

Master in Political Ecology, Degrowth and Environmental Justice
Academic year: 2019-2020

Foundations of Degrowth (6 ECTS)

Instructors

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Teaching assistant: TBC

Classroom: Escola de posgrau (TBC)

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 different schools of thought. We will discuss the definition, origins, evolution, practices and continuous 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 (justice, democracy, ecology, post-development, feminisms and well-being) 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 new frontiers of degrowth oriented action, practice and research.

Structure

The course has fifteen classes (15 x 2 hrs = 30 hours; 6 ECTS), structured into two parts:

- i) The sources of degrowth, (or why degrowth); and
- ii) The paths and strategies relevant for degrowth (or how degrowth), including the new frontiers, alliance and practice that the concept engages (and needs to engage) with.

Each class is normally based upon 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 that everyone has read the readings carefully in advance, and participates in the discussions. This course will furthermore contain a practical session in the context of the experimental project [Can Decreix](#) (France).

All articles and reading material for the class are uploaded here ([Dropbox](#) or [DegrowthCloud](#)) 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 seminars as well as field visits where some of the theoretical concepts studied in class are used as a source of inspiration for practical applications.

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 as possible. At the beginning of each class two students will shortly present their take on the readings of the week: emerging questions, difficulties in understanding, agreements and disagreements. While each week there will be different people responding to these questions, please do the reading regularly as selection of respondents will take place at random. The two students that will be asked to introduce the readings at the beginning of the class will have to write an assignment of about 300 words in total, in which you address the following questions: What is the main argument of each article/chapter? What did I not understand, or what needed further clarification? With what did I disagree (if anything) and why? The students will have to send the assignment by email to the teacher of the class within one week.

If you cannot attend the class

If, for any reasons, you cannot attend the class, please, do the readings, and on the day of the class send to the teacher the assignment, as described here above. One assignment for each class you miss.

Exam

The exam will be a take-home writing one week after 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 (of maximum 1000 words), responding to the question and explaining their answer. They will write using their own computers and having access to the internet. The exams will be graded by the coordinator of the module. For the final mark, we will take into consideration the exam (40%), the presentation and assignment of the weekly readings (20%), the group presentation in class (20%) and the degrowth art piece (20%).

READINGS: It is important to read everything, but if you are running short of time, then prioritize those in yellow. By the end of the course, the students are expected to have read the book: “*Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New era*” by D’Alisa, Demaria and Kallis.

Social networks

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/researchanddegrowth/>

Twitter: https://twitter.com/R_Degrowth #degrowth

PROGRAM OUTLINE

I. The sources of degrowth (why degrowth)

October 2nd, 2019

1. What is degrowth? (Filka Sekulova, Federico Demaria and François Schneider);

This class will start with a group dynamic exercise where the concept will be collectively explored (Filka). We will then introduce the course, discuss the definitions of degrowth (Federico), and dive into its history (François) This class will last two hours and a half (unlike the rest of the sessions). The students shall come to the class with a written short definition of degrowth, maximum 100 words. Please paste it also [here](#), and read all the definitions before coming to the class.

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_FDemaria-2013_Env_Values-libre.pdf

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. (2018) The rise - and future - of the degrowth movement. *The Ecologist*. Available at: <https://theecologist.org/2018/mar/27/rise-and-future-degrowth-movement>

Field trip to Can Decreix (second half of October, probably two separate groups 18-20 & 25-27)

The practice and experimentation of degrowth is a real challenge. Many people interested in the practice of degrowth come in conflict with their day to day habits and institutions. How do you slow pace in a speeding world? How do you practice voluntary simplicity in a context of hyper-consumption? How do you favor a preventive rather than pipeline approach (to pollution, for example)? Instead of focusing on the growth addiction within the existing institutions or observing the lack of appropriate environment for degrowth proposals (being in conflict with the rest of society), we will here experience a more systemic practice of degrowth. This practice will consist of two weekends in October with 15 participants max with the aim to ‘experience degrowth’ in the context of Can Decreix, a pilot project of degrowth in practice, where simple and low-technology are combined with a ‘different lifestyle’. During this field trip we will also explore the possibilities of engaging with practical projects within the master. For more details, see degrowth.org/can-decreix

October 9th 2019

2. Critiques to development and decoloniality (Federico Demaria)

The class introduces the cultural and ecological critiques to development. Please, write your own definition of development before the class [here](#).

Dengler, Corinna and Seebacher, Lisa Marie (2019) What About the Global South? Towards a Feminist Decolonial Degrowth Approach. *Ecological Economics* 157: 246-25

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).

October 16th, 2019

3. Well-being and simplicity (Filka Sekulova);

This class engages with the well-being foundations of degrowth, bringing in macroeconomic data on the relationship between economic growth and happiness, and critically reflects upon the notions of well-being and meaningful living in relation with income levels.

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.

October 23rd, 2019

4. Alternatives to development towards the Pluriverse: Lessons from the Global South (Federico Demaria);

The class explores the alternatives to development, along the lines of the literature on post-development, discussing their similarities and differences, and how they can be articulated.

[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.](#)

Kothari, A., Salleh, A., Escobar, A., Demaria, F. and Acosta, A. (2019) *Pluriverse: A Post-Development dictionary*. Delhi: Tulika/AUF. Introduction, plus one chapter of your choice.

October 30th, 2019

5. The biophysical limits to growth (Filka Sekulova);

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”.

[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. https://public.wmo.int/en/resources/united_in_science

November 6th, 2019

6. Technology (Francois Schneider);

The course brings better understanding of the conflictive relation between technology (techniques) and degrowth. We will try to 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 versus techno-enthusiasm.

[Christian Kerschner, Petra Wächter, Linda Nierling, Melf-Hinrich Ehlers \(2018\) Degrowth and Technology: towards feasible, viable, appropriate and convivial imaginaries. *Journal of cleaner production*.](#)

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

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

November 13th, 2016

7. Feminisms (Filka Sekulova and Federico Demaria)

This class discusses how to make feminist reasoning an integral part of degrowth activism and scholarship, as well as the potential for an alliance between feminisms and degrowth, taking into consideration the possible issues and challenges that might arise.

Dengler, Corinna and Strunk, Birte (2018) The Monetized Economy Versus Care and the Environment: Degrowth Perspectives On Reconciling an Antagonism. *Feminist Economics* 24 (3): 160-183

“Carework as Commons: Towards a Feminist Degrowth Agenda” by Bengi Akbulut. <https://www.degrowth.info/en/2017/02/carework-as-commons-towards-a-feminist-degrowth-agenda/>

D’Alisa, G., Deriu, M., Demaria, F. (2015) Care. In: D’Alisa, G., Demaria, F., Kallis, G. (eds) (2014) *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

November 20th, 2019

8. Cultures (Francois Schneider)

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 versus multiculturalism. It will lead us to different proposals around decolonisation of the cultural imaginary, diversal and open localism, a localism without closure, without defence of privileges.

PLEASE NOTE: bring one example of degrowth art. It could be a photo, or other type of copy of someone else's degrowth art, or it could be your own composition, in different form. We will do a small exhibition.

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)

November 27th, 2019

9. Sources, practices and alliances I (Filka Sekulova);

5 groups of 3 students each * (10 minutes presentation + 5 questions) = 120 minutes

What was missing from this course? Students divide in group of 2 or 3, select a topic and/or author, and give a 10 minute presentation in class on how this relates, and eventually could ally with degrowth

(potential topics include feminisms, post-extractivism, anti-racism, migrations, commons, decoloniality, non-violence, economic and environmental history, buen vivir; potential authors: Silvia Federici, Alexandre Chayanov, George Orwell, Ariel Salleh, Walter Benjamin and many others). Please list the topics and members of the groups [here](#) by the 9th of October. You either write the topic that you would like to investigate, or simply join the topic proposed by someone else.

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. Research on degrowth. *Annual Reviews of Environment and Resources*.

December 4th, 2019

10. Sources, practices and alliances II (Federico Demaria);

5 groups of 3 students each x (10 minutes presentation + 5 questions) = 120 minutes

Weiss, M and Cattaneo C (2017) Degrowth - Taking Stock and Reviewing an Emerging Academic Paradigm. *Ecological Economics* 137: 220-230.

II. The paths and strategies relevant for degrowth (how degrowth)

December 11th, 2019

11. Tourism and degrowth (Filka Sekulova);

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

December 18th, 2019

12. Political strategies and actors (Federico Demaria);

The class introduces the politics of degrowth, which means the what, how, who and for whom. We will discuss one strategy in particular, institutional politics, while the following classes will address oppositional activism and alternatives building.

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/>

Post-Growth Open Letter to EU institutions signed by over 200 scientists: “Europe, It’s Time to End the Growth Dependency” <https://degrowth.org/2018/09/06/post-growth-open-letter/>

Herbert et al (2018) Beyond visions and projects: the need for a debate on strategy in the degrowth movement. Degrowth.info <https://www.degrowth.info/en/2018/10/beyond-visions-and-projects-the-need-for-a-debate-on-strategy-in-the-degrowth-movement/>

January 8th, 2020

13. Environmental justice movement and degrowth (Federico Demaria);

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.

January 15th, 2020

14. Resistance and bottom-up alternatives building (Filka Sekulova and François Schneider);

This class addresses the emergence and role of community-based initiatives and resistance movements in the frame of degrowth, suggesting a framework for understanding their success.

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

January 22nd, 2020

15. Housing and narratives (François Schneider);

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.

January 29th, 2020

16. Take-home Exam

SPECIAL SEMINARS TAKING PLACE DURING THE COURSE

Direct Democracy (Christos Zografos with Federico Demaria); 18th December 2019 at ICTA Z/22

The seminar 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>