

SHARED | DIÁLOGOS
DIALOGUES | COMPARTIDOS

ECOTONO



Shared Dialogues is a transdisciplinary project which explores participatory and artistic tools for sparking collective reflections about ecological loss and environmental conflict experiences, in particular those related to the Mar Menor lagoon eutrophication

The project is based on a participatory research process carried out between January 2021 and February 2023 by Violeta Cabello Villarejo and Paula Adrea Zuluaga-Guerra together with local actors. The project started with the socio-historical analysis of the territory, followed by a co-research process for dialoguing and reflecting on the Mar Menor and de Campo de Cartagena. **Shared Dialogues** culminates this research with the co-creation of visual stories by the researchers Violeta Cabello Villarejo, Paula Adrea Zuluaga-Guerra, Paula Novo, Marcela Brugnach and María Mancilla Garcia, together with visual artist Josune Urrutia Asua.

In this document we present a brief background on the social conflict that has arisen from the eutrophication on the Mar Menor lagoon and that has led to the challenging of the intensive agriculture of the drainage basin (Campo de Cartagena). To then share relevant insights about the participatory research process and of the making of the visual stories.

About the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena

The Mar Menor is a 135 km² coastal lagoon (the largest in the western Mediterranean), located in Southeastern Spain, in the region of Murcia. It is home to unique biodiversity, is essential for the livelihood of about 100 artisanal fishers and several tourist operators, and is also the region's family summer resort par excellence. However, it is currently undergoing a serious ecological crisis due to the excessive enrichment of its waters with nutrients, mainly from agriculture, but also from livestock farming, runoff during storms, and deficiencies in the wastewater treatment networks.

The eutrophication of the lagoon has been translated into the disproportionate growth of microalgae, which dyed the waters green in 2016, and to two mass wildlife death events in 2019 and 2021 (due to biochemical processes that made the water anoxic). Although this kind of events have not happened again in the following years, the lagoon remains fragile and subjected to much uncertainty.

The basin that drains water to the lagoon is one of the most important agricultural areas in

Spain, the 'Campo de Cartagena, known as the Campo. Known as "Europe's orchard", this area has been almost exclusively dedicated to intensive irrigated agriculture of vegetables and citrus fruits since the 1980s, when it became one of the beneficiary areas of the Tagus-Segura water transfer. The fast transformation from secano to irrigated agriculture not only expanded production and income generation for hundreds of families, but also saw the arrival of new actors (such as multinationals) and business connections with the European food markets. Moreover, intensive agriculture led to a new relationship with the land, as well as to the use of a migrant workforce (often poorly paid and in precarious conditions) and a sustained increase in water demand.

For four decades, the intensive agriculture of the drainage basin and the lagoon coexisted with no visible intersection. Nevertheless, with the 2016 algal bloom, the connection between the Campo de Cartagena and the Mar Menor was made clear to the public opinion and the society. In 2017, the Scientific Advisory Committee working on the official diagnosis

of the eutrophic crisis declared that the intensive agriculture of the Campo de Cartagena had major responsibility in the crisis due to the use of nitrate fertilizers and the role of urban developments (and, to that extent, of tourism) in phosphate production. Despite these first attempts at intersectoral and interdisciplinary dialogue, the politicization of participation spaces blew that fragile consensus out of the water, and the Committee broke up in 2018.

Since then, public debate has focused more on the disagreement regarding the direct sources of lagoon pollution. This debate has been strained in part by the work of a foundation financed by the agricultural sector itself, which seeks to dissolve the connection between agriculture and the Mar Menor in the media and in the public eye.

After the mass wildlife death event in 2019, social movements which started to emerge in 2015, redoubled their efforts and strengthened bonds with environmental organizations to protect the lagoon and to advocate for a deep change in the socio-economic model of the region. After thousands of people demonstrated in Cartagena, Murcia, and the lagoon area, they decided to support the idea of leading a

Popular Legislative Initiative to declare the lagoon a legal person, and to become the first ecosystem in Europe to have legal personhood. The Mar Menor was declared a legal person in October 2022, after several months of efforts evident in the collection of 639,826 signatures throughout Spain, and the passing of the law through the Parliament and the Senate.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that dialogue between the different economic sectors, administrations, social movements, and academia on how to face the eutrophic crisis of the lagoon has been virtually impossible. In fact, relationships between the various sectors have strained in the past years. When we started this research in 2021, there were no spaces for participation that were considered legitimate by all sectors, and there was profound distrust towards the administrations and scepticism of joint efforts and intersectoral collective action.

Other causes of decline and uncertainty in the lagoon.

Between the 1960's and the 1970's and with the aim of expanding the touristic capacity of the area, local governments transformed stony riverbanks into beaches, dredged the Estacio Channel to allow bigger ships to enter to the lagoon from the Mediterranean and urbanized almost the entire extension of the coasts, especially La Manga. Summer visitors who came primarily from the same region, but also from other areas such as Madrid, established their second homes in the lagoon. As the population grew, so did the need to treat water waste, which in the early years was often discharged directly into the lagoon. This led to the modernization and expansion of the treatment plants in the mid-2010s.

In the same spirit and to encourage sailing, 13 ports were built around the perimeter of the lagoon, which became one of the areas of the Mediterranean with the highest density of ports. Thus, many areas of the lagoon have been heavily deteriorated, to the extent that currents have been affected and sludge accumulation has increased, as has ship traffic.

In the southern are of the Mar Menor, close to Los Urrutias, there is a temporary, ephemeral and intermittent water channel that comes from the mining area of the Sierra Minera de Cartagena that drains into the lagoon. Although the last open-cast mines closed in the 1990s, it is estimated that the transport of heavy metals was frequent for several decades and still occurs. New studies are currently underway to determine whether physicochemical changes in the lagoon may induce the release of heavy metals into the water column. So far, research shows that these are trapped at the bottom and that removing them can be not only very costly but dangerous.

Another activity that has been growing in recent years is extensive pig farming in the Campo de Cartagena. Although their role in the crisis is rather unknown, there are scientists and activists who point out that poor waste management may be polluting the aquifer and leading to increased dissolved phosphate in the lagoon.

Creating a dialogue and collective reflection group

Paola Andrea Zuluaga-Guerra and Violeta Cabello Villarejo started their collaboration in January 2021. During their first year of work, Paula learnt from the experience of 28 people who inhabit in the mainland and lagoon areas and created, together with Violeta, a story which tells about the transformation of the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena in the last 50 years from the point of view of these people.

Based on this exercise of co-creation of the story of the transformation of the territory and their own research processes¹, inspired by scientific literature and their research-action and knowledge co-production experiences, they started the co-research process in January 2022. They proposed creating a series of dialogue and reflection spaces among local actors with different experiences and divergent opinions on what is happening in the lagoon, but who share a common concern

about the situation and the desire to contribute to its improvement.

They started from the hypothesis that transforming the existing socio-ecological conflict around the Mar Menor and its relationship with Campo de Cartagena requires the (re)construction of the social fabric encouraging collective action, and embracing existing differences between economic and social sectors. The objectives of this co-research were:

1. To contribute to depolarize the conflict on a small scale, on a “laboratory” scale, critically reflecting on the dominant narratives.
2. To create a collaborative work model between people from different socio-economic sectors, which so far is non-existent in this context.
3. To contribute to the social understanding of the socio-ecological crisis of the Mar

¹ Violeta focused on the analysis of uncertainties associated with the eutrophic crisis of the lagoon. Paula focused on the dynamic modelling of the excessive growth of irrigation in the Segura river basin as the result of a lack of governance which generated overexpectations regarding the consumption of water by growers.

Menor, bringing perspectives from the social sciences and humanities.

Out of a total of 18 invited people, 8 participated fully and 6 partially. The participants live in different areas of the territory, are engaged in various activities (agriculture, fishing, tourism, teaching, research, activism), do not hold a public office or visible positions within the sectors involved or in the public debate on the Mar Menor. The researchers explicitly decided not to involve public administrations or people holding decision-making positions to make room for people whose experiences and worries are not usually represented in the media.

After a year of collective work it is relevant to highlight that throughout the process not only new reflections emerged in the dialogues but there was a cross-pollination of knowledges and new bounds among participants were created. There were also some limitations, since it was a small group in which marginalized communities such as migrant people or youth were not involved. The main lessons learned from this whole process are included in two documents: a reflection on the Mar Menor Crisis and on how to encourage participation in this

context. [On the Mar Menor crisis and other documents on how to encourage social participation in this context.](#)

About these visual stories

The 20 visual stories presented below are fictions based on the previous co-research work. The Shared Dialogues interdisciplinary team of researchers and artist worked collectively on their development. This work involved the original creation, narration and illustration of stories representing part of the diversity of individual and collective experiences in the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena.

They do not tell all the existing stories, nor do they claim to be generalizable representations of the experiences of a sector or group. Nevertheless, they are stories that we hope will help us to understand and perceive the complexity of the socioeconomic and environmental relationships in the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena.

The stories are organised around four groups which we have named ecotones. Evocating its original definition as zones of transition or overlap between different ecosystems, we propose the notion of ecotones as a metaphor for the intersections among communities and stories that inhabit the territory. Other ways of telling and arranging the stories are possible, so we encourage readers to explore the stories without necessarily following the order in this dossier.

Inhabiting land and ocean

**The stories presented below describe the ways of life
in the mainland and in the lagoon: their practices,
feelings and concerns.**

These are some of the questions we asked and reflected on
when creating these stories:

*What are the life stories behind each character?
What do the characters have to say that cannot be heard
in public debates and that can broaden our views of
what is happening in the territory?
How can non-human beings be represented?*

We grow California peppers in our greenhouses,



they are a local delicacy.



We also keep bees and sell the honey.



MY HUSBAND AND I ARE CONVENTIONAL FARMERS. WE USE WATER FROM THE TAGUS-SEGURA TRANSFER AND FROM A LEGAL WELL WATER. 20 YEARS AGO WE JOINED A FARMER'S UNION.

ONCE I GRADUATED FROM BUSINESS SCHOOL, I DECIDED TO GET BACK TO WORKING IN THE FARM. I COME FROM A FAMILY OF FARMERS. I GENUINELY ENJOY FARMING, I GUESS THIS FEELING IS PART OF MY HERITAGE.

FARMING IS INCREDIBLY DEMANDING. I HAVEN'T HAD PROPER HOLIDAY IN YEARS, BUT LOVE THE FEELING OF FREEDOM I GET FROM CONTACT WITH NATURE, WE'VE DONE A GOOD JOB PRESERVING SPECIES DIVERSITY.

THE WEATHER IS ALSO LOVELY. WE GET THE PERFECT CLIMATE ALL YEAR LONG; TEMPERATURE IS ROUGHLY THE SAME FROM WINTER THROUGH SUMMER.



LOLA

lives in Santa Rosalia where she works on the family farm.



ALTHOUGH WE DO CONVENTIONAL FARMING, WE KEEP PHYTO-SANITARY PRODUCTS TO THE MINIMUM.

CAMPO DE CARTAGENA FARMERS ARE ADAPTIVE AND OPEN TO LEARNING NEW AGRICULTURAL METHODS, WE PIONEERED THE USE OF AUXILIARY FAUNA IN PATHOGEN MANAGEMENT.

My husband has been based in Murcia as an agricultural worker for 20 years now. Before joining him I used to live with my in-laws.



The NIE* is required to rent an apartment.



* Foreigner Identity Number

But to get the NIE you must be registered with the Municipality,

which cannot be done if you live in very difficult housing conditions.

A year ago, a friend's friend from San Javier helped me find an apartment in town.

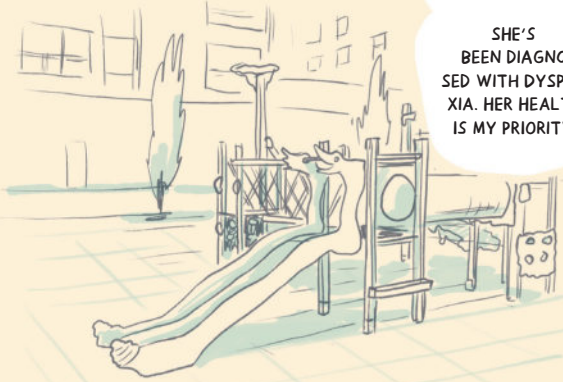


Our family life has improved a lot since we moved in.

ONE OF OUR DAUGHTERS WAS BORN HERE, IN SPAIN.

SHE'S BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH DYSPRAXIA. HER HEALTH IS MY PRIORITY.

EVER SINCE THE LAGOON'S WATER GAVE HER A SKIN RASH, WE HAVE NOT BEEN TO THE MAR MENOR, PREFERRED OTHER BEACHES INSTEAD.



FINDING A JOB IS VERY DIFFICULT BECAUSE I CANNOT LEAVE HER BY HERSELF WHILE MY HUSBAND IS AT WORK.

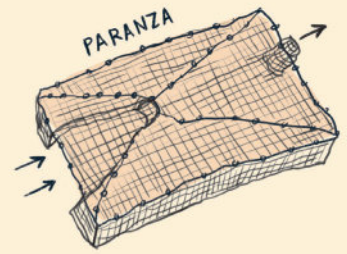
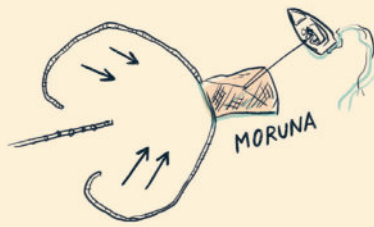
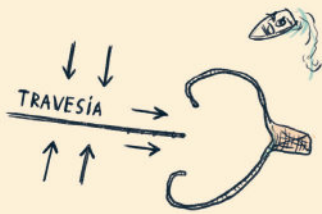
BESIDES, LIFE IS NOT EASY, WE EXPERIENCE RACISM ON A DAILY BASIS.

ALL IN ALL, I AM GRATEFUL TO BE HERE BECAUSE MY DAUGHTER HAS ACCESS TO BETTER MEDICAL TREATMENT, CEPAIM** HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE, AND MY HUSBAND HAS A STABLE JOB.

HOWEVER, IT IS HARD TO BE AWAY FROM MY PARENTS AND SIBLINGS, AND HARDLY IN CONTACT WITH THEM.

ASMAA

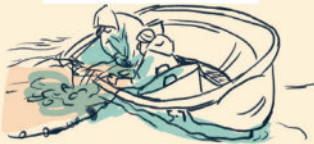
was born in a town of rural Morocco and currently lives in San Javier.



In the good old days fishers would know the ocean, the lagoon. Knew how to catch fish, many kinds of fish.



We also knew how to weave and fix nets.



Could take up all sorts of fishing gear,



We do selective fishing only. Non-commercial and under sized catch is returned to the lagoon.



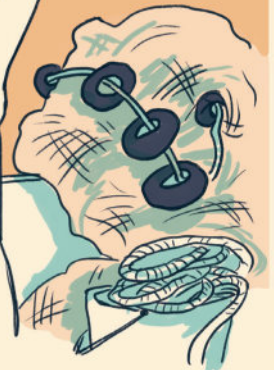
I'M NOSTALGIC FOR THE GOOD OLD DAYS, WHEN FISHING WAS MORE THAN CATCHING FISH.

FISHING WAS LIFE.



JAVIER

was born and lives in San Pedro del Pinatar.



I'VE PULLED THROUGH SEVERAL FISHING CRISES, BUT THE ONGOING ONE HAS BEEN DEVASTATING. IT ANGERS ME TO SEE THE STATE OF THE LAGOON.

The pandemic and the eutrophic crisis forced us to move back into my parents' house in Los Nietos, so we could save some money.



Los Nietos was once a popular spot in the Mar Menor.



It is a ghost town these days, nobody comes here and most locals are gone.



AFTER THE CONSTRUCTION CRISIS, I DECIDED TO INVEST ALL OUR SAVINGS IN A TOURISM ENTERPRISE.

NOW I HAVE A SMALL COMPANY SPECIALISED IN WATER SPORTS.

I AM SAD AND ANGRY BECAUSE NOTHING HAS BEEN DONE TO IMPROVE THE STATE OF THE LAGOON. THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT DOESN'T PROMOTE WATER SPORTS AS IT SHOULD.



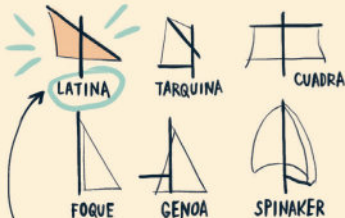
Sailboat cruising is great.



ALBERTO

lives in Los Nietos, and has a small tourism business in La Manga.

You can enjoy nature, experience it in a unique way,



while keeping the nautical practices of the Mediterranean culture alive.

Sailboat cruising is also sustainable and environmentally friendly. You sail with the wind,

so pollution and other impacts on marine ecosystems are nil compared to those produced by other types of ships.

My cousin who works here in Murcia encouraged me to come all the way from Morocco. It's been 20 years now!



I was lucky. I found a permanent job and got all the immigration paperwork sorted, so I started working as soon as I arrived. I was even able to save money to pay up the visa fees.



The days as a picker in the field were long and exhausting. A working day would usually last between 12 and 16 hours, and I could only take Sundays off.

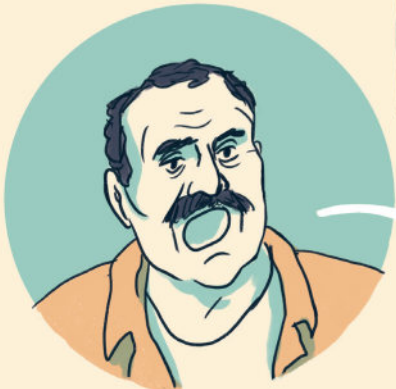


WHEN I ARRIVED IN MURCIA, I SHARED A HOUSE WITH 8 PEOPLE ALSO WORKING ON THE FIELDS. NOW I LIVE WITH MY WIFE AND CHILDREN IN THE CITY.

NOWADAYS I WORK AS A TRANSLATOR AND INTERPRETER FOR COLLEAGUES WHO ONLY SPEAK DARIJA OR OTHER FORMS OF ARABIC.

ADIL

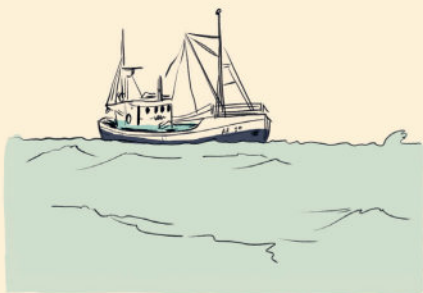
was born in a fishing village in Morocco and now lives in Canteras.



THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE WHO FACE ABUSIVE WORKING CONDITIONS IN AGRICULTURE. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO CLAIM THEIR WORKING RIGHTS BECAUSE INVESTIGATION TIMES ARE SLOW, TAKING SO LONG THAT EVENTUALLY MANY VULNERABLE PEOPLE GROW FRUSTRATED AND LEAVE.

EVEN WITH A JOB AND A RESIDENCE PERMIT, MIGRANTS ARE NOT ALLOWED TO VOTE. IF WE COULD, THE RACIST MESSAGE FROM SOME POLITICAL PARTIES WOULD NOT SPREAD, BECAUSE WE WOULD UNITE AS A POLITICAL FORCE.

The intercontinental journey took place years ago. Nobody's certain exactly when or how.



The Mar Menor has been a dream. Its waters don't pose many obstacles, there are no predators, and the langoustine season is a feast.



Green Crabs are rarely seen now, and it's a shame because they are delicious.



What is hard to understand is the idea of "invasive species". None of them chose to come here, there's no agenda...



It's being said but there is no official statement, because that would mean a ban on fishing.

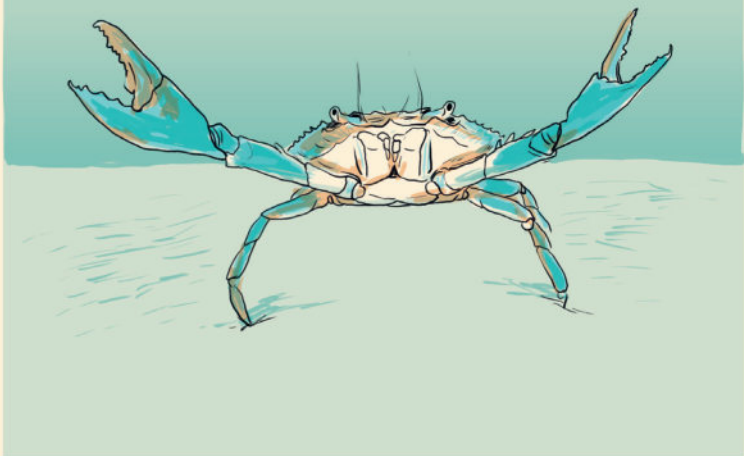


As if they could go back to the American Atlantic coast! Besides, their populations on the coast are endangered.



BLUE CRAB

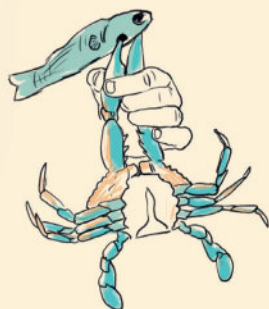
Lives in the lagoon.



Fishing nets make life difficult. It's getting harder and harder to swim freely.



There's a daily catch, they are sold at the Lonja de San Pedro.



Contradiction

These stories portray conversations between friends and colleagues in which they express the contradictions, agreements, disagreements and feelings around common issues in the public debate on the relationship between the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena.

These are some of the questions we asked and reflected on when we created these stories:

What public discourses have permeated the conversations and daily activities of the inhabitants of the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena?

How do local actors embody and represent the contradictions that are usually found in these discourses?

In what ways do scientific and lay knowledge gathered in daily life in the territory interact and influence each other?

Every time I hear someone saying that the *Mar Menor* is doomed, I feel I'm going to lose it. People shouldn't generalise like that, some areas are looking bad but some others are recovering just fine.

... same goes with how some people put all farmers into the "agroindustry" box, what does the term even mean?



DON'T KNOW, MATE.

I MEAN, WE ALL ARE DOING OUR BEST.



IT IS NOT ABOUT THE AMOUNTS OF FOOD WE PRODUCE. LARGE SCALE FARM SITES COULD BE ALL-COMPLYING AND A SMALL ORGANIC FARMER MAY NOT.



"AGROINDUSTRY" IS A POLITICISED TERM

JUST LIKE *MACROGRANJAS* *.

RIGHT! I'VE SEEN HOW IT'S BEEN USED BY CERTAIN POLITICAL PARTIES TO CREATE CONFUSION...

AND SHIFT THE ATTENTION AWAY FROM THEIR INACTION ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES OF THE *MAR MENOR*.



* Large-scale livestock farms

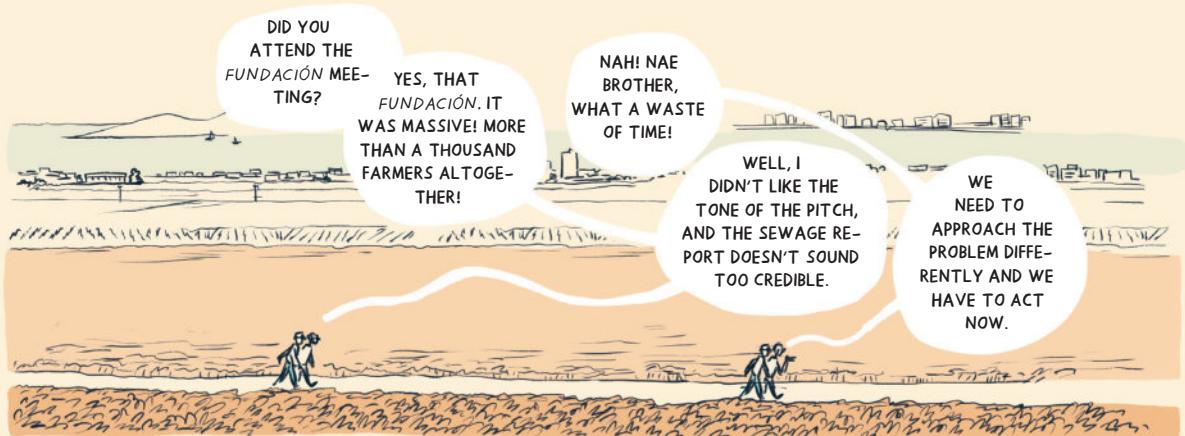
IF THEY WERE TO FRAME THE PROBLEM WITH AGRICULTURE IN TERMS OF "SMALL FARMERS",

IT WOULD GO UNNOTICED. IT SEEMS THAT PEOPLE FEEL MORE EMPATHETIC TOWARDS "SMALL FARMERS".

LOOK, I WASN'T GOING TO BRING THIS UP, BUT I HAVEN'T BEEN TO ANY OF THE *MAR MENOR* DEMONSTRATIONS, BECAUSE I FEEL EXHAUSTED FROM ALL THE FINGER POINTING, AS IF JUST BY FARMING FOR A LIVING MAKES ME THE BAD GUY.

MATE, WHEREVER I GO, INCLUDING THE DEMONSTRATIONS, I SAY IT OUT LOUD, I AM A FARMER.





DID YOU ATTEND THE FUNDACIÓN MEEETING?

YES, THAT FUNDACIÓN. IT WAS MASSIVE! MORE THAN A THOUSAND FARMERS ALTOGETHER!

NAH! NAE BROTHER, WHAT A WASTE OF TIME!

WELL, I DIDN'T LIKE THE TONE OF THE PITCH, AND THE SEWAGE REPORT DOESN'T SOUND TOO CREDIBLE.

WE NEED TO APPROACH THE PROBLEM DIFFERENTLY AND WE HAVE TO ACT NOW.



PFFT! I AM SICK OF BEING BLAMED FOR EVERY SINGLE ISSUE CONNECTED TO THE ALGAL BLOOM

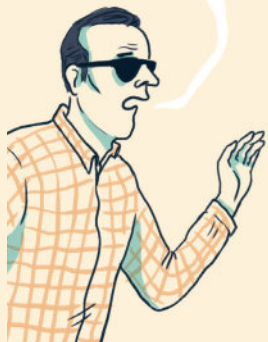
THAT'S NONSENSE! AGRICULTURE CAN'T BE THE ONLY CULPRIT. I JUST WON'T BELIEVE ANYTHING THAT'S NOT BACKED UP WITH SCIENTIFIC DATA.

MY WATER SAMPLES ARE CRYSTAL CLEAR. THE CROPS ABSORB EVERY DROP OF NUTRIENTS. NO LEAKAGE WHATSOEVER!



HOLD ON. SAYING AGRICULTURE HAS ZERO IMPACT IS NO GOOD EITHER. AS WITH EVERY OTHER ECONOMIC ACTIVITY THERE ARE IMPACTS THAT YOU JUST CAN'T PREVENT.

WE MUST ADMIT THAT EVEN THOSE AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES COMPLYING WITH THE STRICTEST NORMATIVES, AND EMPLOYING THE MOST EFFICIENT TECHNOLOGIES, DO TAKE A TOLL ON THE ENVIRONMENT.



FAIR ENOUGH, BUT SAYING THAT WE NEED TO TRANSFORM THE ECONOMIC MODEL IS AN OVERSTATEMENT. WHAT WOULD CAMPO DE CARTAGENA BE WITHOUT FARMERS??



FOR SURE, WE ARE THE MAIN ECONOMIC FORCE IN THE REGION. AGRICULTURE IS MURCIA'S SOCIAL FABRIC.

WE NEED THOSE IN POWER TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AND SEE WHAT IS HAPPENING HERE IN THE FIELD! DIALOGUE AMONG THE INVOLVED PARTIES WOULD BE HELPFUL TOO,

BUT I DON'T SEE THAT HAPPENING IN THE NEAR FUTURE, POLITICS IS ALL ABOUT VOTE-MONGERING AND VESTED INTERESTS!



SINCE THE EARLY 80'S THE IEO* REPORTS THAT LARGE QUANTITIES OF ORGANIC MATTER HAVE ENTERED THE MAR MENOR VIA WASTEWATERS. BUT NO MENTION IS MADE OF PHOSPHATES.

*Spanish Institute of Oceanography

YES, PHOSPHATES ARE MENTIONED GENARO!

I'VE READ THE REPORT FROM COVER TO COVER AND CAN ASSURE YOU THAT PHOSPHATES FEATURE MORE THAN ONCE. THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE CONCENTRATIONS OF PHOSPHATES IN SEWAGE USUALLY MEET THE DISCHARGE STANDARDS.



TREATMENT PLANTS ARE AUTHORISED TO DISCHARGE SPILLOVER WASTEWATER INTO THE LAGOON.



THAT'S WHAT PLANT REPS AND EVERYBODY ELSE SAY. I DON'T THINK IT'S FAIR TO HOLD AGRICULTURE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE DEMISE OF THE MAR MENOR,

PHOSPHATES, WITHIN LIMITS OR NOT, POUR OUT OF THE TREATMENT PLANTS PIPES LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW!

SEWAGE DISCHARGES DO HAVE AN IMPACT, FOR SURE,

BUT ALL THESE ACTIVITIES AGREE WITH THE LAW, AND THEIR EFFECTS HAVE BEEN ASSESSED.

THE DISCHARGE THRESHOLDS HAVE BEEN SET BASED ON TECHNICAL STUDIES. DISCHARGE SITES, METHODS AND MAX ALLOWED VOLUMES WE ALSO ESTABLISHED

PERHAPS THESE THRESHOLDS SHOULD BE REVISED, BUT THAT'S BEYOND OUR REACH.



THE PLANTS ARE NOT MY MAIN CONCERN, THOUGH, BUT THE SEPTIC TANKS AND THE DISCHARGE WATERS OF RESIDENTIAL AREAS DISCONNECTED FROM THE SEWAGE NETWORK.

THIS IS RARELY BROUGHT UP IN POLITICAL DEBATES!

I'VE HEARD THE CITY COUNCIL IS PLANNING TO SPEND MILLIONS OF EUROS ON REPAIRING, NOT EXPANDING, THE NETWORK.

FINALLY! BUT WHAT ABOUT THE DISCONNECTED AREAS? NO ONE'S CHECKING ON THEM.

NOT TO MENTION THAT CITY COUNCILS HAVE INFO ON ANYBODY USING THE NETWORK.

EXACTLY THE CASE OF BAHÍA BELLA!



I'M TIRED OF BLAMING ONE ANOTHER, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE MAIN CULPRIT IS THE REGIONAL GOVERNMENT. THEY SIMPLY WON'T DO A THING!



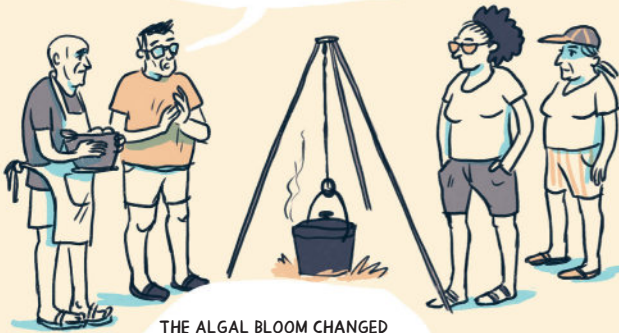
TRUE! THEY ARE NOW IMPLYING THAT CLEARING UP THE ALGAE IS ENOUGH. THAT ONCE THEY ARE GONE, MAR MENOR WILL BE AS GOOD AS NEW!



THE RIVER BASIN AUTHORITY (RBA) MUST BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE. THEY INCENTIVISED FARMERS TO EXPAND IRRIGATION. THE RBA PROMISED EVERY WATER WELL WOULD BE LEGALISED! THEY EVEN WENT ON TO SAY WE SHOULD SET UP OUR OWN DESALINATION PLANTS!

WHEN WE WERE FULLY COMMITTED TO THE DESALINATION PLANTS, THE PLANTS WERE DECLARED ILLEGAL BY THE RBA. WE WERE PERSECUTED AND SANCTIONED!

BUT THEY ARE THE ONES FAILING AT THEIR JOB, UNABLE, UNWILLING TO PREVENT THE BRINE FROM REACHING THE LAGOON.



THE ALGAL BLOOM CHANGED EVERYTHING! THEY HAD TO SHOW THEY "WERE DOING" SOMETHING FOR THE LAGOON. THEN CAME ALONG A SLEW OF POINTLESS POLICIES!



I DON'T BELIEVE A GREEN BELT WILL BE ABLE TO FILTER THE INCOMING WATER FROM THE ENTIRE CAMPO DE CARTAGENA!



AND DON'T GET ME STARTED ON THE PACE AT WHICH CITY COUNCILS ISSUE NEW CONSTRUCTION LICENCES, MORE BUILDINGS, MORE TOURISTS, MORE SEWAGE, LARGER FLOODS, SOMEDAY IT WILL ALL HAVE TO STOP, RIGHT?

MMH, FOR PERSPECTIVE GUYS, YOU ARE DOING MUCH BETTER AS FARMERS THAN OTHER SECTORS. FISHERIES AND TOURISM HAVE BEEN LEFT ON THEIR OWN!

NAH, UNLIKELY. POLITICIANS ARE SELF-SERVING, THEY HAVE NO SENSE OF TERRITORIAL IDENTITY, YET EVERYTHING IS POLITICISED!



Feeling the lagoon

Even though all the stories in this publication tell us about the feelings of the people inhabiting the territory and their connection with the land and the sea, the following stories focus on some experiences of suffering, sorrow, sadness, solidarity, and resistance, among others, around the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena.

These are some of the questions we ourselves made and reflected about when we create these stories:

How do local actors face the deterioration of the Mar Menor?

How are feelings about the territory experienced, represented, and shared?

Who is mobilizing, and how, to take care of the lagoon?



HEY MIGUEL!
OVER HERE!



HELLO EVERYONE,
APOLOGIES FOR
THE DELAY, HOW
CAN I HELP?



WHILE YOU FINISH UP THIS PLACARD, MAYBE YOU COULD ALSO SHARE YOUR ACTIVISM JOURNEY WITH THE REST OF THE TEAM?

I AM WORKING ON A BLOG POST ON ACTIVISM, ON HOW DISTINCT AND DIVERSE OUR JOURNEYS ARE.

COOL! IT ALL STARTED AFTER THE ANOXIA EVENT IN 2019.

FRUSTRATION AND SADNESS MADE ME TRY TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS CONCERNED WITH THE LAGOON IN NEIGHBOURING TOWNS, WHOM I FOLLOW ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

WE TEAMED UP TO DOCUMENT THE ANOXIA EVENT.

ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER, UNTIL ELENA TOOK ME IN.



ELENA IS SUPER INSPIRING!



I MET ELENA SHORTLY AFTER LANDING FROM THE UK, DURING A CABALLITOS MONITORING CAMPAIGN. NOW THAT I AM BASED IN LOS ALCÁZARES, I REGULARLY VOLUNTEER TO WORK WITH ELENA AND THE REST OF THE TEAM.

ELENA, COULD YOU PLEASE SHARE YOUR STORY?



MY STORY IN ACTIVISM PREDATES THE FORMATION OF THIS GROUP OF LOVELY PEOPLE. I'D SAY IT ALL STARTED AROUND MID 2015.



A FRIEND INVITED ME TO A MEETING TO DISCUSS THE MAR MENOR, SHORTLY BEFORE THE ALGAL BLOOM HIT! SO WE HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO COME TOGETHER TO PROTECT THE LAGOON! WE HELD SCIENTIFIC DEBATES OPEN TO THE PUBLIC. THEN WE BEGAN CAMPAIGNING FOR THE LEGAL PERSONHOOD PROJECT.

ALL OF A SUDDEN WE FOUND OURSELVES COLLECTING SIGNATURES UNTIL THE MAR MENOR FINALLY BECAME A LEGAL PERSON... AND HERE WE ARE, AS MOTIVATED AS EVER!

THAT'S TRULY INSPIRING INDEED. YOURSELF ANDRÉS?



I AM A HARDCORE ACTIVIST, I'VE DEVOTED THE PAST 20 YEARS OF MY LIFE TO PROTECTING NATURE IN THE MURCIA REGION.

I DID MARINE BIOLOGY SO WHEN THE FIRST SIGNS OF EUTROPHICATION SHOWED UP, I BECAME A FULL-TIME MAR MENOR ACTIVIST.



I DO SUPPORT CONNECTED CAUSES. I'M NOW TRYING TO GET PEOPLE TO LOOK AT THE MACROGRANJAS * ISSUE, THOSE ONES ARE PROBLEMATIC.

AND YOU FUENSANTA?



I WOULDN'T CALL MYSELF AN ACTIVIST THOUGH I'D LIKE TO BECOME ONE.

* Large-scale livestock farms



I'M A PHOTOGRAPHER AND I'VE BEEN COLLABORATING WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS, SHARING THE PHOTOS I'VE TAKEN THROUGH THE YEARS,

BUT I GUESS I GOT MORE INVOLVED AROUND THE LEGAL PERSONHOOD MOVEMENT. I WORKED NON-STOP COLLECTING SIGNATURES IN MADRID!

I am a conventional farmer harvesting once a year. I know this may seem unconventional in my conventionality, but it is my way. In *Campo de Cartagena*, most farmers harvest 2 or 3 times a year. I myself do well enough with a single harvest. I live pretty comfortably like this.



I'm a member of a farmers' union, and often join meetings. I go there to hear what other farmers have to say, and cast my vote if I must.



I try to show my support for agriculture and other causes I consider important, such as the protection of the *Mar Menor*. Not many demonstrators know that I live off the land.



I'm based just a couple of miles away from the shore. I learned to swim and walk in the *Mar Menor*, and so did my children.



IT'S PAINFUL TO LOOK AT THE *MAR MENOR* THESE DAYS.

I'VE ALWAYS STICKED TO THE RULES. NO ONE EVER SAID MY FARM WAS HARMING THE LAGOON, UNTIL A FEW YEARS AGO.

THEY ARE NOW EXPROPRIATING MY LAND TO SET UP A "GREEN FILTER",

LEAVING THE BUILDINGS IN FLOODING AREAS UNTOUCHED.

IT'S SO UNFAIR!

PEPE
lives in Los Alcázares where he was born.



I WOULD LIKE TO KNOW HOW GREEN GRABBING MY FARM WILL FIX THE LAGOON, WHILE THE CONSTRUCTION BOOM STILL GOES UNCHECKED IN LOS ALCÁZARES!



WHEN EVERYTHING IS TAKEN AWAY FROM SOMEONE, DON'T BE SURPRISED IF THERE ARE CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT THEY'D DO! DON'T COME TELLING US THAT WE CAST OUR VOTES LIGHTLY!

We used to come down to Los Nietos every summer when I was a child. It all changed when I got married and my own children came along.



We've been going to La Manga ever since. For the last 40 years La Manga has been our holiday destination.



I know the lagoon like the back of my hand, and can tell that it isn't what it used to be. I've suffered its demise in the flesh.



I'M HEARTBROKEN BY THE CURRENT STATE OF THE LAGOON. SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN PART OF MY LIFE ... ALMOST A FRIEND.

IT PAINS ME TO THINK THAT MY GRANDCHILDREN WON'T SEE HER THE WAY I DID.

Back when I retired in 2014, I decided to become an environmental activist.



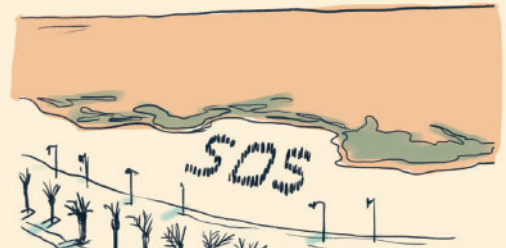
My *compis* and I noticed a radical change in the *Mar Menor*: the water was getting murkier, the bottom of the lake became indistinguishable, and the smell... whiffs of pestilential fens and noxious effluvia...

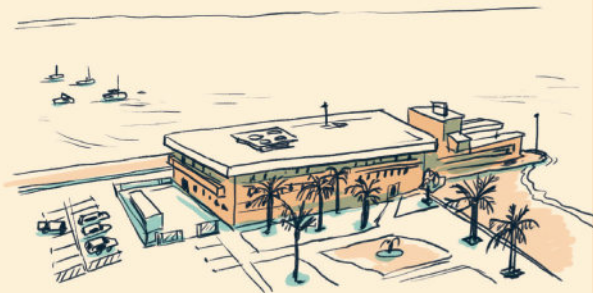
CARMEN

was born in Murcia and lives in La Manga.



The 2016 algal bloom triggered the creation of a group, a quasi-collective, orientated towards the discernment of the state of the lagoon. We got in touch with experts, and government officials. We devote ourselves to raising awareness about the *Mar Menor* amongst the Murcian society.





**CENTRO
OCEANOGRÁFICO
DE MURCIA**

LOOKS LIKE A BAD OMEN,
THE WEATHER IS WAY
TOO HOT FOR MAY.



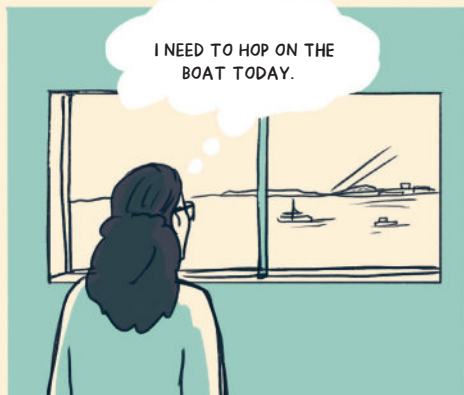
LET'S HAVE A LOOK.
ACTUALLY THIS COLOUR IS A
GOOD SIGN BUT THE CAULERPA
KEEPS GROWING.



I DON'T KNOW IF I'D BE ABLE
TO BEAR ANOTHER ANOXIC
CRISIS IN THE LAGOON.



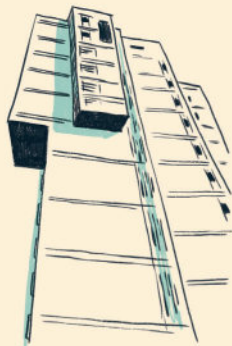
I NEED TO HOP ON THE
BOAT TODAY.



BERTA

was born in
Cartagena and lives
in Los Urrutia.

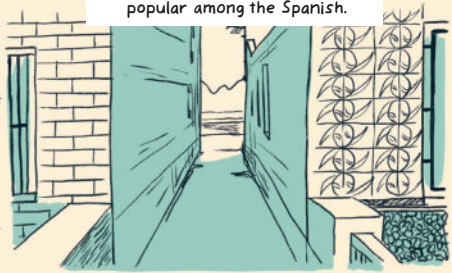




In my experience, the local government's incentives for tourism are practically zero...



Despite its potential for water sports compared to other European spots, La Manga is only popular among the Spanish.



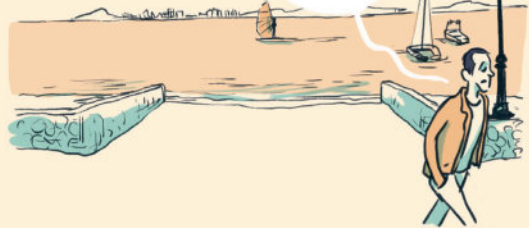
IT'S HARD FOR FOREIGN TOURISTS TO REACH LA MANGA.

THEY MUST FLY IN TO ALICANTE FIRST AND THEN HEAD TO MURCIA. THE LOCAL AIRPORT OPENED AFTER 20 YEARS OF ENGINEERING WORKS,



YET THERE'S ONLY ONE OR TWO FLIGHTS A WEEK!

YOU TELL ME, HOW CONVENIENT IS THAT?



THE MAR MENOR AND THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA HAVE BEEN PART OF MY LIFE SINCE FOREVER... RIGHT AFTER TURNING 13 I GOT INTO WINDSURFING, AND HAVEN'T STOPPED EVER SINCE.

JOSÉ

was born in France and now lives in Cabo de Palos.

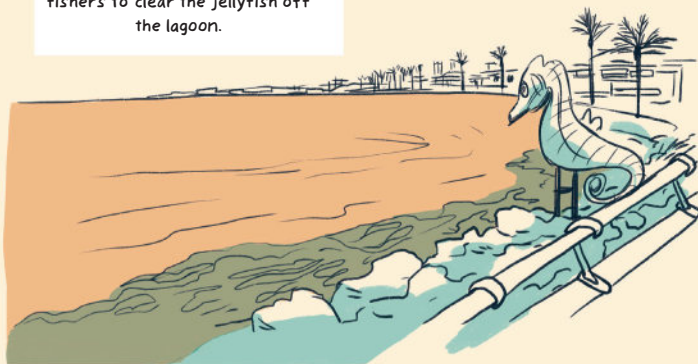


IN THE MAR MENOR WATER SPORTS TOURISM IS ALMOST NONEXISTENT, YET THE CONDITIONS FOR THIS TYPE OF SPORTS ARE EXCELLENT,



ALTHOUGH LATIN-RIG IS OUR FORTE, OTHER WATER SPORTS LIKE KITESURFING COULD BE PROMOTED.

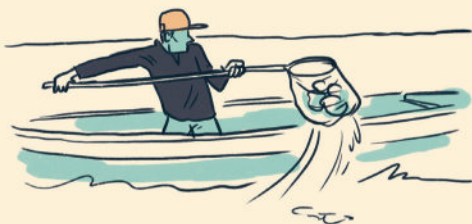
The government used to hire fishers to clear the jellyfish off the lagoon.



The algae would clog the fishing gear and make catching fish practically impossible. We'd spend hours cleaning the algae off the nets.



The truth is, we were not aware of much back then... Cousteau's son was brought in to study the jellyfish!



Now we know that jellyfish were the first sign of eutrophication, jellyfish would act as nutrient filters.



After the last algal bloom, even the jellyfish deserted the Mar Menor.



The third quarter of 2022 was peculiar in this sense, it was more profitable to catch algae for the government than fishing like we used to.



I CANNOT IMAGINE MY DAUGHTER WILL TAKE OVER. I FEEL THE FUTURE IS MORE UNCERTAIN THAN EVER. EVERYTHING IN THE MAR MENOR SEEMS TO BE CHANGING FOR THE WORSE.



JORGE

was born and lives in San Pedro del Pinatar.



I FEEL ACTUAL SADNESS SEEING THE *MAR MENOR*, *MI HERMANA* WITHERING INTO A GREEN SOUP AGAIN.



DOESN'T LOOK TOO DIFFERENT TO ME, WOULDN'T RISK A SWIM IN IT, THOUGH!

BEFORE THE ALGAL BLOOM, YOU COULDN'T RESIST. WE WOULD ALL HAVE TO WITNESS THE LAGOON IN HER SPLENDOROUS TRANSLUCENCE... *MI HERMANA MAR MENOR*,

ONE DAY, I'M SURE, WE'LL BE ABLE TO SHARE THIS GIFT OF SORORITY WITH THE LAGOON. SPEAKING OF SORORITY AND RESISTANCE, DID YOU HEAR ANOTHER DEMONSTRATION TOWARDS SAVING THE LAGOON IS UNDERWAY?

I DID. A CUSTOMER SUGGESTED I SHOULD GO, BUT I JUST CAN'T, DEMONSTRATIONS ALWAYS OVERLAP WITH MY SHIFTS...

... SO FRUSTRATING! I FEEL THIS IMPERIOUS NEED TO BE THERE FOR THE *MAR MENOR*, *MI HERMANA*, BUT SELF-PRESERVATION COMES FIRST, I GUESS.



SISTERS, YOU KNOW I SUPPORT EVERY EFFORT TOWARDS PROTECTING THE LAGOON, BUT I CAN'T GO EITHER. I'M WAITING FOR THE DECISION ON MY CITIZENSHIP APP.

NO DEMONSTRATING FOR ME UNTIL MY IMMIGRATION STATUS GETS SORTED. I CAN'T RISK A STOP-AND-SEARCH ENCOUNTER WITH THE POLICE.

SAME HERE. I WOULDN'T RISK BEING PROFILED BY MY EMPLOYERS. FINDING A JOB TO BARELY GET BY HAS BEEN HARD ENOUGH ALREADY.

SURE, SIS, SURVIVING IS HARD ENOUGH ALREADY. NEVER MIND DEFENDING THE RIGHTS OF OUR *COMPIS*.

A FEW DAYS AGO A FAR-RIGHT POLITICIAN ACROSS THE STREET THREATENED TO DRIVE ALL IMMIGRANTS OUT.



I TOLD HIM HE WAS WELCOME TO TRY, I HAVE EVERY LEGAL RIGHT TO BE WHERE I AM!

IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO BE AS CAUTIOUS JUST BECAUSE OF MY UPBRINGING, I'D BE LEADGING ALL THINGS *MAR MENOR*, JUST THE THOUGHT OF EXPOSING MYSELF AND MY FAMILY...

SISTERS LOOK, LOOK! A KALEIDOSCOPE! A *MAR MENOR* SUNSET IS LIKE HOPE COLOURING SORROWS ANEW.



Shared reflections

These stories reflect moments when the main characters sat together in spaces aimed to dialogue and reflect in favour of the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena.

These are some of the questions we asked and reflected on when we created these stories:

Can we reflect on issues about which we disagree regarding the Mar Menor and Campo de Cartagena, even if we do not reach an agreement?

How can we think about a shared future that includes migrant people and youth and does not imply a return to the past?

How to give a voice to the lagoon as a subject?



I WORRY THAT THE MINISTRY FOR ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION MAY DISMISS THE ROLE OF THE AQUIFER IN THE ACTION PLANS. THAT WOULD BE A TERRIBLE MISTAKE.



WAIT, WHAT WE KNOW AT PRESENT IS THAT MOST OF THE NUTRIENTS ENTER THE LAGOON THROUGH THE RAMBLA DEL ALBUJÓN.



THAT MAY BE TRUE, BUT WHY DO YOU THINK THE RAMBLA HAS A RIVERINE LOOK THESE DAYS? BECAUSE THE AQUIFER IS AT CAPACITY!

REGARDLESS OF HOW THEY ARE TRANSPORTED, VIA THE RAMBLAS OR THE AQUIFERS, THE NUTRIENTS ARE OF AGRICULTURAL ORIGIN AND CARRIED ALONG BY RUNOFF FROM IRRIGATION.



THAT'S EXACTLY MY POINT! THE NUTRIENTS REACH THE RAMBLA ONCE THE RETURN FLOWS SATURATE THE AQUIFER. THIS HAS BECOME PRETTY OBVIOUS SINCE 2016. THE VOLUME OF NUTRIENTS MOVING FROM THE AQUIFER TO THE LAGOON IS INCREASING.

IF THAT'S CORRECT, AND PROVIDED THAT THE GROUNDWATER TABLE REACHES THE LAGOON ALONG THE NORTHERNMOST SECTION OF THE WATERSHED, THEN THAT AREA WOULD BE THE WORST HIT BY THE EUTROPHICATION PROCESS, AND THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE EVIDENCE OF THIS. IN FACT, THE SOUTHERN PARTS OF THE BASIN, WHERE THE RAMBLA DEL ALBUJÓN IS LOCATED, ARE KNOWN TO HAVE SUFFERED THE MOST.



MAYBE YOU'RE RIGHT BUT LET'S NOT FORGET THAT THE AQUIFER DRAINS TO THE RAMBLAS AT MANY OTHER PLACES WHICH AREN'T MONITORED. IRRIGATION AND RAINWATER CANALS DOWN FROM TORRE PACHECO CONVERGE TO THE ALBUJÓN, HENCE TO THE LAGOON CONVERGE TO THE ALBUJÓN AND, HENCE, TO THE LAGOON.

YES, SUPPOSE WE DO AGREE ON THIS.

SEEMS THEY FINALLY FOUND COMMON GROUND.



OK BUT HOW ARE WE GOING TO PORTRAY THE LAGOON?



THAT IS A QUESTION WE'VE BEEN ASKING OURSELVES FROM THE BEGINNING. IT'S BECOME PIVOTAL AT THIS STAGE OF OUR RESEARCH. NOW THAT THE LAGOON'S BEEN INVESTED WITH LEGAL PERSONHOOD,

PEOPLE ARE WONDERING WHO HOLDS THE LEGITIMATE RIGHT TO SPEAK FOR THE LAGOON.



IT IS NOT A TRIVIAL QUESTION, BESIDES, IS THE LAGOON TO BE CONCEIVED AS A BIOPHYSICAL ENTITY?

WHERE DOES IT BEGIN? WHERE DOES IT END?,

OUR WORK SHOWS THE FALLACY IN ATTEMPTING TO CUT OFF THE *MAR MENOR* FROM CAMPO DE CARTAGENA

BUT THE LAGOON IS ALSO MADE UP OF, OR RATHER IT IS ONTICALLY CONSTITUTED BY, ITS NON-HUMAN HABITANTS,

FROM ALGAE TO FISH, THROUGH JELLYFISH, AND EVEN THE CAROBS ALONG THE SHORE. DON'T YOU THINK?



OF COURSE! AND ALSO THE EXPERIENCES OF THE FARMERS

WHO CAN TELL THE LAGOON'S MOOD JUST BY LOOKING AT THE COLOURS OF HER WATERS, AND THE TOURIST'S LOOKING FOR WARMER WATERS AND A MUDDY EXPERIENCE.

... OR THE THIRD-GENERATION ARTISANAL FISHERS WITH THEIR BRINE-ENCUSTED SKIN WITH SEA SALT.



... OR THE MIGRANT WORKERS PICKING LETTUCE AND BROCCOLI SUN UP TO SUN DOWN, UNABLE TO VISIT THE LAGOON BECAUSE THEY DON'T EVEN HAVE THE TIME TO GAIN AWARENESS OF THE *MAR MENOR*.

... OR THE WOMEN WHO PERCEIVE THE LAGOON AS AN EXTENSION OF THEIR BODIES, AND WHO FEEL PHYSICALLY ILL WITH EVERY ALGAL BLOOM.



IT SEEMS THE LAGOON IS MADE UP OF THE PEOPLE WHO EXPERIENCE IT, THEIR STORIES, MEMORIES, AND DREAMS,

AND ALSO BY THE NON-HUMAN BEINGS WOVEN INTO THEM.

EL CALDERO TASTES OF SUMMER

FRESH

SLIGHTLY SALTY, WITH A MINERAL TOUCH

ORANGE

SOFT AND COOL

ALMOST ODOURLESS, A BIT OF BRINE AND SEA

PIMIENTO COLOUR, OLD RUSTY RED

NOW WE ARE GOING TO SEE THE MAR MENOR AND THE 2050 CAMPO DE CARTAGENA THAT WE HAVE ALL DREAMT UP

SOME SOLAR PLATES



AN UNSPOILT LANDSCAPE LA MANGA WITHOUT BUILDINGS

LOOK AT IT! THERE'S THE FRIED EGG JELLYFISH, SWIMMING AS ELEGANTLY AS YOU DREAMT HER UP, ISABEL.

THE LAGOON LOOKS CLEAN WITH VERY FEW BUILDINGS, AS MANY OF US WISH.

DREAMING IS IMPORTANT.

EVEN IF IT'S JUST FOR A MINUTE, IT GIVES YOU HOPE THAT YOUR DAUGHTERS WILL ONE DAY ENJOY THE MAR MENOR AS I DID.

OH, YES, RODRIGO! YOU'RE RIGHT.

WHAT I LIKE THE MOST IS SEEING THE LAGOON FULL OF WILDLIFE, WITH TRANSPARENT WATER,

AS I KNEW IT ONCE. I WISH IT WEREN'T A DRAWING BUT A PHOTO.

AGRICULTURAL TERRACES



PERHAPS WITH DIFFERENT CROPS, OR FEWER CROPS, OR NEEDING NO FERTILISER

CROPS

but there's less of them!

RESTORATION OF THE RAMBLA HEADERS

ECOSYSTEM IN BALANCE

INVERTED PYRAMID



FEW PEOPLE

THE RAMBLAS ARE CLEAN



LONG-EARED OWL



OCELLATED LIZARD
YOU CAN'T SEE IT BUT IT'S THERE



Dumping areas are clean and are used to walk, have picnics, play, etc.

FOX (used to be fearful)



WHAT I DON'T SEE HERE IS JOSEFA'S APOCALYPTIC DREAM IN WHICH THERE IS PLENTY OF VEGETATION AND WILDLIFE BECAUSE THINGS GOT SO BAD THAT HUMANS HAD TO LEAVE.

A MAR MENOR WITH NO HUMANS

IT'S NOT APOCALYPTIC, IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DREAM FOR ME.

I UNDERSTAND THAT MY DREAM DOESN'T FIT WITH YOUR IDYLIC MAR MENOR.

I AM NOT SO OPTIMISTIC. FOR ME THE PROBLEM OF THE MAR MENOR IS WE HUMANS. AS LONG AS WE ARE HERE, THINGS WON'T GET BETTER.

TRUE THAT, ESPECIALLY SINCE POLITICIANS DON'T MIND THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

YES, THAT'S ALSO TRUE, BUT WE SHOULDN'T FORGET THAT WE CAN DO THINGS TOO, THAT EVERY LITTLE ACTION COUNTS

PERHAPS IT'S NOT AS WE KNEW IT, BUT CERTAINLY BETTER THAN NOW,

A MAR MENOR THAT'S NOT EUTROPHISED, WHERE CHILDREN AND THEIR GRANDPARENTS CAN PLAY WITHOUT BEING BURIED IN THE MUD,

A GREENER CAMPO DE CARTAGENA, WITH MORE TREES AS WELL AS CROP.

OF COURSE! BECAUSE AGRICULTURE NEEDS TO CONTINUE TO EXIST! WE CANNOT DREAM OF A MAR MENOR WITHOUT CAMPO DE CARTAGENA.

TING!!



Shared Dialogues is a collective effort of (without order):
Paula Andrea Zuluaga-Guerra, Violeta Cabello Villarejo,
Marcela Brugnach, Maria Mancilla Garcia, Paula Novo and
Josune Urrutia Asua.

*Participatory researech process in the Mar Menor and
the Campo de Cartagena (without order):* Paula Andrea
Zuluaga-Guerra and Violeta Cabello Villarejo.

*Shared Dialogues project design and co-creation of visual
stories (without order):* Paula Andrea Zuluaga-Guerra,
Violeta Cabello Villarejo, Marcela Brugnach, Maria
Mancilla Garcia, Paula Novo and Josune Urrutia Asua.

Management of the project: Paula Novo.

Graphic design, layout and illustrations:
Josune Urrutia Asua.

Translation: Asunción Álvarez.

Translation revision: Elena Martín Gil.

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