

Malmö Dialogue

DEGROWTH AND SOCIAL REBIRTH – The Logical Steps to Global Survival

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Marko Ulvila with Safania Eriksen

Francois Schneider, from Research & Degrowth, France, made a presentation titled: "*Degrowth" to build convergence for another world (fair and sustainable)*).

Why do we need degrowth? Because of non-equity & social problems, economic crisis, ecological problems, democratic problems, well-being problems, violence problems, scientific questions, etc.

The economic growth has not solved our problems:

- The world is not less polluted
- We do not save time
- We always spend a lot of money and effort
- Unemployment is not solved
- Culture is becoming more uniform
- World inequity is sharpening
- Our life is not less risky
- We are at risk of recession
- We are not happier

We need different kinds of degrowth:

- Degrowth of financial capacity to exploit
- Degrowth of property rights to exploit
- Degrowth of infrastructure to exploit
- Degrowth of time for being exploited and consumed
- Degrowth of unawareness

Concrete degrowth could mean the following :

- Urban degrowth, more preserved spaces
- Degrowth of privatisation
- Waste and incineration degrowth, more recycling and reuse
- Degrowth of living spaces per person, less washing machines, less computers and sharing them
- Transport degrowth: less cars, trucks, planes, roads and airports, more bikes and public transport
- Speed and distance reduction, localisation and less haste
- ICT vs. degrowth, imagining limits to computerization of all activities
- From supermarkets to localised production and consumption
- Demographic questions
- Tourism degrowth
- Agro-industry degrowth, less GMOs, pesticides and herbicides
- Less animal products
- Degrowth energy use with less fossil energy and nuclear, more renewables
- Reducing bulldozers, explosives and other extractors
- Less advertising

The short history of the French degrowth movement includes writings from Georgescu-Roegen,

Partant, Ellul, Illich and Latouche. Conferences have also been held on the issue: Network of Growth Objectors for Post-Development (ROCADE) was founded after the UNESCO conference in 2002, and other conferences were held in Lyon 2003, Montbrison 2005, and Paris 2008.

In the Paris Degrowth Conference in 2008 we had various outcomes. We aim at making "degrowth" an international concept shifting to new paradigms. In the conference the growth politics were identified as destroying solutions and there was a consensus that **sustainability means a lower level of resource use and to reach that, degrowth is needed.**

Degrowth joins those who wish to collectively survive through crises and those who wish to collectively manage a soft landing. The conference initiated international convergence and a network of citizens who desire less and different consumption and production.

Right sizing at the world level is identified as a desired goal, meaning degrowth among the affluent and influential, and post-development for the global South. Sustainability and equity within democratic frameworks are agreed as important goals and conditions of degrowth.

There are many supporters of degrowth in France: Minorities in political parties, political movements and unions; the network around the website *décroissance.org*; the magazine "La décroissance"; Institute for Economic and Social Studies on Sustainable Degrowth (IESSSD), scientists around Research & Degrowth, and the network around the academic journal "Entropia". There are also local groups on degrowth in almost 20 cities around France.

Convergence of themes and associations is that we do not need more, but we need less and different. Degrowth joins many different cultural and alternative groups and movements: movement on global democracy and anti-globalisation, anti-capitalists, LETS, consumer associations, energy saving and anti-nuclear coalitions, organic and local agriculture, vegetarian associations, health cooperatives, associations promoting bicycles, public transport, pedestrians, hiking, local tourism, preventive and alternative medicine, eco-building associations, anti-mining, coalitions against incineration, recycling networks, pacifist networks, nanotechnology and technical critics, anti-adverts, ecovillage networks, etc.

Mauro Bonaiuti, University of Bologna, Italy, made a presentation titled: *Searching for a Shared Imaginary, Degrowth/Bem-vivir: A Common Vision for Social Movements.*

Why do we need degrowth or "bem-vivir"? Because **growth is the common denominator of the complex dynamics causing the crisis. Bonaiuti noted that the absence of a common understanding of the multiple crises is missing and it is the main hindrance for the social movements. Social systems react to the shared imaginary - so shared imaginary is needed.**

He concluded that even social movements are not aware of the urgency of the multidimensional crisis. Most of the movement themes could be interconnected with a degrowth/bem-vivir narrative. This would include issues of war, poverty, exclusion, unemployment, Tobin tax, IFI reforms, energy saving, defence of commons, solidarity economics, lifestyle, etc.

How to move from Growth to Degrowth? We need:

- Limits to capital flows (starting from Tobin Tax)
- Reduction of the scale of trans-national corporations, media, systems of transports, health, education, etc.
- Rethinking economy and technology from global to local scale

Shifting from growth to degrowth means moving from unsustainability to sustainability.

Degrowth is a technological and social revolution starting from the energy system. The new system should be based on energy saving, renewable resources and local network of energy distribution.

Financial resources may be provided by a progressive "internalization" of environmental costs.

The new model would also mean shifting from competition to cooperation. On a global scale, this would be democratization of international institutions, such as WTO, IMF and UNO, and moving from policies based on competition to policies based on cooperation and non-violence.

On a European scale, we call for a "European pact" for labour and environment, and reduction in working hours. On a local scale, self-sustaining valorization of territories and extending the networks of solidarity economy are needed.

Degrowth also means shifting from dependence to autonomy. This requires educational methods that tend to favour awareness, autonomy, critical sense, creative leisure time, well-being as opposed to well-having; reform of the media and educational policies having the purpose of changing styles of life and consumption.

Aruna Roy, from Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan, India, made a presentation titled: *The Capital of Labour and the Cost of Deprivation: How the Other Half Lives – Common Sense Economics*.

Roy started off by telling that in India 80 per cent of the population live in the margins, even during the almost 10 per cent growth. The main issue is mere survival.

She introduced colleagues from Rajasthan, India: Naurti, a dalit woman; Sushila, a villager who demanded government records; and Shankar, communicator and farmer. The group performed a song about needs and rights. *"We do not want: Pepsi Cola, Hero Honda, Bisleri water, whisky and wine. We do want: water, river, forest, wages, records of government expenditure allocated for the poor."*

The right to information campaign grew as a common cause for many of the inequalities that ordinary people face in Indian villages. The slogans included *"Our money, our accounts"* and *"Government money is our money"*. The campaign demanded: transparency of all government records, government people to be held accountable, social audit, and returning the money to the villagers from whom it has been taken illegally in corruption.

As a result of the campaign, a new Right to Information Law was passed in India in 2005, which has turned the colonial secrecy policy to transparency and responsiveness. Through the law, water privatisation and GMO plans have been exposed and reversed.

Another important campaign for sustainability has been on the right to work, passed also in 2005. The Rural Employment Guarantee Act ensures employment in the rural areas. This will help in political mobilisation also, when people do not need to worry about getting food for the evening, but can also think ahead.

Comments and questions from the audience:

Stella from Argentina referred to the 2001 crisis. A new paradigm is needed, and it may evolve easier from a crisis situation. Employment requirements go against the new paradigm - the need for work and degrowth do not go together.

Olli Tammilehto from Finland pointed out that if economy is defined differently to include household work and commons, the current economy is not growing but destroying, actually a degrowth society. *"I would rather have a positive concept that would not link to the 200-year-old concept of economy. Actually, originally economy meant household economy, now household is outside the economy. Degrowth is a misleading concept. This society is not growing, it is destroying the world."*

Jarna Pasanen from Finland supported the idea that a new and shared imaginary is needed. Now

the mind-set is build by commercial advertisement. That is one reason why even all the movements are not ready for a radical change, as **people think that growth really is a "natural development" and not an ideological construction.**

A person from Norway also felt that a complete change is needed. However, when discussing this among others, it is difficult to get support to the idea of radical change. He also referred to the peak oil situation, and the difficulties in the dominant economy have already been observed. He wanted to know if degrowth is the only option.

Responses by the panelists:

Schneider responded to the point regarding the problems in using the dominant notion of economy. There have been attempts to have totally different paths, such as simple living. **On the concept of 'degrowth', he noted that what is strong about the concept is that it challenges the concept of growth. Some things must degrow.**

Bonaiuti also commented about the choice of using the word 'degrowth' to describe the new thinking. It is provocative as it clearly notes the need for turning to the opposite direction. Household economy and subsistence production are perfectly part of the vision. On the question about jobs, moving to a two-hour workday has been proposed. In a competitive system this is not possible. **There are at least two meanings of degrowth: a utopia for intentional transformation, or forced real degrowth from a collapse.**

Roy discussed how investment by TNCs in India does not create jobs for the ordinary people, but displaces them from land and livelihood in large numbers. The establishment of Special Investment Zones escalates this. They were modelled by China where there are two of them, in India 300 are planned. In Goa, the plans have been removed after a movement and large protests have taken place, for example, in Nandigram in West Bengal.

Per Råberg, from Ecolife, Sweden, presented a paper about global survival. He mentioned that his point of departure has been that of ecocrisis. The outcome of the global mega crisis is not only the destruction of life forms and expressions. **A rescue operation requires much more than radical ecological and economic systems, a complete paradigm change is needed.** A diagnosis and solutions have been the core of the Ecolife project. An ecological model has been developed. It includes a self-reliant political regional system. Are the sustainable models realistic? A metropolitan development fuels deterioration of the hinterland. What would be the allies for a regional vision? **Social rebirth and global survival should be the new catchwords.**

He also pointed to the dynamics of the European Social Forum process. He was happy that environmental themes and networks have become more prominent. Anyhow, he found that many of the organisations involved do not challenge the dominant powers and models.

Råberg referred to **the processes around Brundtland commissions and the Rio Summit of 1992. The social aspect of sustainability was not defined as change in industrial countries, but a process for developing countries to adapt western lifestyle.** He found Mauro's paper about the evolving nature of degrowth very inspiring. The advice by Murray Bookchin should be followed.

Jean-Marie Robert, from Objecteur de Croissance, France, explained how the growth-objectors' movement is spreading around the world. He welcomes all to join. Three types of people who can become growth-objectors are:

- People who choose voluntary simplicity
- People who are active in associations and NGOs to change the models of consumption
- People involved in political struggle who are active in parties or reflection groups

The degrowth movement encourages application of economic instruments so that harmful

misuse is made expensive and introduction of basic income to change relation to work. Also new concepts about agriculture are coming up from the farmer organisations.

Maria Gjerding, from NOAH – Danish Degrowth Network, Denmark, spoke about the Danish degrowth network that started a year ago at the Danish Social Forum. **Ecological destruction and social erosion with the eminent crisis call for alternatives. While the symptoms are clear, the causes are less obvious. To the network, such root cause is the striving for economic growth.** The network is working on five themes: Search for alternatives, definition of degrowth, international networking on degrowth, historical understanding, and working out a societal and human development vision. The objective is to take the idea to those who are not already active.

Jonathan Korsár, from Demokratisk Alternativ, Sweden, commented that the definition of degrowth is not so important, but the big challenge is to bring about the needed change. In Sweden, the debate about the issues is very limited, only one problem gets attention at one time. For example, the issue of peak oil was very popular at the time when the then Prime Minister Pärson was talking about making Sweden an oil free society, but it disappeared from the agenda when climate change became the new topic. **Some individuals in environmental and political organisations are talking about degrowth while the majority have trust in green growth and new technologies.** Democratic alternative is participating in local government elections with the belief that locally democracy can be real.

Y. David, from Citizens' Global Platform (CGP), India, mentioned the problems pertaining to climate change, increasing poverty and consumerism. The CGP is working to give voice for the marginalized majorities. From this perspective the CGP is trying to understand the problems and find solutions. Activities in Finland, India, Tanzania and Brazil are to make the marginalized majorities matter.

Jarna Pasanen, Coalition for Environment and Development and Friends of the Earth, Finland, explained the related work in Finland. She said that the activities are very much in the line of the degrowth vision even though the word 'degrowth' has not been used. One of the campaign initiatives is to work less, earn less, consume less – live more. She also referred to the Malmö-Belem newspaper produced for the ESF by Friends of the Earth groups with many inputs relevant to the topic.

Co-organizers of the dialogue were: *Citizens' Global Platform / Finland, Coalition for Environment & Development / Finland, Demokratisk Alternativ / Sweden, ECOLIFE / Sweden, Objecteur de Croissance / France, NOAH – Danish Degrowth Network / Denmark*