

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

Professor of Latin American Studies and Anthropology

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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features of a particular declination of the anti-utilitarian anthropology in the Mediterranean experience –a suggestive historical reference for a degrowth future.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

Paulson, DeVore, Hirsch. 2021. Convivial Conservation in Brazil. 7pp

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:

Ailton Krenak. [Ideas to Postpone the End of the World](#). Check out book summary in Portuguese, Spanish, English.

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

A. Kothari, A. Salleh, A. Escobar, F. Demaria, A. Acosta, eds. 2019. *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary*. Read the forward, preface and introduction (41 pages), then select one chapter of interest to read and summarize for class.

Berta Caceres 2015. [Goldman Prize](#) Acceptance Speech. Video 3 minutes

Susan Paulson 2019 [Pluriversal learning](#): pathways toward a world of many worlds. **Nordia Geographical Publications Yearbook**. 20pp

Suggested additional reading:

A. Kothari, F. Demaria and A. Acosta. 2014. [Buen Vivir, Degrowth and ecological Swaraj](#): Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy. *Development*, 12pp

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

Nirmal Padini and Dianne Rocheleau. 2020. “[Decolonizing degrowth](#) in the post-development convergence: Questions, experiences, and proposals from two Indigenous territories.” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*. 19pp

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

Jason Hickel, [The anti-colonial politics of degrowth](#). *Political Geography* 2021. (3pp)

Suggested additional readings:

J.K. Gibson-Graham. 2008. [Diverse economies: performative practices for 'other worlds.'](#) *Progress in Human Geography* 19pp

Lang, M. and D. Mokrani. 2013. [Beyond Development: Alternative Visions from Latin America](#). (Originally published in Spanish as [Mas alla del desarrollo](#), 2011.). Quito: **Fundación Rosa Luxemburg**/Abya Yala Ediciones 2011

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

Romano, O. 2015. Anti-utilitarianism. Chapter 1 in G. D’Alisa, F. Demaria, G. Kallis (eds.) *Degrowth. A vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge, London & N.Y, pp. 48-51

Romano, O. 2015. *Dépense*. Chapter 17 in G. D’Alisa, F. Demaria, G. Kallis (eds.) *Degrowth. A vocabulary for a new era*. Routledge, London & N.Y., pp. 114-117.

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

Romano, O. 2019. Mediterraneanism. In A. Kothari, A. Salleh, A. Escobar, F. Demaria, A. Acosta (eds.), *Pluriverse. A post-development dictionary*. Tulika Books, New Delhi., pp. 237-240

Romano, O. 2020. Beyond the servile. The society of degrowth. Chapter 4 in *Towards a society of degrowth*. Routledge, NY & London.

3.2 Degrowth, meaningfulness and happiness

Feb 16th – March 9th / 2022

14:30 - 17.00 CET

Instructor:

Filka Sekulova

Postdoctoral researcher at ICTA/Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

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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

Musikanski, Laura. 2015. Measuring Happiness to Guide Public Policy Making: A Survey of Instruments and Policy Initiatives. *Journal of Social Change*. Volume 7, Issue 1, Pages 39–55

Nic Marks: The Happy Planet Index, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1o3FS0awtk>

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

Sekulova, F. and van den Bergh J.C.J.M. 2016. Floods and happiness in Bulgaria. *Ecological economics*, Vol. 126, pp: 51–57

Sekulova, F. and van den Bergh, J. 2013. Climate change, Income, and Happiness: An Empirical Study for Barcelona. *Global Environmental Change*, Vol.3-5, pp.1467-1475.

Class 4 – Materialism and happiness:

Chancell, J. and Lyubomirsky, S. 2011. Happiness and thrift: When (spending) less is (hedonically) more, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Volume 21-2, 131-138

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.

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

Class 5 – Meaningfulness, community well-being and degrowth

Roy F. Baumeister, Kathleen D. Vohs, Jennifer L. Aaker & Emily N. Garbinsky (2013) Some key differences between a happy life and a meaningful life, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 8:6, 505-516,

Oishi S, Diener E. Residents of Poor Nations Have a Greater Sense of Meaning in Life Than Residents of Wealthy Nations. *Psychological Science*. 2014;25(2):422-430.

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

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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

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

Doreen, M., 1991. A global sense of place. *Marxism Today*, 38(June), pp.24-92.

Stavrides, S., 2016. *Commons space*. London: Zed Books(Introduction)

Optional

Harvey, D. (2012) *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution*. London: Verso (Section 1, Chap. 3)

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=b9hbPFazFOY&ab_channel=TheGreatRelation

Optional

Alexander, S. and Gleeson, B., 2018. *Degrowth in the suburbs: A radical urban imaginary*. Springer.

Meijering, L., Huigen, P. and Van Hoven, B., 2007. Intentional communities in rural spaces. *Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie*, 98(1), pp.42-52.

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

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

Varvarousis, A. and Koutrolikou, P., 2018. Degrowth and the City. *e-flux architecture* Available: <https://www.e-flux.com/architecture/overgrowth/221623/degrowth-and-the-city>.

Optional

Kallis, G., Paulson, S., D'Alisa, G. and Demaria, F., 2020. *The case for degrowth*. John Wiley & Sons. (Chapter 3)

Savini, F., 2021. Towards an urban degrowth: Habitability, finity and polycentric autonomism. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, p.0308518X20981391.

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

Gibson-Graham, J.K., 2002. Beyond global vs. local: Economic politics outside the binary frame. *Geographies of power: Placing scale*, pp.25-60.

Class 5 – A Participatory Commons Game

None
