

AcPrac Case Study

A Latin American People's Green Deal: What Role Can Collaborations Between Academia and Activism Play?

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About AFSEE

[The Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity \(AFSEE\)](#) at the LSE International Inequalities Institute is an innovative fellowship programme that is funded through a landmark grant from Atlantic Philanthropies.

AFSEE aims to build a community of changemakers whose work addresses social and economic inequalities across the globe, while supporting them in developing imaginative approaches to their work. Adopting an ethos of collective action, the programme encourages collaborations between a range of stakeholders, including academics, activists, artists, development practitioners, and policymakers.

About the AcPrac Project

This case study is published as part of the '[Exploring the Potential of Academic-Practitioner Collaborations for Social Change \(AcPrac\)](#)' project. The AcPrac project has two key objectives: 1) to contribute to AFSEE's theory of change by exploring the conditions that are conducive to developing generative processes of knowledge exchange between academics and practitioners; and 2) to examine the methodological and epistemological challenges of researching inequalities, and particularly how the latter might be reproduced through the research process itself.

The project also makes theoretical contributions by reflecting on the drivers behind the collaborations that different stakeholders pursue and it explores the potential of collaborative research, as a methodology, in challenging knowledge inequalities and in decolonising research.

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Introduction: Why Do We Need a Common Socio-Environmental Agenda for Latin America and the Caribbean (or a Latin American Green Deal)?

To tackle the impacts of the multiple crises they are experiencing, including the climate crisis, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have an urgent need to strengthen regional cooperation. The region's high vulnerability, combined with its multiple inequalities, is exacerbating the impacts of phenomena such as rising temperatures, variable rainfall, melting glaciers, and the increased frequency of extreme weather events. Mass population displacements, food insecurity, environmental degradation caused by land system changes, scarcity of water and electricity, and climate change-linked loss of life and livelihoods, are some of the impacts facing entire communities in the region. These impacts will be accelerated without a fundamental change of direction (World Meteorological Organization, 2022).

Although the Global North bears the lion's share of responsibility for the climate crisis, it is in LAC's interest to accelerate its energy and eco-social transition outside the fossil fuel paradigm that has driven the current environmental disaster that has triggered the climate emergency. If it does not do this, the long-term costs of high dependency on carbon-intensive economies will be greater and will be more acutely felt by the most marginalised sectors of society. To achieve this transition, the region must rethink its development strategy. However, Latin American and Caribbean countries face several limitations stemming from the unfavourable international context and their own domestic dynamics. The magnitude of the climate crisis also means that any efforts they undertake in isolation are insufficient (Bárcena et al., 2020). Regional cooperation is therefore key to a successful strategy. Without cooperation at the regional level, countries of the region would fail to harness the advantages that they each offer in the transition to de-carbonised economies, making the task ahead far more difficult.

Faced with this scenario, debates over the type of transition, and the scope of a regional cooperation agenda to drive it, continue. Competing visions of this transition are reflected in the intensification of socio-environmental conflicts throughout the various ecosystems that make up the region. The energy and eco-social transition will be just and viable to the extent that it gives the vast majority of the population, particularly groups that have been historically excluded and discriminated against, the possibility of improving their quality of life according to their own visions of development.

To this end, this document proposes moving towards a green development strategy that protects the people, understood as one that, at each step of the transition, aims to empower the local communities that have historically inhabited the territories, and reshape development along ecological lines (Ajl, 2021, p. 101). Having established what we understand this concept to mean, this paper briefly explores some of the critical contemporary challenges to an eco-social transition in the region – food sovereignty and energy transition – with a focus on Chile, Colombia and Brazil, while proposing that the concepts of boundaries and sufficiency are incorporated into the future research agenda.

Development that protects the people begins with recognising the disparities the region faces in its integration into the global economy, with the aim of recognising feasible ways to overcome such disparities. In this sense, it distances itself from the visions of transition that perpetuate the region's subordinate role as a supplier of raw materials and cheap labour within the framework of green capitalism. It also distances itself from visions that propose an industrialist modernisation project with renewable energies and different degrees of redistribution, but that fail to recognise the existence of socio-ecological boundaries on how economies function or the aspirations of local communities. This is a proposal that not only proposes decarbonisation as a planet-responsible action; it is also as an opportunity to strengthen the region's economic clout in ways that do not exacerbate the climate crisis or environmental degradation, and that contribute to creating more egalitarian societies.

The possibility of a regional agenda for a just eco-social transition requires transformations at different levels: narratives, policies, knowledge and everyday practices. Collaborations between activists and academia may prove effective in opposing dominant narratives and providing viable policy alternatives that are based on the region's realities. These may help bridge gaps in understanding and push for the changes in practices required by a just eco-social transition.

The direction and leadership of the governments of Brazil, Chile and Colombia offer an unprecedented opportunity to formulate a Latin American Green Deal based on a vision of development that protects the people and strengthens the region's bargaining power on the global stage. This paper aims to help identify possible pathways for effective collaborations between academia and activists that can drive changes in narrative, generate knowledge and inform policy decisions that countries in the region may take to refocus their development strategy towards decarbonised economies. We also emphasise the role that Brazil, Chile and Colombia can play in formulating a regional cooperation agenda and negotiating reforms that facilitate a just transition, including the mobilisation of resources to implement that agenda more strategically on

the global stage. In this second aspect, we inevitably touch on political aspects and the barriers that the core issues we identify present for traditional notions of geopolitical power and opportunities for collaboration between nation-states.

The essay's methodology is based on practical dialogue between three researchers and activists from Brazil, Colombia and Chile around three questions, which in turn correspond to the three sections into which the document is structured:

1. What are the main challenges in each country in consolidating a people's green development strategy?
2. How could Latin American countries benefit from a regional cooperation strategy? What have we learned from previous (mostly failed) regional integration efforts?
3. What kind of partnerships between academia and activists are needed to contribute to a regional cooperation agenda for a just eco-social transition?

1. Challenges in Brazil, Chile and Colombia in Fostering a People's Green Development Strategy

The development trajectories of Latin American countries have cemented the power of sectors that, strengthened by the neoliberal reforms of recent decades, are resisting an eco-social transition. The high dependence on tax revenue in export sectors with a high carbon footprint tends to be used as an argument to resist or moderate the speed of energy transition policies and other economic policies that seek to remove economic stimuli to these sectors and redirect them to other activities. This is reflected in public debate, namely through prominent arguments which posit that efforts to transform production would entail a high risk of capital flight, fiscal and exchange rate crises, and considerable job losses, among other macroeconomic impacts. These warnings have led to strong resistance against change in broad sectors of the population. The threat is real, to some extent. It is true that, in other parts of the planet, there have already been disastrous experiences with efforts to implement 'pro-ecological' measures that were not implemented carefully or justly. Consider, for example, the strong rejection of fuel taxes in France, or Sri Lanka's most recent failure to abandon agrochemicals (Via Campesina 2022). The main challenge, therefore, is to make the existence of alternatives credible and to move forward decisively to implement them in ways that minimise risks and gain sufficient support to continue the forward momentum.

This significant shift in the region's future strategies also requires us to redefine recent processes of change and diagnose the challenges, often hidden from the gaze of traditional economic policy, in a different way. Let us now briefly consider the case of Chile, often seen as a successful

example of economic development in the region. In Chile, the high levels of per capita income – very high by regional standards – have been achieved in part thanks to the growth of export-oriented sectors that have been directly detrimental to the eco-social sustainability of its territories. In addition to its main export product, copper, more recently, single-crop farming of fruits such as avocado and intensive and unchecked salmon farming in the country's southern fjords have taken off. Both industries have caused profound damage to local biodiversity – including the availability of drinking water and dangerous processes of antibiotic bioaccumulation at sea – and have eroded local livelihoods. This is in addition to the damage already built up in mining and forestry monoculture territories dating back several decades.

The focus on strengthening this form of development has meant de-prioritising chronic – but already clearly identified – challenges, such as progress in food sovereignty and overcoming energy poverty, especially in the south of the country. The disrupted progress in these transformations is not accidental. It reflects the fact that such goals have not been on the political agenda or, if they have, they have been displaced by the constant priority given to developing export industries and attracting foreign investment. Failure to address these challenges has created and accumulated specific consequences, from the progressive deterioration of food security and food quality in general to the progressive deforestation of what remains of the native southern forest, destroyed by illegal logging for domestic heating.

In the case of Brazil, there is a strong consensus in climate policy on the role the South American giant might play in the transition to a low-carbon economy. Brazil has an immense wealth of biodiversity, diverse ecosystems and, even more importantly, the country contributes ecosystem services that are essential for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions (Hickel, 2020). Bearing in mind that a people-protecting green development strategy places indigenous peoples and forest wardens at the centre of its agenda. Indeed, the role of indigenous peoples is essential to combating the climate crisis. In this sense, the proposal from the government of Luiz Inácio Lula Da Silva to create an Indigenous Affairs Ministry would open the doors to formulating policies based on communities' experience, with the ability to scale up green growth alternatives that respect the planet's boundaries.

Carbon sequestration by the Amazon rainforest is seen as one of the key pillars of tackling the climate crisis, and this has been pursued mainly through the development of carbon markets. The current concern is the multiple different design options involved in building the market, which raises questions about how policymakers make these decisions in practice – something which has not yet been done for forest certificate trading in Brazil (van der Hoff et al., 2020).

Despite having a low-carbon energy matrix (mainly hydroelectric), Brazil is the sixth-largest CO₂ emitter in the world, mainly from land use: monoculture exporters of commodities and livestock (Our World in Data, 2022). Years since the country's return to democracy, there had been an attempt to halt the advance of deforestation in the northern and central-western regions, but all efforts evaporated during Jair Bolsonaro's government. A challenge for Brazil today is therefore to re-establish itself as a country prepared to fight against deforestation in the face of powerful actors that have been able to establish themselves in the region with incentives from the federal government.

Because these activities have established themselves in the country illegally, it makes confronting them more complex – land grabbing, illegal gold mining and the unbridled increase in deforestation have taken place on indigenous land, threatening local populations, putting their lives at risk and increasing violence in the region (Global Witness, 2020). Compliance with rules and laws and funding at institutions within the country's command and control structure are essential if Brazil is to regain control of the territory and be more ambitious in its green development proposals for the region.

In the case of Colombia, livestock and deforestation are the main causes of greenhouse gas emissions, followed by the energy sector. Colombia shares with Brazil the challenge of curbing deforestation in the Amazon and in the Orinoquia natural region. It is something that has become a complex socio-economic phenomenon in which strategies based on military and police supervision have not yielded the expected results and have even ended up being counterproductive to institutions working with local communities as allies. This illustrates the urgent need to seek mechanisms that discourage the local population from becoming associated with activities that cause deforestation and provide them with subsistence alternatives.

In addition to being concentrated in the hands of a few, the land is being used in a way that is contrary to its intended purpose. Most agricultural land is being used for extensive livestock farming, in which large-scale farms dominate. The government elected in 2022, led by President Gustavo Petro, has reignited debate on the need for agrarian reform that can free up land currently used for livestock grazing to expand agriculture and forests in ways that can settle the historical land access debts of the peasant population, Afro-descendants and indigenous peoples. While these groups have strengthened their organisational capacity and gained political representation, there are huge expectations around what policies will be implemented to ensure their economic and social inclusion.

Petro's government has made an energy transition policy another of its priorities. However, because oil and coal make up a substantial share of exports and fiscal revenues, against the

backdrop of inflation and devaluation of the Colombian peso, this has created a climate of alarm around the potential economic consequences of an accelerated transition that places limitations on the exploration of new hydrocarbon deposits. The challenge is, therefore, how to implement successful policies on the diversification of production that can give a decisive boost to local economies, to mitigate the perceived risks of the transition.

These three national contexts reflect the enormous challenges facing the region in moving forward along a green development path that protects the people. In this scenario, greater coordination between academia and activists, aimed at paving the way for alternatives, could help address these challenges in several ways. First, increasing knowledge about the social and ecological consequences for specific sections of the population of continuing the current development status quo, compared to other alternatives. This includes impacts on air quality or access to water sources for urban areas more familiar with the supposed benefits of the status quo than with its negative impacts. Activists who have traditionally supported the most affected local communities may benefit from academic research documenting these impacts and, in turn, academic research could be more widely circulated and have a greater influence on decision-making if it is widely used in public debate by those advocating alternatives.

Second, proximity to, and understanding of, local contexts by activists who have been immersed in the territories, as well as the knowledge of the communities themselves, should be a basic starting point for research on alternative policies that should be implemented and for the evaluation of their impacts. Solutions designed in a way that is divorced from their specific contexts have proven to be ineffective.

Third, given the predominance of growth-oriented planning of raw material export sectors in the region's countries, there is little research on the sectoral and regional integration challenges of a people-protecting green development strategy. Research in this area is taking on renewed importance with prospects of political openness at regional level, where there is a need for reflection in the face of the trials and errors of policies aimed at corrective measures. A dialogue between academia, both traditional and scientific knowledge, as well as public policy, has a key role to play in a people's development strategy at the regional level.

Finally, the similar challenges and complementary strengths of LAC countries emphasises the need to work together as a region. As will be discussed below, the challenges facing each country will be difficult to address if the region does not broaden its possibilities for cooperation, which also includes moving towards partnerships between academic and activist networks at the regional level.

2. Without Cooperation, the Transition Is Problematic: What Do the Countries Stand to Gain from a Regional Green Deal?

What role does Latin America want to play in a global energy transition scenario? To be a sacrificial zone that bears the costs of providing cheap raw materials for the transition to renewable energies in the rest of the world, or to be strongly aligned with how local communities want to develop as part of a bottom-up process of industrialisation that protects biodiversity and ecosystems in the region? (Avendaño & Bertinat, 2023; Lang et al, 2023). The possibility of strengthening the economic clout of countries in the region, based on a just eco-social transition, depends largely on the capacity for action as a regional bloc. Continuing to act in a dispersed way would inevitably be a recipe for perpetuating LAC countries' subordinate integration into the global economy, with all its social and environmental costs.

A regional green deal is still an unmet challenge for the Latin American region. As Svampa (2022) points out, programmes that have, to date, aspired to productive integration – such as IIRSA, then the South American Council for Infrastructure and Planning at UNASUR (COSIPLAN) – serve a clear purpose of facilitating extraction processes in a neo-developmental way. Although COSIPLAN has now been dismantled, infrastructure developments have continued to advance, facilitating predatory extractive processes such as the recent boom in the extraction of balsa wood in Ecuador (Acción Ecológica 2021).

The need to rethink political coordination is even more urgent if we consider the recent positioning of countries such as Chile, Uruguay, Argentina and Colombia as future energy exporters under the green hydrogen impetus (Gaevert., et al, 2023; Villagrasa, 2022). Chile was a pioneer in 2020 by proposing to be the first global energy exporter by 2050 (Ministry of Energy, 2020). The success of this target will rely on an unprecedented expansion of renewable energy infrastructure, notably in the northern desert area and in Patagonia, the southernmost region of the country. Like other countries, Chile points to its 'comparative advantage' – in other words, its ability to secure electricity based on unconventional renewable energies at an attractive market price – as the main argument for pushing forward an ambitious agenda that can be scaled up quickly and secure demand for green hydrogen beyond its borders. What is not clear is how the growth of this new export sector would avoid the conflicts that this model has already caused in that country and in the region in general. Nor is it clear how it would meet the criteria we have set for people-protecting development.

Regional fragmentation is already apparent in the prospects for green hydrogen's progress in the region (Villagrasa, 2022). While Chile looks to Europe as a potential buyer, Brazil has interest from Chinese investors and Argentina has Australian companies looking to produce green

hydrogen in its southern region (CGEP, 2024). So far, this impetus has reflected the rationale identified by Svampa in regional connectivity projects, and thus 'the region continues to be dictated by the North, while energy colonialism advances and governments of the South compete with each other to secure international contracts for the production and export of green hydrogen (the new global Eldorado)' (2022, p.27). Cooperation would open other possible futures. What would it mean, for example, to redirect green hydrogen production to a common goal of overcoming energy poverty in LAC?

Within the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), climate change authorities from all 33 countries of the region, with the exception of Brazil, issued a declaration in November 2022 in which they reaffirmed the importance of regional unity and collaboration to address the climate crisis and promote holistic and sustainable development, and to enhance coordination in various multilateral fora with a view to strengthening synergies and coordination in climate negotiations (CELAC, 2022). However, a common agenda needs to be implemented in practice.

With a much more positive political scenario, and consistent with the urgency of a just transition in their countries, the proposal for a regional alliance for people-protecting green development would place LAC in a geo-strategic position that was founded not on exploiting but empowering local communities, and on protecting rather than plundering nature. Such an alliance would require Brazil to return to a position of political leadership to strengthen the region's social and economic progress. For example, Brazil's food production potential is unquestionable, but today most agricultural production is destined to produce commodities for export, with China and the United States as the main destinations. Food production and supply has the potential to benefit an entire region in search of food sovereignty. Brazil's industrial capacity could also generate linkages with other countries with a relative abundance of natural resources.

A common regional agenda for people-protecting development could include the following (non-exhaustive) list:

- Re-thinking development strategies. To address the climate crisis in a way that does not exacerbate its subordinate position in the global economy, LAC must build a development strategy that maximises each nation's complementing strengths within mutually beneficial relationships. By establishing a regional industrial green ecosystem that combines strengths such as the abundance of critical minerals and the possibilities of scaling up renewable energy generation, LAC can make the most of its potential for their own priority needs. One interesting initiative to learn from is the report of the African Independent Expert Group on Just Transition and Development (IEGJTD, 2023). This report serves as

an invitation to various stakeholders, including governments, academia, the private sector, civil society, the media, and the international community, to update the development model that African nations use to project their future and address structural weaknesses related to food sovereignty, energy demands, and the low value added of their exports relative to imports.

- Adapt governance and planning structures to the region's socio-environmental regulatory systems and ecological heritage. There is an imbalance between the political and administrative structures and the way in which biomes and eco-regions would need to be governed in order to be protected, and for the protection of the people who live there. The Amazon is perhaps the most emblematic example. The Amazon region is an interconnected system that covers eight of the region's countries, and in which more than 400 indigenous peoples have lived for millennia. The knowledge, languages and practices of these indigenous peoples make up invaluable and indispensable cultural heritage for the Amazon to continue fulfilling its essential role in climate regulation and the provision of other key ecosystem services for the region and the planet. If there is an opportunity to be seized upon, following renewed leadership from governments such as Brazil and Colombia, it is the promotion of initiatives such as the Andes-Amazon-Atlantic corridor, to seek forms of government that give decision-making power to the peoples who have traditionally inhabited these territories, and to recover the ecosystem and social connectivity of these and other eco-regions of Latin America. To give impetus to these processes, there is a wealth of networks built by community activism, such as those prompted by the Pan-Amazon Social Forum and other similar initiatives.
- The integration of the region's electricity networks. Latin America has the in-built advantage that renewable sources represent 33% of the region's total energy supply, compared to 13% worldwide (Energy Information System of Latin America and the Caribbean (SieLAC), 2020). Regarding electricity generation, renewables account for almost two thirds of the total energy mix in LAC compared to less than one third globally (IEA, 2023). However, disparities between countries are considerable: while Brazil generates 84% of its electricity from renewable sources, Jamaica relies on imported oil derivatives to generate 87% of its electricity (OECD et al., 2022). Connectivity of the region's electricity networks should be prioritised by providing access to electricity for the 17 million people currently without power (IEA, 2022), and prioritising intra-regional trade.
- Take leaps forward in regional economic integration and policy coordination in ways that allow for bottom-up industrial development. The fact that it is home to 61% of the world's

lithium, 39% of the world's copper and 32% of the world's nickel and silver reserves (OECD et al., 2022) is often highlighted as an advantage for the region. However, if the countries of the region ultimately presented a coordinated front to the world on the basis of terms defined by green deals designed for other regions (such as the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States or the European Green Deal), rather than setting their own terms, the abundance of these minerals critical for the transition, for which a 500% growth in demand is estimated by 2050 (World Bank, 2020), could become a curse that perpetuates extractivism. The region must leverage its negotiating power on the global stage by using its natural resources to promote its own industrial development that champions community capacities and traditional knowledge, and which combines the strengths of each country through greater commercial, monetary and financial integration, all within firmly established socio-ecological boundaries. Progress in this direction means the integration of aspects of internationalisation, the transformation of production for life and climate action as a focus of the 2022–26 National Development Plan in the case of Colombia (NDP, 2022).

- Strengthen regional dialogue. A regional agenda must go much further than state institutions. Solidarity between peoples is fostered by the sharing of common visions and interests. Opportunities should be explored for connecting processes of defending local economies or territories that share common interests in different corners of the region. Examples could be communities that engage in artisanal or subsistence fishing and are seeing their livelihoods threatened by the effects of climate change or other threats; small local businesses that combine agro-ecology and eco-tourism and are exposed to extreme weather phenomena that threaten their survival; or artisanal mining, to transform harmful environmental and labour practices and curb its displacement by large-scale mining, among other pressures. There is fertile ground for collaborations between academia and activists that can strengthen understanding of which economic forces common to several contexts are putting these local economies at risk and how, for example, trade, investment and intellectual property policies and regulations, among others, could be used to protect these economies. The work by the South Centre, a form of intergovernmental think tank that supports the States of the Global South in international economic negotiations, sets a good precedent in this regard. The region's leadership in pushing for the Escazú Agreement also illustrates a way of using the law to protect environmental defenders who have bravely confronted powerful interests that undermine common environmental heritage.

A robust regional cooperation deal could have very significant impacts as it could give the region a negotiating advantage for trade agreements and for financing the transition to low-carbon economies; for boosting the transfer of technology and knowledge and the creation of science hubs for green development; for extending regional collaboration networks in the defence of common interests conducive to a just eco-social transition, and for broadening the debate on well-being and planetary boundaries within the region itself.

3. Gaps in Research for Advancing a Regional Cooperation Agenda Where Collaborations Between Academia and Activism Could Be Valuable.

The winds of change, and the promising prospects for a cooperation agenda in response to the climate crisis and Latin America's multiple inequalities, have been accompanied by a strengthening of theoretical paradigms that compete to capture the region's political imagination. One of these paradigms is that of green industrialisation, as a form of modernising production. This paradigm encompasses the proposal by Italian economist Mariana Mazzucato for a mission-oriented policy approach, in which states not only correct 'market failures' but actively shape markets and mark out the growth of strategic sectors (Mazzucato, 2022). Also within this paradigm are the recent calls for a Green Deal for the region that leverages the commercial value of biodiversity and makes extensive use of carbon markets (Lebdoui, 2022). These approaches focus on seeking alliances between the state and the private sector for the development of green capitalism in the region.

At the other end of the spectrum, having had deeper roots in the region for decades, is the post-developmental paradigm (Escobar, 2015; Demaria & Kothari, 2022), which has emphasised concepts such as just transitions, alternatives to development and the autonomy of communities to govern their territories. One initiative that connects academic reflection in responses to the visions of transition from the Global North with the practice of local communities is the Southern Eco-social Pact (2020). This pact was launched under a founding manifesto in which social movements, regional organisations, communities and networks, alternative governments, among other stakeholders, were invited to formulate a vision of redistributive, gender, ethnic and environmental justice around a series of proposals, such as the creation of national care systems, a universal basic income, the construction of post-extractivist economies and societies, among others.

A people-protecting development agenda can provide a bridge between reflection on green industrialisation policies and local initiatives that advocate alternatives to the extractivism that is typical of the post-developmental approach. This is promising terrain for effective partnerships between academia and activists. Although socio-environmental conflicts and practices of

resistance and construction of alternatives by local communities have been documented extensively within the framework of the post-developmental paradigm, there is little research on how a development strategy focused on people and the environment could boost the advantages of these economies and on which policy instruments are required to achieve this. The green modernisation paradigm's emphasis on cooperation between State and business has altered the importance of a people-oriented agenda. In the case of Colombia, for example, concepts of alliances between the public sector and people or community, the people's economy and energy communities have gained momentum, as have institutional efforts to strengthen the economic power and control over resources of stakeholders traditionally excluded from State cooperation circles (NDP, 2022).

In pursuit of a decarbonisation agenda for Latin America, academic-practitioner collaboration emerges as a crucial paradigm, dismantling the myth of limiting growth. Academic-practitioner collaboration encapsulates three key pillars: knowledge exchange, enriched tactical approaches, and the bolstering of collective counter-power through strengthened coalitions. This collaborative synergy harnesses the research and analytical strengths of academia alongside the practical wisdom of practitioners, enabling a profound understanding of the region's intricate challenges and promoting evidence-based interventions. It enriches the tactical toolkit by blending theoretical frameworks with on-the-ground insights, producing relevant and accurate data to persuade decision makers. Furthermore, it fosters the formation of stronger coalitions among diverse stakeholders, amplifying their collective influence and facilitating the challenge of narrative disputes, ultimately propelling the region towards social and economic equity and justice.

A fundamental question in this dialogue between paradigms is: how are notions of boundaries and sufficiency incorporated into development planning? Regarding the first concept, there is already a degree of recognition in the international community of the idea of 'planetary boundaries' (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). Within political philosophy, the theory of limitarianism has also been concerned with justification for the distributive justice implications of this notion of boundaries (Robbeyns, 2022). However, the more localised, social and political dimension of these boundaries is less explored. Beyond monitoring certain key environmental indicators, the establishment of critical points or boundaries is a political and social process, not a scientific one (Brand et al., 2021). Do political communities have the right to effectively determine boundaries for what happens in the ecosystems they inhabit? This social dimension of limitation as self-limitation entails taking seriously the plans for autonomy and political self-determination of the people and multiple population groups that inhabit Latin American countries.

A benchmark for how decisions by organised communities can set boundaries through institutional mechanisms of direct democracy is the 'popular consultations' in Colombia, through which several municipalities voted against the decision to carry out various extractive activities in their territories. Although a set of court decisions restricted their scope after an initial boom period (Muñoz and Peña, 2019), these consultations are a specific manifestation of a field in which academia and activism could fruitfully collaborate – that of studying the mechanisms of direct democracy through which notions of socially agreed boundaries could take shape.

As regards sufficiency, there is still no clear orientation as to which provisioning systems will help the region transition to multiple different post-extractivist ways of life that break with the current paradigm of infinite economic growth. Latin America has a great wealth of agro-ecological, political and philosophical proposals aimed at sufficiency rather than infinite growth, including the already acknowledged range of different approaches to living harmoniously with people and nature, or '*buenos vivires*'. (Loera González, 2015.) Notions of sufficiency and self-sufficiency are at the heart of the *Buen Vivir* principles, for example in the concept of *suma qamaña* in the Aymara – Quechua people of Bolivia (Huanacuni, 2010). However, these principles have also been diluted in typically developmental agendas, in countries such as Ecuador that have officially incorporated it into government policies (Acosta, 2008; Caria & Domínguez, 2016). It is unclear how the most radical principles of indigenous cosmologies could effectively gain ground from the imperative of attracting and providing legal guarantees for foreign investment, which continues to shape governments' agendas, relatively independently of their political leaning.

This entails, among other things, re-focusing research on technological innovation, not to meet the needs of the Global North or the expansion of the imperial way of life in the Latin America region, but instead to strengthen initiatives that are already implementing agro-ecology, energy autonomy and community management of natural resources as part of broader political projects. Different community and hybrid organisations bringing together academia and social movements are already dedicated to systematising the rich knowledge that these communities already possess – for example Vía Campesina, CENSAT Agua Viva in Colombia or ANAMURI (National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women) in Chile.

Collaborations between academia and activist are subject to trial and error and learnings gleaned from complex social processes. In Chile, for example, the experience of drafting a new constitution – later rejected by referendum (commonly referred to as '*plebiscito de salida*') – was a fruitful process of dialogue between representatives of social movements with a long track record in environmental conflicts, and academic institutions dedicated to mitigating and adapting to climate change, such as the Center for Climate Science and Resilience – CR2 (Bórquez et al.,

2022). Although the process ended with the rejection of the final text, it does offer keys to addressing the confrontation of powers and the population's concerns around the possibility of a profound transformation of legal frameworks towards a greater and more robust protection of ecosystems.

In the cases of Brazil, Colombia and Chile, the arrival of a new generation and new political platforms with renewed ties to socio-environmental movements may introduce a fresh perspective that prioritises the opportunities for collaboration between academia and activism explored in this essay. A welcome first step took place in August 2023 with the organisation of the Amazon Summit in Belém, Brazil, a meeting of the eight Member States of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, that brought together thousands of indigenous peoples' representatives, policy-makers, researchers and advocates to forge transnational ties and set up a roadmap for protecting the Amazon (ACTO, 2023). The fact that COP16 on biodiversity will be held in Colombia and COP30 will be held in Brazil represents a great opportunity for coalitions between academics and activists in the region to position an agenda such as the one discussed in this paper. Meanwhile academics and activists must exert pressure for a just eco-social transition, they must continue to have spaces to participate and influence governments as they take decisions that will affect the future of the planet. The opportunity lies, more profoundly, in whether Latin America can find a development pathway that strengthens its economic power on the global stage not on the basis of exploiting its own peoples and overshooting its ecological boundaries, but instead through offering communities the possibility to find their own opportunities for development while showing another path for the world in the care of its ecosystems and its biodiversity.

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