
Solidarity and ecological balance: global perspectives on revaluing eco-human kinship

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This article explores the concept and application of ‘solidarity’ and ecological ‘balance’ as a way to gain a fresh perspective on the relationship between nature and humankind. Following a legal pluralist and post-humanist theoretical framework, solidarity and balance are examined for how they are expressed to illustrate the ecological and social interdependencies between ecosystems and society, and their impact on environmental governance. The application of balance and solidarity are presented through five specific philosophies, movements or worldviews that propose alternative models of non-Western socio-economic and legal-cultural pathways: the Balinese *Tri Hita Karana*, Central and Southern Africa’s *Ubuntu*, South America’s *buen vivir*, India’s *ecological Swaraj*, and the global conceptualisation and application of *degrowth*. These perspectives emphasise the importance of cultural and legal plurality as well as the communal efforts to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice, and wellbeing. They all support a narrative that displaces the traditional universalisation of anthropocentrism and Western-centric modes of conceptualising and interpreting law and society. The intent of this analysis is to explore the similarities among the above worldviews and present their potential applicability to a variety of contexts. By de-centring Western anthropocentric paradigms of environmental governance, it is possible to overcome the false dichotomy between anthropocentric and eco-centric approaches in environmental law and contribute to a re-prioritisation of the role of nature in the debate on sustainable development. This process of re-prioritisation has both theoretical

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and practical significance, as it brings together the contributions of legal pluralism and post-humanism in environmental and social governance on one hand, and appraises alternative tools and modalities for law and policy-making that fully recognise the role of local and indigenous practices on the other.

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Marta Simonetti

Introduction

In environmental governance, the concepts of 'solidarity' and 'balance' reflect the interconnectedness between ecosystems and society. They are integrally embodied in worldviews that offer alternative socio-economic and legal models outside of a Western framework. These include the Balinese *Tri Hita Karana* ('three causes of happiness'), Central and Southern Africa's *Ubuntu* (emphasising humanness), South America's *buen vivir* (or 'living well'), India's *ecological Swaraj* on ecological and social sustainability, and the conceptualisation and application of *degrowth*, a global social movement promoting a more inclusive paradigm of growth. These perspectives highlight the significance of cultural and legal diversity, as well as collective approaches to achieving environmental sustainability, social justice, and wellbeing. These worldviews are polycentric, with their union between spiritual and physical matter, between humankind and non-human entities. They exemplify a perspective on law and society that recognises both formal and informal legal systems, as well as a post-humanist approach that decentres humankind. As such, they challenge the simplistic divide between anthropocentric and eco-centric views and advance nature's role in the debates on growth and environmentally sound development. A legal pluralist and post-humanist theoretical framework provides an expanded vocabulary and tools to observe, situate and analyse the aforementioned expressions of 'solidarity' and 'balance' in the spheres of environmental and social governance. Lastly, this approach provides theoretical and practical tools that reflect traditional and indigenous practices in law and policy.

Ecological balance: a pluralistic and post-humanist approach

Definitions of 'ecological balance' and a 'healthy environment' are formed by scientific, sociological and ontological perspectives. Ecological balance is defined as the result of interactions between humankind—measured, for instance, through population density, ecological footprint, and greenhouse gas emissions¹—and the environment; it represents an 'equilibrium' in the quantity and quality of species² (humans included) and the natural world, as well as a state of 'dynamic equilibrium' in which an ecosystem can function harmoniously and sustainably.³ The concept of 'balance' is crucial for addressing the competing interests between human activities and the needs of nature, as well as between individual and community rights. It establishes ecological limits on human activities and fosters a broader approach to ethics whereby moral concerns are expanded towards non-human entities, such as the natural world. This focus on a state of balance in nature and between humankind and ecosystems is based on ensuring a stable relationship between organisms and their environment, thus underscoring the ecological and social interdependencies between ecosystems and society.⁴ This, in turn, recognises nature for its intrinsic value, rather than solely for its utility to humans.⁵ Nature and the environment can therefore be considered agents alongside humanity, in an ontology that presents "no definitive break between sentient and non-sentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena".⁶

In environmental law and governance,⁷ the term 'balance' is often used alongside the term 'healthy'.⁸ For instance, the Constitution of the Philippines refers to "the right of the people to a balanced and healthy ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony

¹ Lucia Tamburino, Giangiacomo Bravo, 'Reconciling a positive ecological balance with human development: A quantitative assessment', *Ecological Indicators*, 129 (2021), pp. 1–9.

² Craig Kauffman and Linda Sheehan, 'The Rights of Nature: Guiding Our Responsibilities through Standards', in *Environmental Rights: The Development of Standards*, ed. by Stephen Turner et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 342–66.

³ See for example: https://wwf.panda.org/discover/knowledge_hub/teacher_resources/webfieldtrips/ecological_balance/.

⁴ John Thompson et al, 'Ecological solidarity as a conceptual tool for rethinking ecological and social interdependence in conservation policy for protected areas and their surrounding landscape', *Comptes Rendus Biologies*, 334.5–6 (2011), pp. 412–19.

⁵ Diana Coole, Samantha Frost (eds), 'Introducing new materialisms', in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) pp. 1–43.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Throughout this article, I refer to law as the system of rules, both formal and informal, at the national level as well as at the localised, customary and/or indigenous level. When referring to governance, I refer to processes and mechanisms to enact those rules.

⁸ May and Daly bring many more examples in their discussion on environmental constitutionalism and the role of balancing anthropocentric rights to a clean and healthy environment with expressions and commitments to a balanced ecology. See: James R May, Erin Daly, *Global Environmental Constitutionalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

of nature”; Qatar mentions that “the State endeavours to protect the environment and its ecological balance”. In Indonesia, the 1945 Constitution refers to the “right to live in physical and spiritual prosperity, to have a home and to enjoy a good and healthy environment”⁹ under the Human Rights section. Another reference to the environment and the concept of balance in Indonesian society is made in Article 33.4, where it is stated that the national economy is based on “principles of togetherness, efficiency with justice, continuity, environmental perspective, self-sufficiency, and keeping a balance in the progress and unity of the national economy”.¹⁰

This analysis uses frameworks provided by theories of legal pluralism and post-humanism to inquire into the characteristics of the worldviews presented here, and how their commonalities also provide universal principles of solidarity and kinship. Legal pluralism challenges the presumption that the law is solely the product of state activity and recognises that there are multiple sources for law and legal authority beyond the state.¹¹ It is an analytical prerequisite for enabling the exploration of worldviews and philosophical positions or movements that exist alongside formal law. Pluralism in this context aims to pinpoint the limits of ‘singularity’, a term that encompasses legal positivism’s scientific, objective nature but fails to recognise the socio-cultural contexts in which the law develops. Margaret Davies (2005) stresses that by recognising ‘multiplicity’ in legal theory and in legal practice, legal pluralism can best offer the blueprint to understand and interpret the law in its socio-cultural context in ways that are “appropriate to contemporary conditions of cultural and political diversity”.¹² Conversely, legal ‘monism’ and legal positivism – with their emphasis on singularity, totality, objectivity and centralisation – are ill-equipped to explain the complexities of different societies and groups, their symbols, values, language, and customs.¹³ In fact, they can be “obsolete and obstructive”¹⁴ because they fail to respond to the evolving social demands of societies, thus discounting the complexities of a varied and complex world. This situation in turn risks diminishing the voice of oppressed groups such as ethnic minorities, women or nature itself.¹⁵

⁹ Article 28 H, *The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia* – As amended by the First Amendment of 1999, the Second Amendment of 2000, the Third Amendment of 2001 and the Fourth Amendment of 2002. <http://www.humanrights.asia/indonesian-constitution-1945-consolidated/>.

¹⁰ Article 33.4, Section on the National Economy and Social Welfare, *The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia*. <https://jdih.bapeten.go.id/unggah/dokumen/peraturan/116-full.pdf>.

¹¹ Joyeeta Gupta, Antoinette Hildering and Daphina Misiedjan, ‘Indigenous People’s Right to Water Under International Law: A Legal Pluralism Perspective’, *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*, 11 (2014), pp. 26–33.

¹² Margaret Davies, ‘The Ethos of Pluralism’, *Sydney Law Review*, 27.1 (2005), pp. 87–112.

¹³ See Ch. 3 ‘Natural Law and Positivism’ in Margaret Davies, *Asking the Law Question* (Sydney: The Law Book Company, 2002), pp. 75–127.

¹⁴ Davies (2005), p. 90 and p. 112.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 100–106.

A post-humanist approach also questions human superiority over nature, urging the need to de-centre the position of a Western-centric (and typically white, male) representation of humankind as the sole 'beneficiary' in its interaction with nature. Rosi Braidotti (2013) observes a number of changes – digitalisation, technology, bio-engineering or the climate crisis, for instance – that have blurred the distinction between what is human and non-human.¹⁶ Specific to the environment, these changes have led to strengthening the Earth's role as a political agent in an attempt to enrich the narrative on sustainability and environmental rights.¹⁷ This is reflected by approaches such as the rights of nature and new materialism¹⁸ that have sought to change the perspective of analysis by re-positioning nature at the centre of the debate on sustainable development. Nature, humanity and non-human entities are then seen in their relational dimensions that focus on connections and interdependence, rather than exploitation and domination.¹⁹ By removing the hierarchy of man, the supremacy of the human experience over the natural world is also challenged from political, ethical and (specific to the research focus of this article) ontological perspectives by providing additional viewpoints and explanations on existence and the way it interrelates with the wider cosmos. Fostering the idea of ecological balance as a means for promoting environmental governance and rights paves the way towards alternative models that are truly pluralistic, value a variety of knowledge systems, and see all elements of life (material, social, and spiritual) as interconnected.²⁰

Relational aspects and kinship: overcoming dichotomous modes of governance

The worldviews examined in this article—*Tri Hita Karana*, *Ubuntu*, *buen vivir*, *ecological Swaraj*, and *degrowth*—share common modes of governance based on trust, consensus,

¹⁶ Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Books, 2013).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ The rights of nature are a legal and philosophical concept that grants ecosystems and natural entities—such as rivers, mountains, or forests—intrinsic rights, thus conferring legal 'personhood' (nature as the right holder) and 'standing' (nature bringing a case to a hearing). This approach differs from the conventional legal perspective, which considers nature as property or a resource to be used for human benefit (see, for example, an introduction to the rights of nature in <https://www.garn.org/rights-of-nature/> and in <https://www.boell.de/en/2025/01/23/rights-nature-redefinition-human-nature-relations>). New materialism stresses the independent and active role of non-human entities, such as indeed nature, defying previous characterisation of nature as passive. Having agency, nature can act, influence and be influenced. This perspective provides content to extrapolate the intrinsic value of nature and potentially empowers the development of a (legal) framework that enhances non-anthropocentric environmental rights. See Diana Coole, Samantha Frost (eds) (2020).

¹⁹ Jérémie Gilbert, 'Creating Synergies between International Law and Rights of Nature', in *Transnational Environmental Law*, 12.3 (2023), pp. 671–92.

²⁰ Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta, 'Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy', *Development*, 57.3–4 (2014), pp. 362–75.

transparency, inclusivity, and reciprocity. Through their focus on relations and kinships, they aim to restore the balance disrupted by a Western anthropocentric and colonial perspective. Loh (2022) argues that these relational qualities both shape and are shaped by a fundamentally posthuman vision of inclusive ethics.²¹ There is a reversal of perspective here: while an exclusionary approach is characterised by centrism (having one moral agent), anthropocentrism (seen as an inevitability), hierarchy and a dichotomous nature, the focus on relations instead stresses the interconnectedness between the human and the non-human as well as the human and nature. These worldviews reject the notion of the human as the sole autonomous agent and place it instead in a space characterised by entangled relations with both human and non-human entities.

These entangled relations are dynamic and polycentric, based on kinship and a network of relations that include bioethics, which honours all life and the rights of nature;²² a holistic view of human wellbeing that equally values both spiritual and material elements; social and environmental equity and justice; solidarity and reciprocity with respect for both collective and individual rights; responsibility; ecological integrity and resilience; and a meaningful pursuit of happiness.²³ These characteristics exemplify reciprocal responsibility, interdependence, accountability and care. In these spaces, human and non-human entities can be studied in all their self-organising components, i.e. vital and active forces that shape, create and enable experiences.²⁴ Sharing resources, nutrients, and space becomes a proxy for mutuality, “where the members of an ecosystem are interdependent and, in a sense, reciprocally give and receive gifts. The quality of reciprocity among members of an ecosystem is essential.”²⁵ What becomes crucial in the inquiry into these worldviews is the process to understand the quality of the relationships, which, in Karen Barad’s (2007) theory of agential realism, overcomes the binary positions between material and socio-cultural perspectives and therefore enables us to see the universe as a unified whole.²⁶

²¹ Janina Loh, ‘Posthumanism and Ethics’, in *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, ed. by Stefan Herbrechter et al (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 1073–93.

²² Donna Haraway, analysed in Hannes Bergthaller and Eva Horn, ‘Posthumanism and the Anthropocene’, in *Palgrave Handbook of Critical Posthumanism*, ed. by Stefan Herbrechter et al. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022), pp. 1159–78.

²³ Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta. ‘Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy’, *Development*, 57.3–4 (2014), pp. 362–75.

²⁴ Diana Coole, Samantha Frost (eds). ‘Introducing new materialisms’, in *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) pp. 1–43.

²⁵ Kyle Whyte, ‘Indigenous Environmental Justice: Anti-Colonial Action through Kinship’, in *Environmental Justice: Key Issues*, ed. by Brendan Coolsaet (Oxford: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), pp. 268–69.

²⁶ Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

Embodied narratives of ecological balance

The worldviews of *Tri Hita Karana*, *Ubuntu*, *buen vivir*, *ecological Swaraj* and *degrowth* share important commonalities. With their focus on relational and kinship aspects of governance, the decentring of the role of humankind, and the recognition of the deep value of ecosystems in the balance of the universe, they embody the narrative of normative pluralism with its focus on the importance of norms and customs as legal expressions, and of post-humanist thought with its emphasis on non-human entities. Together, they manifest polycentric forms of life and power.

Worldview	Area	Characteristics	Influence on law and governance
Tri Hita Karana	Bali (Indonesia)	– Underpins kinship and union among humankind, God (or other higher spiritual entity) and nature. – Embraces collective systems of governance. – Exemplifies normative plurality.	– Influence upon the governance of resources. – Additional influence on aspects of customary law recognised at the local level.
Ubuntu	South-ern and central African countries	– Focuses on humanity and humanness. – Stresses link among people and with nature. – Upholds kinship and relations. – Challenges hierarchy.	– Direct influence on content and on limits of certain rights (e.g. national law, South Africa). – Recognition of application of principles in international law.
Buen Vivir	Bolivia Ecuador	– Places social justice and equity as pillars of any debate on growth and development. – Recognised rights of nature as intrinsic to interaction with the environment. – Interdependence and balance among all beings. – Attributes value to grassroots movements, democratic participation. – Support non-exploitative growth.	– Direct link, e.g. the Bolivian Constitution (2009) and Ecuador's (2008) recognise <i>buen vivir</i> as a guiding principle to ensure harmony with nature and people.
Ecological Swaraj	India	– Social justice. – Democratic participation. – Self-rule, grassroots, democratic involvement on governance and decision-making.	– Influence principle of localised governance, direct democracy – Application in international law
Degrowth	Global	– Ecological sustainability. – Social justice. – Purposeful reduction of economic growth. – Alternatives to growth and societal well-being.	– Some countries modelled development pathways on degrowth principles.

Tri Hita Karana

In Bali, the concept of *Tri Hita Karana* (the 'three causes of happiness') represents an alternative model to Western socio-economic and legal-cultural pathways and is at the basis of the cultural, socio-legal, and spiritual organisation of the *desa adat* (customary

villages). The philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana* permeates all dimensions of life and is an essential driver of ecological sustainability in village life and for the governance of local natural resources. It provides the spiritual backbone for and the embodiment of a belief conducive to protecting ecosystems, species, and natural cycles. There is a critical focus on the symbiosis between people and nature: nature as a whole and natural resources, such as water and forests, are recognised as autonomous and interdependent ecosystems, rather than objects or property for human consumption. Achieving this balance highlights the interconnectedness between humans and nature, the significance of cultural and legal plurality, and the communal efforts to attain environmental sustainability, social justice, and wellbeing.²⁷

In Bali, maintaining a balance between nature and people can be conveyed through the practice of *subak*. This is a traditional and communal water management process using filtering wells, next to which a stone or small monolith is positioned, to indicate the veneration of water by the Balinese people as well as to manage a stable and equitable distribution of water across local farms and villages.²⁸ In this context, the *subak* embodies the philosophy of *Tri Hita Karana*, uniting the spiritual, human, and natural realms. The democratic and egalitarian practices of the *subak* system have allowed Balinese farmers to grow rice more abundantly than anywhere else in the archipelago, despite the challenges posed by a dense population and land encroachment for real estate developments.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an African worldview that centres on humanness and the interdependence of individuals with their communities and ecosystems, acknowledging that every life is realised within a community viewed as “a network of mutuality”.²⁹ It is a “social system where everyone takes responsibility for one another and for the collective whole.”³⁰ Ubuntu embodies a language that is “both compassionate and capable of uniting previously conflicting national groups and communities for a renewed social and political beginning”³¹ where humanity is shaped by the environment. This environment

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ I Made Geria et al., ‘Built environment from the ancient Bali: The Balinese heritage for sustainable water management’, *Heliyon*, 9.11 (2023).

²⁹ James Ogude (ed.) *Ubuntu and the Reconstitution of Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), pp. 1–19.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

encompasses not only the community but also the natural ecosystem and the local neighbourhoods in larger urban areas. The concept of Ubuntu, which pertains to unity and reconciliation, can also extend to our relationship with nature and reconciliation with Mother Earth. Among African communities, it is commonly believed that the Earth is a living entity, serving as a home for God and ancestors. The environment is therefore respected as a dwelling of the highest spiritual forces.³² The philosophy of Ubuntu emphasises that caring for the Earth involves stewardship, not just out of reverence for ancestors and concern for future generations, but also in recognising the Earth as a 'clan member', deserving of the same care given to mothers or cousins.³³ Etieyibo (2017) enhances the traditional interpretation of Ubuntu with added meanings, asserting that this offers a stronger framework for environmental protection compared to the prevailing "Western individualistic system of capitalism."³⁴ Ubuntu underscores the need to treat nature as equivalent to human beings, recognising the profound connection between people and their environment. Nevertheless, the colonisation and racialisation of both people and nature in Africa have disrupted this bond, resulting in the erosion of empathy towards the environment amidst the rising urbanisation and commercialisation of African societies and lifestyles.³⁵

Buen Vivir

Buen vivir is the Spanish translation of the Quechua term *Sumak Kawsay*, meaning 'living well'.³⁶ Rooted in the indigenous worldviews of Latin America, *buen vivir* emphasises the inherent value and rights of nature, and the importance of living in harmony with the land. This perspective rejects the notion of nature as a resource to be exploited and instead views humans as integral members of a larger, interconnected ecosystem.³⁷ It places the wellbeing of the community above individual interests, fostering social justice and equality.

³² Robert K Chigangaidze, 'The environment has rights: Eco-spiritual social work through ubuntu philosophy and Pachamama: A commentary', *International Social Work*, 66 (2023), pp. 1059–63.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Edwin Etieyibo, 'Ubuntu and the Environment', in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy*, ed. by Adeshina Afolayan and Toyin Falola (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 633–57.

³⁵ Danford Tafadzwa Chibvongodze, 'Ubuntu is Not Only About the Human! An Analysis of the Role of African Philosophy and Ethics in Environment Management', *Journal of Human Ecology*, 53 (2016), pp. 157–66.

³⁶ Oliver Balch, 'Buen Vivir: The Social Philosophy Inspiring Movements in South America', *The Guardian*, 4 February 2013.

³⁷ Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta. 'Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy' *Development*, 57.3–4 (2014), pp. 362–75.

With its focus on the interconnectedness of all life, *buen vivir* also offers an alternative paradigm to development driven by technological advances, capitalism and unrestrained investments.³⁸ This alternative model can respond to the long-standing search for harmonious ways of living by indigenous peoples over the past centuries. *Buen vivir* rejects the Western concept of linear development, which sees a path from underdevelopment to development achieved through the exploitation of natural resources. As such, it breaks down the anthropocentric narrative of human dominance over nature.³⁹ It recognises that people are an integral (and symbiotic) part of nature and should not “dominate, commodify, privatise and destroy it”.⁴⁰ This alternative perspective further supports the value of indigenous peoples’ diverse cultures and traditions and a harmonious relationship between humans and nature.

Ecological Swaraj

Ecological Swaraj is a concept that draws on Gandhian principles of self-determination and indigenous worldviews. It envisions a radical ecological democracy that prioritises both environmental sustainability and social justice while promoting local self-governance and collective action.⁴¹ In *ecological Swaraj*, the connection between humanity and nature is achieved through self-reliance, self-governance, and direct participatory democracy, which are the fundamental pillars of environmental governance. It is recognised that local communities should have economic power over their own resources and that there should be no exploitation or coercion of those groups by larger corporations or the state in the name of economic growth and development. In this sphere of direct political democracy, decision-making authority originates at the most basic level of a human community, whether rural or urban, granting every person the right, ability, and opportunity to participate. This authority subsequently expands to higher tiers of governance that are accountable to the grassroots, guaranteeing that political decision-making honours ecological and cultural limits.⁴² Furthermore, there is full recognition of the plurality of cultural norms and knowledge, which is no longer considered intellectual

³⁸ Alberto Acosta and Mateo Martínez Abarca, ‘Buen Vivir: An Alternative Perspective from the Peoples of the Global South to the Crisis of Capitalist Modernity’, in *The Climate Crisis: South African and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives*, ed. by Vishwas Satgar (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018), pp. 131–47.

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 131–47.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 138.

⁴¹ Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta (2014), pp. 362–75.

⁴² Ibid.

property of a specific group (and as such, legally protected) but rather a public good for everyone.

Degrowth

Similar to the worldviews analysed above, *degrowth* also brings attention to the perpetuating contradictions of the sustainable development narrative while seeking an alternative in which societies can thrive using fewer natural resources. Moving away from growth defined exclusively as growth in the gross domestic product index, *degrowth* challenges the hegemony of the market. It demands a “democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialised countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice, and well-being”.⁴³ This model seeks to teach people to appreciate the beauty of small things and local produce again, and as such it seeks to have a closer position to nature and the means of production so that societies will learn to prioritise social and ecological wellbeing over consumption and production.

Degrowth presents ideas that are not bound in discrete territorial entities but that can, nonetheless, frame the narrative and shape individual countries’ responses to the socio-economic and environmental crises it seeks to address. In its applications, the degrowth movement has highlighted the importance of moving beyond a one-size-fits-all model of socio-ecological transformation. This approach highlights the need for context-specific solutions that consider historical inequalities, global economic dependencies, and diverse local contexts, including recognising alternative pathways towards growth and development rooted in indigenous knowledge and post-development thought. The Kingdom of Bhutan is a notable example of experimenting with various paradigms of growth, as exemplified by the establishment of the Gross National Happiness Index, which is now applied across policy drafting and implementation.⁴⁴ The index broadens the understanding of what sustainable growth means for people and ecosystems. It is based on four pillars (sustainable and equitable socio-economic development; good governance and equality before the law; ecological sustainability; cultural preservation), which provide a pathway to overcome the negative consequences of capitalism, including growing inequalities and climate change-induced disasters.

⁴³ Ibid, pp. 368–69.

⁴⁴ See for instance: <https://www.gnhcentrebbutan.org/gnh-happiness-index/>.

Conclusion

The emergence of analogous notions expressed across different regions of the world – utilising distinctive narratives while centring on common themes of solidarity, ecological balance, the de-commodification of nature, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and social justice – attests to the necessity for radical political and ecological transformations founded on shared goals and collective responsibility. The approaches of *Tri Hita Karana*, *Ubuntu*, *buen vivir*, *ecological swaraj*, and *degrowth* provide alternatives for environmental preservation, challenging the linear models of development, including those advocated by contemporary sustainable development practices that fail to address the historical and structural roots of unsustainability and inequality.⁴⁵ They recognise the bio-physical limits of the Western model of economic growth and seek to find solutions through a narrative that values culture, customs, and spirituality.⁴⁶ They enhance the often inadequate emphasis on direct, community-level participation in environmental governance.⁴⁷ This, in turn, prioritises cultural diversity as well as ethical and spiritual values, particularly the rights of indigenous peoples and communities to economic and cultural self-determination and participatory environmental governance.⁴⁸

The narratives of legal pluralism and of post-humanism help reveal the richness of spaces and forms in which law, culture and governance can manifest. For instance, integrating anthropocentric perspectives with environmental consciousness⁴⁹ rebalances human-centric substantive and procedural rights (the rights-holders being people) with the needs and rights of nature and other non-human entities (that can become legal holders of those same rights). Avoiding a false dichotomy between anthropocentric and eco-centric approaches can not only foster synergies between the two approaches but can also contribute to a re-prioritisation of the role of nature in the debate on equitable, as well as socially and environmentally sustainable development.⁵⁰

Furthermore, the worldviews examined in this article share common principles that transcend physical borders and geographical locations. The narrative around regenerative rather than exploitative practices and the overcoming of the dichotomy of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, of nature versus humanity, has resonated globally because it supports

⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 362–375.

⁴⁶ Ashish Kothari, Federico Demaria, Alberto Acosta. (2014), pp. 362–75.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Linda Hajjar Leib, ‘Reconfiguration of the Human Rights System in Light of Sustainable Development and The Two-Level Conceptualisation of Environmental Rights’, in *Human Rights and the Environment: Philosophical, Theoretical and Legal Perspectives* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 109–56.

⁵⁰ Philippe Cullet, ‘From Green Rights to Rights of Nature: Fostering Synergies’, *Green Diplomacy* (2023).

a more relational approach to protecting nature, including the broader recognition of the rights of nature in national and international law.⁵¹ Finally, it provides a number of potential pathways to ecological balance and social justice that can lead to political empowerment and contribute to more just and equitable societal relations.

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