

Articulating Rights of Nature and Degrowth: Proposals Around Mar Menor

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Abstract This article calls for deepening the articulation between Rights of Nature (RoN) and degrowth. First, a historical overview identifies ecofeminism, *Buen Vivir*, and Green Legal Theory as areas of already existing connection. Despite tensions, we propose four promising intersections: multispecies conviviality; commoning; temporalisation of limits; and more-than-human care. Finally, we explore this articulation thinking with our fieldwork around Mar Menor, Europe's first ecosystem with subjective rights. Specifically, RoN could enable to situate degrowth within ecosystems, while degrowth may inspire institutional design to materialise RoN.

Keywords Rights of Nature. Degrowth. Mar Menor. Social-ecological transformation. Ecofeminism. Buen Vivir. Conviviality. Commons. Limits. Temporalities. Care. Legal personhood. Institutional design. Green Legal Theory. Multispecies.

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1 Introduction

Both Rights of Nature (RoN) and degrowth are attempts to bring about radical socio-ecological transformations which, in recent years, have gained steam and prominence in academia, in civil society (Putzer, Cook, Pollock 2025) and even in national and international policy circles such as the UN Harmony with Nature programme (UN 2022). On the one hand, there have been major national implementations of RoN such as the Constitution of Ecuador (2008) or the recognition of legal personhood of the Te Urewera Forest, Whanganui River (2017) and Taranaki Maunga Mountain in New Zealand and the saltwater lagoon Mar Menor in Spain (2022). On the other hand, also degrowth has been taken up as a serious policy option as reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) discuss degrowth policies and pathways as ways to tackle the climate crisis (e.g. IPCC 2022). Furthermore, the governments of New Zealand and Scotland and cities such as Amsterdam, while not embracing degrowth, have decentred growth as the goal of economic policy-making and instead adopted concepts such as ‘wellbeing economy’ and ‘doughnut economy’.

Besides calls for engagement (e.g., Escobar 2015; Tănăsescu 2022), there are only some rather short common discussions, such as by Parrique (2024; 2025) or Richter (2017; 2025). Ecofeminist thinkers have discussed both already in 1993 (Mies, Shiva 2014). Later, a number of scholars have brought degrowth in conversation with RoN, insofar as both are part of *Buen Vivir* and post-development thought from *Abya Yala* (Latin America) (e.g. Acosta, Brand 2017). In post-development discourses, both feature prominently as parts of discussions about a pluriverse of alternatives to the euro-modern one-world-world (Kothari et al. 2019). Yet, these conversations remain rather limited, and the core of the respective discourses separated. For example, in two recent handbooks containing articles by many key degrowth thinkers, RoN were mentioned once (Easton, Hebrón 2024) and twice (Nelson 2024) respectively, without substantial engagement. Reciprocally, in two recently edited volumes on RoN, degrowth is not mentioned at all (Ruales et al. 2024; Rodríguez-Garavito 2024).

This article attempts to prepare the ground and offer first steps to close this gap by bringing these two movements into closer conversation. We first give a short introduction to degrowth and RoN and review the limited literature that discusses both. In the main part of the paper, we flesh out the proximities and tensions that already exist between RoN and degrowth, while acknowledging that we cannot fully account for the plurality of these two rich discourses. We then introduce four concepts that we think are fertile meeting ground for RoN and degrowth. Finally, we show the relevance of

thinking degrowth and RoN together through the case of Mar Menor and point to future research directions.

2 Historical and Conceptual Proximities

2.1 Close Roots, Different Directions

While RoN and degrowth originated independently from one another, they were both first explicitly formulated in the 1970s as critiques and alternatives to a capitalist model deemed deeply unsustainable. However, these critiques were organised along different lines. Originating in close relation to ecological economics, degrowth emerged as primarily economic and materialist, focusing on the impossibility of infinite growth and therefore on the necessity of a shrinkage of productive activity (Gorz 1972; Meadows et al. 1972). RoN appeared initially as a primarily ethical critique of the reduction of natural entities to mere resources for human use without intrinsic value, and called for their recognition as subjects of rights. Nevertheless, both movements and discourses pluralised into sprawling networks that showcased convergences.

The degrowth discourse quickly extended beyond quantitative arguments towards a more qualitative critique aiming at emancipating the social imaginary from the supposed necessity of growth. Specifically, critiques of alienation engendered by an instrumental relationship to the world have brought it closer to critiques emanating from RoN (Amar 1973). In this wake, the degrowth movement, originating at the heart of Western modernity, increasingly sought alternatives in non-Western thought. In particular, it explored decolonial perspectives, both in the sense of liberating (neo-)colonised countries from the material control exerted by ‘developed’ countries through unequal exchange as well as in decolonising the modern Western imaginary (Latouche 2003). It also increasingly engaged with feminist thought and the commons (see § 4.2 and § 4.4). Timothée Parrique, to mention just one of the many definitions proposed today, attests to the inclusive and open nature of the concept: “the downscaling of production and consumption to reduce ecological footprints, planned democratically in a way that is equitable while securing well-being” (2025, 12).

RoN traces to the 1970s, with American jurist Christopher Stone (2010) arguing for natural entities to be represented in court as damaged parties that can receive reparations. Around the same time, German-Chilean lawyer Godofredo Stutzin developed the idea to recognise RoN in the Latin American discourse (1976). Aiming at transforming legal and political institutions, RoN has

developed in relation to other movements seeking to move beyond anthropocentrism, such as environmental ethics or deep ecology. In academia and through organisations like the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF) and Pachamama Foundation, RoN spread internationally. Since the 2000s, in conversation with Latin American decolonial and post-extractivist perspectives, RoN hybridised with indigenous cosmovisions. After several U.S. municipal ordinances recognised them in the 2000s, RoN and *Pacha Mama* gained constitutional recognition in Ecuador (2008), followed by a universal civil-society led declaration of RoN in Cochabamba, Bolivia (2010). As of January 2026, the EcoJurisprudence Monitor reported 649 RoN initiatives across 58 countries (Putzer, Cook, Pollock 2025). Yet, until recently, RoN had remained relatively marginal in Europe. However, in September 2022, Spain's Mar Menor lagoon became Europe's first natural entity recognised as a rights-bearing subject (Vicente Giménez 2023). Like degrowth, RoN form a diverse movement with sometimes contradictory currents. For example, Sólón (2018) distinguishes four streams: indigenous, scientific, ethical, and juridical, while Tănăsescu (2022) contrasts an eco-theological current (concerned with sacralised Nature as a whole, as in Ecuador) and a pragmatic current (attached to specific socio-ecosystems, as in New Zealand).

As both movements diversified and matured, particularly three confluent streams became apparent in the literature: Ecofeminism, *Buen Vivir*, and Green Legal Theory.

2.2 Confluent Streams

2.2.1 Ecofeminism

Emerging in the 1970s, ecofeminists criticised unlimited growth, the systematic domination of women within patriarchal capitalism, and the destruction of ecological cycles as interwoven phenomena. Although it echoes many older, non-Western ideas, the term 'ecofeminism' was introduced in 1974 by Françoise d'Eaubonne. While it does not invoke the discourse of RoN, it links the capitalist appropriation of the fertility of soils and of women as two forms of violence against the reproductive sphere. Two decades later, the book *Ecofeminism*, published by Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies, clearly expresses the necessary relation between the critique of growth and RoN:

For humans to protect life on Earth and their own future we need to become deeply conscious of the rights of Mother Earth [...]. Our world has been structured by capitalist patriarchy around fictions

and abstractions like ‘capital’, ‘corporations’ and ‘growth’[...]. We need to get grounded again – in the Earth, her diversity, and her living processes [...]. (Mies, Shiva 2014, 21)

As evidence of a continuing convergence, Laure Pérez Prieto and Mónica Domínguez-Serrano (2014) proposed to articulate feminism, degrowth and *Buen Vivir*, including RoN. They call to develop a ‘Feminist Ecological Economy’ that respects human physicality as well as the reproductive capacities of ecosystems.

2.2.2 *Buen Vivir*

In the 2010s, degrowth and RoN discourses have intersected around *Buen Vivir*. Originating from Latin American indigenous movements in the 1920s, *sumak kawsay* (translated as *Buen Vivir* or ‘Good Life’) offered an alternative to the ongoing coloniality of the postcolonial state and Western growth-based ideas of development. It gained prominence in the 1990s-2000s, in social movements as well as in Ecuador’s constitution of 2008. Indigenous actors, allied with transnational organisations (Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature (GARN), CELDF), were instrumental in incorporating RoN into the constitution. In *Abya Yala*, *Buen Vivir* and RoN both form part of intercultural post-development and post-extractivism discourses that promote plural indigenous onto-epistemologies, common property regimes, and non-extractive relations to nature against capitalism and productivism (Acosta, Brand 2017).

Several authors have directly connected degrowth and RoN through *Buen Vivir*. Gudynas (2015) notes *Buen Vivir* rejects the predetermined historical linearity enshrined in progress and growth. Instead, it defends community-based and non-materialist ideas of welfare while promoting nondualist ecological relations. For that reason, Escobar (2015) argues *Buen Vivir* and RoN are less anthropocentric than degrowth, despite the latter’s ecological roots, while Gudynas (2015) thinks of *Buen Vivir*’s as more ambitious in aiming towards a change in cosmovisions with regard to the relation of society and nature. In a similar vein, Brand (2015) argues that post-extractivism’s critique of Western, rationalistic, binary understandings of nature can provide an important impulse for the degrowth debate. Richter (2025) notes degrowth’s anthropocentrism has led to its rejection by some Global South environmental justice activists, arguing degrowth has inadequately engaged with the nature/culture constructions inherent in ecological economics. By recognising non-human agency and interests, she argues, RoN can help degrowth overcome such nature-culture binaries rooted in

modernity and coloniality in favour of embracing plural, relational ontologies.

Parrique considered RoN and the concept of *Buen Vivir* to be part of the “societal project toward a post-growth economy” to live “in harmony with nature” (2025, 164). In particular, RoN appear to be a way of politicising natural entities rather than reducing them to mere economic resources. It thus allows degrowth to move away from a reductionist and quantitative view of life and instead consider other-than-humans as partners in a natural contract within a terrestrial community.

2.2.3 Green Legal Theory

Green Legal Theory outlines another possible bridge between the two fields. According to this school of thought, traditional environmental law, while aiming to stop the detrimental consequences of economic activity, ended up legitimising capitalism through sustainable development and ‘green growth’ that fails to address the core tension between growth and ecosystem conservation. Some advocate for post-growth law take inspiration from RoN and indigenous rights (Dufour, Hiez, Vanhonnaeker 2024). For example, Alexander (2010) argues that the modern property regimes prioritise economic efficiency and growth, making them ecologically predatory. Their reform, he proposes, could unite degrowth and Earth Jurisprudence, though he doesn’t address RoN, a key component of Earth Jurisprudence. Similarly, Garver argues RoN need to include degrowth to be effective:

if RoN or similar rights are adopted within the dominant global paradigm of growth insistence, [...] the risk is high that the growth-insistent paradigm will overwhelm or at least dilute those rights. (Garver 2020, 105)

Without degrowth, just as was the case with environmental law previously, RoN risks remaining largely unenforced.

Nevertheless, preliminary discussions in Ecofeminism, *Buen Vivir* and Green Legal Theory have not led to a systematic integration of the two fields. While the majority of works and initiatives on RoN include a critique of growth, degrowth is rarely mentioned, and degrowth authors are rarely cited. Conversely, while the majority of works on degrowth call for a transformation of our relationship with nature, relatively few call for the recognition of RoN.

3 Tensions, Gradually Overcome

RoN and degrowth did not emerge without tensions between their core concepts and have sometimes diverged. Yet it seems that these tensions have weakened over time, paving the way for a more systematic synthesis.

The scarcity of references to RoN in degrowth handbooks reflects a more general trend in mainstream degrowth literature, which rarely explores the theme of RoN. Neither Tim Jackson (2011), nor Kallis (2017) and Saitō (2024) discuss it. In recent years, with RoN becoming more prominent, some authors started mentioning it (Hickel 2022; Taibo 2022), but most often on an *ad hoc* basis and without in-depth analysis. And while most work on the concept of RoN includes criticism of growth, we didn't find any of it explicitly engaging with degrowth. To explain this lack of reciprocal articulation, we discuss three tensions.

The first tension is simply that the two fields of research, although they have converged over time, emerged within distinct core disciplines: economics, and in particular ecological economics for degrowth; law and legal philosophy for RoN. However, the diversity of degrowth and RoN movements quickly transcended these disciplinary barriers, touching on philosophy, ethics, and plural indigenous and decolonial thought. Even though both fields of research have grown in importance and expanded their disciplinary reach, it still appears that RoN remain relatively unexplored from an economic perspective and, to a lesser extent, degrowth from a legal perspective.

A second tension derives from the discourses' different geographical origins: degrowth primarily concerns Global North countries whose economies exceed ecological limits, while RoN developed more intensely in post-colonial Global South contexts, in dialogue with indigenous worldviews. These different geographic anchors have fostered ontological divergences. RoN, sometimes referred to as 'legal animism' (Hermitte and de Toledo 2021), often criticise a Western ontology that sets apart free human beings from a mechanical nature (O'Donell et al. 2020). By recognising the rights of ecosystems, RoN stand in opposition to a purely instrumental and economic view. In contrast, degrowth first arose in relation to quantitative ecological analysis – the Club of Rome's call to halt growth, based on advanced computer modelling, exemplifies this. Yet, this ontological divergence has weakened, particularly since degrowth transcended quantitative critiques of growth to embrace cultural critique, aiming at new social imaginaries (Amar 1973; Latouche 2003). Moreover, the geographical divergence weakens as RoN have spread across all five continents, and degrowth is articulating with post-development discourses and movements in the Global South.

A third tension concerns differing political strategies. Degrowth emerged as a critical field that targeted the hegemony of growth, with the term itself serving as a direct challenge to the ideology it seeks to deconstruct. By contrast, RoN are framed positively: they aim to recognise new legal subjects and integrate other-than-human entities as partners. into political and legal life. While degrowth has since expanded to include constructive proposals and RoN imply curbing extractive and excessive property rights, the two discourses still tend to point in somewhat opposing directions. To some, RoN can appear naive, advocating for new rights without addressing the capitalist economic infrastructure that underpins extractive practices. For eco-Marxist degrowth thinkers, RoN risk remaining at a mere superstructural level as they focus on culture and law rather than on the transformation of society's metabolic relations with nature. Foster (2021), who adopts degrowth with reservations, argues RoN repeat human rights' mistake by referencing vast, abstract communities rather than concrete political ones and neglect the concrete material relations underpinning political structures. However, this criticism has to be qualified considering that many RoN initiatives are situated in specific socio-ecological systems as in Whanganui (2017) or Mar Menor (2022), rather than enacting transcendent Nature.

Overall, the historical, geographical, ontological, and strategic tensions that may have distanced RoN and degrowth no longer seem substantial to us.

4 Between RoN and Degrowth: Bridging Concepts

Building on the explored existing connections (see § 2) and the discussion on seeming tension between the discourses (see § 3), we now move to proposing four bridging concepts that may facilitate denser articulations in the future.

4.1 Multispecies Conviviality

Conviviality as a concept has long been at the core of the degrowth debate (see Vetter, Festerer 2024) and is based on the idea of "individual freedom realised in personal interdependence" (Illich 1973, 11). This notion of interdependence, as well as conviviality's anti-utilitarian resistance to the reduction of the world to mere objects for human use, makes it a fruitful meeting point for RoN and degrowth - especially when extended towards "multispecies conviviality" (van Dooren, Rose 2012). Some authors already make that connection: Parrique (2025) associates the politicisation of natural entities through RoN

with the prospect of multispecies conviviality, while Adloff (2023) views RoN as an already existing way of recognising multispecies convivialities. However, neither of them developed these ideas in detail. Conviviality also lies at the heart of Büscher and Fletcher's (2020) proposal for a post-capitalist and non-dualist conservation.

Multispecies conviviality could help to clarify the ambiguous notion of nature implied by RoN. As an alternative to the universalist notion of nature that has dominated Western modernity, it posits a multitude of living forms in complex interaction. It appears to be a useful complement to ecological justice, an important concept for both RoN and degrowth. On the one hand, multispecies conviviality could thus enable an interpretation of RoN not through 'mononaturalism' – nature conceived as a single, immutable natural order that can inspire reactionary appropriations – but through 'multi-naturalism' (Lorimer 2012): a search for dynamic equilibriums that allow the interests of many forces and species, including humans, to be aligned. On the other hand, multispecies conviviality could enable degrowth thinking to more consistently include the more-than-human as an active participant in its thinking about political alternatives and environmental justice.

4.2 More-Than-Human Commons & Commoning

Commoning and the commons has similarly been crucial in degrowth (Dengler, Lang 2022; Vetterer, Festerer 2024), while recently, there have also been attempts to combine them with RoN (Degens 2022). The connection between these discourses and the concept of the commons is not surprising, given that both have developed critiques of private property rights, which are considered excessive and too unrestricted in capitalist societies. Here again, the idea of extending the commons to the more-than-human prepares the ground for a fertile meeting of degrowth and RoN.

There are broadly two major ways to understand the commons. Institutional economics views the commons as common-pool resources maintained and managed by complex community-based systems that guarantee their sustainable use. As such, commons offer an alternative to both the state and the market (Ostrom 2015). They call for the deconstruction of the bundle of rights crystallised in property rights (in particular *usus*, *abusus*, and *fructus*) in order to distribute them more equitably. Yet, in this view, natural entities remain resources and not subjects of rights.

Alternatively, commons can be conceived not primarily as goods and rules but as a social practice: commoning (Bollier, Helfrich 2019). Such a perspective allows for recognising non-human actors as necessary partners that are always already involved in the

interdependent and relational practices of commoning (Weber 2016). With regard to RoN, Degens argues that recognising RoN may change the rules and claims in commons arrangements by facilitating the recognition of non-human nature as an active stakeholder in the commons (Degens 2022). Natural entities are not anymore objects but subjects of rights in the commons through legal relationships that are more subtle and reciprocal than those in modern property law. Kahui and Cullinane (2019) even interpret the law that recognises the legal personhood of the Whanganui river as recognising an ecosystem commons.

Beyond these limited first encounters, there is significant potential for further mutual learning: the rich literature on the commons and the many already existing practical experiences could serve as a valuable reservoir for the institutional design of RoN, while degrowth's strong engagement with the commons can be extended to deeper more-than-human perspectives via RoN. Conversely, the commons question and frequently decentre the role of the state, while the state is considered pivotal in promoting economic transformation in some degrowth approaches and appears as the guarantor of RoN by exercising its monopoly to violence. A deeper engagement with the commons may help to develop RoN proposals that are less dependent on the state in enforcing and enabling the realization of rights.

4.3 Temporalisation of Limits

Ecofeminist thinking has identified another bridge between RoN and degrowth that deserves to be explored further: their relationships with time. As early as 1993, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva (2014) suggested a significant convergence between degrowth and RoN regarding temporality: RoN are systematically denied because the infinite growth assumed by capitalism disrupts the regeneration cycles of ecosystems. In contrast, non-capitalist communities and women in caregiving roles take greater responsibility for the often slow rhythms of regeneration. This relationship to time is also a relationship to limits: the natural, regenerative rhythms of humans and non-humans appear as limits that are denied by capitalism.

The relationship to time and limits is obvious when it comes to degrowth. Early formulations called for an urgent slow-down of the productive metabolism to avoid an otherwise inevitable catastrophe (Gorz 1972; Georgescu-Roegen 1995). Proposals for degrowth have thus often been intertwined with calls for deceleration (Saitō 2024; Parrique 2025). Similarly, many authors writing about RoN mention the structural incompatibilities between the linear acceleration of societies and the cycles of nature, and the rhythmical

incompatibilities between the short timeframes of the economy and the deep timeframes of nature (Acosta, Brand 2017).

Rosa (2019) argues capitalist society's technical, social, and existential acceleration creates a mismatch between economic demands and natural rhythms. This acceleration converts resonant human-nature relationships, where both are mutually transformed in interaction, into alienating ones. Though Rosa doesn't address RoN and might critique their potential 'bureaucratisation of nature', they could translate particular natural rhythms and limits into a politically understandable language. As human rights enable non-instrumental human relationships, RoN could foster new resonant relationships with nature, freed from growth and acceleration imperatives.

RoN declarations often mention the obligation to respect ecological cycles in order to allow them to sustain and regenerate themselves. These rhythms appear as the temporal dimension of ecological limits to be respected, mostly by restricting certain human activities. Thus the rights of humans are limited by certain rights that are more-than-human. This is what prompts Parrique to recognise RoN as a way of limiting property rights for a degrowth transformation (2024). In a different vein, Richter (2025) argues that by complementing ecological limits and social limits to growth, RoN could help degrowth recognise relational limits to growth emerging from worldviews that see humans as part of and dependent on the more-than-human world, thus inhibiting extractivism and destruction.

Degrowth and RoN ultimately raise complementary questions regarding time and limits. RoN could help to clarify and situate the global and abstract limits of degrowth, which are sometimes perceived as arbitrary and top-down, by replacing them with localised and living limits. In other words, it could help to situate and temporalise limits as rhythms and cycles which maintain the regenerative capacities that of the living world.

4.4 Care in More-Than-Human Worlds

Care is one of the key concepts of feminist thought and has become crucial to the degrowth discourse through ecofeminism (Paulson, Saave, Mookerjee 2024). Famously defined by Tronto and Fisher as "everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair <our world> so that we can live in it as well as possible" (1990, 40), care has been increasingly thought in a posthumanist fashion to extend to more-than-human worlds (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). Earlier, Mies and Shiva (2014) pointed to the responsibility of the growth-oriented capitalist system in the devaluation of care work necessary for social and ecological reproduction. Their ecofeminist thinking calls for a theory of care that goes beyond simple relationships between humans

to include the more-than-human. Based on this tradition, degrowth scholars envision a society where care work towards both human and more-than-human nature is revalued and recentred to the core of economic activity, often in relation to commoning (Dengler, Lang 2022).

The debate on the relation of care and RoN is more ambiguous. Ghijssels (2023) proposes relational values that concern meaningful human-nature relationships and argues they are expressed in care and respect for nature. Just as Magallanes (2018), she analyses that values such as care can be coded into RoN laws, e.g., in New Zealand. Similarly, Bezerra Guimarães (2023) presents RoN as both based on and encouraging care for life and nature. In contrast, Marshall (2019) presents RoN as an environmental ideology that cannot meaningfully capture indigenous relations of care to the country and may even impede their practice.

Crucially, this last point shows that care is never innocent but always entails the question of who cares, what to care for and in what ways. Despite these words of caution, we argue that RoN innovations may foster relations of care in our more-than-human worlds and that this deserves further research and experimentation. From this perspective, RoN can be interesting for degrowth scholars working on institutions that promote a care-full economy and society. Reversely, RoN scholars may learn from degrowth's materialist analysis of care relations in growth-based economies.

5 Articulating RoN and Degrowth in the Field: The Case of Mar Menor

We are writing this article next to Mar Menor, as part of a series of fieldwork carried out since January 2024. Ethnographically following the institutionalisation of the rights of Mar Menor we found this field to be the ideal place in which to illustrate our argument and the bridging concepts we proposed. These reflections have greatly benefited from multiple conversations with a variety of people of Mar Menor basin – lawyers, activists, farmers, hydrogeologists, etc. Drawing on the philosophy of fieldwork (Vollaire 2017) and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), our approach is to engage with the field not as an object of study, but as a living, inhabited place with which to think [fig. 1].

Mar Menor, the largest saltwater lagoon in the Western Mediterranean, has faced an ecological catastrophe in recent decades. When the eutrophication crisis of the lagoon culminated in two mass die-offs of lagoon life (in 2019 and 2021) a historic citizen movement collected 640,000 signatures for a successful popular legislative initiative (ILP) that declared Mar Menor a subject of rights

in 2022 (Ley 19/2022¹ below referred to as ‘the Law’): the lagoon became the first ecosystem in Europe with subjective rights and legal personhood (Vicente Giménez 2023).

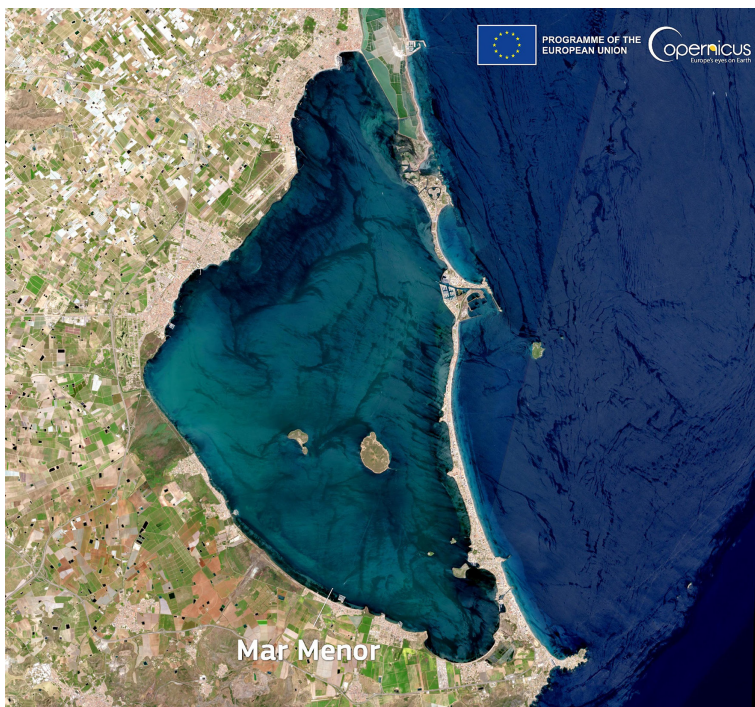


Figure 1 European Union, Copernicus Sentinel-2 imagery of the Mar Menor, 2024. Satellite imagery, 4280 × 4060. Mar Menor, Copernicus, Spain. <https://www.copernicus.eu/en/media/image-day-gallery/mar-menor-risk-oxygen-depletion>, open data

The law recognises the rights to existence and natural evolution, protection, conservation and restoration (Article 2, also other references to the Law below). It furthermore establishes a tutelage that is to represent the lagoon (Article 3). Lastly, it allows anyone to take legal action on behalf of the lagoon (Article 6). Following a challenge to the law by the far-right party Vox before the Constitutional Court, the law was finally upheld in November 2024

1 Ley 19/2022, de 30 de septiembre, para el reconocimiento de personalidad jurídica a la laguna del Mar Menor y su cuenca, Pub. L. No. Ley 19/2022, BOE-A-2022-16019 135131.

with the court recognizing a paradigm shift in environmental law from “antropocentrismo” to “ecocentrismo moderado”.²

5.1 Degrowth and the Mar Menor Law

Even if the Law does not explicitly mention degrowth, some of its main proponents recognise a link between degrowth and RoN. For example, in an interview, legal philosopher Teresa Vicente, one of the faces of the struggle for the lagoon’s rights argued,

I believe that Western society, which dominates the world, is not prepared for the distribution of resources and degrowth and, ultimately, for respecting the limits of the ecosystem that have been exceeded with the current model of development.³

The law itself opens up potential prospects for degrowth. Article 2 details the right to protection as follows: “the right to protection implies limiting, stopping and not authorising activities that pose a risk or harm to the ecosystem”.⁴ This is reinforced by Article 7, describing the obligations of public administrations to “prohibit or limit the introduction of organisms and organic and inorganic material that could permanently alter the biological heritage of Mar Menor”.⁵ This prohibitive force of the law is not unique to RoN, but the law is notable for its emphasis on limits and prohibition based on the interpretation of fundamental rights in the lagoon.

Around Mar Menor, the harmful activities to be limited are primarily related to industrial agriculture, responsible for the main problem of the lagoon: nitrogen saturated run-off from industrial fertilisers, while other sources of pollution such as phosphates, heavy metals or pesticides play a smaller but not negligible role (Mas Hernández 2025). Even though the proposal for degrowth is certainly not unanimously supported by the many signatories of the Mar Menor ILP, several activists argue that RoN require degrowth. For example, one activist told us: “Now with the paradigm shift, [...] we

2 Corte Constitucional de España (20 de noviembre de 2024). Sentencia 142/2024. BOE no. 311, de 26 de diciembre de 2024, 14.

3 “La sociedad occidental que domina el mundo creo que no está preparada para la distribución de los recursos y el decrecimiento y, en definitiva, para respetar los límites del ecosistema que han sido sobrepasados con el actual modelo de desarrollo” (Vicente 2020; Unless otherwise stated all translations are by the Authors).

4 “El derecho a la protección implica limitar, detener y no autorizar aquellas actividades que supongan un riesgo o perjuicio para el ecosistema”.

5 “Prohibir o limitar la introducción de organismos y material orgánico e inorgánico que puedan alterar de manera definitiva el patrimonio biológico del Mar Menor”.

need to look at a third phase, which would be a bit more complicated, involving a pullback. [...] We need to make an economic pullback. (Q: a degrowth? – Yes” (Interview 18/02/2025).⁶ Also, Alianza Mar Menor (AMARME), one of the main organisations fighting for the rights of the lagoon, has signed a Spanish degrowth declaration that in turn makes a reference to RoN (Más Allá del Crecimiento 2025).

5.2 Situating Degrowth Through RoN: The Mar Menor Law and the Temporalisation of Limits

Another conversation with local activists allowed us to consider Mar Menor’s rights with regard to the temporalisation of limits. While his friend Sergio argued that degrowth is fundamental, Manuel, a retired chemistry teacher and biology enthusiast, preferred the concept of deceleration: “It is not the problem that humans affect nature”, he argues, “but the rate of change, the sheer speed of predation and extraction”. “The Mar Menor”, he follows, “has a right to slowness, to deceleration” (22/01/2026).⁷ This reflection inspires a finer, place-based interpretation of degrowth as the challenge facing Mar Menor go beyond reducing material flows in absolute terms and include the deceleration of their rates and rhythm.

Indeed, the Mar Menor disaster has disrupted its rhythms and timelines. Mar Menor, like every ecosystem, is dynamic and always changing. In fact, the origins of the lagoon date ‘only’ 18,000 years back when La Manga, the strip of land separating the lagoon from the Mediterranean, was formed (Mas Hernández 2025). For a long time, human transformations – such as salt works, traditional fishing or terraced dry-land agriculture – remained slow, with limited or sometimes even positive impacts on the ecosystem. Changes accelerated radically in the second half of the twentieth century. Coastal construction boom, open-pit mining, and particularly export-oriented industrial agriculture violently transformed the landscape and its metabolism. While terraced dry-land agriculture favoured infiltration, water now rushes down towards the lagoon. Because of these conditions, DANAs (episodes of torrential rainfall) have triggered eutrophication and algae blooms that led to mass die-offs in Mar Menor.

⁶ “Ahora, con este cambio de paradigma, [...] tenemos que considerar una tercera fase, que sería un poco más complicada y que implicaría un retroceso. [...] Tenemos que llevar a cabo un retroceso económico. (P: ¿un decrecimiento?) – Sí”.

⁷ “El problema no es que los seres humanos afecten a la naturaleza sino el ritmo del cambio, la velocidad vertiginosa de la depredación y la explotación. El Mar Menor tiene derecho a la lentitud, a la desaceleración”.

Recognising Mar Menor's rights could enable localised, temporally-specific justification for sectoral degrowth, targeting specific harmful material flows rather than general economic contraction. It adapts degrowth to particular socio-ecological communities, focusing on respecting specific ecological limits rather than only planetary boundaries, making it more relatable to local inhabitants. This intersection suggests ecosystem-focused degrowth that frees ecological capacities from harmful economic pressures, while offering a strategic advantage as it enables a positive framing: not as restricting economic activity but as liberating ecosystem activity and enhancing the lagoon's living power and flourishing potential (Parrique 2025).

5.3 Mar Menor Law, Care and Multi-Species Conviviality

The case of Mar Menor shows the difficulty of any reference to any stable 'natural order', although the concept is mentioned in Article 2. It has been so thoroughly transformed that it cannot go back to a former state, as both activists and scientists readily admit. According to more recent ecological theories, this 'natural order' can only be interpreted as a meta-stable order, driven by the intermingling of a wide variety of species with diverse interests.

An analysis which focuses on the speed and quality of change rather than change itself, allows for a more flexible understanding of the rights of Mar Menor. It avoids the criticism levelled at RoN for postulating a stable 'natural order' that never existed, and which is increasingly at odds with rapidly changing ecosystems. In this sense, RoN would not aim to preserve a petrified order, impossible in any case in the Anthropocene/Capitalocene, but rather to promote a politics of time and deceleration that is sensitive to the variety of species and rhythms of regeneration coexisting to constitute Mar Menor. In fact, since the recognition of the rights of Mar Menor, the concrete reality of discussions on the watershed has not been oriented towards eliminating human activities, but rather towards controlling the most negative flows and attempting to regulate these flows over time: not only reducing illegal irrigation, but also building storm reservoirs to limit water inflows in the event of cold drops. What the right to regeneration in the law means in practice is thus not only a scientific question of returning to a conservation baseline, but also a political question of enabling and caring for multispecies flourishing in a changing world. One particularly striking example is the *Pinna nobilis*, a giant clam threatened with extinction. It only entered the lagoon in 1983 after the construction of a large channel to the Mediterranean, which significantly changed the physio-biological conditions of Mar Menor, to the detriment of many other species.

A multispecies interpretation of conviviality and care may offer conceptual tools to negotiate what has to degrow, and for whom, and what needs to be cared for, in more-than-human constellations.

5.4 Mar Menor Law and More-Than-Human Commons: Degrowth as Guidance for the Design of Economic RoN Institutions?

Interpreting and applying the rights of Mar Menor brings us to the institutional set-up proposed in the law. This Tutelage is composed of three institutions: a Committee of Representatives (Comité de Representantes, made up of citizens and members of the administration), a Monitoring Commission (Comisión de Seguimiento, made up of representatives of civil society, economic organisations, unions and the municipalities of the basin) and a Scientific Committee (Comité Científico). Compared to other ecological institutions, the Tutelage stands out for the preponderance of citizen voices (the majority in two committees) and the strength of the Scientific Committee (one of the three voices of the Tutelage). While this political design appears to be one proposal among many others, it could represent an original institution for democratic ecological planning, as advocated by degrowth (Parrique 2025).

However, the creation of this legal personality raises unanticipated questions that require ongoing innovation. In this respect, the field of degrowth and the commons could provide guidance. The Tutelage, as a private law entity, needs an economic structure, yet it has no precedent in Europe. Since the publication of the implementing decree of the Mar Menor Law in January 2025, the Mar Menor has obtained a tax identification number, a bank account and, therefore, financial capacity. Mar Menor activists are still wondering about the sources of funding and how it will be used – to finance legal proceedings or, ultimately, ecological regeneration measures? At the beginning of 2026, the Spanish government is considering allocating several thousand euros to the Tutelage for its internal organisation, a public funding which activists see threatened in the case of a change in government. Yet, through its Tutelage, Mar Menor has the potential to become an economic agent in its own right, with the means to take economic action in favour of the regeneration of the water-basin. Here, the institutional thread of degrowth, and more-than-human commoning in particular, could contribute to activists' thinking and, in other contexts, help to construct new designs for these new ecological institutions.

Degrowth related ecological economics, including its quantitative aspect, may also support institutional innovation. Admittedly, RoN aim to bring about a shift towards relations between societies and

the more-than-human that are not reducible to quantitative terms. Yet, quantitative indicators, through scientific analysis, may still play a role as can be observed in the case of Mar Menor. Article 3 of the Law, which sets out the protection of Mar Menor, emphasises the role of the Scientific Committee in identifying “indicators [to monitor] the ecological status of the ecosystem, its risks and appropriate restoration measures”.⁸ This use of quantitative and technical approaches, not with a view to growth but rather to reducing the impact of the economic metabolism on the ecosystem, is in line with the perspectives of degrowth.

Partially related to the field of degrowth and commoning, scholars have developed alternative methods to growth-oriented accounting. These approaches, like the ‘CARE model’ (Rambaud, Richard 2022) or ecosystem-centred accounting (Feger, Levrel, Rambaud 2021), propose ecological accounting, more adapted to degrowth objectives. They could equip new RoN institutions such as the Mar Menor Tutelage. Camille de Toledo explores the perspective of RoN institutions becoming agents of degrowth:

For the first time, degrowth actors – rivers, lakes, forests... – would pay taxes on their incomes, collected in return for human use, and thus contribute, in the same movement, to the needs of our societies and the financing of our public services (Toledo 2026, 66)⁹

He envisages these institutions as being more independent of the state, yet not market-based: a third path that could be related to commoning.

However, this path could lead to the kind of problem that the Mar Menor case suggests: the state administration and its contradictory interests sometimes seem to impede the enforcement of RoN: On the one hand, the protection of the lagoon is at odds with the region’s dependence on agro-industrial activity and the more general structural dependence of the state on economic growth to finance its budget. On the other hand, governmental and administrative actors might be unwilling to share power. For that reason, in December 2025, Teresa Vicente left the Committee of Representatives, claiming that the administrations of state and region were hindering action

⁸ “El Comité científico tendrá entre sus funciones la de asesoramiento al Comité de Representantes y la Comisión de Seguimiento, e identificación de indicadores sobre el estado ecológico del ecosistema, sus riesgos y las medidas adecuadas de restauración, que comunicará a la Comisión de Seguimiento”.

⁹ “Pour la première fois, des acteurs décroissants – des rivières, des lacs, des forêts... – paieraient des impôts sur leurs revenus, perçus en contrepartie des usages humains, et donc contribueraient, dans le même mouvement, aux besoins de nos sociétés, aux financements de nos services publics”.

for Mar Menor. But if not the state, who will enforce the law against reluctant capitalist actors? What might common-based RoN enforcement look like? Reflections on commoning at the bioregional scale in a perspective of degrowth (Waldenberger, Savini 2025) could help imagine RoNs that are less dependent on the nation state. This may well substantiate Parrique's argument that "giving rights to nature is a veritable revolution that will forever change the way that we view – and do – economics" (2024, 280).

6 Conclusion

RoN and degrowth share a historical origin as diverse responses to the ecological awareness of the 1970s. Both have developed into vast transnational and transdisciplinary movements that have fostered spaces for dialogue and encounter, particularly ecofeminism, *Buen Vivir* and Green Legal Theory. As their systematic articulation has been little explored to date, we propose to deepen four bridging ideas, already outlined in the literature, to better reinforce these movements: multispecies conviviality, more-than-human commoning, the temporalisation of limits, and a more-than-human theory of care.

The recognition of the rights of Mar Menor in Europe, on a continent where the need for degrowth is increasingly recognised, enables an initial experiment in this crossover. As such, it may well be understood as a non-reformist reform (Richter 2025) and thus part of a plurality of ruptural, interstitial, and symbiotic strategies towards a degrowth society (Schmelzer, Vetter, Vansintjan 2022). Non-reformist reforms, while working within the current system, make space for and point towards a more radically different society. The new Mar Menor personhood, more than a mere legal instrument, could emerge as a landing of degrowth at the scale of a lagoon basin.

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