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## Indigenous People in Latin America: Movements and Universities. Achievements, Challenges, and Intercultural Conflicts

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### ABSTRACT

The idea of social movements tends to be associated, in a reductionist manner, with protests in public spaces and negotiations in institutional spaces. Nevertheless, social movements are agents of change across a wide variety of social spaces. One of the most notable ones is that of education. While the most visible initiatives tend to be short-term courses, some sectors of several social movements have also promoted higher education programmes through alliances with conventional Higher Education institutions, or have created their own institutions. Indigenous peoples around the world have long fought for their educational rights. Some have struggled for access to higher education institutions, for suitable reforms to existing institutions, and for the right to establish their own institutions. Their interest in advancing higher education initiatives is directly related to a need to train individuals in political, professional and technical resource areas in order to successfully advance projects of social, economic, political, institutional, and/or legal reforms. Based on participatory field and documentary research, this article discusses some salient aspects of the experiences of higher education institutions that sectors of indigenous people movements in Latin America have established, highlighting their main achievements and challenges, as well as the intercultural conflicts they confront.

### KEYWORDS

Indigenous Universities; Intercultural Universities; indigenous movements; Latin America; critical higher education; indigenous education; intercultural education; intercultural citizenship; buen vivir

The idea of social movements tends to be associated, in a reductionist manner, with protests in public spaces and with negotiations in institutional political spaces. While social movements do develop practices in those spaces, they do also in other social realms, such as in the field of education. The feminist, indigenous, and Afro-descendant movements, as well as the landless peasant, human rights, and homosexual movements, usually include professionals whose main focus is to defend the rights of individuals and communities affected by social injustices. Additionally, these movements also include professionals and technicians who lend supporting services to those same social

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subjects in different types of arenas and initiatives. Consistent with their objectives, these social movements promote and/or develop educational initiatives to disseminate their worldviews, to advance theoretical and political debates, and to provide training in certain essential skill areas, among others.

Educational initiatives are vital for social movements to ensure that they have the key political, professional, and technical resource people required to formulate proposals of social, economic, political, normative, legal, and institutional reforms. Moreover, they serve to defend rights, to lend a variety of services, and to implement projects that are in step with their agendas. The most visible educational initiatives are focused courses and workshops aimed at training participants in the political and technical frameworks required by associated organisations as well social agents relevant to their practices. Some sectors of a number of social movements, however, have gone beyond these efforts, intervening in the field of higher education itself through the development of alliances with 'conventional'<sup>1</sup> higher education institutions, or even through the creation of their own institutions of higher education (IHE).

Indigenous peoples from various regions around the world have long struggled for their educational rights. Depending on specific circumstances, they have fought for access to and appropriate reforms of existing higher education institutions, as well as for their right to establish their own institutions. Some of them have made notable strides in the field of education, whether on their own or through alliances with other actors ranging from the elementary through to secondary school levels and even the university level. Throughout Latin America, the scope of action of Indigenous Peoples in Higher Education encompasses a considerable number of experiences as a result of those struggles and direct initiatives, and of the practices of other social agents with overlapping and/or convergent agendas (e.g. some conventional universities, groups of university professors and students, sectors of the popular education and human rights movements, some constituencies of the Catholic and Evangelical churches, private foundations, among others), and the responses and practices of the local and/or federal governments of various countries in the region.

While this large field of experiences currently includes a broad variety of initiatives developed by diverse social agents, the terminology used to describe it in different institutional contexts, including some university and public policymaking ones, tends to be homogenising. 'Indigenous' and 'Intercultural' are the adjectives most often combined with the nouns Universities or Higher Education Institutions, in this way homogenising with broad strokes a heterogeneous field without providing further detail. My direct participation in small workshops, working groups, project development gatherings, and other kind of meetings held in some 12 Latin American countries, as well as regular face-to-face and electronic communication with intellectuals from several indigenous communities, has allowed me to learn that those generalisations are a matter of concern for those who play key roles in the ongoing activities of Indigenous People Universities. Specifically, they take issue with the fact that such terminology fails to address the differences between institutions created and run *by* indigenous people organisations and/or intellectuals, and those created and run *by* outside agents *for* indigenous peoples. This fundamental difference is pivotal to the understanding of the political, ethical, and epistemological orientations that inform the mission of each type of institution.

With that important difference in mind, and based on documentary and participatory field research (see, 'acknowledgement' for more detail), this article discusses the

experiences of higher education programmes and institutions created *by* sectors of indigenous organisations and/or intellectuals, their main achievements and challenges, and the intercultural conflicts they have encountered. The first section of the article offers some notes on demographic, historical, and normative/legal factors relevant to the matter. Employing an ad hoc institutional typology, the second section offers a comprehensive panorama of the large and heterogeneous field of Higher Education and Indigenous Peoples experiences. This panorama allows for a contextualisation of the higher education institutions created by indigenous organisations and/or intellectuals. The third section of the article explores the latter in greater depth, discussing specific issues related to four Indigenous Peoples Higher Education experiences in four different Latin American countries. These examples are helpful illustrations of the diverse types of political and institutional arrangements developed by sectors of the Indigenous movements as they seek to ensure the effective development of their higher education initiatives. The subsequent sections of the article focus on the main achievements and challenges of these initiatives, as well as the intercultural conflicts they encounter and have to manage. The concluding section presents some ideas for further discussion.

### **Brief notes on demographic, historical, and normative/legal factors**

While the social, political, and cultural significance of the indigenous peoples cannot be reduced to their quantitative aspects, demographic indicators can offer some insight for understanding certain social dynamics. Such as, for example, the variety of ways in which indigenous movements have managed to establish their own higher education initiatives in different countries.

Before offering demographic data it is important to stress that the global term 'Latin America' refers to a geographic region that comprises 20 independent countries. Demographic data on indigenous peoples, however, is available for only 17 countries of the region. Official estimates of the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE), the Population Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLA), based on national censuses from each of these countries, indicate that their aggregated indigenous population in 2010 was nearly 45 million people out of a total population of about 540 million, representing about 8.3 per cent of this total. Nevertheless, this single figure may not offer adequate clarity on two significant dimensions of diversity. First, both the actual number and the proportion of indigenous population vary widely from country to country. For example, it is around 17 million in Mexico (15 per cent of the total population), 7 million in Peru (24 per cent), 6.2 million in Bolivia (62 per cent), 5.9 million in Guatemala (41 per cent), 1.8 million in Chile (11 per cent), 1.6 million in Colombia (3.4 per cent), 1 million in Argentina (2.4 per cent), 1 million in Ecuador (7 per cent), 0.9 million in Brazil (5 per cent), 0.7 million in Venezuela (2.7 per cent), 0.5 million in Honduras (7 per cent), 0.5 million in Nicaragua (8.9 per cent), 0.4 million in Panamá (12.3 per cent), 0.1 million in Costa Rica (2.4 per cent), 0.1 million in Paraguay (1.8 per cent), 0.08 million in Uruguay (2.4 per cent), and 0.015 million in El Salvador (0.2 per cent). Second, the diversity of indigenous peoples living in the region is remarkable, accounting for 826 different peoples, a figure that also is unequally distributed, since 305 of them live in Brazil, 102 in Colombia, 85 in Peru, 78 in Mexico, 9 in Costa Rica, 9 in Panama, 3 in El Salvador, and 2 in Uruguay. Moreover, it is estimated that

‘there are approximately 200 indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation’ in Brazil, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, and Bolivia. (ECLAC 2014: 37–9).

In order to understand the current situation of the indigenous peoples in Latin America and their policies and practices in the field of higher education we must highlight certain aspects of their histories. The history of the American continent, as we all know, has been profoundly marked by the European invasion and colonisation, which gave place to massacres, territorial dispossession and forced migration, including the social and territorial reorganisation of the original inhabitants of this part of the world along with the massive importation of contingents of enslaved African peoples. Concomitantly, their religions were banned and they were forced to adopt Catholicism. Their languages, too, were generally banned, at least in public spaces and in particular within the education system. Ancestral knowledge suffered a similar fate, especially in the fields of education and healthcare as it was often associated with the European idea of ‘witchcraft’, among others. Independence from European colonial powers and the advent of new republics in the nineteenth century did not put an end to these conditions, since the newly established States continued many of these practices. Moreover, these new States implemented educational and cultural policies openly aimed at homogenising national imaginaries, seeking by all means to create a national narrative that glossed over differences.

As a result of these historical processes, all of these countries continue to display *de facto unequal intercultural relations*. It is precisely in response to this situation that indigenous organisations advance social and political projects that seek ‘interculturality with equity’, as it is sometimes termed, in their struggle for legal and constitutional reforms, including the recognition of the pluriethnic character of the States in question. Historical processes are also important for understanding these peoples’ demands and proposals to decolonise the education systems; including higher education. Depending on the case, such efforts have meant struggling to have their worldviews, languages, knowledge systems, historical narratives, contemporary problems, and projects for the future, included in established educational systems, and/or establishing their own autonomous systems of education (Mato 2008a, 2009a, 2009b, 2012, 2015).

The historical struggle of indigenous peoples around the world, along with the actions of other social agents with overlapping agendas, resulted in the establishment of a number of international instruments in the 1960s that have been helpful in advancing the recognition of their rights. The adoption of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) was a first step, followed by the formulation of several other international instruments that have been invaluable in this regard. It is generally accepted that the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, established by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1989, and also known as ‘ILO Convention 169’ has been the most influential among them; at least until the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007. An important aspect of the rights established in the ILO Convention is that it be enforced in those countries that have ratified it: and this is the case in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. While a discussion of the specific content of these instruments exceeds the scope of this article, it is worth mentioning that articles 22, 26, 27, and 31 of the ILO Convention, and articles 14 and 15 of the Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples, established rights that are particularly significant for indigenous demands and initiatives in the field of higher education.

Another outcome of these struggles has been the recognition of certain rights of indigenous peoples as part of the wave of constitutional reforms that have taken place throughout Latin America since the end of the 1980s. Currently, the National Constitutions of the majority of Latin American countries recognise indigenous peoples' rights to language, identity and other cultural matters – such is the case of the constitutions of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela. Additionally, in practically all of these countries there are specific laws that protect the rights of indigenous peoples, in some cases including specific stipulations for the field of education. Nevertheless, in the majority of cases these regulations have few practical effects; the closing of an indigenous university in Ecuador is a case in point.<sup>2</sup> These normative contexts, however, have been favourable to the demands and initiatives of indigenous peoples' movements in several fields, including higher education, and therefore they are regularly appealed to.

### Higher education and indigenous peoples: a heterogeneous field of experiences

Those histories, struggles, and changes in international and domestic normative contexts, as well as other international factors that I have discussed elsewhere (Mato 2008b), have led some States, intergovernmental and bilateral agencies, private foundations, universities and other kinds of IHE, to begin to develop a variety of initiatives in the field of higher education *for* indigenous peoples. Depending on the case, the resulting experiences have involved to a certain extent the participation of indigenous people communities, organisations, and/or intellectuals. It is difficult to offer precise estimates regarding the number of experiences of this type currently in Latin America. Nevertheless, based on findings resulting from the activities developed from the Project on Cultural Diversity, Interculturality and Higher Education of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IIESALC) and its continuation in the UNTREF-based project, it has been possible to identify more than 100 of them. It has also been possible to ascertain that many of them are linked through different types of modes of communication and collaborative relations, a dynamic that also included those institutions directly developed by indigenous organisations and/or intellectuals. These relationships are evident in various meetings and publications.

It must be stressed, however, that this is a heterogeneous field of experiences. There are important differences associated with the specific aims and objectives of these experiences, the institutional formats that make them possible, and the participating social agents. The role of indigenous communities, organisations and intellectuals in each experience is a significant factor in the differentiation among them. Hence, a wide range of variations may be observed, from those experiences created and managed by indigenous agents, to others in which they do not have any sort of participation other than being students.

As mentioned earlier in this article, the heterogeneity of this field is often obscured by the use of generalised terms that refer to its institutions simply as 'Indigenous Universities'

or ‘Intercultural Universities’. In an effort to adequately articulate nuances of this diverse field, I proposed a typology – adopted and applied in the UNESCO-IESALC project – that has since been increasingly adopted by various participant agents in the field (Mato 2008b). Based on that typology, the following discussion offers a synthetic panorama of this sizeable and heterogeneous field, seeking specifically to highlight the particularities of those higher education institutions that have been created *by* indigenous people organisations and/or intellectuals.

### ***Programmes for the inclusion of indigenous individuals as students in ‘conventional’ universities and IHE***

Scholarship and/or quota programmes for indigenous individuals in ‘conventional’ universities constitute modalities of what we may call ‘programs for the inclusion of individuals’. Another modality of ‘inclusion of individuals’ is the provision of academic and psychosocial support to such students. These programmes are numerous throughout Latin America, although some indigenous people and other agents in the field stress that they are insufficient. Examples of this type of programme that are discussed in the UNESCO-IESALC project are the Edumaya Program at the Rafael Landívar University, a Jesuit university in Guatemala (Giracca 2008), and the Ford Foundation’s Pathways to Higher Education Program, which has helped to provide some experiences of academic and psychosocial support in Brazil, Chile, Peru, and Mexico (Didou 2008).

There are conflicting views on outcomes of these programmes. On the one hand, some maintain that they constitute a ‘brain drain’ from remote communities towards large urban centres. Another objection is that they tend to ‘Westernise’ students, who lose their native languages, ethnic values, and appreciation of their traditional knowledge. On the other hand, some assert that programmes of this kind not only create opportunities for individuals, but also contribute to increase the number of indigenous individuals who in one way or another will serve their respective communities, as lawyers, educators, health professionals, and the like. I must point out, in any case, that many of the indigenous and Afro-descendant authors who have contributed case studies to the already-mentioned UNESCO-IESALC project have had the opportunity of pursuing their degree and/or postgraduate education with the support of such programmes.

### ***Degree programmes and other types of certifications established by ‘conventional’ universities and IHE***

There is a wide variety of modalities within this type: including associate, bachelor, and engineering degrees, as well as graduate certificates and/or postgraduate degrees. Many of these experiences are geared to training educators for bilingual intercultural education programmes at a variety of levels throughout the educational system. Of these, most are directed to in-service educators through diverse educational strategies, including some in the schools of the community in which they work. The UNESCO-IESALC project has documented and discussed several experiences that serve as examples of this type: some of these are, the Indigenous Teacher Training Degree Program of the *Insikiran* Nucleus of the Federal University of Roraima, in Brazil, where currently 20 programmes of this kind exist (Carvalho and de Carvalho 2008); the University Technicians in



Community Justice Program developed by the Law and Political Science Department at the National University of San Andrés (Mallea-Rada 2008); the Cotopaxi Academic Program, a bilingual intercultural education training programme at the Polytechnic Salesian University, in Ecuador (Farfán 2008). Some of these programmes exhibit significant levels of participation by indigenous professors. Their curriculums, in some instances, also integrate the languages, knowledge, and modes of learning and knowledge production of indigenous peoples (Mato 2011a).

### *Teaching, research, and social service programmes developed by 'conventional' universities with the participation of communities of indigenous peoples*

The group of experiences included in a somewhat forced manner in this third type expresses the diversity of professional and academic cultures, institutional contexts, and monoculturalist regulations that challenge the creativity of many groups of educators, researchers and other significant actors. The complicated name of this third type encompasses three subsets of experiences, however some of them are part of more than one of these. A first subset includes experiences mainly from teaching projects and programmes, which may also include important research and/or community liaison components. Some of these experiences incorporate the participation of indigenous teachers, and/or of the languages, knowledge and modes of knowledge production and learning of indigenous peoples. A second subset includes experiences where intercultural collaboration takes place mainly in research programmes and/or technology generation projects, some of which include instructional activities while others do not. Some of these projects produce knowledge on indigenous or Afro-descendant communities, systematise their languages, knowledge, and/or generate technologies that are products of collaborative work between scholars and communities. A third subset includes experiences in which collaboration takes place especially through activities geared at improving the quality of life of indigenous communities. Most of these experiences integrate knowledge from the communities themselves. The principal activities in these types of cases are related to service and/or liaison with the communities even though they may include instructional and/or research activities as well. A noteworthy aspect of the experiences included in any of the three subsets is that all of them involve significant participation of community members, not as 'ignorant' subjects to be 'civilised', but as active producers contributing from their languages, knowledge, and modes of organising the activities. The Registry created by the UNESCO-IESALC project has made possible the documentation of basic information on dozens of experiences of this kind throughout the region, of which six have been studied in some depth (Mato 2009b).

Of the six case studies, the Teaching and Research in Traditional Medicine Program at the National Polytechnic Institute, a public IHE in Mexico may be an illustrative example. Between 1990 and 2008, this Program incorporated the participation of an interdisciplinary team of scholars along with that of teachers and elementary school students, traditional physicians, and rural labourers from the state of Oaxaca. The results of the ethno-medical information gathered over years of collaborative work were then presented to the population through different media, which included the development of botanical collections, teaching materials, a manual of phyto-therapeutical resources that was also translated into the indigenous Zapotec language, exhibitions in schools, markets and



other public venues. Furthermore, this experience led to a restructuring of the curriculum of courses of study at the undergraduate level in degree programmes such as Dentistry, Doctor of Medicine in Surgery and Homeopathy, Doctor of Medicine in Surgery and Obstetrics (Camacho-Morfin *et al.* 2009)

### ***Partnerships of indigenous organisations and 'conventional' universities or IHE***

Because of the partnership format, this modality of intercultural collaboration usually does not lead to the creation of permanent programmes, but to experiences that have a relatively limited duration. The UNESCO-IESALC project has identified several experiences of this kind that have already concluded, and others that are ongoing. Among the latter is that of the Indigenous Organisation of Antioquia and its Institute of Indigenous Education, in association with the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana and the University of Antioquia. It offers a Degree Program in Ethnoeducation, a Specialty in Indigenous Government and Administration, and a Degree Program in Mother Earth Pedagogy (Cáisamo and García 2008). On the other hand, the Interethnic Association for the Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSESP, in Spanish) has also developed two programmes, one aimed at training intercultural bilingual teachers, and the other at training intercultural nurses (Trapnell 2008, Rodríguez-Torres *et al.* 2009). Experiences of this kind are most fruitful, especially because they allow for wide ranging intercultural collaboration in the process of educating professionals and technicians of indigenous communities (Mato 2009a, 2009b, 2011b).

### ***Intercultural Universities and IHE***

'Intercultural' is the key adjective often included in the names of most Universities and IHE whose curricula seek to integrate knowledge systems and modalities of learning of two or more cultural traditions in Latin America. In the cases in which it is not part of the name, this adjective appears as a meaningful element in institutional statements of purpose. Interestingly, two types of institutions that are critically different use the same adjective to describe their mission. On the one hand, it appears in the mission statement of some universities and IHE *for* indigenous peoples that have been established either by State agencies, 'conventional' universities, or groups of conventional university professors in collaboration with indigenous people organisations and intellectuals. On the other, it also appears in the statements of most universities that have been created and are managed *by* indigenous organisations and/or intellectuals, as well as by a particular case of co-creation and co-management that will be discussed in the following section. An important difference, however, is that the latter group usually pairs the adjective with the term 'Indigenous', in this way emphasising that the institutions belong to these peoples and are therefore also managed by them.

The interpretation of ideas and policies of intercultural education is a matter of much dispute between States and indigenous peoples. One aspect of the dispute has to do with the particular cultural worldview that informs intercultural education and its practices. Depending on the case, the referential axis could be the Western hegemonic worldview, that of a particular indigenous community, or a collective formulation of several indigenous communities. Another aspect of dispute involves the language, knowledge, values, and

ways of learning that are included in the curriculum. States usually dichotomise between Western and homogenising representations of indigenous peoples. Yet another point of conflict revolves around who is entitled to teach in these Intercultural Universities; a significantly challenging issue because States do not tend to recognise indigenous Elders and knowledgeable persons as adequately suited for the role. A broader element of dispute is associated with the profile of the target audience for the university or IHE. Indigenous intellectuals, for example, point out that State-sponsored intercultural education institutions at all levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary) are aimed at and established *for* indigenous peoples, whereas intercultural education should be part of the mainstream system, available and open to all regardless of ethnic background (Mato 2009a, 2011b).

Since the following section of this article is specifically focused on the discussion of a few salient aspects of the experiences of Indigenous Universities, I will wrap up this section by mentioning a few examples of Intercultural Universities or IHE that have been created by State agencies or 'conventional' universities. While the UNESCO-IESALC project has documented and discussed several experiences of this type, it remains instructive to mention a few of them here. In 1987, the government of the Chaco province in Argentina established the Educational and Research Centre for the Aboriginal Modality (Valenzuela 2009). In 2001 the government of the State of Sinaloa, Mexico, created the Autonomous Indigenous University of Mexico (UAIM, in Spanish) (Guerra 2008). In 2003 the federal Secretary of Public Education in Mexico created the first 'Intercultural University' of a federal system that soon incorporated UAIM within, and currently counts twelve institutions (Schmelkes 2008, Fábregas 2009), including the Universidad Veracruzana Intercultural, that is part of the larger Universidad Veracruzana (Dietz 2008). In 2008, the president of Bolivia, by Supreme Decree, established the system of Intercultural, Communitarian Indigenous Universities of Bolivia, currently constituted by three universities (Choque-Quispe 2012).

### Indigenous Universities and IHE

Throughout Latin America, indigenous intellectuals and organisations routinely emphasise that the expression Indigenous Universities or IHE must be used only to name those institutions that have been established and are governed by them, are accountable to their organisations and communities, and guarantee the continuity of their ways of living, languages, knowledge systems, values, and fulfilment of their projects for the future. According to most of them, these precepts also provide for the possibility of being intercultural – as most of these types of institutions define themselves. The intercultural condition may be reflected in the inclusion of the worldviews and interests of several indigenous peoples, and in some cases also those of neighbouring Afro-descendant peoples, or even of Western knowledge and language traditions, and, in fact, most of them do include these. To emphasise the importance of ensuring the endurance of traditional knowledge in their curricula, some Indigenous People intellectuals, universities, and organisations speak in terms of intercultural as well as *intracultural* knowledge.

That said, it is important to bear in mind that despite certain shared characteristics or elements, Indigenous Universities or IHE constitute a heterogeneous array. This should not be surprising considering the differences between indigenous peoples, their particular histories, organisations, leaderships, and intellectuals, the institutional and economic

barriers they have to deal with, and the disparity of political, economic and academic alliances they have built to create their universities. Some of these institutions have only a small number of students, and have been established by local leaderships in partnership with conventional universities of different types. Such is the case, for example of the Mayan University Ixil, established in Guatemala in 2012, with the support of the Nicaraguan Evangelical Martin Luther King University; or the Kawsay Intercultural Indigenous University, established in Bolivia in 1997 with the support of Linköping University (in Sweden), Mondragon Unibertsitate (a non-profit cooperative private university in the Basque Country, Spain), and the Salesian Polytechnic University (a Catholic university in Ecuador) (Cerruto 2009). A different kind of case is that of the Indigenous Intercultural University (IIU), established in 2007 by the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean; a multilateral agency based in La Paz, Bolivia, governed by a Board constituted by representatives from government and indigenous organisations. With the support of the Belgian and German agencies, the IIU has developed its work through four networks. One of these networks is constituted by conventional universities from several Latin American countries and Spain, another by their own graduates, and another by a group of well-known indigenous leaders and intellectuals named Indigenous Intercultural Chair (CII, in Spanish), and still another from Indigenous Universities – named the Network of Intercultural, Indigenous and Communitarian Universities of Abya Yala (RUIICAY in Spanish) – further references to these last two networks will be made in the following pages (Fondo Indígena 2012, Palechor 2016).

In order to illustrate the variety of political and institutional arrangements that indigenous social movements have developed throughout the region, I will briefly discuss four of the cases of Indigenous Universities and IHE that we have documented in the UNESCO-IESALC project. These concrete references should prove helpful later when I consider the intercultural conflicts that some of these higher education projects confront.

### ***The Autonomous Indigenous and Intercultural University (Universidad Autónoma Indígena Intercultural, UAIIN)***

UAIIN was established in 2003 by the Indigenous Regional Council of Cauca (Consejo Regional Indígena del Cauca, CRIC), and is part of its organisational structure. Founded in 1971, CRIC is the traditional authority of the indigenous peoples of the Cauca Department in Colombia, recognised as such by the Colombian government. It is also one of the strongest indigenous organisations in the country. In the institutional context of the National Constitution, the Secretary of Education of the Cauca Department has recognised the CRIC as the educational authority for indigenous peoples of that Department. The National Ministry of Education, however, has yet to officially recognise the UAIIN. Cauca is the department with the highest density of indigenous population in Colombia – nine different indigenous communities can be found throughout its territory. Since its foundation, the CRIC has been building a pedagogical project that is closely tied to its political and cultural project, as well as to those of each of the indigenous people's 'Life Plan'. Through CRIC's various reflexive and decision-making spaces, its organisational process began to adopt education as a political tool to affirm and fight for cultural rights. It began with the training of bilingual teachers, which led to the creation of community schools. Further efforts saw the establishment of various spaces to train leaders to

work in government and in the healthcare system, as well as to develop production teams to reinvigorate crop cultivation and other processes. As the indigenous movement grew and its needs broadened, CRIC designed special programmes to train key resource technicians and professionals to address them within the framework of what is currently known as their Own Educational System (*Sistema Educativo Propio*) (Bolaños *et al.* 2009).

### ***The Amazonian Indigenous Training Centre (Centro Amazônico de Formação Indígena – CAFI)***

CAFI was created in 2006 by the Coordinating Body of the Indigenous Organisations of the Brazilian Amazon (Coordenação das Organizações Indígenas da Amazônia Brasileira – COIAB), based on pilot experiences undertaken at the beginning of 2003 with the support of The Nature Conservancy. COIAB, the largest indigenous organisation in Brazil, was founded in 1989. It brings together 75 member organisations of the 9 States in the Brazilian Amazon. As such, it represents more than 430,000 people belonging to 160 different indigenous communities who occupy 107 million hectares of land in the Amazon. CAFI was founded as an instrument of struggle and representation of the indigenous peoples in the Brazilian Amazon. Its main focus is the promotion and defence of what they consider to be basic rights: land, health, education, economy, sustainability, and interculturality. CAFI, which is part of the organisational structure of the COIAB, provides for the training of professionals especially qualified to work in indigenous organisations. To that end, their training includes courses in both the technical and the political skills required to be leaders, citizens and activists of the indigenous cause. CAFI regularly offers training in two alternate courses: one in Project Management and one in Ethno-Environmental Management. Over 100 students have already completed the courses, and while this may seem like a small number, it is a significant one because of the roles that these graduates play in such an important region of Brazil and the planet (Flores 2009).

### ***The University of the Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast (Universidad de las Regiones Autónomas de la Costa Caribe Nicaragüense – URACCAN)***

URACCAN was created in 1992 by a group of indigenous and Afro-descendant leaders of the two Autonomous Regions of the Nicaraguan Caribbean Coast to ensure access to professional training and avoid brain-drain, as well as to improve living conditions, fight institutionalised racism, exclusion and marginalisation, and contribute to national development from their distinct histories and experiences. The 1987 Constitutional Reform of Nicaragua identifies the country as a multiethnic, multilingual and pluricultural country, acknowledging the existence of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples as well as of other ethnic communities that live in the Nicaraguan territory. The country has 2 Autonomous Regions on the Caribbean Coast that together represent 52 per cent of the national territory. This region also has another intercultural and indigenous university, the Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University, founded through the initiative of indigenous and Afro-descendant local leaderships (Chavarría-Lezama 2008). These two

universities have been formally recognised by the Nicaraguan State, and are part of the National Council of Universities.

URACCAN describes itself as an ‘intercultural community university’ that contributes to development processes involving the identity of indigenous and *mestizo* peoples as well as of Afro-descendant and ethnic communities, with the goal of promoting intercultural citizenship. The university aims to develop high-quality ethnic, cultural and socially relevant educational processes, and to work alongside local leadership to foster what in their institutional vocabulary is named as ‘human development with identity and sustainability’. In doing so, it seeks to strengthen autonomy through the training of human resources, to stimulate and develop ethnic and cultural revitalisation processes, and to establish spaces for reflection, discussion and debate at the local, national and international levels that provide the opportunity to raise and consider issues related to the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and civil rights. Most of the students at URACCAN come from indigenous and Afro-descendant communities and rural territories with *mestizo* populations. A considerable number of URACCAN graduates are currently directors or mid-level managers in institutions and organisations, as well as members of the teaching staff at the university itself. There are also URACCAN graduates who are regional and national delegates, regional and municipal councillors, mayors, and delegates for government institutions (Hooker 2009).

### ***The Intercultural University of Indigenous Peoples and Nations ‘Amawtay wasi’ (Universidad Intercultural de las Nacionalidades y PueblosIndígenas ‘Amawtay Wasi’)***<sup>3</sup>

Amawtay Wasi University (AWU) is a higher education institution whose creation was promoted by a sector of the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador (Confederación de las Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador – CONAIE) and the Scientific Institute of Indigenous Cultures (Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas – ICCI). CONAIE was founded in 1986 and comprises organisations of all the indigenous peoples in Ecuador. It has organised numerous political campaigns of national scope that have defied the various Ecuadorian governments and have also led important constitutional and political reforms in that country. In 2005, after nine years of technical work and political mobilisations, AWU was recognised by the National Council on Higher Education (Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior – CONESUP) and has since been part of the National System of Higher Education in Ecuador. The university and its authorities are therefore accountable to CONESUP and the CONAIE.

Until 2013, when the national government suspended its activities, AWU offered training in various fields, including Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples, Agroecology, Educational Sciences, and Architecture. It endeavoured to contribute to the education of human talents, prioritising a harmonious relationship between Mother Nature and the Human Being as well as healthful community living as the foundation for a Plurinational State and an Intercultural Society. It is worth noting that the university’s name contained the term ‘intercultural’ because its academic offerings and demands for social justice were not exclusively aimed at indigenous peoples. The university’s name contained the phrase ‘of the Indigenous Peoples and Nations’ because the philosophical and methodological conceptualisation behind its creation emerged from indigenous nations and peoples, yet it was not exclusively

geared toward indigenous people. An important aspect of the AWU's mission was its criticism of the Western idea of 'development' offering the alternate concept of *Sumak Kawsay* (an expression in Kichwa language that may be translated into English as 'Living Well', or 'Living Harmoniously').<sup>4</sup> The university considered this a contribution of the indigenous peoples to humanity in their struggle to demonstrate that there is an alternative to hegemonic thought, that each people has its own world vision, and that all of these should be respected (Universidad Intercultural Amawtay Wasi 2004, Sarango 2009).

## Main achievements and challenges

Research that I conducted for the aforementioned UNESCO-IESALC project reports that the main achievements of Indigenous Universities, special programmes for indigenous peoples established at 'conventional' universities, and other programmes established as partnerships between indigenous organisations and conventional universities and IHE, are:

- (1) Improved access of indigenous individuals to higher education opportunities and provision of services that enable them to complete their studies successfully.
- (2) Tailored educational offerings that take into account the needs, demands and projects of specific communities.
- (3) Creation of local employment, and the development of local initiatives.
- (4) Development of participatory learning modalities, often focused on applied research, and also the integration of learning, research, and services to the community.
- (5) Integration of different systems of knowledge.
- (6) Promotion and valorisation of indigenous languages and, whenever possible, incorporation of these into learning processes.
- (7) Training and granting of professional degrees to individuals from local communities who are cognisant of the needs, demands, and proposals of those communities.

The most common challenges that these universities and special programmes confront are:

- (1) Insufficient and/or precarious budget.
- (2) Attitudes of racial discrimination by public officers and diverse social agents.
- (3) Difficulties arising from the rigidity of the criteria applied by the government agencies in charge of granting recognition and/or accreditation.
- (4) Academic and institutional barriers resulting from the rigidity of criteria and procedures applied by the 'conventional' universities within which some programmes work or, in some cases, act as programme partners.
- (5) Difficulties in identifying and hiring teachers and other staff with adequate sensitivity, and personal as well as technical resources for intercultural work.
- (6) Financial difficulties of their students.
- (7) Insufficient scholarships.
- (8) Difficulties arising from the precarious economic and legal conditions within which the communities they serve live daily.



## Intercultural conflicts

For all their successes, these Indigenous Universities face some serious obstacles. A case in point is that of the above-mentioned AWU. After nine years of technical work and political mobilisation, in 2005 the Ecuadorian National Council of Higher Education (CONESUP in Spanish) formally recognised the University and was integrated into the National System of Higher Education. Despite this significant achievement, AWU faced what would eventually become insurmountable challenges because it was forced to operate as if it were a private university on the grounds that the Treasury could not contribute to the budget of a university whose institutional model and educational orientation did not correspond to those of the other public universities in the country. The authorities of AWU repeatedly requested resources, noting that these requests were covered by the provisions established by article 27 of the ILO's Convention 169. Article 27 determines that governments shall recognise the right of indigenous peoples to establish their own institutions, provided that such institutions meet the standards established by the competent authority in consultation with these peoples, and that, to this end, appropriate resources are to be provided for its operation. The claims of AWU went unheeded, and no resources were provided. The AWU faced the additional challenge of renewing its accreditation when the new Law on Higher Education became effective in October 2010, forcing the institution to undergo a new evaluation process, in August 2011, as per the stipulations of the newly formed Board of Assessment, Accreditation, and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Consejo de Evaluación, Acreditación y Aseguramiento de la Calidad de la Educación Superior – CEAACES).

The most recent conflict between AWU and the Ecuadorian Government was apparently settled on 31 October 2013, when CEAACES issued the Resolution No. 001-068-CEAACES-2013, in which it decided 'to suspend definitely the activities of University Amawtay Wasi' (CEAACES 2013). Space limitations prevent me from commenting on the criteria and evaluation procedures applied in this case. They are detailed, however, in a 112 page document issued by CEAACES identified as Resolution No. 003-0026-25CEAACES-2012 (dated 4 November 2012), of which I managed to obtain a copy – the document is not available online. Far from any pretence to become involved and mediate in the dispute, for which I lack sufficient information and evidence, since my last visit to AWU was several years ago, I do venture to point out that the document manifests a clash between two worldviews, and consequently between two projects of society and two conceptions of the idea of University.

The difference of perspectives is evident, for instance, in the section of the CEAACES website where the names of the four members of the Board are listed along with a brief outline of their credentials and experience. The abbreviation 'PhD' the customary abbreviation of the title in Latin, 'Philosophiae Doctor' appears after each last name. As we know, this is the highest degree granted by universities in English-speaking countries, notably the United States since some British universities use the abbreviation D.Phil. This detail, which at first glance appears matter-of-fact and otherwise innocuous, nevertheless is a significant element that speaks to the fundamental differences between the two parties. The fact is that upon perusing the expanded information on each Board member, it is evident that two of them obtained their doctoral degrees at universities in Brazil (where the title given is to Doutor/a), and one in France (where the title given is



‘Docteur’). The use of the abbreviation ‘PhD’ in Spanish, the official language of the Ecuadorian State, does not apply in these cases. Instead, what should appear is the abbreviation ‘Dr’ preceding the name of the person in question (CEAACES 2014). Whether it was the members or the institution who listed the degrees as such, their translation points to an ideological framework that informs a particular perspective of the broader project at hand.

In addition, the way in which the CEAACES Council Members are presented is consistent with the assessment approach, which is described in the already-mentioned CEAACES document of 2012 (Resolution No. 003-0026-25CEAACES-2012). An additional and concurrent clue is that about 50 per cent of the bibliographical references that support this document are publications listed in English, though several of them are available in Spanish.<sup>5</sup> While I am not suggesting that it is inappropriate or inapplicable to reference literature in English or languages other than Spanish, what catches the eye is that an Ecuadorian public agency issues an official document citing bibliography in a foreign language even when translations into Spanish of those texts exist; moreover some of them are available on the Internet. The bibliography is indicative of the ideological framework of this governmental body, as well as an obstacle for Ecuadorian citizens who may be interested in consulting its references. The choice to cite literature in English even though it is available in Spanish – in an official document issued by a government agency of a country whose official language is Spanish – along with the way in which CEAACES Board members are officially presented on the website of this organisation – indicating their highest academic title by the abbreviation ‘PhD’ rather than using the official academic titles of the Portuguese and French institutions – manifest the truly different conception that this government agency has of the realm of higher education, particularly the ‘university’, from that of AWU.

Beyond these details, the conflict of worldviews is further evidenced in the ‘Report of the Overseers’ (*Informe de los Veedores*), dated 10 June 2013, who represented the Network of Intercultural, Indigenous and Communitarian Universities of Abya Yala (*Red de Universidades Indígenas, Interculturales y Comunitarias de Abya Yala – RUIICAY*) of the Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean (*Fondo para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas de América Latina y el Caribe*), a multilateral agency ruled by a Body comprising representatives both of national governments and of various indigenous organisations in Latin America, as well as of a few additional donor governments. The report was presented to the CEAACES on the 8 of October 2013; significantly, among other things, it states that:

5. [...] it is important to point out that in the evaluation process of the University ‘Amawtay Wasi’ conducted by the CEAACES Evaluation Committee we can observe some inconsistencies:

- a) Art. 18 establishes two phases for the evaluation process, self-evaluation and institutional assessment (verification), yet only the second stage was carried out.
- b) The evaluation process began on September 23. However, in an October 2 letter, CEAACES sent a document containing the matrices that the evaluation team would use as the basis of verification.

c) The assessment that should have been conducted as an on-site observation according to the matrix, was carried out haphazardly, we assume that the evaluation team did so from memory, or in an improvised manner.

6. The evaluation process does not consider the pedagogical model of 'Amawtay Wasi' University, which responds to another vision that is not the conventional one, rather the one particular to the indigenous peoples. This model has other objectives. The infrastructure responds to another conception of the relation with nature.

7. The attitude and manner of some members of the Evaluation team was not very professional, [it was] rather inquisitorial and colonial.

Accordingly, it is possible to say that there exists a conflict of visions that has led to antagonism. On the one hand, there is CEAACES' vision, which responds to the Ecuadorian Government's ideas of national development and what constitutes a university. On the other hand, the vision of AWU, which is associated with both the idea of *Sumak Kawsay* – and the concomitant critique of the Western idea of 'development' – and with its own conception of what constitutes a university. This is perhaps a critical factor to understanding why CEAACES resolved to close ('suspend in a definitive way' as resolution says) the University Amawtay Wasi. To honour the ILO's Convention 169 regulations, CEAACES could have instead sought to implement a participatory assessment model, designed to solve problems and strengthen the capabilities of AWU. Yet, the outcome may also reflect certain political issues at hand, as this 'final' decision by CEAACES was possible because in recent years CONAIE appears to have lost its ability to mobilise indigenous peoples to fight for their rights; the type of clout it used to have when the AWU was established. Another factor that might have led to this drastic 'final' decision could be the differences and tensions within the indigenous movement itself, which affect the ability to garner a collective and united response to the closing of this institution; perhaps particularly because the AWU was not part of the CONAIE structure.

Unfortunately, the case of the AWU is not exceptional. As the chair of the UNESCO-IIESALC project, I have had many opportunities for onsite observations and exchanges with key players from various sides of this field throughout Latin America, which has given me a first-hand understanding of the dynamics involved. These experiences have led me to conclude that the mechanisms and criteria for assessment and accreditation and/or recognition that specialised government agencies apply to already existent Indigenous and Intercultural Universities, or projects to create them, as well as 'conventional' universities' special programmes directed to these populations, constitute a key issue and obstacle for advancement in this field.

Since I want to avoid relying exclusively on conclusions from my personal experiences, I requested the opinion of 12 colleagues who have or have had significant responsibilities in this area, from within some indigenous organisations, governmental agencies, or multi-lateral organisations. Because of the scope of their responsibilities, these people are knowledgeable about these issues in several Latin American countries. I therefore requested that they provide comprehensive answers at the regional level. Each and every one of these colleagues provided ample responses that were roughly convergent. They were many and too lengthy to quote here in their entirety, so I will limit myself to citing a few key excerpts from the responses received from four of these.<sup>6</sup>

Gabriel Muyuy is a member of the Inga people. He has been the Director of the Presidential Program for Indigenous Peoples of Colombia since 2010, when it was established. Prior to that, he was the Vice President of the National Indigenous Organisation of Colombia (ONIC) and twice Senator of the Republic of Colombia on behalf the Indigenous Movement of Colombia. In response to my query regarding the difficulties in recognising the value of the knowledge of indigenous peoples, he, among other considerations, mentioned:

[ ... ] public policy decision makers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the spirit and scope of national and international law regarding the recognition of the diversity of peoples and nations. Monocultural visions of both development and construction of thought are still extant. (Personal communication, 16 July 2014, my translation)

Sylvia Schmelkes is a recognised specialist in the field who, among other responsibilities, from 2001 to 2007 served as the General Coordinator for Intercultural and Bilingual Higher Education (CGEIB) of the Secretary of Education of Mexico. As such, she promoted and coordinated the creation of the Intercultural University system in that country. Speaking from a strictly personal level, without espousing or expressing any particular institutional position, she stated:

There is widespread ignorance about the value of indigenous knowledge. The State conceives the notion of higher education in terms of bringing the indigenous persons to the universities, or in the best of cases, of bringing the universities to the indigenous communities, but not in terms of a university that is in and of itself 'indigenous', in which both indigenous language and knowledge are central components of the curriculum. This idea generates contempt and resistance. (Personal communication, 12 July 2014, my translation)

Roberto Alulima has worked since 2010 for the previously mentioned Fund for the Development of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. Between 2013 and mid-2015, he was the Technical Secretary of this multilateral agency. Commenting from a strictly personal level that does not reflect the Fund's position, he emphasised that:

Even though many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have formalized many of the rights of indigenous peoples in their Constitutions, there persists the issue of recognizing their right to have an *Educación Propia* [Education of their Own]. *Educación Propia* is different from the policy introduced in several states of *Inclusive Education*. (Personal communication, 21 July 2014, emphasis in original, my translation)

Libio Palechor-Arévalo, besides holding college and postgraduate degrees, has been conferred the title of a *Mayor* (a Wiseman) by the already-mentioned Regional Indigenous Council of Cauca (CRIC), in recognition of his status as traditional Wiseman among his people. Palechor-Arévalo has played a prominent role in the founding and development of the CRIC educational strategy. Among other responsibilities, he has been Rector of its UAIIN (2011–2012) as well as coordinator of the also already-mentioned Intercultural Indigenous Chair of the Indigenous Fund for Latin America and the Caribbean. He said:

Governments believe that what is needed is to facilitate access to the University for indigenous peoples, casting an inclusive view on the issue, which does not suit our peoples because our objective is to survive as such through time. Therefore we need education that fosters our existence, not our extinction. Governments focus on 'higher education' for indigenous

peoples whereas our proposals are of an education from, with, and for the Indigenous Peoples. (Personal communication, 24 July 2014; my translation)

## Ideas for further consideration

The universities created by indigenous organisations that currently exist in Latin America aim to prepare professionals in ways sensitive to cultural specificities and diversity, which is a necessary condition for effective work in culturally diverse countries. The training they provide takes advantage of the knowledge systems of indigenous peoples as well as Western traditions. Besides their interest in training professionals capable of being effective in culturally diverse countries, these institutions also seek to respond to the interest in training technicians, professionals, and leaders that these organisations need in order to develop their own practices, particularly their projects for further democratisation in Latin American societies.

These universities, however, frequently elicit reservations among certain social sectors that question why indigenous peoples should enjoy the prerogative of providing education based on their particular worldviews. Some of the common arguments that indigenous leaders and organisations use to answer this question are: first, that this is a right established in the ILO Convention that has constitutional status in all the countries that have ratified it. They support the legitimacy of this constitutional argument by highlighting that State and private higher education institutions further the paradigms of hegemonic social groups and do not impart knowledge about indigenous histories, languages, systems of knowledge, problems and projects for the future. The leadership of many indigenous peoples point out that if there are Catholic and other religious, business and 'elite' universities, why then not have indigenous peoples' universities too. Moreover, they argue, Indigenous Universities are conceived not as closed and exclusive entities but rather as institutions of an intercultural character; open to all interested individuals. In contrast with State-sponsored intercultural primary and secondary education programmes – in which interculturality is thought and expressed from the point of view of the hegemonic social sectors – courses and learning strategies in Indigenous Universities are based primarily on their own worldviews, interpretations of human history, and projects for the future, into which they integrate components of other contemporary societies.

There is a fundamental conceptual difference between the idea of intercultural education that adopts as its point of reference the 'official' worldview of States, and the idea of intercultural education that is based on the worldview of indigenous peoples. The States' worldview scantily value the importance of cultural differences – assuming that 'other cultures' are obstacles to development, and that sooner or later all citizens must become what States regard as 'modern'. Meanwhile, the indigenous peoples' worldviews assert the importance of cultural differences.

The crucial difference is that the latter involves the active inclusion and recognition in educational programmes of the languages, knowledge, and cultures of those 'others'. That is, it includes learning about their histories, problems, and projects in the same way that one learns 'official history' and 'modern science', in terms both of acquiring new knowledge and skills and of criticising what may need to be reconsidered. It entails, among other things, thinking about the future of our societies not in terms of 'development' – which continues to be understood as a concept closely tied to notions of 'progress' and 'economic

growth', regardless of however much it may have been stylised as 'sustainable' – but instead in terms of 'Living Well'. That is, of living in a way that is consonant with worldviews that understand humankind as part of what we call 'Nature', and not as a purportedly superior species that inhabits, manages, and uses planet Earth as a source of 'Natural Resources'. A few centuries of western modern worldview hegemony, as they meaningfully argue, has resulted in desertification, water pollution, global warming, climate change, and other disasters that we are yet to discover or overcome.

Thus, the transformative value of the higher education experiences that sectors of the indigenous movement promote should not be seen only in terms of their role to train technicians, professionals and politicians – which all social movements require, be they progressive or conservative – but also in relation to their ability to facilitate a critical reflection about contemporary societies and their future possibilities. Contrary to the pre-conceived notions of some sectors, these critiques do not imply a 'return to the past', but instead a projection into the future that seeks to ensure not only environmental but also social sustainability, and generally more and better democracy, as well as better standards of living.

Following appropriate remarks that indigenous intellectuals frequently offer, it is important that we consider how the training opportunities that 'conventional' universities offer to the population at large are pertinent and relevant to the social and cultural diversity of Latin American societies. To what extent and how effectively do 'conventional' universities and IHE prepare the professionals required by diverse indigenous peoples? Are these institutions adequately producing professionals and technicians whose skills correspond to the cultural diversity of their respective countries and of their respective fields of action? Do they address, concomitantly, the diversity of worldviews, values, modes of knowledge production, technologies, languages, needs, demands, and project proposals that will equip these individuals to participate in the construction of pluricultural societies? As we reflect on this, we must critically discuss the social and political relevance and epistemological value of ungrounded theoretical discourses on this matter, usually made without any engagement with indigenous people communities, organisations, or intellectuals, their actual experiences and own elaborations in this field.

## Acknowledgements

This article is based on research done by the Project on Cultural Diversity, Interculturality and Higher Education of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IIESALC), which I have directed since 2007.<sup>7</sup> With the collaboration of almost 70 colleagues from 11 Latin American countries, the Project has at present published four books containing 40 studies about particular experiences in this field, and 10 studies on national contexts, which also present basic data about 60 additional experiences (Mato 2008a, 2009a, 2009b, 2012). About half of the colleagues involved in the Project are indigenous or Afro-descendant professionals, while others are professionals who do not identify as such but who have been working for many years in this field collaborating with communities and/or organisations of indigenous or Afro-descendant peoples. Most of them, along with other special guests, have participated in two international meetings that issued recommendations now partially adopted in official declarations of the Culture and Education Commission of the Latin American Parliament (Panama City, 2012), and the Regional Conference on Higher Education (Conferencia Regional de Educación Superior, Cartagena de Indias, 2008). The recommendations were also

presented at the World Conference on Higher Education (Paris, 2009). Indigenous organisations increasingly reference these declarations as formal support of their demands and proposals in the field of education. Following up this UNESCO-IESALC project experience, in 2011 the Third of February National University (Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero) established the Program on Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America,<sup>8</sup> and more recently promoted the creation of the Inter-University Network on Higher Education and Indigenous and Afro-descendant Peoples in Latin America,<sup>9</sup> that currently counts on the institutional participation of around 40 universities. These two large projects have provided me many opportunities for onsite observations and exchanges with key individuals and organisations from various sides of this field throughout Latin America. Insights from these projects have greatly contributed to the preparation of this article. It would not be possible to mention the names of all the people who over these years have enhanced my understanding of this subject matter. I must mention, however, that this article in particular has benefitted from the generous feedback of the anonymous reviewers and editorial team of the *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. I am also thankful to Emeshe Juhász-Mininberg for feedback and editing.

## Notes

1. In this article the term ‘conventional’ higher education institution (HEI) is used to name those institutions that have not been expressly designed and developed to respond to the demands and proposals of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples.
2. A book produced by the UNESCO-IESALC project specifically focuses on the analysis of the gaps between sanctioned norms and public policies, associated budgets, and State practices in the field of Higher Education in Latin America (see, Mato 2012, 2015). Several studies further discuss these gaps for specific country cases (e.g. Cunningham-Kain 2003, Pancho, 2004, Chirinos Rivera and Zegarra Leyva 2005, Mato 2008a, 2008b).
3. ‘Amawtay Wasi’ is an expression in kichwa/quechua language that can be translated into English as ‘House of Knowledge’.
4. The Kichwa expression *Sumak Kawsay*, and its Aymara language equivalent *Suma Qamaña*, are ethical principles that comprise the world visions of these two indigenous communities. They are usually translated into Spanish as *Buen Vivir*, which we may translate into English as ‘Living Well’ or ‘Living Harmoniously’. These peoples and other indigenous intellectuals and organisations of the Americas prefer these terms to the Western concepts of ‘development’ and ‘progress’, emphasizing that they are not related to access to material goods and/or individual ‘quality of life’, since both of them, as well as their equivalents in some other indigenous peoples’ languages, imply *living harmoniously* both *in community* and *with Mother Earth* (Yampara 2004, Choque-Quispe 2006).
5. Some of the publications in English mentioned in the CEAACES document, and which have already been published in Spanish translation, are James Gleick’s book published in Spanish as *Caos: la creación de una ciencia* (Seix Barral 1988), or Bart Kosko’s book published in Spanish as *Pensamiento borroso: la nueva ciencia de la lógica borrosa* (Editorial Crítica 1995), as well as Michael Gibbons’ *La nueva producción del conocimiento* (Pomares-Corredor 1997), which is even available Open Access online: [http://www.ses.unam.mx/docencia/2007II/Lecturas/Mod1\\_Gibbons.pdf](http://www.ses.unam.mx/docencia/2007II/Lecturas/Mod1_Gibbons.pdf) (Accessed 21 December 2013).
6. These informants have granted their formal approval to be identified in print alongside their testimonies.
7. For more information refer to the Project’s website: [http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=22&Itemid=405&lang=es](http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=22&Itemid=405&lang=es).
8. For more on this project see, <http://untref.edu.ar/sitios/ciea/programa-y-proyecto/programa-educacion-superior-y-pueblos-indigenas-y-afrodescendientes-en-america-latina-esial/>.
9. For more information on this Network, see *Red Esial*: <http://untref.edu.ar/sitios/ciea/red-esial/>.



## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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