

YASUNI-ITT AND POST-OIL DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS FOR DEVELOPMENT EDUCATORS

Chris O'Connell

“The struggle does not stop when the revolution is in power. It starts a new kind of struggle, new kind of fighting that all societies knew and are knowing. Then the role of education changes also” Paulo Freire (Horton et al. 1990: 218).

Abstract: The election of a series of leftist presidents across Latin America brought hope of alternative models of development, and a greater say for civil society organisations. Instead social actors have been marginalised – even criminalised – by ‘progressive’ governments that have continued to rely on extractive industries to fund social programmes. Ecuador’s Yasuní-ITT, which emerged from civil society, was seen as a possible model of ‘post-oil’ development. Adopted by the government of President Correa, its cancellation resulted in strong opposition from a new social actor: urban young people, styling themselves *Yasunidos* (United for Yasuní). This article contends that this surprising outcome can only be understood by reference to the development education (DE) programme organised by environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The case of *Yasunidos* demonstrates the potential for using Freirean pedagogy to construct civil society responses to this new context.

Key words: Civil society; New Left; Ecuador; post-neoliberal; post-oil; development; education.

Latin America has been described as the only region of the world where a ‘fundamental change’ of development model is occurring (Kirby, 2012: 27). This change comes after two decades of upheaval in the region’s economy, polity and society. The widespread introduction of neoliberal economic policies during the 1990s heralded an attempt to create what Silva has termed a ‘market society’. These efforts, however, were met with a

countermovement: sustained resistance from civil society. This sector, led by social and indigenous movements, has formulated alternatives to the neoliberal model, ousted sitting presidents, and ‘ushered in governments inclined to act on mandates’ to tackle neoliberalism (2009: 53). Kirby has contended that education, and in particular the work of Paulo Freire, played a key role in this process of transformative change (2012).

The ‘New Left’ governments that rose to power in many countries offered the promise of an alternative path, together with closer relations between civil society and the state. Various described as ‘radical’ (Ellner, 2012; Raby, 2006) and ‘populist’ (de la Torre & Arnson, 2013; Weyland, 2013), the presidents of Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia have tended to style themselves as the leaders of a revolution, albeit of a democratic variety (Becker, 2011; Cannon, 2009). Presidents Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa have overhauled the institutional frameworks of their countries, and wholly altered the power dynamics (Ellner, 2012). In a region with serious and long-standing social issues, these governments have achieved ‘remarkable’ progress in increasing social spending and reducing poverty and inequality (Hogenboom, 2012).

As the dust settles, however, some have begun to question whether these ‘progressive’ governments are formulating alternative models of development (Muñoz Cabrera, 2012; Weyland et al., 2010). In particular, critics point to the continued dependence on extractive activities like oil, gas and mining as evidence of continuity rather than change (Gudynas, 2012; Hogenboom, 2012). Accompanying this trend has been a steady deterioration in relations between the state and civil society, which has been portrayed as an obstacle to development (Gudynas, 2012: 403). Furthermore, governments have enacted laws that limit the scope for contentious action. Faced with this ‘totally new context’ (ibid), civil society actors have been forced to seek alternative approaches. A key component of the reaction by civil society, this article contends, has been education.

This article considers the case of an alternative model of development that has emerged from this context. Ecuador's 'ground-breaking' Yasuní-ITT scheme (Pellegrini et al., 2014: 284) has been called a model of 'post-oil development' (Acosta et al., 2009). This initiative originated in civil society and 'activist organisations' (Bebbington, 2012: 23), and proposed leaving oil underground in return for contributions from the international community. The scheme was adopted by the 'leftist' Correa government in 2007, garnering international attention (Larrea & Warnars, 2009). Reaction to the scheme within Ecuador, however, was 'lukewarm' (Acosta et al., 2009). Nevertheless, when Correa moved to cancel the project in 2013 following several setbacks, the response from local civil society was unexpectedly fierce, yielding widespread protest and calls for a referendum (Coryat, 2015). At the forefront of the resistance was a new generation of activists styling themselves *Yasunídos* (United for Yasuní).

The Yasuní-ITT Initiative presents an excellent case study for educators seeking to understand challenges to new models of development. This paper begins with an overview of the 'New Left' in Latin America and its relations with civil society. The second part looks at the Yasuní-ITT Initiative, its origins, promise, and failure. The third part presents a study of development in the global South, reviewing a schools' programme which sought to engage citizens on the issue. That section goes on to consider one outcome of the programme: the *Yasunídos* collective. The article contends that given the complex balance of forces in many countries, Freirean critical pedagogy is fundamental to the survival of social movements and, consequently, for the generation of new paradigms of development. As Martinez notes, these are the sectors of society that have traditionally 'offered alternative and sustainable economic models and practices' (2014: 140).

The 'New Left' and civil society: Creating a new model?

The debt crisis that engulfed Latin America in the 1980s led to the 'lost development decade' (Kirby, 2003: 53). The cure prescribed by international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) – neoliberal economic policies – while bringing stability, had

significant side-effects. Critical problems like hyperinflation were controlled, and credit lines were re-opened. Nevertheless, the more ambitious promises of neoliberalism – increased foreign investment, growth of local business, higher employment – failed to materialise (Green, 2003; Kirby, 2003). The privatisation of state assets led to more corruption (Stiglitz, 2003), and reduced the state's capacity for redistribution (Roxborough, 1992). The outcome was an increase in poverty and stratification, leading the UN's Development Programme to describe Latin America as the most unequal region in the world (2004: 43).

In socio-political terms, the effects were equally grave. Along with 'downsizing' the state, neoliberalism deregulated industry and flexibilised labour, which decimated the union movement (Green, 2003), and 'shredded the bonds' between traditional parties and voters (Roberts, 2003: 39). The result was widespread disaffection with democracy across the region (Mainwaring et al., 2006). As Silva has noted, neoliberalism was experienced by the urban and rural poor, indigenous people and elements of the middle class as 'economic, political, and social exclusion and injustice' (2009: 266). Nevertheless, the roll-out of neoliberal reforms across the region was incomplete (Walton, 2004), due to resistance from an unexpected source. The rise of social and indigenous movements resulted in struggles against the imposition of these policies (Silva, 2009; Wolff, 2007).

During the late 1990s and the early 2000s, these movements gradually identified the neoliberal agenda as the common source of their problems (Silva, 2009). According to Kirby, the influence of Freirean pedagogy is fundamental to understanding how movements were able to articulate and frame their issues without any 'pre-set blueprint' (2012: 28). This level of consciousness enabled social actors to find innovative responses to threats, and to pursue transformative change. As Philip and Panizza (2011: 50) have noted, these struggles were never purely economic in nature but sought more fundamental reform, often bringing down governments in the process (Hochstetler, 2006). The outcome of this turmoil was the election of a series of presidents who committed themselves to sweeping

reforms; to ‘post-neoliberal’ development (Kirby & Cannon, 2012: 8). Among those taking power via this process were Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales and Rafael Correa.

The years that followed were equally dramatic, with these leaders overseeing significant institutional reform, typically including a new constitution to ‘re-found’ the state (Lomnitz, 2006). In spite of these achievements, however, the debate continues as to whether these ‘progressive’ regimes have replaced the neoliberal development model. Some have classified these governments as examples of the ‘petro-left’ (Schamis, 2006), or ‘rentier populism’ (Mazzuca, 2013). This argument suggests that the commodities boom of the last decade allowed these presidents to purchase electoral support through redistributive policies (Schamis, 2006). Thus rather than representing a new model, these governments have simply revived the ‘traditional rentier model’ (Weyland, 2009: 146). Others have pointed to the prioritisation of marginalised sectors (Ellner, 2012), and to significant reductions in poverty and inequality (Hogenboom, 2012) as signs of real change. For some, however, this merely amounts to an improvement on the existing model (Gudynas, 2012).

Although disagreements remain, there is consensus on some features of the ‘New Left’. Firstly, there is agreement regarding the renewed importance of the state as a central actor in both society and the economy (Roberts, 2013). While the commodities boom may not account entirely for the ‘left turn’, it has allowed countries with oil and gas reserves to assert the state’s role as the regulator of economic activity (Muñoz Cabrera, 2012: 67). The governments of Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador have aggressively renegotiated contracts with international companies, yielding improved terms for the state (Lievesley, 2009). This income has helped fund overdue investment in infrastructure, increased spending on health and education, and measures to address the chronic poverty that is a historic problem in these nations (ECLAC, 2013). Nevertheless, questions remain as to whether these positive changes constitute a transformation of the economic model (Kirby and Cannon, 2012).

A second element of consensus in the literature is the influence of civil society. It is widely believed that mass protests against neoliberalism facilitated the rise to power of the ‘New Left’ (Silva, 2009; Lievesley, 2009). As Kirby and Cannon have outlined, civil society activism ‘generated a discourse critical of the neoliberal project, built movements to challenge it, and provided many of the leading figures that were to win state power’ (2012: 13). Furthermore, social actors are behind many of the new models that have emerged from these leftist projects – the ‘seeds of alternative development’ (Gudynas, 2012: 407). A prominent example is the *Buen Vivir* (good living) paradigm, also known as *sumak kawsay*. This concept, now enshrined in the new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia, is ‘rooted in indigenous epistemology’ and advocates a fundamental change in the relationship between humans and nature (Muñoz Cabrera, 2012: 67).

The coming together of these two forces – a renovated state apparatus with a powerful civil society – has become the focus of attention for many studying the region (Cannon & Kirby, 2012; de la Torre & Ortiz, 2015). Some have noted ‘the importance of mobilised citizenry’ (Kirby, 2012: 27) in shaping policy outcomes and development models. As Philip and Panizza note, civil society has become ‘the new *moderating power* of Latin America politics’ (2011: 41). However, as is becoming increasingly clear, democratically elected governments with mandates for radical change do not necessarily take kindly to such moderation. According to Lievesley, governments typically try to ‘control and fragment’ these forces, and to limit their behaviour and impact (2009: 34). As might be expected in countries rich in natural resources, this tension manifests most clearly in the trade-offs between the economy and the environment (Kirby, 2012: 29).

The next section will consider one of these countries: Ecuador. Specifically, it will examine an alternative model of development that emerged from civil society. The Yasuní-ITT Initiative was an attempt to side-step the historical tension between development and conservation by monetising the preservation of an area of highly diverse rainforest (Larrea and Warnars, 2009). The initiative was adopted, promoted but ultimately

abandoned by the state amid political acrimony. The Yasuní project is a useful lens through which to examine relations between civil society and the state, and the challenges to realising innovative development models in the face of social, political and economic pressures. This case also gives insight into the new context for social actors in countries ruled by ‘leftist’ governments, and highlights the dynamic role that education plays in shaping their response.

Monetising the Amazon: The Yasuní-ITT Initiative

Ecuador presents an excellent case for studying the dynamics of ‘New Left’ governments, mobilised civil society, and alternative development models. During the neoliberal period, attempts to advance economic reforms were met with sustained resistance by civil society (Silva, 2009). This era of contention resulted in the ousting of three sitting presidents in a ten-year period (Hochstetler, 2006), and interrupted the reform process. At the forefront of this resistance was the indigenous movement which through innovative forms of peaceful protest built up legitimacy and forced concessions (Zamosc, 2007). Other movements played roles in these struggles, however: labour unions, neighbourhood committees, and sectors of the middle class (Silva, 2009), along with an atypically influential environmental lobby (Andrade, 2015).

These actors played a significant role in propelling left-wing economist Rafael Correa to the presidency in 2006. While Correa was an outsider, many of his chief advisors had ties to civil society. Thus the first plan for government produced by *Alianza PAIS*, Correa’s nascent political party, effectively compiled historic demands that had emerged from civil society (2006). Furthermore, movements and NGOs had a leading role in shaping Ecuador’s ‘progressive’ new constitution (Becker, 2011). This new document enshrined the concept of *Buen Vivir*, granted rights to nature, and recognised indigenous identity but not all concessions to civil society were of a symbolic nature. The new government imposed higher taxes on oil companies, trebled spending on education and health, and granted amnesty to several hundred imprisoned movement leaders.

Unsurprisingly, then, many civil society actors felt that this was an administration with which they could work. Nevertheless, to truly make good on what it termed its ‘Citizens’ Revolution’, the government needed to ‘move beyond rhetoric and vague platitudes to a pursuit of alternative development models’ (Becker, 2011: 109). Evidence that this could happen came from the government’s support for a radical proposal for ‘post-oil development’ (Acosta et al., 2009). This would involve embracing ‘revolutionary ideas’ and ‘imaginative financing mechanisms’ to transition from extraction to a more sustainable economy. The foundations for the Yasuní-ITT Initiative were laid by civil society organisations *Acción Ecológica* and Oil Watch (Rival, 2012). As Oil Watch coordinator Esperanza Martinez explained in an interview on 15 July 2015, the initiative began as a moratorium on oil exploration in Ecuador’s southern Amazon. While this approach was included in the plan for government (AP AIS, 2006: 47), it was opposed by Correa. Instead the proposal was limited to three oil fields in Yasuní National Park.

Despite the more modest scale, the Yasuní-ITT Initiative put forward by Minister for Mines and Energy, Alberto Acosta, and adopted by the government in 2007, was considered a challenge to the ‘logic of extractive development’ that underpinned neoliberalism (Acosta et al., 2009). Furthermore, Yasuní National Park could be seen as the ideal ‘test case’ for such a scheme. Firstly, the park houses extraordinary biodiversity, including hundreds of species of bird, mammal and insect; the park was declared a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1989. Secondly, the park’s territory is home to several ‘uncontacted’ tribes of the indigenous Huaorani nation that have withdrawn deep into the rainforest, and whose survival could be threatened by oil exploration. Finally, it has oil reserves. According to expert reports, approximately 846 million barrels of heavy crude could be extracted from beneath the Ishpingo, Tambococha and Tiputini (ITT) fields.

The plan as originally conceived was reasonably straightforward. The value to the Ecuadorian state of the oil in ITT was estimated to be US\$7.2 billion over a thirteen year period (Pellegrini et al., 2015). In return

for contributions totalling half that figure (US\$3.6 billion) by international donors, Ecuador would leave the oil under the ground. Not only would this aid the preservation of the park's human inhabitants and biodiversity, proponents in both government and civil society were keen to point out the wider global benefits. In a general sense, the scheme would save the region from the deforestation that tends to accompany oil activity. More specifically, supporters of the initiative estimated that by not burning this oil, emissions up to 407 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide would be avoided (Acosta et al., 2009).

Given the context of global climate change, the scheme was promoted as a new method of preventing greenhouse gas emissions (Larrea & Warnars, 2009). In presenting the initiative to the UN General Assembly in September 2007 President Correa's speech framed the issue as one of climate justice, stating that Ecuador was seeking joint responsibility rather than charity. The proposal was well-received internationally, with figures such as Muhammad Yunus, Rigoberta Menchu and Prince Charles providing endorsements. By 2008, the German Bundestag had voted to pledge US\$50 million per annum to a trust fund yet to be created (Rival, 2012). The Yasuní-ITT initiative appeared to have potential to be a new model of development for Ecuador, Latin America and the world.

Along with an alternative model of environmental protection, Yasuní-ITT offered the possibility of a new way of tackling development issues at a national level, combining the strengths of civil society and the state. As Rival has noted, the advent of 'New Left' governments offered the hope that social movement and state actors would come together 'to rethink economy, ecology and political commitment' and balance the needs of humans and nature (2012: 153). For example, while some civil society members were uncomfortable with the monetisation of the Amazon, it was clear from his inauguration speech in January 2007 that this element appealed to Correa, a trained economist. The innovation of Yasuní Security Certificates (YSCs) – effectively government bonds – as a means of securing

donations offered a possible way to keep both environmentalists and economists happy.

In spite of its apparent promise, as years passed the optimism surrounding the Yasuní-ITT initiative began to fade, and harsh realities intruded. On the global stage, the scheme hit problems during COP 15 in 2009, when YSCs were deemed ineligible for the United Nations' reforestation strategy (REDD) – emblematic of the gap between global North and South at that time (Rival, 2012: 164). Furthermore, in 2010 difficulties arose between international donors and the Ecuadorian government over the governance structure of the trust fund. Interpreting attempts to limit the use of pledged funds as an attack on national sovereignty, Correa announced that donors could 'stick their pennies in their ears' (Coffey, 2013). Perhaps as a result of these issues, the level of international donor pledges fell far short of expectations (Pellegrini et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, even in the face of international apathy, some have argued that the Ecuadorian government could have – and indeed should have, in light of its constitution – made good on its plan to leave the oil in the ground (Acosta et al., 2009). In that sense, it is arguable that the biggest threat to the initiative came from within the government itself. For some in civil society, there were many reasons to doubt the government's commitment to the scheme, particularly given Ecuador's growing debt to oil-hungry China (Martinez, 2014). More generally, many felt that the government's ideology was amorphous, and that 'pressure from below and to the left' was needed to ensure promises were honoured (Becker, 2011: 113). The capacity of civil society to maintain that pressure, however, came under threat as the government moved to control the 'political space' occupied by movements, and deter opposition.

Chief among the measures introduced were Executive Decree 16, which gave the state significant control over social organisations (de la Torre & Ortiz, 2015); and a new Penal Code, which decreed many methods of

protest acts of terrorism (Coryat, 2015). A report by Amnesty International (2012) estimated that 200 leaders of social movements faced terrorism charges. Other measures involved co-optation, creation of parallel organisations, and closure, as in the case of Pachamama Alliance (de la Torre & Ortiz, 2015). Along with these overt legal measures, the president's discourse toward civil society turned increasingly hostile. Correa used speeches and his Saturday morning television show, *Enlace Ciudadano* (Citizens' Connection), to deride the 'infantile left, environmentalists, and Indianists' (ibid: 9), who were portrayed as greedy special interest groups holding back national progress.

Correa was re-elected in February 2013 with a large majority, strengthening his claim to democratic legitimacy. On 15 August 2013 Correa announced the formal cancellation of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative. The move was justified using discourse resonant of what Gudynas has termed 'new extractivism' (2012). The president committed to using 'cutting edge' technology to minimise environmental damage; and to directing revenues from the oil extracted to combat poverty. 'We cannot be beggars sitting on a sack of gold', Correa maintained. Given the fragility of both organised political opposition and civil society, Correa might have expected the strongest criticism to come from abroad. He was wrong. The day after the announcement, protests broke out; the following day *Yasunidos* was formed. The next section will consider the emergence and impact of this key social actor and the role that development education played in its formation.

The response of civil society: education and action

The emergence of *Yasunidos* was described by political scientist Pablo Andrade in an interview on 16 July 2015 as the 'rebirth' of a civil society in Ecuador. For Esperanza Martinez, *Yasunidos* restored her faith in the possibility of a mobilised citizenry. While the long-term effect of this group remains unclear, these statements by experienced observers of state/civil society dynamics give a clear sense of its impact. Yet the emergence and significance of the group is puzzling on a number of levels. Firstly, there is the context of a fragmented civil society, along with the high rates of public

approval enjoyed by Correa. Secondly, a mere four years earlier it appeared that the Yasuní-ITT initiative had failed to capture the national imagination. Finally, there was the make-up of the organisation, which was ‘youth-led’ and independent of parties or indigenous movements (Coryat, 2015: 3747).

What could explain the emergence and subsequent impact of this *sui generis* social movement? Coryat has proposed two explanations of the level of citizen resistance to the cancellation of the project, which included protests and the formation of *Yasunidos* (2015). First there is the influence of social movement struggles over neoliberalism and the protection of the environment. Secondly, and somewhat ironically, is the impact of the government’s own marketing strategy promoting Yasuní-ITT. This multi-million dollar international campaign presented stunning images of the park’s natural wonders and ‘fostered pride and ecological consciousness’ among ordinary Ecuadorians (ibid: 3746). While these factors go some way to explaining a general public backlash, they do not provide a full account of the *Yasunidos* phenomenon. In particular, they fail to explain the fact that the collective was predominantly conformed by young city-dwellers.

At interview Esperanza Martinez explained that many believed it would be necessary to push the government to fulfil its commitment to leaving the oil in the ground, and that efforts to exert pressure hinged on an aware and engaged population. Returning to Freire’s work, and specifically to Kirby’s (2012: 28) evaluation of its influence on Latin American civil society, it has been asserted that a precondition for the emergence of movements is an ‘empowered and socially aware consciousness’. Where was this consciousness sown in the case of *Yasunidos*? How was it that a significant sector of urban youth came to know and care so much about a distant area of rainforest? It is contended that the answer lies in development education, and in particular a schools’ programme provided by environmental organisations Oil Watch and *Acción Ecológica* (Ecological Action).

Prior to continuing, this article will defend the assertion above that the programme can validly be considered ‘development education’. While the term is not common in Latin America, the influence of Freire on civil society is considerable. Particularly relevant is Freire’s concept of ‘praxis’, defined as ‘reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it’ (2000: 51). As McCloskey (2015) has asserted, the influence of Freire on DE is strong in terms of both aims and approach. Additionally, in comparing the practice of DE in the global North and South, Liddy (2013: 39-40) has found many similarities. Certainly common conceptions of DE in a Northern context would appear relevant also to the Latin American context. For example, IDEA (2012) has stated that DE uses ‘participatory and democratic learning methods’ to provide learners with a ‘critical understanding of our complex world’. McCloskey (2009: 2) has noted that DE ‘aims to result in informed local action based on a global consciousness’.

On this basis, it is contended that the DE label is correctly applied to the *Mi Futuro Yasuní* (My Future Yasuní) educational programme. As set out by Martinez in interview, a key objective was to promote critical understanding not only of the initiative, but of wider issues like indigenous rights and environmental destruction. Local themes were framed in a global context, citing climate change and international human rights. The stated aim was to generate public debate with a view to action. For example, the ‘script’ used for workshops identified action outcomes, one of which was ‘pressurising the state’. The approach used was participatory and utilised a range of techniques and resources. Finally, although explicitly linked to a campaign, the programme promoted reflection, thus transcending the category of what Freire has termed pure activism (2000). This section will continue with an outline of the schools’ programme; and an account of the emergence, impact and legacy of the *Yasunidos* movement it helped create.

Education: *Mi Futuro Yasuní* Programme

According to Martinez, the decision to enter the educational space was born more out of necessity than choice. The prior experience of Oil Watch in campaigning against extraction had relied on working with the local

population. In the case of Yasuní, however, the population was sparse and some of those living there were not contactable. A further problem was the low level of public awareness of the park: according to Martinez, an opinion poll in 2007 revealed that only 10 percent of the population had heard of Yasuní. Accordingly an education campaign was launched in 2007, to coincide with the adoption by the government of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative. By the time President Correa announced its cancellation, the programme had run for over six years. Its success in engaging the population, and in particular youth, on the issue would then face its ultimate test.

The schools' programme was devised by Oil Watch and run by *Acción Ecológica*, and targeted both primary and secondary levels. The scale and ambition of the programme were initially modest, beginning in just two schools with the aim of generating general debate. However, as more schools joined, the scope of the programme developed toward specific action outcomes. Martinez stated that a further objective of working with students was to use them as a means of raising consciousness among their parents. The starting point for the programme was Yasuní's status as a national park, and in particular its vast biodiversity. The objective was to engender a sense of national pride in Ecuador's natural riches, to see that 'nature belongs to everyone' (echoing the government's own slogan, 'the homeland now belongs to everyone'). The overarching approach as inspired by the natural environment was positive and fun, said Martinez.

The programme provided workshops to students during school hours. Courses typically lasted five weeks, with each workshop taking around 90 minutes. The approach was explicitly participative and dynamic, featuring activities tailored to the participants' age range. The materials featured many visual aids, in particular depicting natural wonders, but also positive images of indigenous people. For younger participants, resources focussed on environmental protection and the harmful impacts of oil exploitation. A campaign was developed featuring a piggy bank into which children were encouraged to deposit coins to help save Yasuní, while role plays centred on building a bond between participants and the ecosystem.

Events were organised to honour ‘child ecologists’, which received coverage in popular children’s magazines. For Martinez the most satisfying activities were those partnering older and younger participants.

For adolescents, the workshops feature more explicitly political elements. Concepts from the constitution, such as *Buen Vivir*, the rights of nature, and protected areas, were introduced. Indigenous culture was discussed, but also international instruments for the protection of their rights. Emphasis was placed on the impact of extraction on both humans and nature, which were related to global climate change and calls for a new model of development. Workshops encouraged participants to reflect on action outcomes within both the local and global context. For example, a role play activity included an exercise where those representing civil society were encouraged to arrange a ‘popular consultation’ over the Yasuní-ITT question, a reference to an article of the constitution that allowed citizens to convoke a recall referendum on any national issue. This provision was to become a central feature of the *Yasunidos* campaign.

Not every aspect of the educational programme was successful, Martinez admitted. By way of an example, she referred to a mobile phone application called ‘The Age of Yasuní’ which featured a children’s game which aimed to prevent an oil well being drilled. Martinez admitted that the game was ‘repetitive’ and that the application had not achieved much, but she noted that it was an attempt to find new ways to reach young people. The programme effectively came to an end upon the cancellation of Yasuní-ITT in 2013. Survey data from polling agency CEDATOS carried out at that time revealed that awareness of Yasuní-ITT in Ecuador had increased to over 80 percent, while rates of approval were well over 70 percent. While Martinez acknowledged that the state marketing campaign had been significant, she believed the programme had played a role. The real test of the programme’s success, however, would be measured by actions.

Action: *Yasunidos*

As noted, the *Yasunidos* collective did not grow out of a pre-existing political or social movement (Coryat, 2015: 3747). Nor were the members of this organisation drawn from marginalised sectors of the population with a history of spontaneous protest. Although *Yasunidos*' webpage asserts the heterogeneous nature of the collective, stating, 'we are students, peasants, artists, workers, mothers, fathers, children, activists, the group was made up mainly of 'urban young people' (Coryat, 2015: 3746). The organisation sprung up apparently fully formed just three days after the cancellation of Yasuní-ITT; within months they would be referred to as a 'key social actor'. This outcome can only be understood by reference to praxis: during the programme these young people had reflected; they were now ready for action.

The effects of the education programme can also be observed in the methods *Yasunidos* employed to campaign against the termination of the initiative. The first phase, in the immediate aftermath of Correa's announcement, involved widespread protests involving many actors. Police reacted aggressively to the protests, while Correa used the media to single out and demean individual protesters. As a combination of repression and fatigue took their toll on protesters, *Yasunidos* began to harness more innovative tools to keep the issue in the public eye. The group revived the Andean tradition of the *zapateada*, cultural events featuring music, dance and song (ibid). *Yasunidos* also drew on modern technology, disseminating videos, music and images via their website and social media. The collective also forged alliances with indigenous communities resistant to drilling.

Nevertheless, it was the decision to seek a recall referendum on the issue of Yasuní-ITT, and the campaign that followed, that sealed the importance of *Yasunidos* as a social force. Article 104 of the constitution allowed for the convocation of a *consulta popular* (recall referendum) by the citizenry on an issue of national importance, provided they could produce a petition supported by five percent of the electorate. In the case of Yasuní, this amounted to 583,324 signatures. Martinez described the process of

collecting signatures, mainly conducted on the streets, as ‘very difficult’. Nevertheless the process revealed more evidence of the influence of education. Martinez recalls witnessing children who learned about the scheme persuading fearful parents to sign. Elsewhere Coryat (2015: 3752) has noted the desire of *Yasunidos* to not only collect signatures, but to engage in dialogue with citizens about the issue.

With around three months remaining before the deadline for signature collection, *Yasunidos* held a press conference to reveal that 90 percent of the required signatures had been collected. According to Martinez, ‘that was when the war began’. The government reacted to the announcement with a forceful campaign, that including media attacks, trolling on social media, intimidation by security forces, and the launch of a parallel consultation designed to sow confusion (Coryat, 2015). The tactics did not succeed. *Yasunidos* exceeded all expectations by gathering 757,623 signatures, which were presented to the National Electoral Council (CNE). This was not the end of the matter, however; amid accusations of fraud, the CNE disqualified over 60 percent of the signatures, ensuring that the referendum would not proceed.

While *Yasunidos* may have lost the battle over the recall referendum, it is not yet clear who will win this ‘war’. The government was also damaged by the affair. Local elections in early 2014 saw the government lose all of the major cities, an outcome attributed by both Martinez and Coryat (2015) to a public distaste for the treatment of *Yasunidos*. Following that period there has also been a resurgence in civil society mobilisation in Ecuador, including the re-emergence of the indigenous movement (Becker, 2015). While *Yasunidos* have faded somewhat from view, their influence continues. Although the government amended the wording of Article 104 of the constitution to prevent further citizens’ referenda, there has been an upsurge in ‘alternative’ consultations among communities threatened by oil or mining. As Martinez stated, ‘I believe *Yasunidos* did this’.

Furthermore, this case is not unique; other organisations in Ecuador are also turning to Freirean pedagogy in response to the challenging contemporary environment. For example, FECAOL is a federation of small farmers on Ecuador's coastal plain, a region not renowned for social movements. This helps to explain the foundation of a School of Agroecological Formation. Richard Intriago, one of the organisation's leaders, explained in an interview on 12 July 2015 that the school was created to strengthen the organisation, promote agroecology, and form leaders with a 'critical vision'. The school draws inspiration from the 'Paulo Freire' Latin American Institute of Agroecology set up by *Via Campesina* and Brazil's Landless Workers' Movement (MST). The curriculum promotes active participation based on reflection and commitment to the construction of a society based on justice and solidarity. As Intriago explained, 'first we need to build our capacity; then we will be ready for action when the time comes for change'.

Conclusion

The ascension to power of governments of the 'New Left' has proved a double-edged sword for civil society in parts of Latin America. While these organisations have seen many historic proposals accepted and even enshrined in constitutions, they have also been pushed to the political fringes. Furthermore, social actors that have in the past been the authors of alternative models of development are increasingly sceptical of the path taken by 'progressive' governments. Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in the area of resource extraction, upon which the economies of countries like Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador depend. Attempts to use traditional methods developed during the neoliberal era to put pressure on governments have yielded diminishing returns due to legal and discursive moves to criminalise and delegitimise protest.

The case study of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative and its failure serves to highlight this dynamic. However, as the article also demonstrates, civil society is continuing to innovate in response to this changed context. In particular, social actors are turning increasingly to the spirit and techniques

of Freirean education in order to reflect on the current reality with a view to fresh action outcomes. As the study of the *Mi Futuro Yasuní* schools' programme, and its influence on the emergence of the *Yasunidos* collective has demonstrated, not all avenues for action have been closed. It is clear that civil society actors in Latin America will continue to be the agents of their own transformation. It is for this reason that those who work with and are inspired by the region do not talk about 'charity', but about 'solidarity'.

References

Acosta, A (2013) 'Why Ecuador's president has failed the country over Yasuní-ITT', *The Guardian*, 4 September 2013.

Acosta, A, Gudynas, E, Martínez, E and Vogel, J (2009) *Leaving the oil in the ground: A political, economic, and ecological initiative in the Ecuadorian Amazon*, Washington, DC: Centre for International Policy.

Alianza PAIS (APAIS) (2006) *Plan de Gobierno Movimiento PAIS 2007-2011: Un primer gran paso para la transformación radical del Ecuador*, Quito.

Amnesty International (2012) *Para que nadie reclama nada: ¿Criminalización del derecho a la protesta en Ecuador?*, London: Amnesty International Publications.

Andrade, P (2015) 'El gobierno de la Naturaleza: La gobernanza ambiental posneoliberal en Bolivia y Ecuador' in F de Castro, B Hogenboom and M Baud (eds.) *Gobernanza Ambiental en América Latina*, Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

Bebbington, A (2012) *Social conflict, Economic Development and Extractive Industry*, London/New York: Routledge.

Becker, M (2011) 'Correa, indigenous movements, and the writing of a new Constitution in Ecuador', *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 38, No. 1, January, pp. 47-62.

Becker, M (2015) 'Ecuador's new indigenous uprising', *Upside Down World*, 12 August 2015, available:

http://upsidedownworld.org/main/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5422%3Aecuadors-new-indigenous-uprising&catid=25%3AEcuador&Itemid=49

(accessed 17 December 2015).

Cannon, B (2009) *Hugo Chávez and the Bolivarian Revolution: Populism and Democracy in a Globalised Age*, Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press.

Coffey, G (2013) 'Ecuador: Some observations regarding the Yasuní-ITT proposal', *Upside Down World*, 22 September 2013, available: <http://upsidedownworld.org/main/news-briefs-archives-68/4472-ecuador-some-observations-regarding-the-Yasuní-itt-proposal> (accessed 15 Dec 2015).

Coryat, D (2015) 'Extractive Politics, Media Power, and New Waves of Resistance Against Oil Drilling in the Ecuadorian Amazon: The Case of Yasunídos', *International Journal of Communication*, Vol. 9, pp. 3741-3760.

de la Torre, C and Arnson, C (eds.) (2013) *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, Baltimore/Washington DC: The Johns Hopkins University/Woodrow Wilson Centre Press.

de la Torre, C and Ortiz, A (2015) 'Populist polarization and the slow death of democracy in Ecuador', *Democratization*, pp. 1-21.

ECLAC (2013) *Social panorama of Latin America 2012*, Santiago: United Nations Publications.

Ellner, S (2012) 'The Distinguishing Features of Latin America's New Left in Power: The Chávez, Morales, and Correa Governments', *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 96-114.

Freire, P (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary edition, New York/London: Continuum.

Green, D (2003) *Silent Revolution: The rise and crisis of market economics in Latin America*, New York: NYU Press.

Gudynas, E (2012) 'Extractivismos persistentes y el progresismo sudamericano' in M Daza, R Hoetmer and V Vargas (eds.) *Crisis y Movimientos Sociales en Nuestra América*, Lima: Programa Democracia y Transformación Global.

Hochstetler, K (2006) 'Rethinking Presidentialism: Challenges and presidential falls in South America', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 401-418.

Hogenboom, B (2012) 'The return of the state and new extractivism: what about civil society?' in B Cannon and P Kirby (eds.) *Civil Society and the State in Left-led Latin America*, London: Zed Books.

Horton, M, Freire, P, Bell, B and Gaventa, J (1990) *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on education and social change*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

IDEA (Irish Development Education Association) (2012) 'Position Paper: The Role of Development Education in Development Beyond 2015', available: https://www.ideaonline.ie/uploads/files/FINAL_Dev_Ed_and_Devt_B2015_position_paper_to_Dochas_13_Dec_2012.pdf (accessed 17 December 2015).

Kirby, P (2012) 'Educating for Paradigm Change', *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 14, Spring, pp. 19-32.

Kirby, P (2003) *Introduction to Latin America: Twenty-First Century Challenges*, London: Sage Publications.

Kirby, P and Cannon, B (2012) 'Globalisation, democratisation and state-civil society relations in Left-led Latin America' in B Cannon and P Kirby (eds.) *Civil Society and the State in Left-led Latin America*, London: Zed Books.

Larrea, C and Warnars, L (2009) 'Ecuador's Yasuní-ITT Initiative: Avoiding emissions by keeping petroleum underground', *Energy for Sustainable Development*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 219-223.

Levitsky, S and Roberts, K (eds.) (2011) *The Resurgence of the Latin American Left*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Liddy, M (2013) 'Education about, for, as development', *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 17, Autumn, pp. 27-45.

Lievesley, G (2009) 'Is Latin America moving leftwards? Problems and prospects' in G Lievesley, and S Ludlam (eds.) *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*, London/New York: Zed Books.

Lomnitz, C (2006) 'Latin America's Rebellion: Will the New Left Set a New Agenda?', *Boston Review*, Vol. 31, No. 5, pp. 7-10.

Mainwaring, S, Bejarano, A M and Pizarro Leongomez, E (eds.) (2006) *The Crisis of Democratic Representation in the Andes*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Martínez, E (2014) 'Yasuní: democracia en extinción' in *La Restauración Conservadora del Correísmo*, Quito: Montecristi Vive.

Mazucca, S (2013) 'The Rise of Rentier Populism', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 108-122.

McCloskey, S. (2015) *Thinkpiece: Are we changing the world? Reflections on Development Education, Activism and Social Change*, Belfast: Centre for Global Education.

McCloskey, S (2009) 'Editorial', *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 8, Spring, pp. 1-8.

Muñoz Cabrera, P (2012) 'Economic Alternatives for Gender and Social Justice: Voices and Visions from Latin America', *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, Vol. 14, pp. 64-84.

Pellegrini, L. Arsel, M, Falconí, F and Muradian, R (2014) 'The demise of a new conservation and development policy? Exploring the tensions of the Yasuní ITT initiative', *The Extractive Industries and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 284-291.

Philip, G and Panizza, F (2011) *The Triumph of Politics: The Return of the Left in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador*, Cambridge/Malden: Polity Press.

Raby, D (2006) *Democracy and Revolution: Latin America and Socialism Today*, London: Pluto.

Rival, L (2012) 'Planning development futures in the Ecuadorian Amazon' in A Bebbington (ed.) *Social conflict, economic development and extractive industry*, London and New York: Routledge.

Roberts, K (2003) 'Social correlates of party system demise and populist resurgence in Venezuela', *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 35-57.

Roberts, K (2013) 'Market reform, programmatic (de) alignment, and party system stability in Latin America', *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 11, pp. 1422-1452.

Roxborough, I (1992) 'Neo-liberalism in Latin America: Limits and alternatives', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 421-440.

Schamis, H (2006) 'Populism, Socialism, and Democratic Institutions', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 20-34.

Silva, E (2009) *Challenging Neoliberalism in Latin America*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Stiglitz, J (2003) *Globalisation and its Discontents*, London: Penguin Books.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2004) *Democracy in Latin America: Toward a Citizens' Democracy*, New York: UNDP Publications.

Walton, M (2004) 'Neoliberalism in Latin America: Good, Bad or Incomplete?', *Latin American Research Review*, Vol. 39, No. 3, pp. 165-183.

Weyland, K (2009) 'The Rise of Latin America's Two Lefts: Insights from Rentier State Theory', *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 41, No. 2, pp. 145-164.

Weyland, K (2013) 'The Threat from the Populist Left', *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 24, No. 3, pp. 18-32.

Weyland K, Madrid R and Hunter W (2010) *Leftist Governments in Latin America*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Wolff, J (2007) '(De-)Mobilising the Marginalised: A Comparison of the Argentine *Piqueteros* and Ecuador's Indigenous Movement', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 39, pp. 1-29.

Zamosc, L (2007) 'The Indian Movement and Political Democracy in Ecuador', *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 1-34.

Chris O’Connell is a PhD candidate in the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University, where his thesis focuses on the influence of civil society on the extractive policies of left-wing governments in the Andean region. Additionally, he is a member and current Chair of the Latin America Solidarity Centre (LASC) in Dublin. He has coordinated LASC’s development education course, and regularly facilitates sessions on democracy, populism and natural resources. Formerly, he spent a number of years living, working and researching in South America.