Between Interculturalism and Ethnocentrism:  
Local Government and Indigenous Movement in Otavalo-Ecuador  
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Abstract
The canton of Otavalo in the Ecuadorian Sierra has been a stronghold and intellectual cradle of the Ecuadorian indigenous movement. In the year 2000 Mario Conejo Maldonado, who represented the indigenous political movement Pachakutik, was elected as the first indigenous mayor of Otavalo. His administration has enjoyed recognition for its popular participation formula and intercultural project, integrating mestizos and indigenous citizens. In the context of local state reform challenges and the inclusion and recognition of indigenous citizens in the Ecuadorian state model this study approaches a local government led by an indigenous mayor with an intercultural banner. However, the project of ethnic integration in Otavalo has not evolved without complications and conflicts. Social and political divisions in the indigenous population have been reflected since before Conejo was ever elected. Ethnically based tensions in the local indigenous movement have been manifested throughout the period and in 2006 Conejo left Pachakutik and created a new political movement – Minga Intercultural–. The author argues that the rupture in the Otavalo indigenous movement (and local government) can be traced to the intercultural dilemma and difficulties associated with an ethnically defined political movement. Similarly, aspects of the so called “Correa effect” on the indigenous movement at the local level will be approached, since the Otavalo mayor has joined President Rafael Correa’s PAIS movement before the local elections of 2009.

Key words: Indigenous movement, local government, Pachakutik, alliance-building, interculturalism, Otavalo, Ecuador.


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Presentation
Since the first years of the 21st century, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement, classified as the political actor exerting the greatest impact since its emergence in 1990, has experienced a crisis of representation and legitimacy mainly as a result of its participation in the formal political institutions and in alliances with traditional political actors. The principal organizations of the indigenous movement, including the Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuador (CONAIE\(^2\)), have suffered from tensions, conflicts and internal divisions. These tensions are manifested most strongly in Imbabura Province in the northern Ecuadorian Sierra, and particularly in the municipality of Otavalo, a canton\(^3\) identified as the intellectual cradle of the national indigenous movement and likewise a local fortress for the indigenous political party Pachakutik.

Mario Conejo Maldonado was elected mayor of Otavalo in 2000 on the Pachakutik slate, and he has remained in the municipal leadership since then. He was the first elected indigenous mayor of the canton. Nevertheless, in January 2006 Conejo announced his withdrawal from Pachakutik and later the same year presented a new political movement – la Minga Intercultural – as the culminating point of a relationship that from its beginning had been conflictive with the indigenous movement at a national, provincial and local level. In Otavalo the principal indigenous social movement organization is tied to CONAIE, yet Mayor Conejo decided to abandon Pachakutik in 2006 and created a new political movement. This scenario could be perceived as counterintuitive, since CONAIE-affiliated organizations might be expected to interact more successfully with officials elected on the Pachakutik slate, but in Otavalo the contrary occurred. The tensions between the ethnic indigenous perspective and the ideas of interculturalism are important factors to consider in the light of this contradiction, and therefore a few aspects of this challenge will be touched upon as practical reflections of that dilemma in local political processes as perceived by the actors. This case study illustrates the challenges of political alliance-building in the Ecuadorian indigenous movement and thereby contributes to the theorizing on collective action and political representation of previously excluded groups, a crucial issue in research on ethnically based social and political movements in the Andean region and elsewhere.

\(^2\) Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador. An estimated 80% of the indigenous organizations at the community level are affiliated to CONAIE. Van Cott, 2005: 107.

\(^3\) In this study, canton and municipality are used synonymously, since there is generally no difference in political-territorial divisions between them in the case of Otavalo.
Organizational challenges to combine non-institutionalized strategies with formal institutionalization at the municipal level are considered, and how these challenges are reflected in terms of conflict between the organizations. Important aspects of alliance-building and conflicts at the local level will be analyzed, as will the question whether national power structures affect the organizations at the municipal level. The most recent political scenarios related to the development of the political movement of President Rafael Correa and the upcoming local elections of April 2009 will likewise be considered in the study.

The Pachakutik effect within the Indigenous Movement

With a primary political focus on the local bases, the Ecuadorian indigenous movement could be classified as the strongest on the continent. From the political institutionalization of CONAIE in the mid 1980s, through the municipal electoral triumphs from 1996 onwards and the indigenous contribution to the constitutional process of 1997-98, a political, social and cultural recognition of the Ecuadorian indigenous population has taken place. The indigenous movement has not only been a decisive political actor in issues concerning bilingual education, rural development and models of participatory democracy, but has also contributed to the relatively peaceful overthrow of two national governments, Abdalá Bucarám in 1997 and Jamil Mahuad in 2000. In the presidential election of 2002 the indigenous movement allied with lieutenant colonel and former coup leader Lúcio Gutiérrez and achieved inclusion in the national government, including two ministerial posts for CONAIE-Pachakutik representatives. The alliance lasted only six months, however, and the indigenous movement withdrew from government to re-establish itself as political opposition. Since the transitory Gutiérrez alliance, the indigenous movement has experienced a crisis of legitimacy and credibility, manifested most of all in deepening dissatisfaction on the part of the grassroots with the national leadership of CONAIE and Pachakutik. Despite the relative weakening in its national political influence, Pachakutik has maintained its strength at the municipal level with various kinds of local political alliances. In the 2004 elections, Pachakutik triumphed in seventeen municipalities, among them Otavalo.

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4 Yashar, 2005.
5 Signs of a crisis had appeared already before the Gutiérrez alliance, related among other things to the participation of indigenous leaders in the previous governments, e.g. during the presidency of Mahuad. See for example Beck & Mijeski, 2001.
The strength of CONAIE at the community level has generally benefited Pachakutik in terms of probabilities for establishing the movement politically. Most other Ecuadorian political parties lack strong grassroots movements, something that made Pachakutik attractive as an alliance partner. The relationship between CONAIE and Pachakutik has nevertheless been a two-edged sword since the beginning. On the one hand, the legitimacy and organizational strength of CONAIE contributed to the successful formation of the political party and its electoral participation. But on the other, the superior position of the social movement has prevented the development of the political movement, since Pachakutik is formally subordinated at times to CONAIE. The contradiction between demands for radical structural change through non-institutional means on the one hand, and electoral and institutional participation on the other, has been reflected within the movements. The existence of Pachakutik has not moderated the radical position of CONAIE; the confederation has continued to manifest its repudiation of the traditional political class, questioning the structures of the state. Pachakutik, at the same time, has had to negotiate as a party/movement with these same actors and institutions.

The politicization (and partidization) of CONAIE has contributed to the accentuation of internal contradictions by enforcing the construction of complex structural and organizational relations between the social and political movements. Anthropologist Fernando García Serrano has labeled the contradictory and at times conflictive relationship between the political and social indigenous movements the *Pachakutik effect*, as a kind of battle between the two. As he argues, the political movement is defined and conditioned from the angle of the party system and controlled by oligarchic power structures, whereas the social movement CONAIE rather follows an historical political project related to issues of identity as indigenous peoples. Moreover, García emphasizes certain relevant challenges, or possible negative effects of the relationship. One is the risk of elected Pachakutik leaders placing individual priorities before the collective grievances of the indigenous movement, and related to this issue there emerges the situation in which the indigenous political leader is also to represent the non-indigenous population and consider their needs as well. This dilemma is based on one key difference between the two movements: CONAIE is exclusively indigenous, whereas Pachakutik is an intercultural electoral vehicle open to broader alliance-building, albeit similarly identified as an indigenous party.

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Contextual background

Before proceeding with an analysis of the indigenous government in Otavalo, a brief historical overview is in place to achieve some understanding of the local context. The indigenous population of Otavalo belongs ethnically and culturally to the Kichwa-Otavalo indigenous nationality. Otavalo is popularly well known for its indigenous market of handicrafts and textiles (the biggest in the world). According to the population survey of 2001, Otavalo has the greatest proportion of indigenous population in Imbabura Province, with 55.35% of the 90,188 Otavaleños identifying themselves as indigenous.\(^7\) The exceptionality of Otavalo has been described as a society in which indigenous citizens have achieved economic and social development without losing their fundamental cultural values. Through their handicraft and commerce the Otavaleños succeeded in overcoming the traditional obstacles of discrimination and created an indigenous urban zone instead of the traditional white-mestizo domination of the city.\(^8\) In addition, the element of education should be underscored, as an increasing number of Otavalo migrants returned to the city with university degrees. Several scholars,\(^9\) in order to better understand the recent developments in the indigenous movement, mention the possible existence of an ‘indigenous bourgeoisie’ in Otavalo with its core in the Quinchuquí community. Interestingly, the family of the indigenous mayor of the study – Mario Conejo – is from Quinchuquí.

With regard to the organized indigenous-peasant activities of the canton, the Indigenous Peasant Federation of Imbabura (FICI/Federación Indígena y Campesina de Imbabura) was founded in 1975 by the new generation of Otavalo indigenous intellectuals along with young indigenous peasant leaders of Otavalo and neighboring cantons, mainly from Cotacachi.\(^10\) Shortly before the transition to democracy in 1979, FICI spearheaded indigenous activities.

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\(^7\) Quoted in Torres, 2004. According to the same survey, the average of indigenous self-identification in Imbabura is 25%.

\(^8\) Meisch, 2002; Kyle, 2001; Lalander, 2008. The Indigenous Artisans’ Union of the Centenarian Market of Otavalo (UNAIMCO/Unión de Artesanos Indígenas del Mercado Centenario de Otavalo), founded in 1989, has been the dominating trade union and non-profit entrepreneurial organization of the Otavalo artisans and vendors. UNAIMCO is mainly an urban indigenous organization and since the late 1990s a factional force of Pachakutik-Otavalo.

\(^9\) Korovkin et al, 2002: 90-91; Kyle, 2001. However, the author of the present study is rather skeptical towards the usage of the bourgeoisie concept to classify one of the cantonal indigenous sectors that succeeded in improving their socio-economic conditions.

\(^10\) Korovkin et al, 2002: 115-126. The activities of these indigenous intellectuals were characterized more by the strengthening of the indigenous identity than by local commercial expansion.
mobilizations against the white-mestizo authorities. Together with provincial indigenous federations from Chimborazo and Pastaza, FICI played a crucial role in the formation of CONAIE, and it has maintained its role as the main local and provincial organization of indigenous representation in Otavalo, and since 1986 as the provincial filial of CONAIE. It is important to state that the indigenous peasant federation FENOCIN, associated with the Ecuadorian Socialist Party (PSE), did in fact operate in Otavalo. The PSE has been classified as the most important historical political ally of the indigenous movement. Following Tanya Korovkin, FENOCIN had a significant but short-lived presence in Otavalo in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the new generation of indigenous intellectuals that emerged in the canton questioned the demands of the federation with its mystical message of a proletarian revolution and therefore created FICI, which in comparison has been more focused on ethnicity. As for historical electoral participation of the indigenous actors, FICI has categorically rejected elections until the 1990s. Still, indigenous political activists in Otavalo have participated in parties, not only socialist and leftist but also tending centre-right. The group around Mario Conejo was sporadically close to the PSE party since the late 1970s.

It is worth remarking that Ecuador has longer historical traditions of municipal and provincial elections than many of its neighbors. In practice, though, the political leaders at these levels have been politically weak due to lack of economic transfers. It was only with a legislative reform in 1998 that a principle of co-participation with an autonomic transference of 15% of the national budget to the municipalities was established. Often, however, local governments have received less than 15%. With respect to the political-territorial division of authorities, in Ecuador provincial prefects are responsible for social services in the rural sectors, while the municipal mayors are in charge of the urban areas. The dividing lines between urban and rural are often unclear; in fact, mayors and prefects frequently develop projects in sectors beyond their official responsibility, with a view to generating political support.
Local Government and the Dilemmas of Interculturalism

Mario Conejo Maldonado, sociologist and son of commercial artisans, was elected as the first indigenous mayor of Otavalo in 2000. Conejo is without doubt one of the most successful and recognized mayors of Ecuador, and in a few years he has spearheaded institutional, political, economic, social and cultural changes, including the difficult mission of unifying the different ethnic groups in the canton, a project developed under the banner of interculturalism. As an acknowledgement of these efforts on behalf of ethnic and social integration, Otavalo was declared the intercultural capital of Ecuador by Congress in October 2003. Mario Conejo’s strategy to combat clientelism and paternalism has been manifested through popular participation in decision-making processes and the implementation of development projects. Once elected mayor, Conejo revitalized a Strategic Plan of Otavalo (Plan Estratégico de Otavalo). With the participation of citizen groups, including leaders of social sectors, and activities developed in thematic groups, the project is divided into two sub-strategies known as the Otavalo Life Plan (Plan de Vida Otavalo), which is implemented from above, and the Neighbor Workshops (Talleres de vecinos), capacity-building from below. Several development plans emerged rapidly as a result of the work in the thematic groups. In every plan, visionary technicians from the region played protagonist roles, in permanent collaboration with the citizens involved in the local government. The core development plan of the Conejo administration is the 60/40 formula.

We have developed a formula of development that we call ‘the formula of popular participation for development’. It is a 60/40 model. If we are going to fix the streets in an area, the house-owners pay 60% of the costs [the municipality contributes 40%].

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18 The victory of Pachakutik in neighbouring Cotacachi in 1996 was an important factor affecting the conditions of electoral participation and self-confidence among the indigenous political activists in Otavalo, which can be described as a snowball effect in that it was already manifested that indigenous actors indeed could govern.

19 Transparency principles are used, among other things, in processes related to public contracts with entrepreneurs and architects.

20 The actors behind the 60/40 formula emphasize that it is not question of a ‘model’, distancing themselves from other local ‘model democracies’, such as Cotacachi (interviews Conejo and Santillán, Otavalo, 9 Dec. 2004). Galo Santillán is a close mestizo collaborator of Conejo and is currently director of popular participation in the Municipal Government of Otavalo.

21 Conejo, Otavalo, 9 Dec. 2004. In rural areas the citizens contribute 25% of the cost and the municipal government 75%, since the urban population generally has better socio-economic conditions, whereas the rural citizens are more affected by poverty.
The mayor holds that the 60/40 formula has created a sense of responsibility in the citizens at the same time as the legitimacy of the municipality has increased. Nevertheless, there are critical opinions within the indigenous movement about the 60/40 model, holding that it benefits the privileged sectors of society above all and does not work in the poor rural areas. Luis Maldonado, though, recognizes the importance of the municipal government of Conejo and the 60/40 experience:

Obviously, the initiative is very important. That is, I could not say that it does not work. I think that it is one of the most important local governments that exists...Mario has made very interesting things, like the 60/40, to achieve people’s overcoming this image that they should not contribute, to overcome the [culture of] poverty saying that the state should give us everything.22

However, the project of ethnic integration in Otavalo has not evolved without complications and conflicts. Certain factors indicate a social and political division in the cantonal indigenous population that has been reflected politically since before Conejo was ever elected. In the elections of 2000, Conejo encountered rivalry within Pachakutik through the pre-candidature of FICI president Carmen Yamberla, who represented a hard-line faction within CONAIE. In the course of a pre-campaign that was initiated, Pachakutik allied with the indigenous political movement of the evangelical church, Amanta Jatari, for the purpose of joining forces and selecting a common candidate. In this process each candidate was presented by a local organization; Conejo was launched by the urban cultural association Otavalo Kichwa Llacta, and Yamberla by the community organization of Ilumán. In the selection process Yamberla was supported by sectors of the national level of CONAIE and Pachakutik, among others by Nina Pacari.23 CONAIE thus aimed to intervene in the organizational process to support an actor – Yamberla – instead of recognizing the social

22 Maldonado, Ibarra, 31 May 2007. The author is well aware of the fact that Conejo and Maldonado are cousins, although they represent different factions and levels of the indigenous movement and Maldonado has remained in Pachakutik.

23 Nina Pacari is a historical leader of CONAIE and Ecuarunari, and was Minister of Foreign Affairs in the government of Gutiérrez in 2003. Cotacachi mayor Auki Titaña (brother-in-law of Pacari) was one of the evaluators of the pre-campaign of Pachakutik, and he defended and promoted Yamberla in these elections. Ecuarunari (Ezynador Runakunapae Riecharimui) was founded in 1972 and the name signifies ‘Awakening of the Ecuadorian Indians’. Ecuarunari was a key actor in the creation of CONAIE in 1986. Ecuarunari is the regional organization of the Ecuadorian Sierra, and the strongest regional force within CONAIE.
process, i.e. the option of Conejo. However, the final decision gave Conejo the official Pachakutik candidature, and Yamberla left the movement to participate with a temporary organization called *Valle del Amanecer* (the Awakening Valley). The final electoral results proclaimed a triumph for Conejo with 45.95% of the votes, while Yamberla finished in third place with a humiliating 16.51%. Yamberla’s discourse was considered by many citizens to be too focused on ethnicity, while they viewed Conejo as a more moderate option of indigenous leader with urban connections and approval also among mestizo citizens. In retrospect, Yamberla adds other factors that contributed to her election outcome: the fact of being a woman, poor, without a university title and from the rural sector. Likewise, she emphasizes that the opposition of the evangelical church to her candidature had a decisive influence and that important economic sectors of Otavalo backed Conejo. Nina Pacari argues that Conejo won the mayoralty with the support of the urban indigenous citizens and parts of the national leadership of CONAIE. Summing up, in the Pachakutik-Otavalo conflicts of 2000, elements appear related to class, ethnicity, urban/rural and gender divisions, and other social structures, e.g. the church. Signs of division between Conejo and Pachakutik were thus overt years before the mayor’s leaving the movement in 2006.

The principal tension in the indigenous movement was manifest between a strict political agenda at national level and flexible alliances created at the local level, rather than between Pachakutik and FICI/CONAIE. A contradiction emerged in which Pachakutik functioned simultaneously as the platform of Mayor Conejo and as the oppositional political organization of FICI in the canton. Conejo came to municipal power with Pachakutik and the support of the politically organized evangelical Indians, without having a close connection to FICI. It could be assumed that problems emerge for local Pachakutik governments when and if the social movement turns too radical. The tight connection between the political party and the social movement might then affect the conditions of institutionalized politics in such a way that radical demands cannot be carried through

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26 Yamberla, Otavalo, 11 June 2007.
27 Pacari, Quito, 11 July 2007.
28 However, from the late 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s, the group around Conejo was collaborating closely with FICI, among other things through cultural activities and economic contributions (Carlosama, Ibarra, 27 June 2007). There is a particular connection between cultural and political activities in Otavalo. Political activists, both indigenous and mestizo, often devote themselves to cultural activities (music, art, handicraft, poetry, etc.).
institutionally at the local level. Elements related to both class and ethnicity are important to consider behind the conflict. Conejo’s intercultural banner and his aim to govern for all otaveleños were criticized for not giving priority to indigenous needs in poor rural sectors.

The Divorce

Despite the emerging crisis within Pachakutik at national level, Conejo was re-elected in 2004 with 54% of the votes, an increase in popular support compared to the 46% behind his candidature in 2000. Furthermore, it is worth considering that the evangelical indigenous organization decided to leave the alliance with Conejo in these elections and participate through its own movement, Amauta Jatari. The increased support behind Conejo in 2004 indicates that a growing number of mestizo citizens had recognized the political project of the mayor. In this context it should be clarified that Otavalo is not just any municipality for Pachakutik. At the cantonal level it is one of the movement’s most important strongholds in the whole of Ecuador. Many other municipalities where Pachakutik governs have relatively small populations compared to Otavalo; the votes for Conejo in 2004 corresponded to the electoral support of Pachakutik in fourteen other municipalities. From this perspective, the division of Pachakutik in Otavalo and the withdrawal of Conejo and other leaders and representatives of the organization in January 2006 accentuated an already existing crisis within the movement. Pachakutik and CONAIE demanded that Conejo should leave the mayoral post, as they argued, since he was placed there by the indigenous movement. The mayor was accused of being a traitor, opportunist, and controlled by mestizo societal forces. The claim of his resigning did not boast any echo, though, and Conejo remained in office. Although a vacuum of political representation emerged. After a few months of confusion among the supporters of the mayor, a group close to Conejo in June the same year launched the new movement Minga Intercultural.

Already during an interview with Conejo in 2004, a distance concerning his relation to CONAIE and Pachakutik could be perceived, as if the mayor preferred to view Pachakutik more as an electoral apparatus and the indigenous confederation rather as a

29 In comparative research on deliberative democracy in Ecuador and Bolivia, the personal leadership skills of Conejo have been emphasized as decisive for the success of his local government. Van Cott, 2008: 146-151.
31 In Kichwa the word Minga means ‘collective work in communitarian support’ and is a concept full of indigenous symbolism from the perspectives of identification, solidarity and ethnicity.
national organization and not a relevant actor at a local level. He rarely mentioned the political movement which he officially represented – Pachakutik – or the name of any national social programme or international organization, but spoke rather of ‘nosotros/we’, ‘the local government together with the citizens’, ‘the otavaleños’, ‘through the politics of popular participation’, and so forth, to emphasize who the real protagonists of the process really were.32 From the standpoint of Pachakutik and FICI, Maria Castañeda confirms retrospectively the distance between Conejo’s leadership and the indigenous movement:

I do not see him as a leader of the indigenous movement. He is a personality, a rather savable leader, he has good intentions. He has made very good things, but not as a leader of the indigenous movement. As a professional, as we all have seen, he has made an effort. Although, from the perspectives of the principles of the indigenous movement: No! Still, he has done rather interesting things and that is why they support him here, indigenous as well as non-indigenous citizens support him.33

Nina Pacari asserts that the explanation for the rupture was that Conejo had distanced himself from the agenda of CONAIE and Pachakutik and that his conflicts with the rural grassroots had become so acute that the community organizations were about to punish him, but the mayor left the movement before any such sanction had taken place:

Today Mario Conejo does not belong to Pachakutik. Today Mario Conejo does not belong to FICI [sic.]. In addition, [la Minga] * is a local movement, Pachakutik is national, there is room for everybody and it has a structure, an organizational process, a political vision. And it emerged from the initiative of CONAIE.34

As for Pacari’s comparison between Pachakutik and Minga Intercultural from the perspective of national coverage (in Pachakutik ‘there is room for everybody’), former mestizo members of Pachakutik in Otavalo express having felt excluded in that movement. They were called Pachakutik lights, i.e. not real (indigenous) members. Ariruma Kowii Maldonado

33 Castañeda, Otavalo, 8 June 2007. At the time, Castañeda was a candidate for a master’s degree in local development at FLACSO-Quito.
* Pacari did not even want to utter the name of the new movement.
34 Pacari, Quito, 11 July 2007.
suggests that the conflicts in Otavalo clearly illustrate the risks of ethnocentrism, and equally he criticizes the Kichwas who use it as a political weapon to maneuver against Conejo from the ethnic angle. He confirms that they also labeled Conejo *Pachakutik Light*, asserting that he was the leader of the Otavalo mestizos. Mayor Conejo emphasizes that from the moment he took municipal power, his principal opposition and resistance was always from the indigenous sectors: FICI, UNAIMCO and Pachakutik. Further, he argues that the solution for Otavalo was not to be found in a continued sectorization, which was a main argument behind his defection:

The space of Pachakutik was too limited to include all the aspirants. Pachakutik is to 99% an indigenous movement. It started like a vision for everybody, but later, little by little it was transforming into a more indigenous movement. That is not what Otavalo needs. Otavalo requires broad spaces, more participatory and democratic spaces. Facing the opposition that existed within Pachakutik, I took the decision alone to separate, without having discussed my decision with any member of the working team.

The dilemma of ethnically or interculturally based local government was a central factor underlying the division of Pachakutik in Otavalo. However, it should be emphasized that also in FICI and Pachakutik-Otavalo several leaders express consciousness of the intercultural project and of not closing the gates to the participation of non-indigenous citizens. Summing up, the relation between Conejo and Pachakutik from the year 2000 can be classified as a political project of local alliances that from the beginning was marked by tensions and internal conflicts and which concluded with the mayor’s leaving in 2006. From the perspective of the initial idea behind the formation of Pachakutik as an electoral vehicle to form alliances at different governmental levels, the flexibility principle of the movement thus failed in Otavalo, and parts of the explanation of this malfunction can be traced to the

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36 *According to the estimate of Mayor Auki Tituaña in Cotacachi (26 June 2007), the percentage of indigenous representatives in Pachakutik should be between 20% and 25%, speaking about the number of indigenous authorities in the movement.*

36 Conejo, Otavalo, 12 June 2007. The same criticism of increasing ethno-centrism within Pachakutik exists also at the national level. In 2005 a group of mestizo leaders of Pachakutik, among them Virgilio Hernández and Augusto Barrera, left the movement as a protest against this tendency. Both Hernández and Barrera today hold important political positions within the movement of Rafael Correa.

37 Interviews at FICI, Otavalo, with: de la Torre, Yamberla and Campos, 24 Jan. 2008. Fanny Campos has been a (*mestiza*) collaborator in FICI for 14 years and is provincial coordinator of Pachakutik in Imbabura since 2008.
vague frontier between the social and political indigenous movements. There exists a parallel political sphere to Pachakutik, beyond the institutional spaces where it formally operates as an elected authority but in which CONAIE can mobilize against the agenda of the political party. The contradiction consists in their co-existence within one and the same indigenous movement, with more radical demands on the streets than in formal institutions.

During the fieldwork for the study between 2007 and 2009, several (anonymous) indigenous informants in the Otavalo neighborhoods expressed confusion about the situation and asked how it could be possible that Mayor Conejo no longer represented the indigenous movement of Pachakutik. They felt identification with Pachakutik, and the Whipala flag that has become a symbol of the party, and for them it would be extremely difficult to give their votes to a candidate outside Pachakutik. At the same time, other indigenous Otavaleños say that they still identify with Pachakutik but simultaneously manifest support for and approval of Mario Conejo as the municipal leader.

The progress of the indigenous political movement that came to municipal power in 2000 could largely be explained by the gradual socio-economic development of the indigenous citizens, accompanied by a deepening political consciousness and the integration of the movement with mestizos, albeit with deep dividing lines of an ethnic and class nature. The oppositional factions of Pachakutik in Otavalo are indeed characterized by discourses of class and ethnicity, frequently manifested for instance in the discourses against Conejo’s leadership by the vendors and artisans of UNAIMCO, as well as by FICI as representative of the poor rural sectors. The organizational structure of the CONAIE-affiliated FICI has been present and has strengthened the political movement at the cantonal level, but at the same time has operated in opposition to Conejo, both before and after his withdrawal from Pachakutik. Consequently, there has not been a clear FICI/CONAIE-Pachakutik alliance in charge of municipal power in Otavalo, something that is a fundamental reflection of the main contradiction of the study. Different factions – ethnocentric vis-à-vis intercultural tendencies – can be discerned in CONAIE and Pachakutik that cross the boundaries of the two organizations. Hardliners in CONAIE and FICI have also tried to intervene in the local organizational process, supporting Carmen Yamberla in 2000, for example, instead of recognizing the social process behind Conejo.

The organizational structures of Otavalo have shown to be complex, with many contending organizations. The presence of the evangelical indigenous political movement,
with which Conejo was allied until 2004, is only one instance of these organizational structures. The aspect of the social diversity of the canton’s indigenous population is another, related explanatory factor behind this contradiction. Returning to Conejo’s connection with CONAIE, despite his being a co-founder of Pachakutik, he lacks a solid trajectory within the indigenous movement beyond Otavalo and has participated rather in the form of personal association and a local project of alliances. This factor is decisive for understanding the emergence of tensions and direct conflicts with CONAIE and Pachakutik. The probably most important factor of why the intercultural dilemma has been so strongly manifest in Otavalo is the cleavages presented through the strong presence of Indians in urban areas. Conejo’s principal support thus has not been the rural communities, as might have been supposed considering CONAIE’s traditional strength and its relationship with Pachakutik.

**The Correa effect**

With respect to the current national government of Rafael Correa and his Movimiento PAIS, there has generally been approval and support on the part of Conejo and Minga. In the context of national electoral failures of the indigenous movement, and the popular support behind Correa also among indigenous sectors, Korovkin contributes two explanatory factors. One is the intimate historical relationship between the indigenous movement and Leftist parties, a connection that too seldom has been given scholarly attention. The other is traced to the internal crisis within the indigenous movement, chiefly Pachakutik and CONAIE.38 In Otavalo the Minga movement supported Correa in 2006 and in the elections of deputies to the Constitutional Assembly in 2007, Minga tried to achieve an electoral alliance with PAIS (which failed in the last minute). Already during 2007, voices within Pachakutik-Otavalo feared that an electoral race against Conejo would be hard to win if he received support through an alliance with Correa’s PAIS, i.e. confirming the power of the political movement of the president also at the local level. In the upcoming municipal elections in April 2009 39 Conejo faces severe challenges in the realm of popular support. Although by January 25th in 2009, Conejo was officially approved as the pre-candidate for

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39 Municipal and provincial elections were to have been held in October 2008, but since the planned date was too close in time to the constitutional referendum of 28 September 2008, the former were postponed to April 2009.
the mayoralty on the slate of PAIS. Until December of 2008, however, it remained uncertain whether Minga could unify with the PAIS Movement. In this context, Conejo reflects on the historical challenges of the Left:

Well, we have this issue that despite the alliance that failed [between Minga and PAIS] for the Constituyente, we have maintained a dialogue with them. Ever since the Minga movement was formed we have defined that alliances should be a policy of the movement. In this country, what is important is precisely to join forces of the tendencies. The Right has always been more united and the Left always divided. The Correa phenomenon in some way is seen by us as an opportunity to generate processes of unity within the tendency, but with a purpose and perspective of renovation. But the Left has sinned a lot with radicalism, sometimes extremely orthodox, radical, and with very extreme positions, which leads to the loss of perspectives on realities, and revolutionary projects can hinder action and decisions. I believe that the Left should learn how to interpret local, national and international realities, to also be able to provide answers to the problematic situation of society.40

The political movement around Mario Conejo was subsequently pressured to search new alliance partners after the Pachakutik split, and before the elections of 2009 the most attractive option was the popular PAIS Movement. Pachakutik-Otavalo has suffered from factional disputes and organizational division, related not only to Conejo’s withdrawal from the movement, but also to the development of Correa’s political project. In Pachakutik there exists a kind of ‘Correa effect’, signifying that parts of the movement prefer to develop a parallel oppositional political project, whereas others have integrated the Correa alliance. The crisis at the national level of the indigenous movement is thus reflected in Otavalo. Within the national leadership of CONAIE and Pachakutik there emerged critical statements regarding the oppositional position to Correa. During the electoral campaign of 2006, a high number of representatives of the indigenous movement supported Correa. But, as argued by Gilberto Talahua, former national coordinator of Pachakutik; Ecuarunari opposed the alliance and decided to launch CONAIE president Luis Macas: “He was imposed by the leadership of the indigenous movement, disconnected from the feelings of the bases that

40 Conejo, Otavalo, 7 Jan. 2009.
begged for the alliance and which was later reflected in the electoral results”.\textsuperscript{41} One interpretation of the Correa effect in the indigenous movement could be that Correa has taken advantage of a power vacuum and mobilized a kind of cooptation of social organizations that had experienced political crises of representation, for instance the FENOCIN indigenous peasant confederation. Several ex-leaders of Pachakutik have joined Correa’s political movement. Similarly, CONAIE and Pachakutik are forced to reconsider their political priorities. In the more leftist national political context of the Correa administration, the anti-neoliberal dimension may still be the main concern of the movement, but it will not constitute the rallying point of mass-based oppositional politics, at least not if Correa stays on his popular track.

Returning to Otavalo, Imbabura Prefect Gustavo Pareja is one of Conejo’s contenders for the mayoralty in this election. Pareja has previously been associated with the right-wing PRIAN\textsuperscript{42} and PRE\textsuperscript{43} parties, but he was elected prefect in 2000 on the slate of Pachakutik in alliance with Izquierda Democrática/ID. Until late January of 2009, Pareja was promoted as the likely candidate of Pachakutik to the mayoral post in Otavalo. The leadership of FICI emphasized good historical relations between the federation and the prefect, particularly in comparison with FICI’s experiences with mayor Conejo. The division of Pachakutik and the leaving of Conejo had led local indigenous leaders, mainly of FICI, to promote the electoral overthrow of Conejo as the chief objective in this campaign. And, as they argued, Pareja would be the only possible candidate to achieve such an outcome.\textsuperscript{44} This line of reasoning might be considered contradictory since Pareja too left Pachakutik in 2004, and without being called traitor. However, the ethnic perspective is important in this comparison and while Pareja is mestizo (and as anonymous informants argued: “from the mestizo leaders you can expect all kinds of betrayal and still forgive them”), the expectations were so high when an Indian reached maximum local power. Within the indigenous

\textsuperscript{41} El Universo, 26 Oct., 2007, article: “Salvador Quishpe es el nuevo coordinador de Pachakutik”. With respect to the results of the first round of the electoral process and indigenous support of Pachakutik in the communities, even in the communities and cantons where Pachakutik is in the municipal government a crisis of representation in the indigenous movement appears with electoral preferences for other options at the national level, not only Rafael Correa and Alianza País, but also candidates such as Gilmar Gutiérrez (brother of Lúcio) from Partido Sociedad Patriótica/PSP, and Alvaro Noboa of PRIAN (Báez Rivera & Bretón Solo de Zaldívar, 2006; Freidenberg, 2008). In Imbabura Province the candidature of Macas only captured 2.19% of the electoral preferences, Tribunal Supremo Electoral, http://www.tse.gob.ec (accessed 12 Sept. 2007).

\textsuperscript{42} Partido Renovador Institucional de Acción Nacional.

\textsuperscript{43} Partido Roldosista Ecuatoriano.

\textsuperscript{44} Interviews in Otavalo with; Campos, 9 Jan. and Yamberla, 16 Jan. 2009.
movement there was therefore a higher tolerance level towards Pareja. As for the at that time possible Pachakutik-Pareja alliance, María Castañeda suggests another, partly self-skeptical, aspect of the electoral scenarios of Pachakutik and the contradictory local-national tensions it experiences as a political organization. As she argues, the indigenous rural sectors might be a relatively easy target for populist and paternalist political movements and leaders, a sense of ‘going with the winners’. Notwithstanding, in the last minute, when all other political movements expect Pachakutik already had presented their candidates, the indigenous party chose to participate alone, i.e. there was no alliance with Pareja. José Manuel Quimbo, former president of UNAIMCO, was launched for the mayoralty. In a recent conversation with the author, Quimbo recognized that the political conjuncture with the high popularity of Correa was really not unsurpassed for Pachakutik, and he equally emphasized certain challenges of the indigenous movement:

In the structures of the indigenous movement, particularly at cantonal level, there is a drought of political and ideological formation. To the extent that during the course of four Pachakutik congresses, we have never spoken about the principles, the philosophy or the political project that Pachakutik provides as an alternative force that could emerge to model the meeting between the values and positive things of the Occidental world and the Andean culture. The proposal of Pachakutik is not to enter a communitarian democracy, no-no-no. We aim at searching for a third way in which the real values of interculturalism are nourished.

Conclusions
This study clearly illustrates the importance of approaching the local level in studies of party-movement relations and alliance-building in organizations based on ethnicity. Significant elements to consider analytically might appear more clearly locally than at the more abstract national level. With a main focus on the actors at local level, I have similarly demonstrated that an organizational complexity exists at the local level that is not palpable in the national relationship between Pachakutik and CONAIE. Most studies on the Ecuadorian indigenous movement state that its strength comes from below, from the communities. This power from the grassroots should not always be taken as self-evident, however. The complexity at

the cantonal level is frequently hidden, both in academic studies and in political discourses, behind common statements referring to the power of the communities and grassroots organization. However, the analysis of CONAIE at the municipal level has proved to be difficult in some respects, since the confederation is mainly national, even if its official base structure is in the communities.

Despite Otavalo’s having such a high percentage of indigenous population, Pachakutik did not succeed in establishing a solid movement around the mayor. There are many organizations competing for indigenous representation, with rural-urban divisions and Indians present in practically all social sectors. The Pachakutik alliance around Mayor Conejo lasted until early 2006, but from the first moment, the relationship between the group around Conejo and the oppositional factions of the ‘indigenous party’ was characterized by conflicts and internal tensions, frequently manifested in terms of interculturalism, ethnicity and class. The tight and unclear boundary between CONAIE and Pachakutik affected the conditions of carrying through politics in the local government. The development of the local government in Otavalo has thus not depended for its functioning on the organizational strength of the principal social movement (CONAIE). More important was a rather loosely arranged network between the local government and citizens from different mainly urban sectors, crossing the ethnic boundaries. The combination of the extra-institutional strategies of CONAIE with the institutionalized actions of Pachakutik as a recognized actor within the formal political system requires a renegotiation of the indigenous identity. From the ethnic angle the dilemma thus consists in Pachakutik’s being officially intercultural and pluri-ethnic, whereas CONAIE, as stated, is a pluri-cultural indigenous organization. Returning to the reasoning of the Pachakutik effect in the Ecuadorian indigenous movement; in the situation in which Pachakutik reaches local political power, the crucial quandary emerges the moment the indigenous Pachakutik mayor begins governing also for the non-indigenous sectors. The conflict and break up in Otavalo illustrates that the intercultural dilemma was crucial behind the division of Pachakutik and the creation of Minga Intercultural. Besides, the local implications of the development of the political movement of President Correa are clearly manifested in Otavalo, with Conejo running for re-election on the slate of Movimiento PAIS, whereas Pachakutik is dealing with the challenge of being a Left-wing oppositional actor in a political climate dominated by the popularity of the Leftist movement of Correa.
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* Sympathizer, but not member of Pachakutik.