernity, presented in Western discourse as a superior condition. Development may be seen as the (natural) Westernization of the world through the spread of capitalist economic growth (Rist, 1997; Sachs, 1992). From this perspective, development or poverty are social constructions that do not objectively exist outside of the discourse (body of ideas, concepts, and theories) on development, and thus they can only be known through that discourse (Escobar, 1992b, 1995; Rahnema, 1997). From here is launched a frontal attack on the development industry, including researchers, policymakers, managers, and development agencies. For these authors, "it is time to recognize development as malignant myth", insofar as "the 'three decades of development' have been an irresponsible experiment that has failed miserably" (Esteva 1985, 78).

Secondly, the criticism of modernity extends to significant aspects of the Enlightenment, especially universalism and the tendency to proclaim the validity of certain categories, irrespective of the cultures or local specificities where they are expressed. This will suppose a rejection of materialism as a worldview, and of political economy as a social science. This largely explains the distance between post-developmentalism and Marxism: for post-developmentalists, Marxism would lock the local particularities into a rigid corset,

modeled according Eurocentric criteria. In short, the anti-modern discourse argues that the rejection of capitalism should be based on local and traditional cultural values, and not on some novel aspect of Eurocentric universalism (though it be anti-capitalist) such as Marxism.

However, in addition, the very notion of modernity is affected by the concrete practices it inspires, which can give rise to its fragmentation and dispersion among "constantly proliferating modernities" (Arce y Long, 2000: 1). This multiple modernity generates powerful counter-tendencies to what is conceived as Western modernization, exhibiting patterns of development considered distorted or divergent; that is, local practices can re-elaborate modernity from within, a very illustrative expression of the recognition and interaction of a variety of societies. This question makes relevant the study of realities like Sarayaku because they can help to understand the way in which the proliferation of modernities breaks with a more linear and mechanistic vision of modernity. In this sense, contributions such as Blaser (2010) allow us to see the transformation of modernity and the struggle to claim different versions of globality, precisely from analysis of the political and social organization of peoples such as the Yshiro in the Paraguayan Chaco. From this example, Blaser shows how indigenous peoples' struggle for their worlds, aided by the enormous mobilizing power of nonhumans (most apparent in what moderns perceive as environmental crises), unavoidably bringing the pluriverse to the forefront, which in turn implies a challenge to the universalism of modernity.

Third, post-developmentalism proposes a revaluation of traditional non-capitalist societies; ultimately, life in the undeveloped world is viewed not as 'bad' but, on the contrary, as mere allowance of the free fulfillment and satisfaction that development sought to ruin (Kiely, 1999). Post-developmentalism tends to relativize the value of certain essential aspects of what has been traditionally understood as progress, also vindicating traditional modes of thought and social practice previously condemned or pushed aside, precisely in the name of progress (Blaser, 2010).

Finally, post-developmentalism will foster alternative reflections on what is, or should be, considered a 'good' life. In this sense, the good life is associated with localities in contact with the land, and with local communities, according to the "Gandhian notions of beauty, frugality and simplicity" (Corbridge 1998, 139). That simple life ('simple living' in Sachs (1997), or 'simpler way' in Trainer (2011)) is presented in two versions: the

ecological and the spiritual. The ecological dimension requires a drastic (fast and powerful) reduction in the use of natural resources as the way to a "revolution of sufficiency", which involves both rationalization of the means and extreme moderation in the aims (Sachs, 1997). The spiritual dimension of the good life involves transcendence of the material, subordinating it to an ideal of beauty that is essentially intangible and not dependent on consumption (Gandhi, 1997). All this implies a notion of the good life as associated with the peace and the harmony that might be achieved through simplicity, with less materialistic lifestyles, and where the pursuit of happiness should be associated with spiritual sources rather than consumption patterns.

The notion of *sumak kawsay* bursts onto this debate driven by the coincidence of theoretical and academic disputes and by claims of a new economic model by governments such as that of Rafael Correa and his "citizen" revolution" (Senplades, 2013; García, 2013b). This coincidence allows for comparison between the scope of reflections and theoretical proposals that sustain, and that are derived from SK, the reality of whether those changes are being carried out effectively.⁴

SK is a multidimensional paradigm that proposes new forms of life, stemming from two main aspects. The first aspect is the harmony between human beings and Nature, in a perspective of biocentric coexistence that contrasts the anthropocentric vision of Western developmentalism. In this biocentric vision, the accumulation to life must prevail over the accumulation of capital, meaning that natural resources must not be subjected to the needs of capital accumulation. This therefore involves prioritizing the needs of human beings over the needs of capital, and prioritizing social relationships based on communal ownership over the derivatives of individual property. Continuation of the material conditions of life cannot afford to ignore *Pachamama* (Nature), which must be valued well beyond its monetary potential as a living space wherein all beings that inhabit the biosphere coexist (Acosta, 2012). All of this requires that Nature be 'used' with respect to its natural cycles of reproduction and regeneration, to ensure the ongoing conditions necessary for life.

⁴ The intrinsic nature of SK is controversial. What does it really express? Some authors (Dominguez and Caria, 2014) argue that SK can be functional alongside the primary-exporter model that it seeks to overcome, but that it has been used to consolidate support for the developmental and modernizing utopia of the Rafael Correa model. Although referring to other aspects, Breton (2013) makes a similar analysis when he argues that the discourse of SK "has provided a veneer of discursive alternativeness for the so-called post-neoliberal governments, while concealing actual economic practices and treatment of cultural diversity that, paradoxically closely resemble certain aspects of the technocratic and nationalist regimes of the 1970s." (p. 3).

Therefore, from the perspective of SK, the harmonious relationship between humans and Nature (biocentrism) requires a community-based economic practice, in opposition to the capitalist economic practice that puts the Nature at the service of human accumulation (anthropocentrism).

The second aspect of SK is the implementation of the plurinational and intercultural State, to reclaim and restore traditional forms of social and economic organization displaced by colonization, developmentalism, and neo-liberalism. The principle of plurinationality is based on the "*existencia de diversas naciones originarias como entidades económicas, culturales, sociales, políticas, jurídicas, espirituales y lingüísticas, históricamente definidas y diferenciadas*",⁵ and this should lead to the "*configuración de un ordenamiento político, institucional y jurídico que plasme la unidad en la diversidad*",⁶ (CONAIE, 2012: 32). For its part, multiculturalism "*promueve el diálogo de saberes, de pensamiento, de conocimiento, epistemologías, y espiritualidad en una ruta de ida y vuelta de mutuo aprendizaje e intercambio*"⁷ (CONAIE, 2012: 33).⁸

SK emerges from the indigenous worldview of Andean and Amazonian indigenous peoples of Ecuador and Bolivia, basically as an indigenous philosophy of life (*Rune*) that values the finding and maintenance of harmony between the community (*ayllu*) and other beings of Nature (*Pachamama*). In this sense "*el sumak kawsay es un concepto y una práctica fundamental en la vida del sistema comunitario*"⁹ (Macas, 2014: 180). From a linguistic point of view, *sumak* means ideal – the beautiful, the good, the realization; and *kawsay* is life, in reference to a dignified life in harmony and balance with the universe and with other human beings. In short, "*sumak kawsay significa la plenitud de la vida*"¹⁰ (Kowii, 2014: 168) and it represents an alternative to development derived from the ancestral way that the Andean and Amazonian peoples constructed their relationships with one another and with Nature (Davalos, 2011). Ultimately, SK is a social practice that governs the daily life of many indigenous communities.

⁵ "Existence of various nations such as are historically defined and their differentiated economic, cultural, social, political, legal, spiritual, and linguistic entities".

⁶ "Configuration of a political, institutional, and legal order that reflects the unity within diversity".

⁷ "Promotes a dialogue of wisdom, thought, knowledge, epistemology, and spirituality in a circular route of mutual learning and sharing".

⁸ Inter-culturalism is not multi-culturalism, because it merely "describes the existence of various cultures in a territorial unit that often coexist involuntarily (...) leaving intact the structures and institutions which privilege some over others" (CONAIE, 2012: 33).

⁹ "*Sumak kawsay* is a concept and a fundamental practice in the life of the communitarian system"

¹⁰ "*Sumak kawsay* means the fullness of life"

From these approaches, many academic and political debates have arisen about the potential scope of SK as a paradigmatic proposal for confronting the current capitalist crises and challenges of development. From those debates, very different interpretations of SK have been derived. Indeed, under the common name of SK, three currents and sensibilities can be distinguished, with significant differences between them (Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014; Villalba, 2013).

A first stream, socialist and statist, is characterized by the importance of State political management of SK and the priority of social equity, even above environmental and cultural issues, and vindicating the "socialism of *sumak kawsay*" as an Andean variant of socialism, instead of a merely indigenous approach. The second stream is the post-developmental, nurtured by environmentalism and very close to 'de-growth'. The focus for this current corresponds to Nature (considered as subject to rights; Acosta, 2010) and its defense and preservation, from a perspective where indigenous and feminist elements with reference to authors like Vandana Shiva are incorporated. The third stream is the indigenous and "*pachamamista*", the main aspects of which are the self-determination of indigenous peoples in the construction of SK, along with the spiritual elements resident in the Andean worldview (the *Pachamama* and other divinities, spirits, myths, and rites of these indigenous cultures).

The important differences between these three streams evidence two important and related issues. The first is the distance between the economic policy measures and the actual features of the model of development being built in Ecuador, on the one hand, and the principles of SK (as collected in the Ecuadorian Constitution) on the other; that is, there are certain differences between the original indigenous propositions and those of the new leftist Governments (Breton, 2013; Domínguez and Caria, 2014; Villalba, 2013; Viola, 2014). The second issue comes as a result of the first, raising questions about how some of these principles can potentially be reflected in concrete steps: Through what measures is a biocentric vision expressed? What exactly is a biocentric economic policy? How would one articulate, from an intercultural perspective, the indigenous and the ancestral alongside an urban reality with Western strong presence (the colonial inheritance)? In short, getting back to our main question, *how does one pursue an alternative strategy to development that is not merely "another kind" of development?*

These are central issues in a debate in which progress towards consensus has been uneven. Indeed, many are the contributions deriving from the first question, in areas such as on the meaning of SK and its different perspectives or streams (León, *coord.*, 2010; Senplades, 2010; Acosta, 2012; Hidalgo-Capitán and Cubillo-Guevara, 2014; Villalba, 2013). There also exists analysis and assessment of the policies implemented (Economía, 2013; García, 2013a and 2013b), and there have been illustrative thoughts around the challenges of Government and, in particular, about the new economic model and changes to the productive matrix. (Duque, 2013; Muñoz Jaramillo and Carrión, 2013; Villalba, 2013). Also relevant are the studies and discussions about the multinational and intercultural State (CONAIE, 2012; Villalba, 2013), or about the character of the changes experienced by the State (Chiasson-Lebel, 2013). Furthermore, contributions about the persistent weight of natural resources in the Ecuadorian economy are important, leading some authors to denounce the extractive character of the economic model of Correa (Martínez Alíer, 2009; Gudynas, 2010; Acosta, Martínez and Sánchez, 2013).

On the other hand, contributions pertaining directly to our main question are few. Some elements do appear in Acosta (2012), but the effort is limited to establishing certain general principles that do not go beyond the reiteration of long-standing arguments about the limits of primary insertion and commodity exports, already abundant in the heterodox literature about economic development (as in Samir Amin, Raul Prebisch, and many others). It is here that the current research seeks to make significant contributions. In particular, we believe that some forms of traditional organization for the exploitation of land in rural communities constitute useful experiences of communitarian economy which, as such, can provide a concrete and specific approach to essential aspects of the SK. Analysis of these forms, in this case focused on the experience of Sarayaku, seeks to provide actual content for one of the basic dimensions of SK that are not yet sufficiently answered. We believe that these traditional forms of land use can be identified as useful elements that help in the construction of new economic models inspired by the SK. The following section is dedicated to studying the experience of Sarayaku. To this end, the work will focus on two key aspects of the concrete of communitarian experience of Sarayaku: first, an analysis of the role of the communitarian economy in the concept of SK (because, as mentioned above, the biocentric proposal to establish the kind of relationship between humans and Nature that SK advocates will depend on community-based perpetuation); and second, an examination of communitarian practices deriving from fieldwork conducted within this community.

3.- SUMAK KAWSAY, THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY ECONOMY, AND THE SARAYAKU EXPERIENCE

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Study area and approach

The methodological approach of this research was basically qualitative, in view of the complexity that the approach implied to this Amazonian community. Firstly, Sarayaku is located in the south-eastern of the Republic of Ecuador, in the province of Pastaza. The entry of visitors is complicated and can only be accomplished by means of a small plane or canoe on the river Bobonaza, a six-hour trip. Secondly, Sarayaku maintains a restricted policy for visitors and is not open to tourism, so prior contact with leaders is necessary to obtain authorization.

Once the visitor is accepted, he becomes part of the community and must share in normal work activities and collective festivities. This participatory observation was our method of entering the community to create confidence and to obtain the proper information. Had this confidence not been achieved, the interviews could not have been conducted – a rule imposed by the community. Thanks to the direct efforts and resources of the Central University of Ecuador, Jesús Ortiz Viveros, a post-graduate student and research assistant, was able to visit the community of Sarayaku from April 8 to June 22, 2014, a stay of two and a half months.

3.1.2 Data collection and analysis

During the above mentioned period, a semi-structured survey was carried out among Sarayaku's leaders and households. Interacting within the community are the wise leader (or *yachak*), the formal leaders (who have both social recognition and legal representation), and common households; the surveys were carried out among these three categories of people. The questionnaire was the result of several meetings held in Quito with a multidisciplinary group of experts (anthropologists, sociologists, and economists). The paper's authors validated the questionnaire, taking into account both the objectives of the research and the cultural characteristics of the population of Sarayaku.

The group of experts identified five important dimensions to be evaluated: i) the use of territory through the *chakras* and community spaces; (ii) self-reliant activities for the

reproduction of life (production and distribution); (iii) the sustainable use of natural resources in the Amazon, a very fragile ecosystem; iv) the position occupied by the workforce in the logic of social perpetuation of the community; and (v) types of relations based on cooperation and community life (non-market economic relations). The result was a questionnaire with 12 open questions related to the community economy.

After this complex fieldwork, we collected a total of 14 surveys of various community leaders and households, with both men and women in leadership positions and as heads of household. Later, a focus group was organized in Quito with several national experts, to review the information obtained. Finally, a qualitative report was drawn up and subsequently revised in Madrid.

3.2.- Sarayaku economy

3.2.1 Introduction

The origin myths and sacred taboos that explain the existence and regulate the life of native peoples of the Ecuadorian Amazon show all living beings as sharing the same essence, that is the vital energy of the *kausak sachá* (living forest). This approach means that all living beings are made of the same substance and interchange with every cycle of life. Therefore, in each life-cycle (*pachakutik*, *katun* or *time baktum*) all living things might be different, but they will always return to the common substance as a part of a transformation process. This ontological principle implies that all living beings be afforded the same respect and the same rights. In the case of human beings, when they die, their essence can transform into plants or animals. In turn, plants or animals may have been human beings in other previous cycles. This deep respect for different living beings is one of the most important differences between the Andean and Amazonian way of thinking and the Western outlook. This situation has very important implications both for economic practices and the conservation of nature.¹¹

In the daily life of Amazonian peoples such as the Sarayaku, these sorts of explanations and behavioral codes are part of unwritten law but are traditionally accepted and respected in the jungle, in their economic as well as their social practices. These issues

¹¹ In the case of Sarayaku and the other aboriginal communities who have survived in the Ecuadorian Amazon jungle, all have an oral literature whose origin is related to the *sasy* and *tayak* cultures. These ancestral cultures explain that human predecessors are animals: monkeys for Zapara people, jaguars for the Waorani, and feathered snakes for other aboriginal people. The feathered serpent is a myth found in many cultures in South and Central America.

determine a multidimensional view of the economy under the principles of SK. The technoeconomic activities oriented toward reproducing the material conditions of life are conceived as a dimension within the range of social, environmental, and cultural structures. In other words, the economy from the perspective of SK is understood as the set of productive and reproductive activities that are subordinated to a social and environmental balance (Garcia, 2013b).

This multidimensional concept of economic activity is based on the union of two aspects: the community and the territory. Both aspects are vital to the social and economic organization in Sarayaku. In particular, the community and the territory merge in the *ayllu*. The *ayllu* is the organizational system of the *Kichwa* community that links the natural environment, the community, the family, and the individual. The *ayllu* is where the economy is expressed in terms of community (Simbaña, 2011), and the *ayllu* system prioritizes the natural environment as a collective responsibility, to ensure community well-being and, therefore, family and individual well-being (Kowii, 2014).¹²

3.2.2.- The territory

According to the indigenous conception, as mentioned before, SK should be implemented within a concrete and defined territory, where interrelation exists between material and spiritual elements. This approach is referred to as *kawsak sachá* (living forest). The territory has three areas: a) the orchard (*chakra*), where the basic livelihood is obtained (yucca, corn, potatoes, vegetables, and fruit), along with aromatic, medicinal, and ornamental plants and craft materials; b) the jungle (*sachá*), where families hunt in pursuit of basic livelihood; and c) inland waters (*yaku*), which provide domestic water and fish to enrich family diets. The reproduction of life requires a balanced and very moderate use of these three elements (orchard, jungle, and water) to ensure their conservation. In this sense, the indigenous families produce and exploit from Nature only for subsistence (self-reliance and sustainability). They also share surplus production with other members of community (solidarity). The notion of SK expresses an indigenous philosophy of life based on maintaining harmony between the community and the other beings of Nature in a mixed approach, as both a vital aspiration and the foundation of domestic life.

¹² According to Huanacuni (2010), *ayllu* is an Aymara word that could be translated as “community”, and not merely human community but also natural community (all living beings). The notion of *ayni* or reciprocity of life is their main principle. The community is also variously named *llacta*, *ayllu* or *jatun ayllu* (Macas, 2000).

3.2.3.- Self-reliant communities

Agriculture is the main activity inside the *ayllu*. In this context, the main economic unit is the *chakra*, where there is space not only for production but also symbolic and spiritual traditions, including ancestral knowledge. Each family has a *chakra* (whose size ranges between half of one hectare and four hectares) where crops are cultivated for consumption, as a source of carbohydrates and vegetable proteins such as chili or *uchu* peppers.

The *chakra*, therefore, is an agricultural production system linked to a household, whose property and direct beneficiary is the family. However, production is also socialized through the exchange and production of *aswa* (cassava *chichi*, a fermented beverage) which is socially consumed (Viteri, 2003). The *chakra* is the support for the family's food security and provides inputs for natural medicine; at the same time, it is a space where traditional knowledge and ritual and symbolic elements are expressed and recreated. The management of this production system is done manually, without the use of chemicals, and with very few tools, in order not to introduce negative effects upon the soil or in surrounding ecosystems. In fact, tools like the axe and machete are used only for opening space inside the woods for creation of the *chakra*. In consequence, the relationship with the environment around the *chakra* is ritual and very respectful. In addition, the yield of the land is maintained by traditional techniques of soil and crop rotation. In the *chakra* there is a balance among production, conservation, and ancestral knowledge (GIZ, 2011).

The central issue is that the *ayllu* works as a community production system, where many forms of solidarity and reciprocity prevail. This occurs through two instruments: firstly, through the obligation to share the excess production with other members of the community, which in turn generates prestige and social recognition (Maldonado, 2014b); and secondly, through solidarity work benefiting the community (as with the *minga*¹³), or on behalf of a family (as with the *ayni*¹⁴).

3.2.4.- Sustainability

The community organizational structures are aimed at ensuring self-sufficiency or sustainability through the use of Nature only for subsistence, always respecting the natural

¹³ The *minka* or *minga* is the obligatory work that is developed by each *allyu* to fulfill the community requirements by means of collective activities. For example, community work for building, or for fixing local routes or irrigation canals.

¹⁴ The *ayni* refers to the specific solidarity activities among *ayllus* or among families inside the community in the short term. For example, sowing activities.

production and reproduction cycles. In this way, the community promotes the seamless and indivisible integration of production and Nature. Since economic activities cannot be considered as isolated from the cultural, social, and natural environment, this approach means that economic activities are subordinated to the social and environmental interests of the community. This situation highlights the biocentric approach that forms part of the economic activities behind the SK model. Interest is not focused on the profitability of these economic activities, but on the reproduction of life and the conservation of Nature. In this sense, the "*pachacéntrica*" economy is characterized by null market competition and the balance and harmony between members of the community and between the community and the natural environment where they are situated (Oviedo, 2011).

3.2.5.- The position of the workforce

An essential aspect of the community economy is the position of the workforce, distinct from the workforce in a capitalist economy. This community organization seeks to overcome divisions between the means of production and the workforce itself. In daily activities of the *ayllu*, that division (the basis of capitalist exploitation) is diluted, because community ownership obviates the use of a wage workforce in favor of the family or community workforce. In the case of individual production through particular plots or *chakras*, this is done through family labor without economic compensation.

3.2.6.- Non-market economic relations

Another aspect in which the community economy reflects an alternative to the capitalist logic are the types of commercial relationships established among members of the community, in the sense that they do not necessarily use money. The economic relations within the SK are based on three alternative principles to the capitalist rationale: community aid (*yanapana* by means of the *minga*), generosity (*kuna* by way of gift), and reciprocity (*kunakuna* by exchange of products over time, without commercial or monetary relations). These three principles express a solidarity alternative to the capitalist rationale motivated by individual profit. These forms of solidarity and generosity (*kuna*) or reciprocity (*kunakuna*) compel the indigenous peoples to share their excess production with other members of the community, and this in turn generates social prestige for those who give generously without expecting anything in return (*kuna*) or in terms of reciprocity (*kunakuna*). The SK principles promote the exchange of goods in a deferred way, as opposed to trade and monetary exchange guided by the drive for individual benefit.

3.3.- Reality and the uncertainties in the Sarayaku community economy¹⁵

The predominance of the *chakra* is foundational in Sarayaku, acting as the core of a community economy in which people continually pursue self-sufficiency and independence, not only individually but also collectively. Agricultural production is complemented by collective activities of hunting, fishing, mining, and timber procurement. Fishing is an ancient practice that tends to be more common than hunting because of the great diversity in the area. The combination of hunting, fishing, and fruit gathering with agricultural activities in the *chakra* are thus the fundamental activities for the community subsistence.

Apart from the *chakra* as a family orchard, the members of the community have the right to exploit the collective ownership of forest areas (*purine*), but under a collective vision of spaces being reserved for both agricultural production and hunting. The term used by the leaders of Sarayaku interviewed during this research referred to the existence of collective places in the Amazon rainforest, known as *tambos*. These places are available to all members of the community. In the framework of the *chakra*, the *tambos*, and the community work, there is some division of labor among community members. The hunting and fishing are done by adult men, but women may also fish in some circumstances. Agriculture is in the hands of women, but the preparation of poisons for hunting or fishing is a male responsibility. Men also perform the clearing of forest land. Finally, the harvesting of forest fruits is carried out mainly by women and children.

In this context, it is possible to ask whether this economic system is able to ensure living conditions for the entire community? Another question might be: what happens if resources are insufficient? When complicated situations emerge, community members depend first on crop rotation and the expanded use of community land, as strategies for maintaining harmony with Nature. As a second option, the native is forced into temporary migration seeking wage employment, especially on plantations, in factories, in shops or domestic services, or as self-employed artisans through the production and sale of handicrafts. In any case, such capitalist activities are sporadic and temporary and do not represent a new economic paradigm (enrichment and accumulation) but aim to ensure ongoing family and community self-sufficiency. This situation implies, therefore, that the entire economic process is built around subsistence, according to ancestral economic criteria which seeks not only continuity but also represents a viable alternative.

¹⁵ This section is based largely on structured interviews carried out by the authors.

Under the principle of self-sufficiency, it is clear that the individual accumulation of capital is not predominant, because the logic of community perpetuation is paramount. In this sense, the values of subsistence and community appropriation outweigh the need for individual accumulation. In fact, although there may occur certain processes of commercial exchange of goods and services, both among community members and with other communities, these are neither widespread practices nor essential, but merely complementary.

Under the principles of balance and reciprocity, the Sarayaku community promotes solidarity and equality both in terms of work and in the distribution of the social product, thus ensuring the collective well-being, which in turn implies individual or family welfare. Behind this collective sharing of the surplus is the spiritual vision of the territory and Nature.

One of the more widespread forms of reciprocity is related to the collective labor support for housing construction, in the *chakra*, and in collective work around activities related to hunting, fishing, and fruit gathering. When a couple marries, the community is organized to perform community work for their housing and *chakra*, the idea being to provide the best living conditions for this new family. Something similar happens in the case of already established families if they experience problems related to weather conditions or disease; in such cases, these families receive community support to help them out of difficult circumstances.

Finally, there are a set of ancient practices related to environmental sustainability, because both individual and collective activity are subordinated to the perpetuation of natural cycles. Under the vision of *sumak allpa* (territory, environment, and natural resources), ancient techniques for the preparation and use of land are applied, especially in relation to the use of natural fertilizers and crop rotation. Agricultural production is zoned in the *chakra* and in communal areas. Hunting and fishing activities also adhere to traditional practices, depending on the availability of such resources, and avoiding any possibility of overexploitation. These practices relate to the maintenance of hunting areas, which are limited both in extent and capacity utilization. It is also possible to observe conservation practices and the preservation of endangered species such as the tapir. All waste is carefully recycled to avoid damage to the natural environment. To these ends, the management of

ecosystems within indigenous territories is based on the holistic approach of essential ecological units: *sacha* (jungle), *yaku* (river) and *allpa* (ground).

In this context, other important questions arise: How solid can this type of organization be considered? What uncertainties are relevant for the community economy in the context of the current economic transformations in Ecuador? The reality in this country is of course complex, especially given the political process of change and transformation initiated and launched in 2007 as part of a raft of post-neoliberal policies. These policies are supported by the recovery of the role of the State as the main actor in economic well-being, as it is often mentioned in the specialized literature addressing the emergence of progressive states in Latin America (Grugel and Riggirozzi 2012; Dubash and Morgan, 2012). Ecuador overwhelmingly approved its new constitution in 2008, one of the main innovations of which was a vision for building a new society based on a comprehensive approach to rights and guarantees. The principles of SK thus became the ultimate goal for this society, within the framework of the democratic, plurinational, and intercultural State.

Despite these constitutional guarantees and rights, however, Sarayaku remains subject to uncontrollable changes where markets, wage labor, the media, and the national State are increasingly present, all coexisting within the traditional social organization. Moreover, in recent years the people of Sarayaku have diversified their economic activities through the promotion of tourism. In the past, they ran a tourism company called Amazanga, which later became a family company because the community had insufficient money to operate the enterprise. Also recently, thanks to economic compensation paid by the national State to the community (as imposed by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission (see footnote 2), two planes were purchased and a community company was established. The intention is that all money previously spent on air transportation remain in the community, while the company also helps to promote community tourism and the diversification of economic activities. Other economic initiatives have also been mounted, such as development of a jungle grape liquor, and promotion of handcrafts, native fibers, and fishing. However, these kinds of economic and commercial activities have remained marginal and have done little to resolve new economic challenges.

One of those challenges is the coming elimination of hunting as an economic activity, motivated by the alarming decline of animal resources, and the need to preserve these species for tourism, as well as the increasing pollution of rivers, affecting the fish

stock and the capture of turtles. This process of decrease in the weight of hunting as regards living conditions in Sarayaku has generated a new and difficult cultural challenge: What will be the new social role of men in the traditional community, if their role as a supplier of protein is removed? This conflict has been especially present in forest communities in areas close to populated cities or towns, particularly in the *Jibaro* communities, where cultural traditions have allowed the hunter to keep several wives. As an alternative to economic conflict, husbandry of livestock was adopted as an activity that both genders could perform, although culturally speaking, men want to maintain the right to supply animal protein, while women see this as a complex issue that may create new problems while decreasing the quality of women's lives. Overall, these communities seem to have entered into a process of decomposition, characterized by the loss of economic autonomy, mass emigration in search of better job opportunities, the sale or lease of communal lands, and accelerated acculturation.

On the other hand, thanks to access to primary and secondary education, as well as the successful cross-cultural experiences of community citizens married to foreigners, the younger generations have radically changed their life expectations. These generations now have the expectation of emigrating in a permanent way, finding permanent work or achieving greater educational qualifications in order to access higher living standards and upward social mobility (thus creating conflict with the economic community rationale).

In short, the case of Sarayaku (just as with other Andean and Amazonian indigenous locales) is part of the Ecuadorian experience as it relates to community economy. However, at the same time, this experience occupies only a marginal political and social position within the prevailing development model, as its practices are not part of an active national development vision. For these reasons, the State-sponsored vision that has prevailed in recent years in terms of community economy has been more declarative than effective in the end, both from the perspective of visibility and in terms of its incorporation into the national model.

4.- RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The experience and functioning of communitarian economy in Sarayaku are illustrative of the scope and limits of genuine expressions of SK. A central feature to the traditional organization of Amazonian and Andean communities, the communitarian economy is one of

the pillars of SK, and its analysis provides important aspects for reflecting on the real potential of SK to configure viable alternatives to development beyond rural communities. The analysis carried out also helps to answer the questions posed at the beginning of this work. In particular, how may a biocentric perspective that goes beyond the traditional anthropocentricity of development can be expressed? To what extent might the Sarayaku experience nurture strategies for action translatable to a Westernized urban reality? These questions are integrated into the main question of labor: how can an “alternative to development” be pursued that is not just “another” development (but that in fact rejects the prevailing idea of development)?

The case study offers illustrative aspects for answering the first question. A biocentric perspective means that economic activity is subordinate to the environmental (and social) balance, without exceeding the limits of equilibrium. In Sarayaku’s environmental and social balance is based on the link between community and territory. This union is made possible from functioning of the *ayllu*, allowing articulation of the natural environment, the community, the family, and the individual person. The use made of the *chakra*, the jungle and water resources is oriented exclusively to subsistence and the perpetuation of the life of the community. The ontological principle of Amazonian peoples, according to which all living beings share the same essence and are transformed throughout successive existences, explains this reverential respect for natural resources (animals and plants) and their restricted use. In this sense, the poverty and simplicity of the tools used in economic activities are very illustrative of a biocentric perspective: the priority is not maximum production or increased work efficiency (productivity), but rather to not harm Nature with aggressive implements or invasive work. Activities such as hunting, fishing, and fruit recollection, in addition to small cultivated plots, are completely dependent on the environment in which the communities are located: the impoverishment of that environment would constitute the greatest threat to the survival of the community.

More doubts arise with the second question. The organization of production and distribution from the communitarian economy observed in Sarayaku is predominantly rural in type. The communitarian economy requires very specific conditions: a) low population density within expansive and rich areas with abundant and varied natural resources; b) undiversified and traditional economic activities, without complicated manufacturing (beyond simple processes) or services on a large scale; c) social homogeneity, with few social differences, so that the economic process does not act as a mechanism for creating

inequalities, but rather for cooperation and mutual help. The exceptionality of these features makes it difficult to translate the practices here studied into other areas with distinct characteristics, particularly densely populated areas with diversified economic activities and a heterogeneous social structure (as exists in urban or less isolated areas). As mentioned in section 3.2, each family needs to maintain several *chakras* whose exploitation is alternated, to allow fertile (rather than intensive) use of land. This mechanism is crucial to ensuring the environmental balance that the communitarian economy demands, and it requires that very exceptional circumstances be pursued. The *ayllu*, as self-sufficient community, is supported upon a territory that contains the vital cosmos of material and spiritual elements; outside this territory, rich in biodiversity and broad of extension, such material (and spiritual) elements are scarcely found.

Turning back to the main question formulated at the beginning of this work, how can such an alternative strategy be translated without becoming another variety of development? Is it an alternative only to capitalist development? No doubt, the rationale that guides decision-making in the communitarian economy of Sarayaku differs from the capitalist logic in several ways (indeed, it may be regarded as pre-capitalist). First, the use of land and natural resources aims at the continuation (not enlargement) of societies; that is, ensuring the material basis for subsistence. Therefore the development of productive forces is not pursued, but rather maintenance of the productive capacity adequate to guarantee the life of society. This explains why non-capitalist reproduction orients the economic organization, and economic self-sufficiency is defended over increased economic potential.

Secondly, as a result of the above, economic relations in this context are complementary, not associated with a profit motive but, again, aimed at guaranteeing subsistence. Thus families share the surplus with the community via principles such as the *minga*, the *kuna*, or *kanakuna*. Certainly, this method of managing surplus does represent an alternative to economic relations of a commercial nature, to the extent that merchandise (market-oriented production) is not produced, with utility valued over change. Third, the use of the labor force defies commercial logic; there is no contract labor (labor is not sold in exchange for wages) but the work involved in production is processed cooperatively, within the family or community setting.

Such aspects allow us to perceive the communitarian economy as an alternative to capitalist development: the amassing of capital is not a goal; the market is not the main

regulator of exchanges; there is no labor market and therefore no commodification of the labor force. These characteristic features of capitalism features are associated with the character of property; but here the property is collective and the *ayllu* is the social entity with ownership of territory. Therefore, individuals access resources from the territory on the basis of their position within the *ayllu*, as defined by blood relations and affinity.

Regarding its alternative character to development, the starting point of the communitarian economy is pre-developmental (also pre-capitalist, given the capitalist nature of the original development policy paradigm of modernization). In this respect several issues should be established. First, the communitarian economy is noted for its disinterest in continuously improving the material conditions of existence (SK advises living well over living better), in line with the post-developmental postulates. Its transcendental criteria in making economic choices ensures conditions that will adequately satisfy the needs of the population, as is the case with the majority of developmental principles (especially in the heterodox tradition). Secondly, an alternative configuration requires a minimum degree of versatility, meaning an adaptability to heterogeneous contexts. This is where proposals arising from the communitarian economy find their greatest limits in claiming to represent an alternative to development, insofar as the social organization based depends on very particular (and therefore irreproducible) as well as vulnerable (and therefore unwanted) circumstances.

These demanding conditions for ensuring the communitarian economy have conspired with the economic and social changes being experienced Sarayaku to increase the vulnerability of its social organization. Certainly, as mentioned, the restriction of hunting as an important economic activity, the effects of tourism, increasing migration, growing employment in non-traditional activities, and the changing expectations of younger generations can all have unpredictable effects for traditional societies. These changes, in the worst case, can imperil the continuity of traditional communities as they have been maintained. In that sense, exceptionality and vulnerability remain present in the future prospects for Sarayaku.

Thus the following challenge becomes clear: if the material universe that supported the emergence of these ways of thinking disappears (for example, through the rapid destruction of the Amazon rainforest), or if the ways of interacting productively with the environment radically change, can those ways of thinking and acting subsist? These

practices may represent the last hope for the survival of both these cultures and the forest. The wealth of the diversity of these societies, not only in terms of the natural but also the organizational, sufficiently justifies a need to sustain such traditional forms of human organization so close to the particular material universe in which they emerged so long ago.

5.- CONCLUSIONS

There is a high degree of controversy regarding the conceptual, epistemological, and practical approaches of SK. In effect, SK is source of intellectual controversy in terms of both content and scope. For some authors, SK is a cultural tradition invented and launched against Eurocentrism, but there are many contradictions within such assertions as well as a lack of theoretical consensus (Breton, 2013) – although Alberto Acosta has insisted that this proposal remains in a process of improvement, thus inviting a democratic debate against indigenous essentialism along with the trivialization of this proposal (Acosta Martinez and Sacher, 2013). The truth is that SK cannot be understood as a homogeneous stream nor a defined thought.

However, these kinds of academic discussion matter little to the Amazonian and Andean populations, for whom SK is a simple fact of life, a worldview belief manifested through inherited precepts and an oral tradition articulated to their economic and cultural activities and rituals. These principles serve as a backbone to ensure solidarity, complementarity, and harmony within internal collective relations, and in the relationships between people and Nature.

Based on the study of Sarayaku's communitarian economy experience, we have analyzed the existence of elements of a strategy that is often presented as an alternative to development, and we have assessed its current weaknesses and uncertain future perspectives. In particular, we have identified certain forms of traditional organization (*ayllu*) that represent a clear illustration of concrete and specific aspects of SK. In fact, *ayllu* represents a form of land exploitation and social organization from which the importance of the communitarian economy in the SK and its recognition are understood. From the analysis of these traditional forms of communitarian economy, we can answer the questions formulated in the introduction: To what extent do these experiences represent strategies that go beyond the capitalist conception of development? To what extent do these experiences permit a biocentric perspective that goes further than the standard anthropocentrism of

development? To what extent can these experiences nurture strategies for action in a context of increasingly urban societies?

Firstly, the communitarian economy is frankly and directly opposed to capitalist rationale. Indeed, economic decisions derive from a distinct logic because individual and collective needs outweigh exchange value (community is more important than markets). The ownership of land is collective and work is governed by way of kinship, not contract. The product obtained is directed toward the family's immediate survival and production surpluses are reinvested in the community, as a way to gain social prestige under the principles of *yanapana*, *kuna* and *kunakuna*. Forms of collective work (for the community or to assist other families) also distinguish this form of economic organization as coming from a non-capitalist rationale.

Secondly, the entire economic process revolves around subsistence, that is, the necessary maintenance of the physical and environmental conditions that make their particular life possible. This requirement involves a ritual respect for Nature, informed by the way in which life is conceived in the Andean and Amazonian tradition. There is a strong coherence between the ontological principles present in the Sarayaku population and the material requirements for the maintenance of life. From this double justification, it is possible to understand, on the one hand, the biocentric nature of the communitarian economy of Sarayaku, and on the other hand, how natural resources and labor are used for the reproduction of life, and not for capitalist reproduction (economic growth).

Thirdly, the study of Sarayaku's communitarian economy also illuminates the difficulties in exporting their organizational schemes to other contexts. The model of social organization is consistent with the physical environment from which it arises it both depends on Nature and adapts to it as a survival strategy over time. Such a model can hardly be replicated in physical contexts that do not meet characteristics found in the Ecuadorian jungle or mountains, thus limiting the potential for inspiring new models of development that might prove reproducible elsewhere.

The analysis of specific communitarian economy experience (first contribution) therefore provides elements that enrich the current debate on development and post-development. Specifically, these elements can be summarized in three: a) there are forms of social organization whose economic processes are not regulated according to capitalist rationality or oriented to the market; b) biocentrism must be based on the essential link

between the physical and environmental conditions of social life and the natural characteristics of the place where life is developed. This link facilitates the conservationist commitment since the very existence of society depends on the conservation of the natural environment, thus becoming a source of life; and c) Sarayaku's experience is consistent with some core principles of SK (such as the claim to communitarian economy), especially with the versions of SK with a more indigenist and post-developmental character; however, its potential diffuser raises many doubts. Even the very survival of these forms of social organization and exploitation of the land are uncertain due to its growing vulnerability. The changing expectations of new generations (associated with education, territorial mobility, and extra-community social relationships) and in economic activities (hunting, tourism) generate doubts around the future of collective institutions such as the *ayllu*. In any case, analysis and understanding of social and economic models such as exist in Sarayaku do serve to illustrate the richness and variety of societies outside familiar Eurocentric patterns. Consequently, just as the environment in which they evolved, such expressions of economic distinction deserve to be understood, promoted, and protected.

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