

## Abstract

### Breaking fictions, re-thinking nature:

#### Sumak Kawsay, degrowth and ‘compensation for non-production’ in the Yasuní

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Narratives such as *sumak kawsay* (“life in fullness”) and *degrowth* have tried to disconnect from the imperative of growth and the ideology of progress. They have paid little attention, however, to the accumulation process, thereby failing to rethink nature outside the logic of capital. By analyzing the Yasuni-ITT initiative—a proposal based on “compensation for non-production” of oil in the Ecuadorian Amazon—we critically engage environmentalist narratives around the initiative inspired by degrowth and *sumak kawsay*. We show that their proposal to ‘leave oil in the soil’ in the Yasuni focused on climate change and the respect of the area’s biophysical balance as a way to preserve indigenous people’s livelihoods. However, by not understanding the problem of non-production as an issue of *disconnection from capital accumulation*, it ended up reproducing the fictitious valuation of nature by proposing carbon market schemes as a substitute for oil extraction. We argue that the environmentalists’ failure to understand the initiative as a problem of accumulation exemplifies the limits of degrowth and *sumak kawsay* as proposals for an alternative (to) development. By drawing on a critical political economy framework, we show that categories such as “dependency” and “rent” are fundamental to understanding the challenges of moving away from extraction-based development in peripheral countries. These, paradoxically, are mobilized by the government’s own proposal for the Yasuni, albeit in contradictory ways. This paper ultimately seeks to strengthen *sumak kawsay* and degrowth proposals by suggesting that they centre their analysis on the role of nature for capital accumulation.

Keywords: capital accumulation, *sumak kawsay*, degrowth, Yasuní, nature no-production.

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