

PREFACE

When the ordinary language in use is inadequate to articulate what begs to be articulated, then it is time for a new vocabulary.

We live in an era of stagnation, rapid impoverishment of a vast part of the population, growing inequalities, and socio-ecological disasters - from Katrina, Haiti and Philippines, to Fukushima, the spill in the Gulf of Mexico, or the burial of toxic waste in Campania, to climate change and the continuous disaster of preventable deaths by lack of access to land, water, and food.

There is a failure, even by radical thinkers, to come up with new responses that are not articulated around the twin imperatives of growth and development. If the desire for growth causes economic, social, and environmental crises, as the authors in this volume argue it does, then growth cannot be the solution.

Fortunately, alternatives are springing up on the ground. They range from new forms of living, producing, and consuming in common to new institutions that can secure the livelihoods of all without growth. However, more comprehensive counter-hegemonic narratives are necessary for articulating and connecting these new alternatives. We hope this book offers keywords for constructing such narratives.

Degrowth has multiple interpretations. Different people arrive at it from different angles. Some, because they see that there are limits to growth. Others, because they believe we are entering a period of economic stagnation and we should find ways to maintain prosperity without growth. Yet others because they believe that a truly egalitarian society can only be one that liberates itself from capitalism and its insatiable pursuit of expansion, one that learns to collectively limit itself and work without the calculus of self-interested utility. And yet others, simply because “degrowth” sounds pretty much like the way they choose to live.

Contributions in this book come from different schools of thought, different disciplines, and different spheres of life: ecological (bio- and steady-state) economists,

anti-utilitarianists, (neo)Marxians, political ecologists, cooperativists, nowtopians, and various activists and practitioners. Each of our contributors sees degrowth slightly differently. Not all of them necessarily share what is said in other entries. Yet degrowth is what brings them together and connects them.

Degrowth defies a single definition. Like freedom or justice, degrowth expresses an aspiration which cannot be pinned down to a simple sentence. Degrowth is a frame, where different lines of thought, imaginaries, or courses of action come together. We see this versatility as a strength. This is why we decided to represent degrowth in a (loose) form of a dictionary. The vocabulary of degrowth is a network of ideas and conversations, strongly rooted in the radical and critical traditions, but open-ended and amenable to multiple connections.

The book starts with an essay written by the three of us. It is longer than the other entries in the book, not because we were more lenient with the word limit for ourselves, but because it attempts to present “degrowth” linking this core keyword of this book all the other keywords of this book. In this introductory chapter, we present the history of the term degrowth and the various propositions and ideas that express it.

The remainder of the book is divided into four parts. The first part examines intellectual roots that nourish degrowth, i.e. the epistemologies of degrowth. The entries summarize in a few words entire schools of thought, explaining their relevance for degrowth. The second part presents the concepts that are at the core of degrowth’s critique to the *pensée unique* of growth. Each entry in this part represents a different entry-point into degrowth. Together, these entries form the theory of degrowth. The third part moves to action and focuses on concrete institutional proposals and on living examples of how degrowth looks on the ground. The entries span from state policies to activist projects and try to cover the whole range of the post-capitalist imaginary of degrowth. Finally, the fourth and shortest part of the book, looks at “alliances”; it presents schools of thought, actors, and concepts, which share a lot with the degrowth project but which have only had loose connections with degrowth up to now. It is there where the most fertile geographical links and future extensions of degrowth are to be found and strengthened.

The reader may approach the book in the standard linear way, reading it entry by entry. But, according to us, this will probably be the most boring way to engage with it. An alternative would be to start from what seems as the most intriguing entry and then wander through the cross-references (marked in bold) to other entries. A meticulous reader might want to read one by one all entries mentioned in a single entry, then move to the next unread entry and do the same, until he or she has read the whole book. Readers are encouraged to make their own voyage through the book and reach their own sense of what degrowth means to them.

At the end of this book, in an essay called “From austerity to depense,” we state what degrowth has come to mean to us in the process of preparing this book and reading the contributions. This is our own politically committed and selective take on the book.

The authors contributing to this volume were instructed to write as simply as possible, but not simpler than that. The entries are written for a general public, not for the specialist. They do not demand previous knowledge of the debates or

the terminology. Still, they are framed and composed with the desirable rigor and expertise of academic book chapters. At the end of each entry there is a references list for those who want to delve deeper into each topic.

The book is a collective output, but with our own spin on the selection and arrangement of entries and contributors. As with any intellectual product, our contributions for this book are not only our own, but the output of accumulated work from the people we have read and the people we have discussed with. It embodies and is embedded in the social and familial work of reproduction. It is a result of commoning.

In the Monday reading group of Research & Degrowth in Barcelona we formulated most of the ideas we express in this book. Many of the members of this collective, some of them researchers also at the Institute of Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, are also contributors to this book. But let us acknowledge them also one by one: Filka, Viviana, Claudio, Marta, Kristofer, Erik, Christian, Iago, Christos, Daniela, Diego, Rita, Lucha, Aggelos, Marco, and the various occasional participants of the reading group, too many to mention here. Our special thanks to Joan Martínez-Alier, who created at ICTA a wonderful haven of radical thought without which we would never have come together to work in common, and to François Schneider, who brought to Barcelona his passion for degrowth and shared it with all of us. Let us also thank all these people without whom this volume would have not been completed. Jacques Grinevald who passed to us generously his knowledge of the history of degrowth; our translators from French and Spanish, Bob Thompson and Cormac De Brun; our editors at Routledge Robert Langham, Andy Humphries, Lisa Thomson, Laura Johnson, and Natalie Tomlinson; and Valerie McGuire (aided by Jason Badgley), who not only translated entries from Italian, but painstakingly read and edited all entries of the book, improving the English of non-native speakers, and allowing this to be a truly international volume. We also thank Bàrbara Castro Urío (labarbara.net), our graphic designer, who created the cover and the illustrations of this book, because aesthetics matters too. We acknowledge the financial support of the Spanish government through the project CSO2011-28990 BEGISUD (Beyond GDP growth: Investigating the socio-economic conditions for a Socially Sustainable Degrowth) and of the European Union through the Marie Curie Action Initial Training Networks - FP7 - PEOPLE - 2011; contract No 289374 — ENTITLE (European Network for Political Ecology).

This book has several chapters and authors. We are not the only ones who worked on it, but we did work a lot on it. We would like to dedicate our contributions to those we most care for. Giacomo D'Alisa to his present and future: his wife Stefania and his children Claudia Pilar and Nicolas Mayo. Federico Demaria to his partner Veronica, his parents Maria and Mario, and his brother Daniele. Giorgos Kallis to his wife Amalia, his parents Vassili and Maria, and his sister Iris. And last but not least, to all our close friends and companions.

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