Online Master on Degrowth  
Academic year: 2022-23

3. LIVING WITHOUT GROWTH  
(6 ECTS – coordinator Filka Sekulova) 37.5 hours

3.1 Anthropologies of degrowth

12 January-9 February 2022
14:30 - 17.00 CET (preceded by 30 minute video viewed by participants before class)

Instructors:
Susan Paulson  
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Objectives

This module motivates participants to appreciate the ethnographic diversity of human worlds beyond currently dominant growth societies, and to consider various ways in which communities operate to (re)produce equitable and sustainable life-worlds.

In the first part of this module, participants explore case studies of communities driven by purposes other than growth, and contemplate possibilities for moving from one universal model of development toward pluriversal appreciation of coexisting worlds. We then engage ways to practice decolonizing, deracializing, depatriarchizing and degrowing in our own thoughts and practices.

In the second part of the course, we aim to provide you with the epistemological foundations of degrowth, regarding the general conception of nature, human being and society. We will mainly refer to some classics of economic anthropology like Marcel Mauss, Georges Bataille, Karl Polanyi. Their works have been recently re-discovered by the anti-utilitarian school, founded in France by Alain Caillé and Serge Latouche, in an effort to pry away social sciences from the postulate of the selfish subject. We will then try to recognize the features of a particular declination of the anti-utilitarian anthropology in the Mediterranean experience –a suggestive historical reference for a degrowth future.

Structure
This module is carried out via five two-hour classes, each one preceded by half an hour of introductory videos and the posting of brief contributions by each student in response to the week’s assignments. Class meetings will involve a mixing of teacher presentations and discussions.

**Assignment: Short written commentaries inspired by course readings and videos**

By midnight before each class meeting, each participant posts on our shared class space a written reflection on readings and videos assigned for the week. Entries should be between 150 and 300 words, and may include questions, artwork, poetry, and links to suggested videos/readings/sites.

Each posting should do the following:

- Address an idea from a course reading and/or video that you find valuable or interesting, or that raises doubts or confusion.
- Provide and discuss one quote from an assigned reading.
- Connect course materials with something in your own experiences, observations, and thoughts.

**Focus of each class meeting**

Class 1 (12 January) explores case studies and listens to voices from communities driven by purposes other than growth. Considers what anthropological studies of societies and communities not dominated by capitalist expansion offer to thinking about degrowth.

Class 2 (19 January) contemplates possibilities for moving from currently dominant universal model of development toward appreciation of coexisting worlds in a pluriverse, key to vitality and adaptation throughout history of humans on earth.

Class 3 (26 January) engages ways to practice decolonizing, deracializing, depatriarchizing and degrowing in our own thoughts and practices.

Class 4 (02 February) introduces the main features of the anti-utilitarian thought elaborated in the context of the Mauss (Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales); then focuses on some key topics, like the gift logic (Mauss), dépense (Bataille), embeddedness (Polanyi).

Class 5 (09 February) concludes the course with a focus on the Meridian perspective by Franco Cassano and on the anthropological subject revived in the Mediterranean area, particularly the lower Adriatic.

**Evaluation**

Participants will earn points by contributing to reflection and conversation about readings and videos held online before class each week. Brief writing (150-200 words each week) will be assessed according to criteria indicated in syllabus.

Each of 5 contributions to online discussions may earn up to 20% of grade value.
PROGRAM OUTLINE 3.1

Class 1 – *Seeing life-worlds driven by purposes other than growth*

LaDuke, Winona. *Seeds of our ancestors*, TEDx video 16 min
Survival International *There you go!* 2:21 minute video

Ailton Krenak (Brazil) - *On protecting the Earth*. Gaia Foundation. Video 1.33 minutes
*Degrowth: culture, power*, 2017, 15-article issue of *Journal of Political Ecology*. Read introduction (16 pp text plus many references), then select one article of interest to read and summarize for class.

*Suggested additional reading:*

Class 2 – *Pluriverse: key to long-term vitality of humans on earth*


Berta Caceres 2015. *Goldman Prize* Acceptance Speech. Video 3 minutes


*Suggested additional reading:*

Class 3 – *Decolonize, Deracialize, Depatriarchize, Degrow*


Menonte Nenquimo, 2020. This is my message to the Western world: *your civilization is killing life on Earth*, *The Guardian*

*Wretched of the Earth collective*. 2019. Speech at the global climate strike. Video 2.5 minutes

*Suggested additional readings:*


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**Class 4 – Anti-utilitarianism, gift economy, dépense**


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**Class 5 – *Homo decogitans*: the Mediterranean de-thinking subject**


3.2 Degrowth, meaningfulness and happiness

Feb 16th – March 9th / 2022
14:30 - 17.00 CET

Instructor:

Filka Sekulova
Postdoctoral researcher at ICTA/Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona
filka.sekulova@uab.cat

Objectives

This course will guide you through the well-being stream of degrowth scholarship. We will discuss the multiple approaches to conceptualising and measuring human well-being, along with their critiques. Next, we will explore the economics of happiness, including the latest discussions on the empirical evidence behind the Easterlin paradox, and discuss its relevance for degrowth. The last part of the course will be dedicated to the concept of meaningfulness, the empirical approaches to its measurement and the relation it bears with simplicity, materialism, community action and social mobilization. This course will (most likely) equip you with a counterhegemonic narrative to neoclassical economic (utilitarian) thought, along with the ability to argue degrowth from the perspective of human flourishing.

Structure

The course has five classes of two hours and a half. Each one will include a mix of teaching, discussion and small groups work. You will have to do the readings in advance in order to have a meaningful participation. The first class will present several approaches to understanding and measuring human well-being, objective and subjective, qualitative and quantitative, along with a number of indexes that have been operationalized so far. The second class will engage with the economics of happiness, presenting latest discussions around the empirical evidence for decoupling subjective well-being from income gains, also known as the Easterlin paradox. In class three we will discuss two case studies that operationalize the concept of happiness, one in the context of income decrease, and another around experiencing extreme climate events. The next two classes will delve with the concept of meaningfulness and community well-being, as particular degrowth-relevant strands of well-being, along with

Evaluation

There will be a three-tiered evaluation of the module as a whole (and not this course separately) that will involve three outputs – one or two written, and one or two visual or oral. This will be confirmed in due time.

PROGRAM OUTLINE 3.2

Class 1 – Human well-being: approaches and measurement
Class 2 – The economics of happiness: pros and cons

Why Giving Everyone More Money Is A Bad Idea - Easterlin Paradox Explained:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKE5qCp9cVE

Easterlin, Richard A., Happiness and Economic Growth: The Evidence. Available at SSRN:
https://ssrn.com/abstract=2210847 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2210847

Class 3 – Happiness applications: case studies on income loss and extreme climate events


Class 4 – Materialism and happiness:


The High Price of Materialism, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGab38pKscw

Class 5 – Meaningfulness, community well-being and degrowth


3.1 Degrowth, cities, and the urban commons

16 March - 20 April 2022
14:00 - 16.30 CET (in some cases the class will start with a 30-minute video viewed by participants)

Instructor:
Angelos Varvarousis
Associate Professor of Alternative Spatial Development
Hellenic Open University (HOU) and Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)
aggelosvar@gmail.com

Objectives:

The course aims at exploring what does it mean to live with degrowth in contemporary Western societies and what is the role of the commons in this process. During the classes, we will critically look at a series of social movements and lifestyle strategies that point towards this direction including the Transition Towns Movement, Slow Cities, Ecovillages, Intentional and Hippie Communes, Tiny House Movement, Voluntary Simplicity, Free-Camping, Intentional Downshifting, and more. Also, we will explain the fundamentals of spatial politics and the focus will be on both rural and urban areas.

What is space and what are the different dynamics that emerge and develop in public, private, and common spaces? How does globalization affect places and communities? What is a global sense of space and what does locality mean in conditions of increasing urbanization? How do these realities have been affected by the pandemic and by other crises? How can we address the current socio-environmental impasses of the world through the incipient vocabulary and practice of the commons? And what could be a radical degrowth agenda for transforming our living spaces?

These are some of the questions that will be examined throughout our meetings.

Structure:

The course is structured in three parts. During the first part, we will explore the fundamentals of spatial politics and the basic concepts around them. This constitutes the most theoretical part and will take place during our first meeting. The second part consists of three meetings: one about rural degrowth, one about urban degrowth, and one that tries to move beyond this dichotomy and which tries to focus on processes and not concrete places. The third part of the course is purely experiential and aims at offering the opportunity to embody the acquired knowledge through playing and
experimenting in virtual commoning practices. However, all classes will consist of lecturing, open
discussions, work in groups, and role-playing.

**Evaluation**

There will be a three-tiered evaluation of the module as a whole (and not this course separately) that
will involve three outputs – one or two written, and one or two visual or oral. This will be confirmed
in due time. For this specific course, you will be evaluated on the basis of a short essay that should
be written individually on the experience of the interactive commons game of the last class.

**PROGRAM OUTLINE 3.3**

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**Class 1 – Introducing Spatial Politics: Public, Private, and Common Space**


*Optional*

(Section 1, Chap. 3)

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**Class 2 – Degrowth in the Countryside: Intentional Communities, Ecovillages, Suburbs, and Islands**

COMMUNITIES OF HOPE - Discovering the Ecovillages of Europe
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9hbPFAzF0Y&ab_channel=TheGreatRelation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9hbPFAzF0Y&ab_channel=TheGreatRelation)

*Optional*


Kallis, G., Varvarousis, A., Petridis, P. (2022) Southern thought, islandness and degrowth in the
Mediterranean. *World Development*

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**Class 3 – Degrowth in the Cities: Forming a Radical Urban Degrowth Agenda**
My Town in Transition [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3L9n20myqk&ab_channel=TEDxTalks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3L9n20myqk&ab_channel=TEDxTalks)


*Optional*


Class 4 – Overcoming duality: From alternative plans to translocal transitional processes


Class 5 – A Participatory Commons Game

None