

01 Introduction



Degrowth in Movement(s) is searching for alternatives and alliances

Exploring alternatives and connecting quests

The common ground of the movements, various currents and initiatives participating in this project is their search for alternatives and their call for a shift in paradigms. Society's current focus on competition, profit-seeking, exploitation and economic growth should be abandoned and instead there should be a shift towards solidarity and cooperation and an orientation to specific human needs. The aim is to establish conditions for a *good life for all*. Contrary to neo-liberal doctrine, the people involved in this project show that there are plenty of alternatives and that many more can evolve.

In social movements, currents for alternative economics as well as in initiatives, people are discussing a different, socially just and ecologically sustainable life and economy. They are already actively promoting it or trying it out in many different ways. In more and more places, in practical projects and social struggles, alternatives are emerging. Frequently asked questions are: What could a different and more just society look like? What can we do today to arrive at such a society? And how do our visions for alternatives fit together?

We want to discuss these questions and at the same time create a closer dialogue between the movements, currents and initiatives working on them. For that reason we have organised a structured networking and exchange process. The result is the multimedia publication *Degrowth in Movement(s)*: politically active people and committed scientists reflect on the initiative, the current or movement they are engaged in or connected with. The texts highlight their history, main ideas and visions of an alternative society as well as their central activities, practical projects and protagonists. They also discuss similarities and differences in regard to degrowth and to other movements present in the project

The texts offer a (self-)critical overview and ease access to debates for people seeking alternatives. Furthermore, they deepen the exchange between the different movements, currents and initiatives. They support mutual learning and the development of political strategies to support the diverse and common alternatives.

While talking about social movements we used the following definition:

social movements are a distinct social process, consisting of the mechanisms through which actors engaged in collective action: (1) are involved in conflictual relations with *clearly identified opponents*; (2) are linked by dense *informal networks*; (3) share a distinct *collective identity*" (della Porta and Diani 2006: 20, emphasises added).

One example for this would be climate justice. When saying *currents* we are

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referring to perspectives which do not quite fit into this definition of a social movement. This applies especially to the field of alternative economics, where the third part of the definition often doesn't apply. An example for this could be *commons*. We have also included some authors and topics which tend to represent *initiatives* rather than social movements, e.g. *artivism*.

Different paths leading to alternatives

The social movements and streams which are assembled here follow different paths in their search for alternatives. Some focus on a *theoretical* analysis and criticism of the current situation and from there develop models for an alternative society and economy. Examples for this are the movement for pluralism in economics, post-development, the movement for an unconditional basic income, the queer-feminist critique of the economy or the anti-capitalist network *demonetize.it*.

Others are essentially constructive and *practically* orientated. They start in the here and now, are experimenting with alternatives in “reality laboratories” or give concrete inputs for direct change. Examples are eco-villages, urban gardening projects, the transition towns movement, permaculture as well as solidarity economy projects.

Others again are active in *conflict-orientated* social movements and initiatives. They are active on the streets, at work or with direct actions. Examples are refugee and migration struggles, the climate justice movement, the anti-coal movement, care revolution, the anti-globalisation movement, reclaim the city initiatives, the trade unions and the environmental movements.

Many of the movements and initiatives work on different levels using various strategies: they work theoretically, in practical projects or as activists, setting their priorities differently as they feel necessary.

And of course there is some variety among the streams and movements regarding the question of how they relate to degrowth. One aim of *Degrowth in movement(s)* is to find answers to this question, which we will be providing in a concluding chapter in autumn 2016.

The project *Degrowth in movement(s)*

What is degrowth actually about?

Degrowth is a perspective and an emerging social movement, which in the last few years brought together a multitude of projects and ongoing debates around alternative economies. The main idea of degrowth is an economy

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and society which aims for the well-being of all and for ecological sustainability.

One key conviction is that social and ecological global justice can only be achieved when the destructive economic activities of the global North are reduced. Degrowth criticises the current framework of society, which always calls for “higher, faster, further”, as well as connected phenomena like acceleration, excessive demands, marginalization and the destruction of the global ecosystem. A fundamental change in the growth-oriented methods of production and ways of life as well as an extensive cultural change are thus considered necessary. From a degrowth perspective the transformation needs to be based on values like solidarity, cooperation and mindfulness.

Creating a space for mutual learning

These key degrowth ideas resonate with many politically active people. The degrowth conference which took place in Leipzig in 2014 can be taken as an example of this interest. The five day conference which was both for activists and researchers brought together people active in a diverse range of social movements and projects. At the conference and in ongoing exchanges afterwards they found many similarities, but also differences. Along with productive stimuli, many questions and misunderstandings arose, motivating us to initiate the project *Degrowth in movement(s)* in order to tackle them.

With *Degrowth in movement(s)* we would like to provide space for mutual learning, especially as there is a danger that various movements could repeat the mistakes of others and blunder into the same pitfalls.

In particular people from within movements engaged in alternative economies occasionally see degrowth as a concept or rather as a proposal which is or could become an integral part of other movements or perspectives. But this integration of degrowth ideas and activities also often fails because of prejudices and misunderstandings. At this point *Degrowth in movement(s)* can contribute to a better mutual understanding.

Entering into a dialogue

The name of the project reflects its character: The degrowth movement is moving – moving towards other movements and entering into a dialogue and it wants to become more of a social movement. That is why we are now asking other social movements for their proposals for the degrowth movement. At the same time degrowth is being reflected in other movements, currents and projects. It is being constructively and critically discussed and sometimes integrated. In what way or to what extent this integration is taking place is something we want to find out with this project. We do not wish to push degrowth into the foreground or to present it as the *most important* perspective and movement or as an umbrella for other social move-

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ments to assemble under. Rather, we want to use the dynamics of the 2014 Leipzig degrowth conference to bring various protagonists together and to learn from each other.

This project is explicitly *not* a matter of purely intellectual self-reflection, serving an abstract cognitive interest or a detached academic critique. Rather, its purpose is to enter into a constructive dialogue with existing social movements and projects for an alternative economy. With this dialogue we aim to initiate critical discussions and exchanges and to actively look for common perspectives, strategies and concrete courses of action.

More than a publication

Underlying the texts, videos, pictures and audio records which we present here, *Degrowth in movement(s)* is a networking and exchange process which has been running over the course of one and a half years. It started with a workshop preceding the writing process which was held in autumn 2015 and attended by fifteen of the authors. In this workshop we discussed the project as such and searched in small working groups (world café) for answers to the five main questions (see below) of the project. Furthermore, the list of authors and possible movements/currents was extended.

The workshop was followed by a writing and editing process which led to the 35 texts compiled here.

All texts are written in fairly simple language and answer in five chapters the following questions:

1. What is the key idea of your social movement or stream (most important critiques of the current system, central arguments, visions for alternatives), how did it develop historically and what theory of change is employed?
2. Who is part of the social movement, what do they do (social stratification, how and where are they organized; who are its protagonists, which groups, alliances etc. exist)?
3. How do you see the relationship between your social movement and degrowth and how can or should this relationship develop in the next few years? How is the relationship to other social movements? (Relationship means e.g. similarities, differences, conflicts, alliances etc.)
4. Which proposals does your movement have for the degrowth perspective? (What is missing, which areas are not taken into account adequately, what is underestimated, what themes, questions, problems are discussed one-sidedly, insufficiently or not at all?) Which proposals can the degrowth perspective offer your movement?

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5. Space for visions, suggestions or wishes, e.g.: From the perspective of your social movement and in relation to degrowth which opportunities do you see for the development of a strong common emancipatory social movement in the current political context (ongoing crises, emergence of right wing parties, post-democracy etc.?) What should a larger social movement look like for you to join?

The texts are sorted alphabetically according to the names of the movements. In regard to degrowth we, the editors, answer the first two questions with the support of Dennis Eversberg from the University of Jena. We will deal with the remaining three questions this autumn in the form of a conclusion.

In regard to the selection

The movements, currents and initiatives selected here all follow emancipatory interests; all are orientated towards a good life for all and work theoretically or practically on positive alternatives.

Naturally, the selection of movements, currents or projects in *Degrowth in movement(s)* does not provide a complete overview in any way. We have included those which have already developed more or less strong connections with the German degrowth discussions over the last few years. Some of these movements are globally connected, such as the eco-villages or commons initiatives, but most of the authors live in German-speaking countries and most of their texts focus on the discussions and activities taking place within this region. We would, however, like to encourage others to carry forth the idea and to engage in international dialogues in the sense of *Degrowth in movement(s)*.

We also chose such movements, currents or initiatives with which we would like to have a closer exchange of ideas as we believe this would be fruitful and suspect that we can find similarities on which we can build in future projects.

How do we move on?

After the publication of the texts, audio records and videos on the degrowth web portal, the project will continue with a meeting in autumn 2016. There we will discuss the findings and draw conclusions together with the authors. In 2017, the texts will be published in the form of a book and so made available to a larger public. In another meeting in 2017, we will also discuss the findings and conclusions with a larger group of representatives from the different movements and currents.

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Thanks!

Before wishing everybody fun reading and reflecting, we'd like to express our thanks to a couple of people who supported us with *Degrowth in movement(s)*. First of all we thank all second editors for their comments: Dennis Eversberg, Max Frauenlob, Hanna Ketterer, Kai Kuhnhenh, Christopher Laumanns, Steffen Liebig, Anne Pinnow, Christoph Sanders, Christin Schmidt and Felix Wittmann. Further, we thank the translators Laura Broo, Mercè Ardiaca Jové, Isabel Frey and Christiane Kliemann as well as Gill Laumanns and Santiago Killing for their editorial work on the English texts. We wish to express special thanks to Julia Roßhart for the stylistic and linguistic editing and proofreading of all German texts. We most warmly thank Marc Menningmann and Caro Hempte as well as Christoph Hoeland, who produced the video and audio material for the project.

We hope that *Degrowth in movement(s)* will contribute to a strong emancipatory movement which paves the way for a social-ecological transformation and a good life for all, makes alternatives viable here and now, fights for them and keeps on re-dreaming them.

We hope you have fun reading and feel inspired!

Corinna Burkhart, Matthias Schmelzer and Nina Treu in June 2016

Links and Literature

Links

What is Degrowth?: <http://www.degrowth.de/en/what-is-degrowth/>

About the struggles and need for alliances between movements:

<http://www.degrowth.de/de/2016/05/is-sustainability-only-for-the-privileged/>

Applied as well as further literature

della Porta, Donatella/Diani, Mario 2006. *Social Movements: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

https://www.hse.ru/data/2012/11/03/1249193172/Donatella_Della_Porta_Mario_Diani_Social_Mov.pdf