

Master in Political Ecology, Degrowth and Environmental Justice

Academic year: 2018-2019

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations of Degrowth (6 ECTS)

Instructors

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Invited teachers

Salvador Pueyo, R&D

Christos Zografos, R&D and Universitat Pompeu Fabra

Christian Kerschner, R&D and Masaryk University

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Objectives

Degrowth is the literal translation of 'decroissance', a French word meaning reduction. Launched by activists in 2001 as a challenge to growth, it became a missile word that sparks a contentious debate on the diagnosis and prognosis of our society. 'Degrowth' became an interpretative frame for a new (and old) social movement where numerous streams of critical ideas and political actions converge. It is an attempt to re-politicise debates about desired socio-environmental futures and an example of an activist-led science now consolidating into a concept in academic literature.

This course will lay out the theoretical foundations of degrowth, surveying various contributions from various schools of thought. We will discuss the definition, origins, evolution, practices and construction of degrowth. The main objective is to explain degrowth's multiple sources (part i) and strategies (part ii) in order to delve deep into its basic definition and potential pathways for implementation. To this end, the course presents degrowth's main intellectual sources as well as its diverse strategies (oppositional activism, building of alternatives and political proposals) and actors (practitioners, activists and scientists). The course will also explore examples of new frontiers, in terms of issues, alliances and practices (Part iii).

Structure

The course has fifteen classes (15 x 2 hrs = 30 hours; 6 ECTS), structured into three parts: i. The sources of degrowth (why degrowth); II. The paths to degrowth (how degrowth); iii. Frontiers of degrowth: New issues, alliances and practices.

Each class is normally based two readings: one from classical degrowth authors and one from contemporary ones. We will discuss the readings as a group in class and occasionally use power point presentations to convey some of the key ideas where necessary. We expect everyone to participate actively in the discussions and to have read the readings carefully in advance. All articles and reading material for the class are uploaded in a special Dropbox folder (link:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6m48bn9id4uhhv2/AADSMUsrzPWzMT_bPqhlKcV4a?dl=0) and will stay there up to three months after the end of the class, after which it will be deleted. You don't need to buy books, go to the library or download anything.

The course will include interactive and deliberative workshops as well as field visits where some of the theoretical concepts studied in class are used as a source of inspiration for practical applications. In principle, we foresee two field trips, to Can Masdeu and Can Decreix.

Participation in class and Exam

Participation in class

Participation in class is encouraged, though it will not be evaluated or graded. Different people have different communication styles, some like to talk a lot, others less. We encourage discussion and participation with our teaching style, and we will try to encourage as many of you to speak up and position yourself with respect to the readings and the discussion. At the beginning of each class we may start by asking a group of 5-10 of you to shortly state what you took from the readings of the week, or what question you might have. Each week there will be different people responding to these questions, but please make sure that you are prepared, have done the reading, and are ready to respond when asked.

Exam

A two hour sit-in exam in the last class where students will have to answer a question relating to the content of the course. The students will have to write an essay (maximum 1000 words), responding to the question and explaining their answer. They will write their exams with their own laptops, and with access to internet. The exams will be graded by the coordinator of the module.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

Part 1. The sources of degrowth (why degrowth)

1. What is degrowth? (Federico Demaria, François Schneider and Filka Sekulova); Thursday 4th October, 15.00 – 17.00

We will introduce the course, and discuss together the definition of degrowth.

Latouche, Serge (2009) *Farewell to growth*. Polity Press. Chapter 1.

Illich, Ivan (1973) Tools for conviviality. Introduction (2-7), Convivial reconstruction (16-56, all section), Recovery (98-99), Sudden change (123-126). Available here:

http://www.mom.arq.ufmg.br/mom/arq_interface/3a_aula/illich_tools_for_conviviality.pdf

Demaria, F., Schneider, F., Sekulova, F., Martinez-Alier, J. (2013). What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement. *Environmental Values* 22 (2): 191-215. Available here:

https://www.degrowth.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/What_is_Degrowth_FDemia-2013_Env_Values-libre.pdf

2. Critique to development (Federico Demaria and Brototi Roy); Wednesday 10th October, 15.00 – 17.00

The class introduces the cultural critiques to development and explores alternatives to it, along the lines of the literature on post-development.

Sachs, W. (1992) *The Development Dictionary – A Guide to Knowledge as Power*. Zed Books. Introduction (xv-xx).

Escobar, A. (1995) *Encountering Development*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Preface and Chapters 1 (3-20) and 6 (212-226).

Kothari, A., Demaria, F., Acosta, A. (2015) Alternatives to Sustainable Development and the Green Economy: Buen Vivir, Eco-Swaraj and Degrowth. *Development* 57(3-4): 362-375.

3. Well-being and simplicity (Filka Sekulova); Thursday 11th October, 15.00 – 17.00

Thoreau, Henry David (1848) A Letter to Harrison Blake. Available at:

<https://www.artofmanliness.com/2017/09/09/manvotional-thoreau-simplicity-aspiration/>

Sekulova, F. 2014. *Happiness*, in [D'Alisa G., Demaria F., Kallis G. Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era. Routledge](#)

Kasser, T., Dungan, N., Rosenblum, K. L., Sameroff, A. J., Deci, E. L., Niemiec, C. P., Ryan, R. M., Osp, A., Bond, R., & Dittmar, H. (2014). Changes in materialism, changes in psychological well-being: Evidence from three longitudinal studies and an intervention experiment. *Motivation and Emotion*, 38, 1-22.

4. Ecology and biophysical limits to growth (Salvador Pueyo with Filka Sekulova); Wednesday 17th October, 15.00 – 17.00

The most obvious reasons to degrow are the limited availability of natural resources and the limited capacity of the planet to absorb the impacts of economic growth without undergoing major, undesirable transformations. This class will serve to explore this idea and the existing knowledge on each of the major biophysical “limits”.

Hubbert, M.K. 1981. The world’s evolving energy system. *American Journal of Physics* 49: 1007–1029 [except the sections beginning in pp. 1017–1022].

Steffen, W. et al. 2015. Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science* 347: 1259855.

Anderson, K. and Bows, A. 2012. A new paradigm for climate change. *Nature Climate Change* 2: 639–640.

5. Direct Democracy (Christos Zografos with Federico Demaria); Thursday 18th October, 15.00 – 17.00

The class presents and discusses the potential and challenges of direct democracy as a process that can facilitate a transition towards degrowth futures. It critically calls on the concept of direct democracy by reflecting upon specific questions with the help of readings and through student participation in a classroom activity.

Kallis, G., Kostakis, V., Lange, S., Muraca, B., Paulson, S. and Schmelzer, M., 2018. Research on Degrowth. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, (0), pp.4.16-4.18.

Zografos, C. 2015. Démocratie directe [Direct Democracy]. In: D'Alisa, G. Demaria, F., Kallis, G. Décroissance. Vocabulaire pour une nouvelle ère [Degrowth. Vocabulary for a new era]. Neuvy-en-Champagne: Éditions le passager clandestine, pp: 187-194.

“Don't they represent us?": A discussion between Jacques Rancière and Ernesto Laclau
<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2008-don-t-they-represent-us-a-discussion-between-jacques-ranciere-and-ernesto-laclau>

6. Technology (Francois Schneider and Christian Kerschner); Wednesday 24th October, 15.00 – 17.00

The course will bring better understanding of the conflictual relation between technology (techniques) and degrowth. We will better understand the nature and the definitions of techniques/technology and identify different perspectives from a degrowth point of view: classical thinkers, frugal innovation and societal adjustments, low-tech systems vs techno-enthusiasts.

Ellul J. (1980) *The Power of Technique and The Ethics of Non-Power, Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture*, pp.242-247

Christian Kerschner, Petra Wächter, Linda Nierling, Melf-Hinrich Ehlers (in press) *Degrowth and Technology: towards feasible, viable, appropriate and convivial imaginaries. Journal of cleaner production.*

Schneider F (2008) *Macroscopic rebound effects as argument for economic degrowth. Proceedings of degrowth conference. Paris 18-19 April 2008, Research & Degrowth.*

7. Cultures (Francois Schneider and Aaron Vansintjan); Thursday 25th October, 15.00 – 17.00

The variety of perspectives on arts and degrowth against cultural hegemonies and closures, will bring us to group dynamics and presentations on different hot issues around culture and degrowth. Dealing with both fronts, cultural hegemony and cultural separatism, will lead to debate the right for cultural differences vs multiculturalism. It will lead us to different proposals around decolonisation of the cultural imaginary, diversal, and open localism, a localism without closure, without defense of privileges.

Debord G. (1967). *La société du spectacle* (The society of the spectacle). Chapter 1 (Separation Perfected).

Breleur E. et al (2009) *A Plea for "Products of High Necessity"*.
<http://www.humaniteinenglish.com/spip.php?article1163>

Schneider F. & Sekulova F. *Open localism: Leipzig Degrowth conference; Open-localism, stirring paper, Research & Degrowth, <https://www.degrowth.info/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/3750.pdf> (or degrowth for housing book)*

8. Work (Invited speaker, David Ravensbergen), Wednesday 31st October, 15.00 – 17.00

Gorz, Andre (1980) Farewell to the working class. Chapter 6: A new historical subject.

Kallis, Giorgos (2013) "Friday off": Reducing Working Hours in Europe. *Sustainability* 2013, 5, 1545-1567

Scarrow, Ryan (2018) Work and degrowth. *Nature Sustainability* 1, 159
<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-018-0057-5>

Part 2. The paths to degrowth (how degrowth)

9. Political strategies and actors (Federico Demaria); Wednesday 7th November, 15.00 – 17.00

The class addresses the politics of degrowth, which means the what, how, who and for whom.

Latouche, Serge (2009) *Farewell to growth*. Polity Press. Chapters 2 and 3.

Yes, We Can Prosper Without Growth: 10 Policy Proposals for the New Left.

<http://thischangeseverything.org/yes-we-can-prosper-without-growth-10-policy-proposals-for-the-new-left/>

Demaria, F. (16/01/2017) When degrowth enters the parliament. *The Ecologist*.
http://www.theecologist.org/blogs_and_comments/commentators/2988542/when_degrowth_enters_the_parliament.html

Cosme I, Santos R, O'Neill DW. Assessing the degrowth discourse: A review and analysis of academic degrowth policy proposals. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 2017; 149: 321–34.

Treu et al (2018) Impressions from the Post-growth conference at the European Parliament in Brussels. Degrowth.info <https://www.degrowth.info/en/2018/09/impressions-from-the-post-growth-conference-at-the-european-parliament-in-brussels/>

10. Environmental justice movement and degrowth (Federico Demaria); Thursday 8th November, 15.00 – 17.00

The class investigates the relationships between environmental justice and degrowth, both conceptually and politically.

Akbulut, B., Demaria, F., Gerber, JF, Martinez-Alier (2018) Exploring the connections between degrowth and the Environmental Justice movement. Introduction to the Special issue in *Ecological Economics*.

Martínez-Alier, J. (2012) Environmental justice and economic degrowth: An alliance between two movements. *Capitalism Nature and Socialism* 23(1), 51-73. Available at: <https://degrowth.org/wp->

Part 3. *Frontiers of degrowth: New issues, alliances and practices*

11. Resistance and bottom-up alternatives building (Filka Sekulova and Francois Schneider); Wednesday 14th November, 15.00 – 17.00

Seyfang G and Smith A (2007) Grassroots innovations for sustainable development: Towards a new research and policy agenda. *Environmental Politics* 16: 584–603.

Sekulova, F. Anguelovski, I., Argüelles, L., Conill, J. 2017. A 'fertile soil' for community initiatives: a new analytical framework. *Environment and Planning A*. Vol. 49(10), pp: 2362–2382

12. Tourism and degrowth (Filka Sekulova); Monday 15th November, 15.00 – 17.00

An experimental field class conducted at the Ramblas (Barcelona) through ethnographic observation and mobile labs, followed by discussion. No reading required for the purpose of the class.

13. Housing and narratives (Francois Schneider); Wednesday 21st November, 15.00 – 17.00

Nelson, A. and Schneider, F. (2018) *Housing for Degrowth: Principles, Models, Challenges and Opportunities*. Read Section 1. Simple Living for All, and 22. Housing for degrowth: Summary and further research.

14. Sources, practices and alliances (Filka Sekulova); Thursday 22nd November, 15.00 – 17.00

What was missing from this class? Students divide in group of two, select a topic and/or author, and give a 5 minutes presentation in class on how this relates, and eventually could ally with degrowth (e.g. topics: feminisms, post-extractivism, anti-racism, commons, decoloniality, economic and environmental history, buen vivir,...; Authors: Silvia Federici, Alexandre Chayanov, George Orwell, Ariel Salleh, Walter Benjamin).

For ideas, see: book series in French on the precursors of degrowth (<http://lepassagerclandestin.fr/catalogue/les-precurseurs-de-la-decroissance.html>) and *Aux origines de la décroissance - Cinquante penseurs*. Editors: Biagini, C. Murray D., Thiesset P., Paris: l'Echappée, Vierzon: Le pas de côté, Montréal: Ecosociété, 2017

Kallis, G., Kostakis, V., Lange, S., Muraca, B., Paulson, S., and M. Schmelzer, 2018. The Degrowth Hypothesis. *Annual Reviews of Environment and Resources*, forthcoming.

15. Exam (Francois Schneider); Wednesday 28th November, 15.00 – 17.00