

**Rethinking Transition through Temporalities:
Discursive Alternatives for Crafting
Sustainable Futures**

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Repensando transición mediante temporalidades:
Alternativas discursivas para la construcción de futuros sostenibles

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ABSTRACT | Time is a contested terrain where visions of the future collide, unfold, and reconfigure. Its significance becomes even more pronounced in moments of so-called ‘transition,’ where competing paradigms seek to shape the direction of socio-environmental pathways. This article unravels the temporal dimensions of Sustainable Development, Green Transition, Degrowth, and *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, revealing the tensions between linear, progress-driven narratives and decelerative, cyclical, and relational conceptions of time. Particularly, this article explores how Indigenous ethical-philosophical principles - such as *Kawsak Sacha*, *Tinkuy*, and *Tukuna* - invite a reconceptualization of socio-environmental justice that transcend the linear extractivist logics of modernity. Drawing from post-development and decolonial theory, this article argues that a pluriversal transformation, which acknowledges multiple temporalities, is crucial for fostering a more socially and ecologically just future. This transformation calls for a profound re-engagement with the rhythms of nature and regenerative cycles that sustain life, positioning time itself as a site of struggle and Indigenous knowledge as a critical source for reimagining sustainable futures. **Keywords** | *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*; Degrowth; Socio-environmental Justice; Sustainable Development; Green Transition/Transformation; Temporalities.

RESUMEN | El tiempo es un territorio en disputa donde las visiones del futuro colisionan, se despliegan y se reconfiguran. Su importancia se vuelve aún más evidente en momentos de ‘transición,’ cuando paradigmas en competencia intentan moldear el rumbo de las trayectorias socioambientales. Este artículo desentraña las dimensiones temporales del Desarrollo Sostenible, la Transición

Verde, el Decrecimiento y el *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, revelando las tensiones entre narrativas lineales impulsadas por la idea de progreso y concepciones del tiempo más desaceleradas, cíclicas y relacionales. En particular, se explora cómo principios ético-filosóficos indígenas - como el *Kawsak Sacha*, el *Tinkuy* y el *Tukuna* - invitan a una reconfiguración de la justicia socioambiental que trasciende las lógicas extractivistas y lineales de la modernidad. Apoyándose en teorías del posdesarrollo y decoloniales, el artículo argumenta que una transformación pluriversal, que reconozca la coexistencia de múltiples temporalidades, es esencial para la construcción de un futuro más justo tanto social como ecológicamente. Esta transformación exige una reconexión profunda con los ritmos de la naturaleza y los ciclos regenerativos que sustentan la vida, posicionando al tiempo como un campo de lucha y al conocimiento indígena como un pilar fundamental para la reimaginación de futuros sostenibles.

Palabras clave | *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, Decrecimiento; Desarrollo Sostenible; Justicia socio-ambiental; Temporalidades; Transformación/Transición Verde.

1. Introduction

[Sustainable Development] is a 'metafix' that will unite everybody from the profit-minded industrialist and risk-minimizing subsistence farmer to the equity-seeking social worker, the pollution-concerned or wildlife-loving First Worlder, the growth-maximizing policymaker, the goal-oriented bureaucrat and, therefore the vote-counting politician (Lélé, 1991, p. 613).

*Development and the very idea of progress constitute values (if they can be cataloged in this way) linked to history and the Eurocentric imaginary, whose axes constitute the individual, the domination over nature and quantifying rationality, which are certainly far from the parameters of the *Súmak Káusai*. Even though such rationales have had a certain permeability in the Amazon, they have little echo in the cultural life of the [Indigenous] peoples* (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, pp. iv-v).

The rivers, those beings that have always inhabited different worlds, are the ones that suggest to me that if there is a future to imagine, it is ancestral, because it is already present. I like to believe that all those we are able to invoke in the form of becoming are our traveling companions, even if they are immemorable, because the passage of time becomes a distraction in our sensitive observations of the planet (Krenak, 2024, p. 1).

The 21st century has witnessed an intensifying imperative to critically reassess prevailing development models in response to escalating ecological crises, enduring social inequalities, and the limitations of dominant economic paradigms (Lélé, 1991; Rist, 2007; Mignolo, 2011; 2021; Escobar, 2015; Hickel, 2020; Gudynas, 2021; Nourani Rinaldi, 2022). This re-evaluation is underscored by a growing global interest in Sustainable Development and Green Transition, increasingly manifested in international policy frameworks such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United

Nations, 2015; Escobar, 2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2021; Beling *et al.*, 2018; Nourani Rinaldi, 2022; Kothari *et al.*, 2024; Lang, Bringel, & Manahan, 2024; Dietz, 2024). It is also reflected in grassroots movements, academic research, and policy discussions centered around transitioning to more just, sustainable futures (Ziai, 2015; Kothari, Demaria, & Acosta, 2014; Demaria *et al.*, 2023). Notably, alternative approaches such as the Degrowth movement and the ethical-philosophical principles of *Buen Vivir* offer radical reimaginings of temporality, progress, and transition. Degrowth, challenges the entrenched logic of perpetual expansion, advocating for a deliberate reduction in production and consumption to nurture ecological balance. *Buen Vivir*, rooted in the Kichwa concept of *Sumak Kawsay* (or *Suma Qamaña* in Aymara in Bolivia), emphasizes living in harmony with nature and community well-being - often translated as a 'good way of living' in English (Viteri Gualinga, 2003; Acosta & Martínez, 2009; Gudynas, 2011; Kallis, 2011; Demaria *et al.*, 2013; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014; Lalander & Cuestas-Caza, 2017; Beling *et al.*, 2018, 2021; Altmann, 2020; Lalander, Fortes & Lembke, 2025). These emerging alternatives challenge conventional ideas of time, proposing new ways of envisioning transitions that move beyond the dominance of growth-centric models as the primary measure of development.

Although Sustainable Development discourses have, to some degree, aimed to mitigate capitalism's socio-environmental impacts, the extent of their success remains contested (Lélé, 1991; Dryzek, 2013; Kothari *et al.*, 2014; Gómez-Baggethun, 2019). Persistent power imbalances between the global South and North, along with the ongoing cycle of social inequalities and environmental degradation, suggest that Sustainable Development functions as a somewhat ambiguous framework that ultimately serves to safeguard the *status quo*, i.e., the continuation of the current global capitalist (neoliberal) system. The more recent Green Transition approach, which focuses on shifting from fossil fuel dependence to renewable energy sources, has similarly emerged as a response to the ecological crises, but it often falls within the same market-driven logic of resource extraction (Dryzek, 2013; Bowen & Hepburn, 2014; Carter, 2018; Svampa, 2019; Gergan, Smith & Vasudevan., 2020; Dietz, 2024; Yanez & Moreno, 2024; McNelly & Franz, 2024). Despite its ecological goals centered on technological innovation, the Green Transition may reinforce the systemic issues that perpetuate environmental degradation, particularly the extractivist practices that impact local communities. In many cases, the push for renewable energy involves the exploitation of natural resources extracted from lands traditionally inhabited by Indigenous peoples, rural and marginalized communities. This approach risks deepening existing power asymmetries, where local territories are transformed into commodities for the benefit of global 'green' markets, further entrenching historical injustices.

In contrast to dominant development paradigms that perpetuate linear and progress-driven narratives, where future advancement is primarily quantified by economic growth and technological advancement, alternative frameworks such as Degrowth and *Buen Vivir* offer diverse temporal narratives that engage with cyclical, relational, ancestral and decelerative

conceptions of time (Viteri Gualinga, 2003; Kothari *et al.*, 2014; Inuca Lechón, 2017; Escobar, 2018a; Fricke, 2019; Krenak, 2024). Within this critical discursive field, Indigenous principles - such as *Tukuna*, referring to cyclical transformation/s, *Kawsak Sacha* (Living Forest), *Tinkuy*, which signifies the encounter and clashes of diverse knowledge systems (Uzendoski, 2014; Inuca Lechón, 2017; Lalander *et al.*, 2025), and 'Ancestral Future' (Krenak, 2020a, 2020b, 2024) - offer alternative pathways and perspectives for reimagining sustainable futures grounded in Indigenous knowledge and practices.

Building on these perspectives, this article critically examines the temporal dimensions within mainstream discourses of Sustainable Development and the more recent Green Transition, alongside alternative perspectives, particularly focusing on *Buen Vivir* and Degrowth. Through the lens of post-development and decolonial theory, we examine how each discourse articulates distinct temporal narratives that shape their perspectives on sustainability. We draw from contemporary academic debates on alternative pathways and visions towards sustainable futures, considering historical and contemporary socio-ecological injustices through the lens of the often-overlooked multidimensional temporalities. Specifically, it poses the research question:

How are the temporalities embedded within Sustainable Development, Green Transition, Buen Vivir, and Degrowth reflected in their approaches to transition/transformation and the crafting of sustainable futures?

Methodologically, this text builds its theoretical reflections on a critical analysis of debates surrounding sustainability. As indicated, we primarily draw from the interconnected fields of post-development and decolonial theory, emphasizing insights from scholars and activists focused on *Buen Vivir* and other Indigenous epistemic-ontological principles. The study is likewise substantially informed by insights derived from ethnographic research conducted in Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil, which serve to ground the theoretical debates examined herein. Selected interview excerpts are presented to illustrate and contextualize our arguments.

The paper is structured into several key sections on the interplay between temporality and sustainable transitions/transformations. First, the conceptual foundations of time and its role in shaping socio-political structures are examined, followed by an analysis of the concepts of transition and transformation and their implications for temporal frameworks in (post)development and sustainability discourses. Thereafter, the different temporal frameworks are discussed, focusing on the cyclical, relational temporalities of *Buen Vivir*, the decelerative temporality of Degrowth and the linear, progress-driven perspectives of Sustainable Development and Green Transition. Finally, the paper addresses the clashes between modern concepts of linear progress and Indigenous temporalities, particularly through the concepts of *Tinkuy*, *Tukuna*, *Kawsak Sacha*, and Ancestral Future. It concludes by exploring whether and how these encounters and clashes open up new possibilities for alternative visions of sustainability and future possibilities. The article argues that a

pluriversal transformation, which acknowledges multiple temporalities and ontologies, is crucial for fostering a more socially and ecologically just future.

The simplified conceptual table below offers an initial overview of the key terms, which will be further clarified in the subsequent sections.

Table 1

Simplified Conceptual Clarifications

Framework	Sustainable Development / Green Transition	Degrowth	<i>Buen Vivir / Sumak Kawsay /Kawsak Sacha</i>
Temporality	Linear, progress-driven, future-oriented	Decelerative, degenerative	Cyclical, relational, circular continuity, Ancestral Futures (long-term vision based on ancestral wisdom)
Transformation	Linear transition, reformist, incremental, future oriented	Radical transformation, systemic change, rethinking progress and growth	Pluriversal transformation rooted in relationality, <i>Tukuna</i> (cyclical transformation/s), <i>Pachakuti</i> (complex non-linear relationship of renewal, power and cyclical transformation)
Key Principles	Market driven environmental management/ sustainability, technological progress	De-growth, social justice, conviviality, respecting ecological limits, critique of growth-driven logic, reduction of consumption	<i>Kawsak Sacha</i> (Living Forest), <i>Tinkuy</i> (encounters of knowledge), non-hierarchical coexistence, harmony with nature, decoloniality, collective wellbeing
Epistemic-Ontological Perspective	Universalist, human-centered, anthropocentric	Universalist, respect for the rhythms of nature, regenerative cycles, post-anthropocentric	Epistemic-ontological plurality, relationality, nature-human interconnectedness, all beings as subjects of rights

Note. Authors' simplification based on multiple sources conceptualizing temporalities and transition/transformation among the three alternative discourses: Lélé (1991); Viteri Gualinga (2003); Gudynas (2010, 2011, 2014); Kallis (2011); Mignolo (2011); Dryzek (2013); Uzendoski (2014); Kothari *et al.* (2014); Vanhulst and Beling (2014); Huanacuni Mamani (2015); Ziai (2015); Inuca Lechón (2017); Hölscher, Wittmayer, and Loorbach (2018); Escobar (2018a, 2018b); Escobar (2020); Demaria and Latouche (2019); Gualinga (2019); Hickel (2020); Krenak (2024); McNelly & Franz (2024); García Ruales (2024); Lalander *et al.* (2025).

2. Conceptual Foundations and Temporal Frameworks

2.1. The Floating Meanings of Time: Navigating Power Relations and Socio-Political Structures of Temporal Constructs

While often perceived as an inherent ‘law of nature’, time is a dynamic, floating concept, intertwined with the values that societies assign to human and non-human interactions, as well as to material and spiritual domains. The interpretation of time varies significantly in its implications and forms, contingent upon its discursive context and the underlying ontological and epistemological frameworks (Giddens, 1990; Rifkin, 2017; Escobar, 2018b). This critical analysis positions time as a political and social construct shaped by intricate discursive structures and power relations embedded in historical processes and socio-economic contexts (Thompson, 1967; Foucault, 1977; Escobar, 1984; Mills, 2014).

The concept of modern, linear time is deeply rooted in historical changes, especially the emergence of industrial capitalism. This development ingrained a sense of temporal discipline into the fabric of social and economic life. Thompson (1967) argues that, with the advent of industrial capitalism, time underwent a significant shift - from being marked by religious or agricultural cycles to becoming an instrument of labor control. The standardized, measurable time of clocks and calendars thus became associated with productivity and efficiency, reinforcing the temporal regime fundamental to the modern capitalist state. This shift can be observed in the distinction between ‘work time’ and ‘personal time,’ an ideological separation introduced to maximize economic efficiency that reflects the political imperatives of a burgeoning capitalist economy, where ‘time is money.’

As a foundational element of modernity, time emerged as a rational, objective and measurable concept, framed within a linear sequence that aligns past and future. Linear conceptions of time advanced modernist ideas that nurtured a mechanistic worldview, positioning logical truth as the foundation of knowledge in accordance with positivist principles (Habermas, 1984). The belief in the autonomous individual and the perception of the economy as an independent, self-regulating entity reflect some of modernity’s most influential ideas (Hobson, 2004). Central to this period was the establishment of ontological dualisms - distinctions that separated nature from culture, body from mind, and modern from ‘non-modern’ (Latour, 1993; Escobar, 2018b). These dualistic frameworks continue to shape contemporary institutional structures and cognitive orientations. Consequently, the modern notion of linear time established as one of several constructed ‘truths’ disseminated during this period, each contributing to the overarching worldview that modernity sought to establish.

Philosophers and sociologists like Foucault (1977) and Giddens (1990) further argue that modernity itself restructures time as part of broader systems of power and control. Giddens (1990) discusses how modern temporal structures standardize time across large populations to facilitate governance and economic relations. Foucault (1977) emphasizes the role of discipline in creating a ‘temporal order’ that regulates individuals’ daily lives, aligning them with the needs of institutional structures and shaping behaviors and consciousness within regulated, linear schedules. Time’s role as a force that organizes power relations and sustains specific socio-political structures accordingly establishes a framework with far-reaching implications for how societies comprehend and value temporalities.

As a critical instrument in shaping and advancing the modern world, the conception of linear time is fundamentally connected to notions of progress, and it has been reinforced by the dynamics of colonial expansion. The conquest of the Americas initiated a system of colonial exploitation that not only remade the political and economic landscapes but also imposed a Eurocentric worldview on Indigenous societies (Dussel, 2012). Time became a discursive tool, or a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980; Escobar, 1984, 1995a; Hall, 2019 [1992]), where deviations from Western linearity marked cultures in need of 'civilization.' As Dussel (2012) notes, the colonial imposition of linear progress obscured alternative conceptions of development, reducing Indigenous temporalities to mere stages on a Eurocentric timeline.

According to decolonial scholars, the hegemony of linear time functions as an epistemic mechanism of coloniality, creating temporal divisions that reinforce cultural hierarchies by positioning non-Western worldviews as underdeveloped, backward or primitive (Mignolo, 2011; Mills, 2014, 2020; Rifkin, 2017; Escobar, 2018a; Hunfeld, 2022). As Mignolo notes, the portrayal of non-European peoples evolved over time, shifting from 'savage' to 'primitive' in a way that embedded differences in temporal rather than spatial terms. This construction of temporal difference depicted Indigenous time cycles - grounded in seasonal and environmental rhythms - as symbols of inferiority, portraying Indigenous peoples as lazy and in need of discipline to conform to a rational, linear Western time regime. This process, Mignolo argues, enforced an 'epistemic lobotomy' (Mignolo, 2011, p. 156) by imposing a Western temporal framework that delegitimize other forms of knowledge and set a universal standard for civilizational progress. Similarly, Escobar (2018a, 2018b) critiques modern rationality for its emphasis on linearity, positivism, and objectivism, arguing that this perspective disregards the diversity of temporal frameworks and reinforces an ontological dualism that separates nature from culture, thereby privileging Western epistemologies.

Through these temporal structures, the 'Other' emerges as a subordinate identity, defined by categories that justify colonial hierarchies and racialized ideologies. Rifkin (2017) conceptualizes this process as 'temporal othering', to demonstrate how standardization and linearity reinforce Eurocentric perspectives as normative. Temporal othering reflects the idea of the 'Other' in 'Orientalism', as defined by Said (1979), which relies on the dichotomy between 'the West and the Rest.' Drawing on Said's *Orientalism* (1979), Hall (2019 [1992]) elucidates how this binary opposition perpetuates a hegemonic discourse, where 'the West' is associated with secularism, industrialization, development, and whiteness, while 'the Rest' is characterized as non-white, uncivilized, underdeveloped, and romantically tied to nature. Such dichotomies serve to naturalize Western dominance by constructing the Rest - or the Other - as the antithesis of the West, granting the latter meaning through its differentiation from all that it is not (see also Escobar, 1984; Ziai, 2015; Sud & Sánchez-Ancochea, 2022).

Recognizing the power relations and socio-political structures of temporal conceptualizations is crucial in sustainability studies, as the notion of time significantly

impacts the policies guiding environmental governance. This impact determines not only the pace at which change is pursued but also the frameworks within which these changes are interpreted and legitimated, thereby shaping societal expectations and narratives around sustainability. Hunfeld (2022) argues that while time and temporality are essential dimensions in global justice discourse, they remain underexplored and require more thorough exploration to move beyond colonial legacies, thus highlighting the need for a comprehensive approach that integrates diverse temporal perspectives in sustainability efforts.

In this context, the concept of ‘temporal justice’, as articulated by Hutchings (2008), emerges as a crucial consideration. Temporal justice seeks to rectify the imbalances created by historical injustices and colonial legacies by incorporating marginalized temporalities into contemporary discussions of sustainability. Hutchings asserts that the prevailing Western conception of time as a neutral and universal standard obscures the historical and cultural contexts that inform its significance in justice-related discussions. Accordingly, in our reasoning, time as a political construct, provides a valuable lens for analyzing perceptions of sustainability and advancing socio-environmental justice, particularly as sustainability debates involve temporal perspectives - shaping visions of the future, defining goals, and determining the pace and direction of transitions. This approach acknowledges a plural perspective of temporalities, providing critical examination into the dynamics of human-nature relations and fostering a framework for ethical coexistence.

2.2. Temporalities of Transition/Transformation: Floating Narratives of a World in Change

‘Transition’ and ‘transformation’ are buzzwords in contemporary debates on sustainability, carrying floating and multiple meanings depending on the context and discursive realms. A brief conceptual clarification of ‘transition’ and ‘transformation’ is therefore needed, as these terms are often used interchangeably. Moreover, seen through the lens of temporalities, each term refers to diverse processes of change: transition is a gradual process and follows a linear trajectory in a non-disruptive state, while transformation can occur instantly, not constrained by a linear progression or predefined stages (Hölsher, Wittmayer & Loorbach, 2018).

Transition is often used to describe socio-technological reformist approaches that focus on market-driven solutions to facilitate the Green transition (Dryzek, 2013; Bowen & Hepburn, 2014; Carter, 2018; Hölsher *et al.* 2018; McNelly & Franz, 2024; Rodríguez, Walter & Temper, 2024). Within sustainability research, transition refers to the processes of moving from one social, technological, economic, institutional regime, to another, encompassing shifts in societal subsystems such as energy or cities, where change is manageable in incremental steps (Hölsher *et al.*, 2018, pp. 1-3).

In contrast, for Kothari and coauthors (2023, pp. 315-317), transformation entails a radical, systemic change aimed at addressing the deep-rooted causes of social, environmental, and

economic injustices. This transformation requires challenging existing power structures and promoting greater participation in decision-making, local community empowerment, and the inclusion of diverse forms of knowledge and values. Unlike reformist approaches, which work within existing frameworks, transformation involves a rethinking of social structures to achieve long-term systemic change. This includes breaking down binaries and categories, acknowledging other ways of knowing and being as essential to envisioning futures.

This transformational ethos echoes the Indigenous Andean concept of *Pachakuti*, a term from Andean-Amazonian Kichwa and Andean Aymara cultures that signifies cycles of cosmic upheaval and renewal, likened to the processes of death and rebirth. According to Uzendoski (2014), *Pachakuti* is not merely an isolated event; it represents a cyclical phenomenon through which periods of disruption and regeneration continuously shape life and nature, emphasizing a restorative transformation. The term is derived from *Pacha*, meaning space-time-place, and *Kuti*, which implies a turning or profound shift, often signaling pivotal, even cataclysmic, events that realign social and natural orders through repeated cycles of transformation. *Pachakuti* was used in Kichwa-Aymara to describe the Spanish conquest, characterizing it as a profound ‘turnaround’- a powerful disruption that unsettled and transformed Indigenous worlds, marking a pivotal moment of upheaval and forced adaptation (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 157-158).

As articulated by Uzendoski (2014), the Kichwa epistemic-ontological perspective is rooted in a complex, non-linear relationship of power and transformation. This relational framework emphasizes three fundamental concepts: *Ushay* (power), *Yachay* (knowledge) and *Tukuna* (transformation), which form an interconnected worldview where power is exercised through relational and transformational processes, rather than dominance or hierarchy. *Tukuna* (transformation) embodies multiple layers of meaning that collectively reflect a perspective of transformation in different forms. This non-linear, regenerative approach reflects a dynamic cosmology in which power and knowledge flow through reciprocal respect and adaptability. Embracing a non-linear temporality of metamorphosis and renewal, the Kichwa epistemic-ontological perspective represents the adaptive, fluid nature of *Tukuna*, and a world in which beings in the natural and social realms are constantly interacting and evolving.

Within these paradigms, the non-linear, cyclical temporality of transformation challenges the notion of progress as unidirectional, suggesting that systemic change may involve embracing a relational approach that transcends modernist constraints. By aligning the temporalities of transition and transformation with distinct conceptual and cultural frameworks, our aim is to offer a nuanced perspective on the pathways and potentialities for radical transformation, underscoring the need for multifaceted and culturally responsive strategies in the pursuit of sustainable futures.

3. Discursive Temporalities in Buen Vivir, Degrowth, Sustainable Development, and Green Transition

3.1. Buen Vivir, Kawsak Sacha and Degrowth: Cyclical Time and the Continuum of Transformation

In critical debates on sustainability and post-development, Indigenous ethical-philosophical worldviews, such as *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* (translated as a ‘good way of living’), emerge as fundamental alternatives to development. Rooted in a vision of coexistence - both within human diversity and in relation to nature - *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* constitutes an ensemble of practices and principles of “living in plenitude, knowing how to live in harmony with the cycles of Mother Earth, the cosmos, life, and history, and in balance with every form of existence in a state of permanent respect” (Huanacuni Mamani, 2010, cited in Vanhulst & Beling, 2014, p. 56). As a decolonial discourse, *Buen Vivir* challenges structures of socio-cultural and epistemic oppression, as well as the dominant notions of progress, modernity and global capitalism (Mignolo, 2011, 2021; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). In this regard, decolonization serves as a framework for articulating epistemological alternatives that incorporate pluriversality, acknowledging the equal standing of diverse cultural traditions and knowledge systems. As Acosta argues:

Buen Vivir does not synthesize a monocultural proposal. It is a plural concept. It would be better to speak of *buenos vivires* [good ways of living] or *buenos convivires* [good ways of living together], which arise especially from Indigenous communities and that contribute with new epistemes” (Acosta, 2015, p. 12, italics by authors).

This plural notion of *Buen Vivir* is further reflected in the concept of ‘flying river’ (Lalander *et al.*, 2025), which captures the floating, ever-evolving character. Technically, the ‘flying river’ refers to the movement of vast quantities of water vapor from the Amazon Basin towards the Andes, where it is redirected southward, generating rainfall across vast regions of South America. Metaphorically, the ‘flying river’ analogy symbolizes a dynamic process, continuously shifting and reshaping as it interacts with various territorial contexts, much like how the vapor flows and is influenced by the natural landscape it traverses (Marengo & Souza Junior, 2018; FAO, 2019; Krenak, 2020b, pp. 8, 11). Conditioned by the diverse epistemic-ontological perspectives of each Indigenous group, this ever-changing process is deeply intertwined with local struggles, and highlights the multifaceted character of *Buen Vivir*, which incorporates identity elements of class, ethnicity, and ecologism (Lalander, 2014; Lalander & Merimaa, 2018; Lalander & Lembke, 2020). Despite variations across different ethnic groups, they share an ethical commitment to collective well-being, centered around relational systems practiced in everyday life, at the individual, familiar, and societal levels (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, p. 47).

In this sense, social justice emerges as a central pillar of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, encompassing the struggles against ethno-cultural subordination, while also aligning with broader global efforts to address social inequalities. As such, it can be understood through

three interconnected dimensions and currents of thought: the Indigenous-culturalist (ethnicity/culture), the post-developmental/radical ecologist (ecologism), and the socialist/statist (class/justice) (Lalander & Lembke, 2020; Lalander *et al.*, 2025). Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for reimagining social structures and environmental relations.

Carlos Viteri Gualinga, a Kichwa-Sarayaku leader, was a central figure in both the theorizing of *Sumak Kawsay* since the 1990's and the recognition and incorporation of its principles in the 2008 Constitution of Ecuador, followed by Bolivia in 2009, making similar strides (Acosta & Martinez, 2009; Gudynas, 2011; 2014; Lalander, 2014, 2016; Lalander *et al.*, 2025). This enactment declared the state Plurinational and Intercultural, with collective rights for Peoples and Nationalities (Art. 57–66), acknowledging their own legal systems (Art. 171), and asserting specific rights to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), commonly known as Rights of Nature (RoN) (Arts 10, 71–74) (Lalander, 2014; García Ruales, 2024, p. 2). The recognition of *Pachamama* in the Ecuadorian constitution symbolized a decisive break from the conception of nature, reflecting a shift toward a relational ontology that acknowledges *all forms of life* - human, non-human, and ecosystems - as subjects of rights, a perspective that has significantly contributed to the discourse of environmental politics (Gudynas, 2010, p. 52; 2014, pp. 103-104).

In this context, the concept of *Kawsak Sacha*, or the 'Living Forest', incorporates additional social and ecological dimensions into *Sumak Kawsay*, and calls for legal recognition of the forest as a living entity, through spiritual, reciprocal relationships among all living beings. Internationally launched in 2018 and originating from Kichwa Sarayaku (in Pastaza, the Amazon), *Kawsak Sacha* declaration is aligned with the Rights of Nature in Ecuador's constitution, posing a shift from resource-focused to respect-centered ecological governance. As a political-ontological initiative to establish *Kawsak Sacha* as a legal framework, which "interprets the politics of the forest," it further articulates nature as a sacred force, deeply embedded in the identity and cosmology of the Kichwa Sarayaku people (Gualinga, 2023; Díaz & Gualinga, 2023; Oikonomakis, 2024).

Kawsak Sacha is formulated from a pluriversal perspective, which encompasses six worlds: animal, cosmic, spiritual, vegetal, mineral and human, along with the invisible forest beings/dwellers (García Ruales, 2024, pp. 3-9). It acknowledges the ontological foundation of interconnection between the land, its human and non-human inhabitants, and the visible and invisible worlds (Gualinga, 2019, pp. 223-224; Oikonomakis, 2024, p. 152). By asserting *Kawsak Sacha* as a living forest with agency, the Sarayaku people reinforce their resistance through Indigenous territorial sovereignty and collective legal effort known as 'Indigenous lawyering', positioning themselves against external extractive projects - such as oil drilling and logging - to defend the environment (García Ruales, 2024, pp. 2-3; Oikonomakis, 2024, p. 145).

In relation to the temporal dimension, the principles of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, *Kawsak Sacha*, and *Pachamama* reflect a mode of existence in balance with the elements of *Pacha*

- a holistic conception of space-time-place, encompassing plants, animals, minerals, celestial bodies and spiritual entities. In *Pacha*, time is perceived in consecutive stages, influenced by natural cycles that operate at multiple levels, guiding processes of transformation and renewal. These cycles, rather than being independent or fixed, are dynamic, interconnected and continuously alternating (Inuca Lechón, 2017, p. 21). This perspective weaves together a complex web of non-hierarchical relations across space and time and is rooted in ethical values of relationality, complementarity, reciprocity, and living in harmony with nature (Estermann, 2013, p. 5; Lalander & Cuestas-Caza 2017, p. 34; Escobar, 2018b, pp. 100-103).

In reconnecting with the alternative emerging from the global North, the Degrowth movement aligns closely with many of the critical perspectives of *Buen Vivir*. Degrowth advocates for a radical departure from the imperatives of continuous economic growth, challenging the progress-driven conceptions of time that are foundational to modernity and capitalist expansion (Kallis, 2011; Demaria & Latouche, 2019; Hickel, 2020). This movement critiques the hegemony of development and hyper-productivity, highlighting its destructive impacts, such as resource depletion, environmental degradation, and social injustice. It positions these issues as vital problems that the dominant discourses of sustainability fail to address systematically (Demaria & Latouche, 2019, pp. 148-149).

Central to Degrowth is the idea of ‘degenerative temporality,’ which reframes deceleration as a regenerative process, countering the view that downsizing is inherently negative or regressive. By rejecting modernity’s ‘holy trinity’ of growth, progress, and development, Degrowth envisions a decelerative pace that allows ecosystems and societies to recover from the overreach of human activity. These principles emphasize a restorative and respectful relationship with finite resources calling for a departure from the relentless linear acceleration of modernity toward a rhythm that aligns with nature’s cycles (Kallis, 2011; D’Alisa *et al.*, 2015; Latouche, 2015a; Demaria & Latouche, 2019; Hickel, 2020). It aims to establish a post-growth society where values such as social justice, conviviality, care, and sharing are prioritized (D’Alisa, Deriu & Demaria, 2015). This vision entails a significant reduction in energy and material throughput, staying within the ecological limits of natural resources and respecting the Earth’s assimilative capacity. Such a shift requires embracing a plurality of ways of living that can coexist within these boundaries (Demaria & Latouche, 2019, pp. 149-150), and fostering a collective imaginary that involves a profound change of desires and subjectivities (Latouche, 2015a).

The temporal rupture inherent in Degrowth presents a paradox: while it advocates for deceleration, it also acknowledges the urgent need to address the accelerating climate change. This dual focus reveals a temporal tension between the critique of capitalist imperatives and the growth-driven model, on one hand, and the immediate ecological urgency, on the other (Latouche, 2015b), underscoring the challenge of balancing the call for deceleration with the necessity for urgent climate intervention. The critique of growth becomes intricately linked with the redefinition of what it means to advance, suggesting

that progress may not lie in accumulation, but in transforming the pace of our actions and the underlying values that drive them (Gergan *et al.*, 2020, p. 2).

The interconnected concepts of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, *Kawsak Sacha*, and Degrowth present alternative frameworks that challenge modernist, linear notions of development, advocating instead for degenerative, relational, and cyclical approaches. These perspectives reimagine time and progress, in which transformation is understood as regenerative and interconnected rather than linear. These movements converge around a shared vision of transformation that emphasizes the rhythms of nature and acknowledges ecological limits, fostering a more harmonious and reciprocal relationship between human and non-human worlds.

3.2. Sustainable Development, Green Transition and the Linear Temporality of Progress

The Brundtland Report, formally entitled *Our Common Future*, published by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) in 1987, played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse around Sustainable Development. The project was first intended as a way to address the ecological and social shortcomings of traditional development models. The central goal was the reconciliation of environmental protection, social equity, and economic growth “without any painful changes” in the current (Western) social systems or capitalist structures (Dryzek, 2013, p. 159).

The Brundtland commission (WCED, 1987, paragraph 72) was concerned with rapid economic growth for addressing the pervasive issues of poverty and underdevelopment, while simultaneously addressing environmental degradation (Dryzek, 2013, p. 155). To achieve this ambitious growth trajectory sustainably, the report emphasized the need for a fundamental shift in the nature of growth itself. As highlighted in paragraph 32, the WCED posits that nations can pursue more rapid growth while still aligning with sustainability principles by transitioning towards less material- and energy-intensive activities and investing in resource-efficient technologies. This idea laid the groundwork for the concept of ‘Green Growth’ (Bowen & Hepburn, 2014), suggesting that economic development can be decoupled from environmental harm.

The Brundtland Report’s advocacy for Green Growth posits that through innovation and the adoption of sustainable practices, nations can achieve a balance between economic advancement and ecological integrity. This perspective has influenced subsequent policy frameworks and discussions around Sustainable Development, positioning technological advancement and efficiency as central components in the quest for a sustainable future. Moreover, the endorsement of policies promoting growth, trade and investment marked the beginning of a steady relationship between Sustainable Development and neoliberal globalization, facilitating the expansion of free trade and economic deregulation (Gómez-Baggethun, 2019, p.72). While this optimistic vision sought to reconcile the oxymorons of growth with sustainability (Lélé, 1991), it also raises critical questions about the feasibility

and implications of such a transition. After nearly four decades, this dominant narrative has shown ambiguous outcomes, particularly in the context of persistent environmental crises, deepening inequalities, and the continued prioritization of economic growth (Rist, 2007; Ziai, 2015; Beling *et al.*, 2018).

The Sustainable Development reformist approach reflects a somewhat restrained view of nature, acknowledging its limits only insofar as it continues to provide valuable services to humans (Dryzek, 2013, p. 159). This perspective implies that fundamental, transformative changes are neither anticipated nor deemed necessary. In this context, the value of nature is frequently reduced to functional terms - ‘natural capital’ (Dobson, 1998, pp. 41-47), ‘biodiversity’, or ‘environment’ (Escobar, 1995b, p. 13) - aligning with a mechanical, urban-industrial framework that sees nature as inert matter. As Escobar (1995b) suggests, we are complicit in both the symbolic demise of nature and its physical degradation, emphasizing a disconnect between our perceptions of nature and its actual, ongoing deterioration.

In recent years, Green Transition has become a central theme in development, especially through initiatives in energy transition (Dryzek, 2013; Carter, 2018). Grounded in the principles of Sustainable Development and Green Growth, corporate-led energy transitions prioritize replacing fossil fuels with renewable resources and advanced technologies. The linear temporal logic that underlies Green Transition is structured as a progressive timeline leading towards ‘ecologically modern’ futures of ‘decarbonization’ and ‘climate neutrality’ (Bowen & Hepburn, 2014; Carter, 2018).

Capitalism’s new version as ‘green,’ has pushed capital into new markets with a green facade (Dietz, 2024; Yanez & Moreno, 2024). Green Transition extends its reach by developing new accumulation strategies, including energy transition projects, conservation and restoration mechanisms driven by markets (Dryzek, 2013). While many of the largest polluters rebrand themselves with an eco-friendly rhetoric, their efforts often fit within a broader narrative of decarbonization which establishes fresh avenues for capital accumulation. The green narrative often coincides with the rhetoric of urgency - the impending ecological collapse or apocalyptic futures - which can be understood as a form of temporal imposition, often used to legitimize large-scale interventions without public scrutiny (Svampa, 2019). This narrative of urgency can paradoxically serve as justification for intensified extraction and exploitation under the guise of Green Transition, becoming a new form of “Green colonialism” (Svampa, 2019; Dietz, 2024, pp. 27-39; Yanez & Moreno, 2024).

Analysts anticipate a 500% increase in demand for ‘green’ metals and minerals essential to Green Transition by 2050, as stated in the World Bank’s report “Minerals for Climate Action: The mineral intensity of the clean energy transition” (World Bank, 2020). Future-oriented narratives of Sustainable Development and Green Transition prompt a critical reflection aligned with Krenak’s questions: “Natural resources for who? Sustainable

development for what? What exactly do we need to sustain? Because we're certainly not sustaining life on Earth" (Krenak, 2020a, p. 18).

While the need for societal transformation is imperative, the side-effects of posing apocalyptic scenarios risks directing collective attention on imminent threats while diverting it from structural issues - such as capitalism, colonialism and imperialism - that sustain the crisis itself (Gergan *et al.*, 2020, p. 2). Unilinear time thus plays a dual role: it envisions both potential 'utopias' and impending catastrophes. As these temporal logics accelerate, they lay fertile ground for policies that benefit corporate and state interests, sidestepping deeper systemic critiques. The Green Transition's call for urgency operates within a framework that often leaves capitalism, neocolonialism, and extractivism untouched, serving as a smokescreen rather than a significant transformation (Svampa, 2019; Dietz, 2024; Yanez & Moreno, 2024). Both Sustainable Development and Green Transition risk constraining the scope of transformative change in human-nature relations by framing sustainability within market-driven and technological paradigms that maintain dominant socio-economic structures.

4. Temporal Encounters: Analyzing Transition/Transformation through Relational and Cyclical Temporalities

4.1 Indigenous Temporalities Beyond the Illusion of Linear Time: *Buen Vivir*, *Tinkuy*, and the Ancestral Future

Being in the company of those people made me reflect on the myth of sustainability, invented by corporations to justify their theft of our idea of nature. No company on this earth is sustainable, no matter what they say. But these companies and even whole sectors opportunistically appropriate the concept of sustainability for its marketing value. Corporate sustainability managers have become the *sacerdotes* [high priests] of a new planetary order, self-righteously preaching something their employers, by their very nature, can't practice. And people are afraid to contest anything these *sacerdotes* say. But the fact is, it's dishonest to use a term like sustainability when we're on the verge of being expelled from Gaia. Not even the Indigenous communities are sustainable today, because we can't provide for all our needs in a way that is fully integrated with the land. No community that is in debt to the land can call itself sustainable, because we take out more than we can put back in. Our deficit to Gaia is half an earth per year (Krenak, 2020a, p. 15).

Development in contrast to *Sumak Kawsay*, is conceived only from lack and problems, and consequently raises the existence of a previous state of underdevelopment to appear as the medicine or the formula for overcoming that previous state in a linear transition. *Sumak Kawsay*, on the other hand, is a social practice aimed at avoiding falling into aberrant conditions of existence (Viteri Gualinga, 2003, p. iv).

Tinkuy in Kichwa (*T'hinku* in the Aymara language), can be understood as an encounter between epistemes of complementary diversity, united in reciprocity and renewal (*Pachakutik*). It embodies both convergence and confrontation, acknowledging the

coexistence of diverse ways of knowing while also recognizing that their interaction involves inversion, renewal, and change. Beyond an encounter of perspectives, *Tinkuy* reflects a dynamic process where knowledges and perspectives of coexisting cultures engage with and reshape one another through their mutual interaction with *Pacha* (space-time-place) (Inuca Lechón, 2017, p. 20).

In intellectual debates on *Buen Vivir*, Benjamin Inuca Lechón (2017) uses the conceptualization of *Sumak Kawsay Tinkuy* to emphasize the confrontational and dialogical aspects of *Sumak Kawsay*. *Tinkuy* can be translated as the coexistence of peoples meeting in diversity, united in the Indigenous struggles and resistance against exploitation and oppression (ibid., p. 6). Central to these struggles is the notion of ‘delinking’ from Western colonial structures, which remain embedded in modernity, global capitalism and extractivist systems of exploitation (Mignolo, 2011; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This confrontational ethos offers a critique of the Green Transition’s reliance on intensified resource extraction, particularly as it increasingly targets metals and minerals essential for renewable technologies - resources often found in the global South and, more specifically, in Indigenous territories, where the pursuit of these materials continues to drive exploitation and conflict (Lalander 2016; Svampa, 2019; Lalander *et al.*, 2021; Oikonomakis, 2024).

This critique of the Green Transition resonates with the broader tensions in the incorporation of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* into the constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. While these constitutional commitments to the Rights of Nature and Indigenous ethical-philosophical principles have been celebrated as groundbreaking, they coexist uneasily with state dependence on extractive rents as a primary source of fiscal revenue. Progressive governments in these countries have aligned with transnational finance and industrial sectors, particularly in the mining of metals and minerals (McNelly & Franz, 2024, p. 5). This alignment highlights a fundamental contradiction: the tension between Indigenous rights and principles embedded in *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, and the developmentalist model underpinning state-led economic strategies. As extractivist priorities take precedence, the broader ecological ethos has been constrained within a development model that continues to rely on the exploitation of natural resources, thus contradicting core Indigenous principles (Lalander, 2016; Svampa, 2019; Hope, 2020).

From a temporal perspective, aspirations for a decarbonized future are inherently political, even though they are often framed as apolitical, thereby diminishing their transformative potential (Hutchings, 2008). Habermas (1984) argues that the linearity of modern thought contrasts with more relational perceptions of the future, such as cyclical time and the ‘memories of the future.’ The act of neutralizing conflict through the depoliticization of development discourses serves as a tool of control and power, structuring the field of thought and action (Foucault, 1977; Escobar, 1995b). What we argue is that time and temporality are not neutral or merely sequential measures of progress but should instead be viewed as one of the components in the struggle for socio-ecological justice.

In 2020 and 2021, the Ecuadorian government announced its interest in doubling oil extraction, and is expanding large-scale mining (Yanez & Moreno, 2024, p. 82). Lalander (2016) terms it the ‘Ecuadorian resource dilemma,’ a reliance on resource extractivism as revenue for welfare distribution, equating it with developmental logics in the planning and implementation. The tension is further explored by Cuestas-Caza (2018, p. 50), who argues that *Buen Vivir*, originally rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, became a political project once it was incorporated into national development plans and policies. In this process, *Buen Vivir* turned into a ‘new adjective to development’ aligned with socialist-statist thoughts. The state’s adoption of Indigenous ethical-philosophical principles implied a connection to welfare eco-socialism and Sustainable Development, ultimately sacrificing the ecological and spiritual dimensions that were integral to the original *Sumak Kawsay* proposal (Cuestas-Caza, 2018, pp. 54-55). This tension is further elucidated in Viteri Gualinga’s (2003) observation that there is no equivalent concept of ‘development’ within *Sumak Kawsay*.

In Kichwa cosmologies, time is not a linear, measurable progression but a cyclical (*Pachakuti*) and relational process (*Tukuna*) that interconnects (*Kawsak Sacha*) the past, present, and future. This view disrupts the dominant conception of time in modern development, as described by Habermas (1984), where the future is seen as the point of departure for progress. Kichwa perspectives challenge this linear view by emphasizing the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of maintaining balance in the present. As Krenak (2020a, p. 15) suggests, when time is no longer viewed as something to be measured or controlled for development’s sake, the logic of modern global capitalism faces challenges in sustaining its narrative of perpetual growth and expansion. The reductive view of nature and time as static, controllable entities fails to recognize the complex temporal layers in Indigenous worldviews.

In contrast, the encounters and clashes - or *Tinkuy* - between global North and South transition/transformation discourses calls for a pluriversal approach, recognizing the diverse temporalities, practices, and epistemic-ontological perspectives. As Escobar (2020, p. 27) argues, multiple worlds exist, “partially connected but radically different [whose recognition and praxis] entails an entirely different ethics of life, of being-doing-knowing” that is rooted in interrelationship rather than domination. These forms of interrelationship are not about total abandonment of one world for another, but rather a recognition of the coexistence of multiple worlds.

In line with the pluriversal perspective, Enrique Dussel’s (2012) concept of transmodernity offers critical insights to Eurocentric modernist discourses. Dussel argues that we must move beyond contemporary modernity, not merely toward a postmodern framework, but to a *trans* (beyond) -*modern* one, critically situated outside the confines of modernity. This shift is rooted in ‘critical border spaces,’ where intercultural dialogues challenge Western-centric epistemologies. Transmodernity, according to Dussel (2012, p. 50), is not only inclusive and pluriversal but also deeply ethical, with the goal of advancing the unfinished project of decolonization by bringing about its political realization.

When reflecting on the role of time in pursuing a pluriversal transmodern approach to the future, Ailton Krenak's concept of the 'Ancestral Future' offers a critical reimagining of temporal relations. Krenak (2024) argues that the future is not a horizon to be conquered through technological progress or domination, but a continuation of ancestral ties to the land, grounded in Indigenous knowledges. This perspective envisions time as cyclical and relational, positioning the future as a collective, ethical continuation of ancestral wisdom and ecological stewardship, sustained through a reciprocal relationship with nature. This view challenges the prevalent conceptions of the future as a distant endpoint for planning, control, and competition. As Krenak puts it:

First of all, the future doesn't exist – we just imagine it. To say that something is going to happen in the future doesn't require anything, for it is an illusion. So, you can deposit everything there like in a game of dice. Unfortunately, from modernity onward, we have been induced into being part of the world in a competitive way. And this competitiveness, which has strengthened over centuries, ended up producing a world of gamers. If the future works out: "Bingo!" But the truth is that we are increasingly imagining the projection of very improbable futures, even though we continue to prefer this lie over and against the present (Krenak, 2024, p. 59).

This perspective of time resonates with the Kichwa concept of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* and *Tinkuy*, or encounter and convergence, as discussed by Inuca Lechón (2017). Unlike extractivist and growth-driven models, which externalize ecological costs onto future generations and non-human life, Krenak's Ancestral Future and Kichwa notions of time - where the future is perceived as 'behind us' and the past 'ahead' - demonstrate an alternative approach to temporality that informs deeply ethical commitments (Coello, 2020, p. 37). In such a framework, time and space are interconnected within *Pacha* (space-time-place) (Inuca Lechón, 2017, p. 6). In this temporality, the future is not seen as a separate domain; it is interwoven with the present and past - an 'ancestral space' that calls for an ethical recognition of relationality across generations.

This cyclical view of time carries significant implications for socio-environmental and intergenerational justice. As Gioconda Coello argues (2020), Kichwa anticipations of the future are not speculative; they are grounded in relationships to land, community, and the cyclical rhythms of life. Within this relational temporal logic, current environmental actions impact not only future generations of humans but also the broader community of life - a multi-species and intergenerational responsibility often diminished in mainstream sustainability discourses. Embracing such an Ancestral Future requires a decolonization of time and a reorientation toward modes of existence that prioritize ecological respect, relational ethics, and a commitment to life in its myriad forms. By adopting this lens, the future becomes an expansive, shared space that transcends a human-centered viewpoint, integrating the rights, responsibilities, and rhythms of all living beings. By reconnecting to these temporalities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can aspire to a future that is not a mere 'improbable illusion' or abstract projection, but a living convergence grounded in the cyclical rhythms of life.

4.2 Temporal and Territorial Sovereignty in *Kawsak Sacha*: Towards Pluriversal Transformations

For the Indigenous people, the territory constitutes the natural space of life, conceived as a fundamental ecological unity, where life evolves in its multiple expressions and forms. For our peoples, these spaces are sources of wisdom and knowledges, and of culture, identity, traditions and rights... Therefore, the conception of territory is intimately linked to the exercise of our collective rights and the self-determination as peoples (Viteri Gualinga, 2004, p. 30 [translation from Spanish by the authors]).

The introductory quote from Viteri Gualinga frames the importance and meaning of territory and territoriality (ethnoterritorial belonging) in the multidimensional struggles for self-determination/autonomy and territorial sovereignty. The link between territory and Indigenous identity extends beyond land to be owned or used; it is a fundamental source of wisdom and knowledge, carrying cultural, spiritual and social significance. As integral parts of Indigenous identity, territories are likewise subjects of rights to constitutional protection by the Plurinational state (Lalander & Lembke, 2020, p. 147).

In the context of Indigenous territorial protection, the Kichwa-Sarayaku's definition of the forest as "a living conscious being, a subject of rights" (*Kawsak Sacha*) adds substantive significance to existing rights by rearticulating and expanding the recognition of the Rights of Nature as a political strategy (Sarayaku Governing Council, 2018; García Ruales, 2024, pp. 17–18). *Kawsak Sacha* can be understood, in part, as a response to continuous unauthorized resource exploration without informed consent, emerging from nearly two decades of struggle, marked by battles, protests and resistance against exploitation and violence in Kichwa-Sarayaku territory. Patricia Gualinga, representative of the Amazonian Kichwa-Sarayaku people and spokesperson for *Kawsak Sacha* (Living Jungle/Living Forest), elaborates what the project signifies in terms of autonomy:

We propose a form of self-governance that doesn't mean diminishing the state structure. Rather, it means exercising territorial governance within our territories to allow us to respond to the needs of the people, who have been eternally marginalized throughout history. This Indigenous self-government allows us to respond to our particular realities. That has to be very clear. Actors from outside our communities cannot think that they can come here and negotiate over our territories through regional or central governments or large nongovernmental organizations that serve as intermediaries, while seeing us Indigenous peoples as incapable of responding. We have to find a way, because we can respond. We are the keepers of the territory. We are the caretakers. Why should those above us decide what can or cannot be allowed? That would bring another form of extraction, exploitation, marginalization, racism, and exclusion of the peoples (Patricia Gualinga, interview in: Díaz & Gualinga, 2023, p. 166).

Gualinga's emphasis on Indigenous communities as the territorial 'keepers' and 'caretakers' underscore a fundamental principle of Indigenous self-governance: the

assertion of territorial sovereignty as means to resist historical marginalization and reasserts autonomy over decision-making processes.

The Kichwa-Sarayaku and *Kawsak Sacha* form part of a broader Kichwa-Amazonian people in the Amazon Pastaza region. The historical leader and spokesperson Antonio Vargas, who is a previous president for CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities in Ecuador), underscores this collective identity in his reflection on the origins of *Kawsak Sacha*:

Sarayaku began with this *Kawsak Sacha*, but deep down it's not just Sarayaku. We who live in the forest are all *Sacha* because we are living beings in the forest. Everything that is the forest is life for us (...) Patricia can talk as an individual person, one thing is personal, the other is a form of the Kichwa nationality in Pastaza. At our last congress in Canelos we decided that *Kawsak Sacha* is not only for these persons, not only Sarayaku, *Kawsak Sacha* is for everyone of us who live in Pastaza (Antonio Vargas, interview with Lalander & Joel Bengtsson, Union Base, 3 February 2019. See also: Bengtsson, 2019).

The vision of *Kawsak Sacha* originated in Sarayaku but has since been recognized as a collective project for all Indigenous groups of the Ecuadorian Amazonia through the organization *Pastaza Kikin Kichwa Runakuna* (PAKKIRU, n.d.). This expansion underscores its broader significance for all inhabitants of the Living Forest. By integrating the Rights of Nature within a cyclical, relational temporality, *Kawsak Sacha* embodies an ethical-cultural framework that acknowledges nature's rhythms and the continuity of life. Time, as the living forest, is conceived as a sacred flow where human, non-human, visible, and invisible beings coexist in cycles of mutual regeneration (*Tukuna*), offering a radically different vision for environmental governance.

Departing from *Kawsak Sacha* as an illustrative example of relational-ontological expansion and its role in societal transformation, key distinctions arise when compared to Degrowth, particularly regarding ontological and temporal plurality. While Degrowth advocates for social justice, conviviality, and care, its ontological foundation remains largely grounded within Western universality and operates within a fundamentally linear conception of time, albeit at a reduced pace. As Kallis (2011) and Hickel (2020) emphasize, Degrowth envisions a transformation away from capitalism toward a post-growth society, but to a certain degree, this transformation still operates within a structured, teleological conception of time.

Furthermore, Degrowth's critique of capitalism remains rooted in economic and technological paradigms. Its proposals - such as work-time reduction, redistributive policies, and universal basic income - are framed within existing economic structures (Kallis, 2011; Hickel, 2020). However, it should be noted that Degrowth do offer a crucial critique of the limitations inherent in Green Growth and Sustainable Development, advocating for alternatives that are not driven by conventional development imperatives (Kothari, Demaria, & Acosta, 2014). In contrast, Indigenous ethical conceptualizations do

not center the economy as the primary organizing principle of society. The implementation of the Rights of Nature in Ecuador illustrates this divergence: rather than seeking economic alternatives within the same governance logic, Indigenous movements have pushed for the recognition of nature as a rights-bearing subject rather than an economic resource.

From a decolonial and temporal justice perspective, recognizing time as relational and cyclical is fundamental to dismantling the epistemic dominance of Western modernity in sustainability discourses. Rifkin (2017) argues that Indigenous temporalities, embedded in collective memory, oral traditions, and place-based practices, sustain cultural identity and challenge imposed linear trajectories of development. Temporal sovereignty, in this sense, is both a political assertion and an epistemic rupture. As Mignolo (2011) and Mignolo & Walsh (2018) emphasize, decolonization requires epistemic delinking - breaking away from the colonial matrix of power that structures knowledge, being, and time itself. Temporal sovereignty embodies this delinking by asserting alternative temporalities as central to self-determination and social transformation.

However, as Rifkin (2017) critiques, reducing the distinction between Western and Indigenous time to a rigid binary oversimplifies temporal experiences and risks reinforcing static models of time. These oppositions neglect the dynamic and interwoven nature of different temporal formations. Rather than imposing a singular trajectory of historical progression, embracing multiple processes of becoming reveals how various temporalities interact and influence each other without collapsing into one unified conception. This perspective is crucial for decolonial efforts, as it moves beyond the reductive framing of Indigenous temporalities as mere opposites of Western time. Instead, it allows for engaging with them on their own terms, recognizing their internal complexities and their significance within broader struggles for sovereignty and justice (Rifkin, 2017, pp. 17–18). Recognizing time beyond Western linearity is not merely an acknowledgment of cultural difference but a necessary step toward epistemic justice. It challenges the coloniality of time - the structuring of history and futurity through capitalist, extractivist, and state-centric temporalities that have historically marginalized Indigenous ways of knowing (Mignolo, 2011; Mills, 2014, 2020; Escobar, 2018b).

The need for embracing multi-temporal approaches becomes especially clear in the broader disconnection from the Earth, which Escobar (2016) identifies as a central aspect of the environmental crisis. This disconnection - the inability to “feel and sense with the Earth” - not only limits human-nature relations but also constrains the possibilities for deeper societal transformation. As Kothari et al. (2024, pp. 319-325) argue, addressing this crisis requires dismantling the rigid binaries and categories that structure dominant environmental discourses. Indigenous cosmovisions offer a compelling alternative by resisting the fragmentation of time.

Building on these perspectives and in line with our argumentation, Jorge Garcia-Arias and Javier Cuestas-Caza (2024, p. 7) stress “the importance of integrating human activity with the rhythms and limits of nature, respecting all forms of life as an interconnected whole.”

The authors suggest a transformative model including post-developmental, intercultural, decolonial and ecological dimensions based on the principles of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*. This combination would serve as a bridge to an ethically and ecologically conscious society rooted in justice, diversity, and interconnectedness.

Unlike the reformist agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals or the eco-modernist Green Transition, these Indigenous transformative discourses call for a fundamental rethinking of societal structures. They embrace pluriversal, multi-temporal realities that are delinked from modernist paradigms, fostering worlds where nature and society can coexist while respecting both natural and social boundaries. To claim that these alternatives bear little resemblance to the Sustainable Development Goals would be an understatement. In fact, there are multiple worlds and paradigm shifts between them.

5. Concluding Remarks: Temporal Justice and Pluriversal Futures

This article has explored and critically analyzed the temporal dimensions of alternative development discourses, contrasting the linear, growth-driven frameworks of Sustainable Development and Green Transition with the cyclical, relational, and decelerative perspectives of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* and Degrowth. Each approach is underpinned by distinct temporalities that shape its perspective on sustainable futures. By addressing these perspectives, this study aimed to create space for multiple, coexisting visions of transition and transformation, emphasizing the often-overlooked temporal dimensions within development discourses. We have highlighted the crucial distinction between what is transitional and what is transformative, as these concepts carry different implications, particularly regarding their potential outcomes for environmental and social justice.

The reformist model of Sustainable Development, despite its initially radical aspirations, has evolved into what can be described as an ‘anti-politics machine,’ that suppresses transformative possibilities in favor of dominant narratives centered on Western perspective of progress and development. Both Sustainable Development and Green Transition are anchored in a linear temporality that perpetuates modernist patterns of thought and action. These discourses, with their promises of a sustainable future, uphold and reinforce structures of (linear) dominance within a global capitalist system. This alignment is particularly evident in the growing demand for transition minerals, predominantly located in Indigenous territories. Far from breaking with past paradigms, these approaches - whether consciously designed or shaped by entrenched structural dynamics - replicate modernist, colonial, and capitalist logics, now under the guise of sustainability. This highlights how temporalities, far from being neutral constructs, are deeply embedded in and reinforce existing power structures.

In contrast, the alternative discourses of *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay*, *Kawsak Sacha* and Degrowth challenge the very foundations of modernist progress. Degrowth, emerging as a transformative narrative from the global North, holds considerable potential and shares key affinities with Indigenous epistemic-ontological principles. They advocate for

temporalities grounded in cyclical regeneration, relationality, and interconnectedness, offering a transformative vision of sustainability that aligns with the rhythms of nature.

The relational cyclical perspectives in *Buen Vivir/Sumak Kawsay* and *Kawsak Sacha* center on nature and non-human entities, with *Ushay* (power), *Yachay* (knowledge) and *Tukuna* (transformation) informing an interconnected worldview where power is exercised through relational and regenerative (*Pachakuti*) processes, rather than dominance or hierarchy. In this context, *Tukuna* represents the cyclical and transformative nature of these processes, emphasizing continuous renewal and change, rather than a linear or static progression. The legal recognition of *Kawsak Sacha* as a living forest serves as a powerful example of transformation discourse. By asserting nature and non-human entities as subjects of rights, *Kawsak Sacha* challenges conventional views of nature as resource or property, positioning itself as a powerful conceptual and political alternative. This approach shifts the paradigm, emphasizing that all elements of the ecosystem, including the forest, possess rights. Such a perspective challenges the traditional human-centric legal system. By recognizing nature as a living, interconnected being, we can begin to reframe the broader narrative about human-nature relationships, with balance rather than dominance.

Achieving this transformation also requires confronting colonial structures and legacies. Decolonization - referred to as epistemic justice - is a crucial step toward creating just and sustainable futures. This justice is not only about reclaiming Indigenous knowledge systems but also about recognizing that the world is pluriversal, rather than universal. In a pluriversal world, many different realities can coexist, and these diverse realities are restorative and cyclical. Transformation and transition discourses must integrate different temporalities, recognizing marginalized temporal perspectives and fostering temporal sovereignty.

The shift toward sustainable futures demands the recognition of multiple worlds, ontologies, and epistemologies that acknowledges relationality and interconnection. As Krenak's notion of the Ancestral Future suggests, sustainable futures are not distant endpoints to be achieved but ongoing processes of regeneration and coexistence rooted in ancestral wisdom and ethical stewardship. Ultimately, the pluriversal transformation we advocate is one of cyclical regeneration and relationality, where the interconnectedness of all beings is recognized and upheld, and the principles embodied in *Tukuna* provide a foundation for advancing sustainable futures.

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*****Note.* Front page image: Detail from the ceramic artwork "Växande" ("Growing") by Barbro Johansson as part of a larger collaborative project with artist Torgny Larsson. Photo by Natalie Laprevote, January 14, 2025, Svedmyra subway station, Stockholm.