

Module 1: Foundations of Degrowth

Course 1.1 - Introduction to degrowth

Instructor:

Lucía Muñoz Sueiro & Aljoša Slameršak

Objectives

This course will open and set the context for the remaining of the master's program. In this course we will introduce the multiple perspectives of degrowth, talk about the history of the frame, recent developments, conversations and controversies. The objective of this course is to cover the broad field of the degrowth frame, to equip you with the key concepts, enable you to understand core debates, and questions around degrowth, onto which you will be able to delve deeper during the rest of the master's programme.

Structure

The course has five, two-hour and a half classes. Each one will involve a mixing of teaching, discussion and group work. To participate in class, you should have read the readings in advance. Without this preparation, you may not be able to follow the class, and what you will get out of it will be limited.

The first class ("Introduction to Degrowth") will present a brief history of the idea of degrowth – the academic community and the social movement: where did it start, where did it come from, what are its core claims? The class will provide an overview of different degrowth currents according to their main hypotheses/arguments.

The second class ("Critiques of Growth") will outline the critiques of growth including the ecological, socio-economic, cultural, feminist and decolonial critiques. We will examine how critiques of growth emerged long before the concept of degrowth spread, and how they draw on a variety of intellectual and political traditions

The third class ("The Notion of Limits") will explore different perspectives on the notion of limits, which represent the underlying ontological foundations that shape our beliefs on growth and degrowth. Based on this exploration of the concept of limits, we will discuss how degrowth can (or cannot) relate to the concepts of scarcity, abundance, and collapse.

In the fourth class ("Pathways to Degrowth"), we will focus on the main pathways and strategies for moving toward a degrowth society. We will address the questions of scale, as well as the diversity of degrowth theories of change.

In the fifth class ("Critiques and Frontiers of Degrowth") will conclude the course with some of the most usual critiques to degrowth both from positions clearly opposed to degrowth (such as that of green growth) and from more sympathetic ones. We will also outline some of the frontiers and research directions that will provide an outline for following courses.

Evaluation

See assignment spreadsheet.

PROGRAM OUTLINE

Class 1 – Introduction to Degrowth: what is it and where does it come from?

Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A., & Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The future is degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. Verso Books. Introduction and Chapter 4: Degrowth visions.

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

Class 2 – Critiques of Growth

Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A., & Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The future is degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. Verso Books. Chapter 3: Critiques of growth.

Lowy, M. (2016). *Fire alarm: reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the concept of history'*. Verso Books. Thesis XIII.

Optional:

Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A., & Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The future is degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. Verso Books. Chapter 2: Economic growth.

Kallis, G. (2018). *Degrowth*. Agenda Publishing. Chapter 4: The case for degrowth.

Class 3 – The Notion of Limits

Kallis, G. (2019). *Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care*. Stanford University Press. Chapter 3: The limits of environmentalism.

Lowy, M. (2016). *Fire alarm: reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the concept of history'*. Verso Books. Theses VII, VIII

Optional:

All book: Kallis, G. (2019). *Limits: Why Malthus Was Wrong and Why Environmentalists Should Care*. Stanford University Press.

Class 4 – Pathways to Degrowth

Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A., & Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The future is degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. Verso Books. Chapter 5: Pathways to degrowth; and Chapter 6: Making degrowth real.

Kallis, G. (2018). *Degrowth*. Agenda Publishing. Chapter 5: The utopia of degrowth

Optional:

Barlow, N., Regen, L., Cadiou, N., Chertkovskaya, E., Hollweg, M., Plank, C., Schulken, M., & Wolf, V. (Eds.). (2022). *Degrowth & strategy: How to bring about social-ecological transformation*. Mayfly Books. Part I (1) The importance of strategy for thinking about transformation; and (2) Degrowth movement(s): strategising and plurality.

Class 5 – Critiques and Frontiers of Degrowth

Kallis, G. (2018). *Degrowth*. Agenda Publishing. Chapter 6: Controversies, debates and future research.

Hickel, J., & Kallis, G. (2020). Is green growth possible?. *New political economy*, 25(4), 469-486.

Optional:

Schmelzer, M., Vetter, A., & Vansintjan, A. (2022). *The future is degrowth: A guide to a world beyond capitalism*. Verso Books. Chapter 7: The future of degrowth

Course 1.2: Degrowth, environmental conflicts and global environmental justice

Instructors

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Objectives

This part of the course will present the Barcelona school's approach to the study of commodity frontiers and ecological distribution conflicts, showing its relevance for making the case for degrowth. It will introduce key concepts around environmental justice movements, it will present discussions around questions of alliance between peasant/anti-extraction movements in the Global South and the degrowth movement in the North, and it will approach debates around extractivism, ecological distribution conflicts, just transitions and the Green New Deal from critical, environmental justice perspectives.

Structure

The course has five, two and a half hour classes. Each one will involve a mix of teaching, discussion and group work. To participate in class, you should have read the readings carefully in advance. Without this preparation, you will not be able to follow the class, and what you will get out of it will be limited.

Content

Class 1: Introduction to Environmental Justice Class 1 will introduce the roots of the term 'Environmental Justice'—beginning from the movement in the US, and the expansion of the concept across the world. Assignment: Bring to class 300 words responding to these questions: What is the relation between environmental justice and environmental racism? What is meant by Cole and Foster by "the political economy of environmental justice"? Can you think of similar Environmental Racism/Justice struggles outside the US?

Class 2: Forms of Environmentalism Class 2 will discuss different currents of environmentalism across the world with concrete examples across the North and South.

Class 3: Extractivism, Ecological Distributive Conflicts, Social Metabolism, and the Environmental Justice Atlas. In Class 3 we will explore some definitions and connections between social metabolism, extractivism, and ecological distributive struggles with the Environmental Justice Atlas (www.ejatlas.org).

Class 4: Ecological Distributive Conflicts, Social Metabolism and the Environmental Justice Atlas. Class 4 explores the concept of green sacrifice zones and of "new" commodity conflicts and frontiers. This class will critically engage with "just" transitions and Green New Deal projects.

Class 5: Environmental justice movements and Degrowth

In Class 5 we will consider the alliances between degrowth and environmental justice movements and discuss proposals for creating spaces of collective reflection on the course material.

Evaluation: See assignment spreadsheet.

Material

Class 1: Introduction to Environmental Justice

- Mohai, P., Pellow, D. and Roberts, J.T., 2009. Environmental justice. *Annual review of environment and resources*, 34(1), pp.405-430.
<https://www.annualreviews.org/docserver/fulltext/energy/34/1/annurev-environ-082508->

[094348.pdf?expires=1756299089&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=74F212013C99675FBAD9211D7C8B0BEA](https://www.jasonwmoore.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Cole-and-Foster-From-the-Ground-Up-Environmental-Racism-and-the-Rise-of-the-Environmental-Justice-Movement-2001-NYU-Press.pdf)

- Cole, Luke W., and Sheila R. Foster, 2001. Introduction and Chapter 1 in *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: New York University Press, 2001, pp. 10-33. Available at: <https://jasonwmoore.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Cole-and-Foster-From-the-Ground-Up-Environmental-Racism-and-the-Rise-of-the-Environmental-Justice-Movement-2001-NYU-Press.pdf>

Optional:

- You can also watch one of the short documentaries on Environmental Justice from this site: <https://globalenvironmentaljustice.sites.ucsc.edu/resources-2/united-states-environmental-justice/films-and-documentaries/>

Class 2: Forms of Environmentalism

- Chapter 1 (p 1-15) of the book: Martinez-Alier, J., 2002. *The Environmentalism of the Poor*. Edward Edgar.
- Documentary: Revenga, A., 2005. *Sipakapa NO se vende. Sipakapa qalk' o pirk' ey xik* (Documentary). Caracol Producciones. 56 min. Available with English subts here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F36SqLpqQmQ>

Class 3: Extractivism, Ecological Distributive Conflicts, Social Metabolism, and the Environmental Justice Atlas.

- Joan Martinez-Alier (2009) *Social Metabolism, Ecological Distribution Conflicts, and Languages of Valuation*, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, 20:1, 58-87, DOI: [10.1080/10455750902727378](https://doi.org/10.1080/10455750902727378)
- Patel, R. and Moore, J. (2017) *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet*. (San Diego: UCP).
- Recommended: "The Story of Stuff" (2007). Video 21 min <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9GorqroigqM>

Class 4: Ecological Distributive Conflicts, Social Metabolism and the Environmental Justice Atlas

- Zografos, C. and Robbins, P., 2020. Green sacrifice zones, or why a Green New Deal cannot ignore the cost shifts of just transitions. *One Earth*, 3 (5), pp. 543-5.

Class 5 : Environmental justice movements and Degrowth

- Rodríguez-Labajos, B., Yáñez, I., Bond, P., Greyl, L., Munguti, S., Ojo Godwin U., Overbeek, W., 2019. "Not So Natural an Alliance? Degrowth and Environmental Justice Movements in the Global South," *Ecological Economics* vol. 157: 175-184.
- Check the map of alternatives developed by the Vikalp Sangam network in India: <https://vikalpsangam.org/map/>

Course 1.3: Capitalism, colonialism and degrowth

Instructor

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www.jasonhickel.org/about

Objectives

This course will situate the ecological crisis and degrowth ideas in the context of the history of capitalism, colonialism, and anti-colonial struggle.

Structure

The course has five, two-hour classes. Each one will involve a mix of teaching, discussion and group work. To participate in class, you should have read the readings carefully in advance. Without this preparation, you will not be able to follow the class, and what you will get out of it will be limited.

Content

Class 1: Colonialism and the rise of the capitalist world-system

The first class will explore the rise of the capitalist world economy, looking at how growth in the core states relied on extraction from the global South during the colonial period.

Class 2: Decolonization and the neoliberal turn

The second class will explore the radical anti-colonial movement and the economic policies and visions they deployed during the early post-colonial decades.

Class 3: Globalization and unequal exchange: the new imperialism

The third class will explore the imposition of structural adjustment programmes across the global South, and how this intervention underpins patterns of unequal exchange and ecologically unequal exchange between global North and South.

Class 4: Colonial dimensions of ecological breakdown (and the need for radical convergence)

The fourth class will explore the colonial dimensions of ecological breakdown, and the critique of this issue from social movements in the global South.

Class 5: Political strategy and unilateral decolonization

The fifth class will explore policy strategies that Southern governments can use to throw off imperial exploitation and enforce degrowth in the North, with discussion of benefits and risks.

Evaluation

See assignment spreadsheet.

Material

Class 1: Colonialism and the rise of the capitalist world-system

- Hickel, Jason. “Capitalism: a creation story”, in *Less is More*. (Available in Teams folder)
- Patel and Moore. “Introduction”, in *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things*. (Available in Teams folder)

Optional readings:

- Patnaik and Patnaik. “Increasing supply price and imperialism”, and “Capitalism and colonialism”, in *Capital and Imperialism*. (Book available in Teams folder)
- Sullivan and Hickel. 2022. “[Capitalism and extreme poverty: a global analysis of real wages, human height and mortality since the long 16th century](#)”, *World Development*

Class 2: Decolonization and the neoliberal backlash

- Hickel, Jason. “From colonialism to the coup”, in *The Divide*. (Available in Teams folder)
- Hickel, Jason. “Debt and the economics of planned misery”, in *The Divide*. (Available in Teams folder)

Optional readings:

- Cesaire, Aime. *Discourse on Colonialism*. (Book available in Teams folder)
- Fanon, Franz. *Wretched of the Earth*.
- Nkrumah, Kwame. [Neo-colonialism](#).
- Nyerere, Julius. [Arusha Declaration](#).
- Sankara, Thomas. [Speeches](#).
- Bevens, Vincent. *The Jakarta Method* (Book available in Teams folder)
- Patnaik and Patnaik. “The unravelling of the colonial arrangement”, in *Capital and Imperialism*. (Book available in Teams folder)
- Hickel and Sullivan. “[Plundering Africa: income deflation and unequal exchange under structural adjustment programmes](#)”. *Review of African Political Economy*.

Films:

- *Lumumba*
- *Life and Debt*

Class 3: Globalization and unequal exchange: the new imperialism

- Hickel, Dorninger, Wieland, and Suwandi. 2021. “[Imperialist appropriation in the world economy](#),” *Global Environmental Change*. (Feel free to ignore the Methods section)
- Clelland, David. 2014. “[The core of the apple: Degrees of monopoly and dark value in global commodity chains](#),” *Journal of World-System Research*.
- Smith, John. 2012. “[The GDP Illusion](#)”, *Monthly Review*.

Optional readings:

- Patnaik and Patnaik. “The Neoliberal Regime”, in *Capital and Imperialism*. (Book available in Teams folder)
- Suwandi, Intan. *Global Value Chains*. Monthly Review Press. Suwandi's arguments are summarized [here](#) and [here](#).
- Smith, John. *Imperialism in the 21st Century*. Monthly Review Press. Smith's arguments are summarized [here](#).
- Emmanuel. 1972. *Unequal Exchange: A Study of the Imperialism of Trade*. Monthly Review.
- Amin. 1978. *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism*. Sussex: The Harvester Press.

Class 4: Colonial dimensions of ecological breakdown (and the need for radical convergence)

- Hickel, Jason. 2021. "[The anti-colonial politics of degrowth](#)", *Political Geography*
- Hickel, Jason. 2025. "[Atmospheric colonization and ecological imperialism in the world-system](#)", *Tricontinental Institute*
- Fanning and Hickel. 2023. "[Compensation for Atmospheric Appropriation](#)", *Nature Sustainability* (can skip Methods section at end)
- Hickel and Sullivan. 2024. "[How much growth is required to achieve good lives for all?](#)" *World Development Perspectives*. (or podcast [here](#))

Optional readings:

- Vogel and Hickel. 2023. "[Is green growth happening? Achieved vs Paris-compliant CO2-GDP decoupling in high-income countries](#)", *The Lancet Planetary Health*
- Hickel and Slamersak. 2022. "[Existing climate mitigation scenarios perpetuate colonial inequalities](#)", *The Lancet Planetary Health*
- Hickel, O'Neill, Fanning and Zoomkawala. 2021. "[Who is responsible for Ecological Breakdown? An equality-based approach to resource use in excess of sustainable levels, 2070-2017,](#)" *The Lancet Planetary Health*
- Hickel et al. 2022. "[Urgent need for post-growth climate mitigation scenarios](#)", *Nature Energy*

More on DLS:

- Millward-Hopkins et al. 2020. "[Providing decent living with minimum energy: a global scenario](#)", *Global Environmental Change*.
- Velez-Henao and Pauliuk. 2023. "[Material requirements of decent living standards](#)", *Environmental Science and Technology*.

Class 5: Political strategy and unilateral decolonization

- Hickel, Jason. 2023. "[The double objective of democratic ecosocialism](#)", *Monthly Review* (or podcast [here](#)). And/or: "[Climate socialism](#)". Hickel, Jason. 2021. "[How to achieve full decolonization](#)," *New Internationalist*
- Sylla, Ndongo. 2022. "MMT as an analytical framework and a policy lens: An African perspective".
- Sylla and Hickel. 2024. "[Proposals for unilateral decolonization and economic sovereignty](#)". Progressive International.
- [People's Agreement of Cochabamba](#).
- *Hickel and Sullivan. 2023. "[Capitalism, global poverty, and the case for socialist development policy](#)", Monthly Review*
- Emmanuel, Arghiri. 1986. [Preface](#) to *Unequal Exchange and the Prospects of Socialism*.

Optional readings:

- Kaboub, Fadhel. "[Green and Just](#)", *New Internationalist*
- Amin, Samir. 1990. *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*. Zed Books.
- Amin, Samir. 1984. "[A note on the concept of delinking](#)".
- Olk, Schneider and Hickel. 2023. "[How to pay for saving the world](#)", *Ecological Economics*.
- Kelton, Stephanie. *The Deficit Myth*.
- Heron and Dean. 2022. "[Climate Leninism and revolutionary transition](#)", *Spectre Journal*
- Iticka, Prudence. [Podcast episode on the Alliance of Sahel States](#), *Upstream*
- Hickel, Jason. 2023. "[On technology and degrowth](#)", *Monthly Review*
- Hickel, Jason. "[What would it look like if we treated climate change as an actual emergency?](#)" *Current Affairs*.

- Hickel, Jason. 2021. "[How to achieve full decolonization](#)," *New Internationalist*

