

Impressions from DeGrowth Conference in Zagreb, August 2023



- The 9th International Degrowth Conference: <http://odrast.hr>
- Zagreb, Croatia; 29 August - 3 September, 2023.

I was very happy to attend this event, for many reasons: (a) I'm interested in alternative economy models that embrace ecology and sharing; (b) it was in Zagreb - close to my family & to my "other house", I could arrive/leave by train, & combine it with vacations; AND (c) my employer was paying for it! (since I find it relevant to bring the ideas of "reduction/limitations" (of resources/pollution) and of Climate Justice to the technical communities; (d) at work, South-Eastern Europe is one of my specialities, and focus on overlapping communities is part of my job too.

This was an opportunity for deepening of my interests: in May, I already gave a talk called "Urgency, **Degrowth**, Rebellion: Environmental Impact of the Internet" at RIPE86 meeting in Rotterdam. ([slides](#), [article](#), [video](#)).

de-growth definition:

Degrowth is a social movement and a research framework which advocates for a transition to sustainable and just forms of social organization. The foundational insight of degrowth is that there cannot be endless growth on a finite planet.

Shortest conference review:

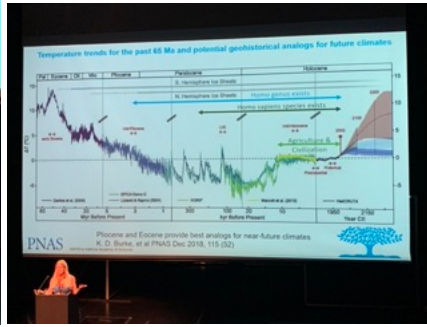
- Biggest likes: impressive keynote speakers, great local integration, much diversity: mostly young participants, huge proportion of women, many (social) scientists & "activists"; very international crowd too; many possibilities for participation, both in the programme & in the self-organised sessions!
- Some objections: too big, too busy, too chaotic, too overwhelming, too academic; not enough "techies".
- Main outcomes: lots of learning, and many contacts & connections made.
- Video recordings: <https://www.youtube.com/@ZagrebDegrowthConference>

Below is a simplified programme: there were 4 venues on 3 locations for 5 days, 10 parallel tracks x3 days PLUS self-organised workshops, and we also had to sort out breakfast & dinner (& lunch too, sometimes, because the one that was provided was chaotic...). Add to this high-summer temperatures (~30C) and the car traffic of the start of the school-season in Zagreb... it was very tiring to try to overcome all of that AND still enjoy! Full programme: https://zagreb.degrowth.net/en/9_int_dg_conf/public/schedule/2

29/8 TUE	30/8 WED	31/8 THU	1/9 FRI	2/9 SAT
8:00-9:00 Registration + coffee	8:00-9:00 Registration + coffee	8:00-9:00 Registration + coffee	8:00-9:00 Registration + coffee	8:00-9:00 Registration + coffee
9:00-10:00 Kohel Saito	9:00-10:00 PARALLEL SESSIONS	9:00-10:00 Paul Stubbs	9:00-10:00 Karin Doolan	9:00-10:00 FES: Degrowth in the Global South
10:00-11:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	10:00-11:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	10:00-11:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	10:00-11:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	10:00-11:30 GEJ: A Round Table on the New Issue
11:30-12:00 Coffee break	11:30-12:00 Coffee break	11:30-12:00 Coffee break	11:30-12:00 Coffee break	10:00-11:30 GEF: Knowledge Community (invitation only)
12:00-13:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	12:00-13:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	12:00-13:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	12:00-13:30 PARALLEL SESSIONS	11:30-12:00 PARALLEL SESSIONS
13:30-15:00 Lunch	13:30-15:00 Lunch	13:30-15:00 Lunch	13:30-15:00 Lunch	13:00-14:00 Lunch
15:00-16:00 Roland Ngam	15:00-16:00 Roland Ngam	15:00-16:00 Françoise Vergès	15:00-16:00 Alexandra Kives	13:00-14:00 FES: Degrowth in the Global South
16:30-18:00 PARALLEL SESSIONS	16:30-18:00 PARALLEL SESSIONS	16:30-18:00 PARALLEL SESSIONS	16:30-18:00 PARALLEL SESSIONS	13:00-14:00 CONFEDERATIONALISM AND MUNICIPALISM PANELS
18:00-19:30 INDUSTRY, LABOUR, WORK DEGROWTH PERSPECTIVE ON POLITICAL ECONOMY FOR GLOBAL PERIPHERY	18:00-19:30 GEOPOLITICS OF DEGROWTH	18:00-19:30 CITIES IN THE POST-GROWTH ERA - THEORY AND PRACTICE	18:00-19:30 DEGROWTH AND POLITICAL LEFT	13:00-14:00 GEF: Knowledge Community
19:30-21:30 ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL: Beasts of the Southern Wild (92)	19:30-21:30 ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL: Beasts of the Southern Wild (92)	19:30-21:30 ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL: The Seeds of Vandana Shiva (92)	19:30-21:30 ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL: The Seeds of Vandana Shiva (92)	17:30 Closing plenary
20:00 + DISCUSSION	20:00 + DISCUSSION	20:00 + DISCUSSION	20:00 + DISCUSSION	19:00 Concert Rudek Degrowth Trio + party

Keynotes, Mayors, Climate

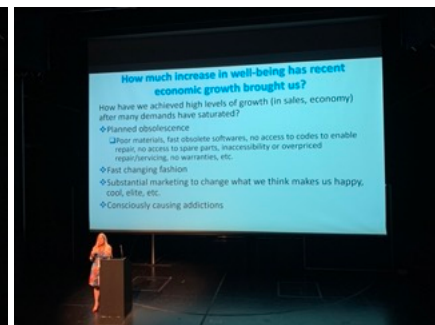
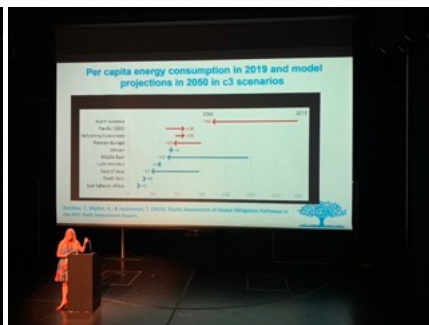
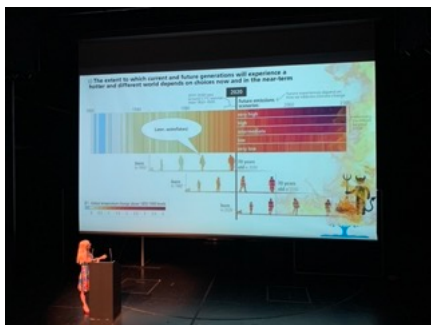
[At the opening ceremony](#), local organisers introduced themselves - many are famous activists and authors in their own right - AND they are friends with the new city government, left/green leaning, so they could get the [Mayor of Zagreb & his two deputies](#) to give the welcome speech! I was impressed & envious & happy for the citizens of Zagreb, to have such progressive leadership!



Major (trio) of Zagreb at the Opening Ceremony & First Keynote: Vice-chair-woman of IPCC

There was also a presentation about the history of these conferences.

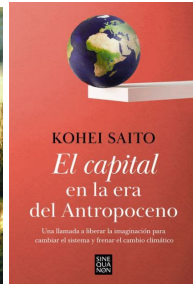
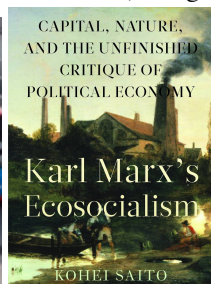
First of the 5 impressive keynotes was by **Diana Urge-Vorsatz**, a Professor at the Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy at the Central European University and Vice Chair of Working Group III (Mitigation) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). She gave a great introduction into the climate science, and what are the consequences if we (in Global North) allow our addiction to growth to continue. She's amazing: a woman, mother, Hungarian; scientist, professor, author, leader, speaker...! She also used the same graph that I used at my RIPE86 talk (with predicted temperatures for generations), *AND* she suggested that the name "degrowth" should be changed -- the sentiment I share, too ;-)) ([talk description](#), [video](#))



Eco-Marxism!

^^^ This is what my philosophy has been all this time, without me realising ;-)

On Wednesday there was a keynote by **Kohei Saito**, famous Japanese neo-Marxist, whose books have been best-sellers and who is both brilliant and brave, for bringing up TWO unpopular economic topics --Marxism & ecology-- in one breath! He's been trying hard to overcome the critique of Marx as proponent of industrialization, and digged out parts of Marx's later writing to make him eco-socialist (or degrowth-communist?!).



^^^ Karl Marx says STOP to growth!

- I loved that his first slide was the same as my first slide from RIPE86 - about **polycrisis**
- He called for participatory socialism, like my [participatory altruism article from 2012!](#)
- and he also counts on the radical voices from younger generations (like XR!)
- other points of agreement: slowing down, rotation of roles, satisfying universal basic needs PLUS communal luxuries, and "from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs".

New concepts I still have to study/incorporate are "metabolic rift", and redefining standards of abundance (to make "degrowth" attractive to working classes). He was questioned about anarchism instead of communism, geopolitics, and "trans-historic" aspects.

[talk description](#), [article](#), [another article](#), ["Degrowth in Japan"](#), and he has a new book in 2024: "Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto".

Recentering Decoloniality

Next keynote answered many of my questions: **Roland Ngam** brought up the "environmentalism of the poor", of the "7 Billion that are already de-growth-ed"!

- *"It is the 1 billion of privileged & rich, whose brutality & greed for raw materials caused..."*
- *...plunder, slavery, monocultures / plantations...*
- *Face of colonialism [now] is corporations, not countries.* "



He called for TWO DIFFERENT DEGROWTHS - for the Global North & the Global South! From the notes: reparations, decolonialism, regenerative practices, global legal cooperation to hold corporations responsible, and people's revolutions of youth across Africal continent and all of Global South. (helped by social media & Internet communication). [abstract](#), [video](#).

Non-Alligned Movement

It was wonderful to meet Paul Stubbs, in person, after years of reading his articles. He's British but "tamed" in Croatia, and speaks "nashki" very well! Paul's talk made me proud to be from Yugoslavia! He went back through the history of Non-Alligned movement, and highlighted their successes -- and the missed opportunities: while they focused on economic & political struggles through trans-national cooperation, they dealt with almost no ecological / environmental issues. Instead, they could have added indigenous peoples' perspectives, and explored more traditional agricultures. Still: I learned about "Group 77" and "new international economic order" (NIEO), & their successor, [BRICS](#). (([abstract](#), [video](#))). Paul also mentioned a book by Rudi Supek: "Ova jedina zemlja", that I managed to find & buy! (([article](#)))



And there is a relevant (Ukrainian) [article](#) : "Europe's East is different from what the West expected: Its colonial and Soviet legacies complicate the simplistic binary division between the Global North and the Global South." (Reckoning with Eastern Europe's Colonial Trauma)

Utopias & DeGrowth

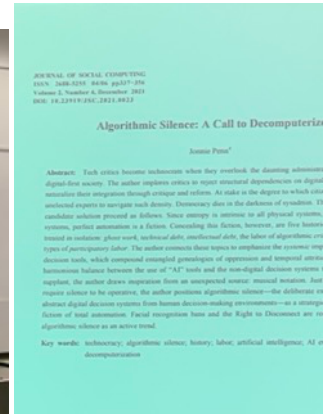
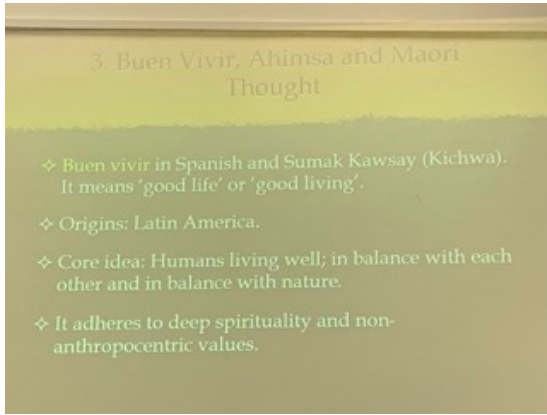
Alexandra Koves told about ways to convince ordinary people about the possibility of utopia, and how the DeGrowth principles resonate with values coming up, over & over again, when "random" groups are asked to imagine ideal future. (([abstract](#), [video](#)))

This reminded me of my own favourite **fictional utopia books**, that I keep plugging in any chance I have, so here they are again:

- The Dispossessed (Ursula K. LeGuin)
- The Fifth Sacred Thing (Starhawk)
- The Years of Rice & Salt (Kim Stanley Robinson)
- Parable of the Sower (Octavia Butler)
- The Island (Aldous Huxley)



Indigenous, Natural & anti-AI talks



Several of the smaller sessions that stood out were from the track "[Feminist, decolonial, anti-racist and anti-ableist ecologies](#)". Vasilis spoke about rebalancing & enchanting the world; eco-centricity of landscapes, plants, animals; interdependence & symbiosis...

... *degrowth needs to embrace a truly ecocentric worldview, borrowing from alternative cosmovisions from the Global South. Such a deep recalibration would allow it to move further away from Eurocentrism and closer to the path of sustainability.*

... then Milja showed us the hidden city of Wild Belgrade, and inviting us to say STOP to the destruction of ecosystems for other-than-humans around us... and to increase our sensing of & empathy for living networks, & our regenerative impact.

... While Jonnie Penn talked about algorithmic silencing, introducing "resting cycles" into computing, and using everything - from legislation to protests - to DeGrow "cloud" & "AI" / (Post-Digital Era and Life After Big Tech).

Here are the links to their talks: 2018,115,111 & more: 227,

And here are other relevant links that popped in my head while listening to them: (copy'n'paste):

- https://wiki.techinc.nl/User:Becha/AI_is_ecocode
- <https://labs.ripe.net/author/becha/computing-within-limits-2023/>
- <https://emergencemagazine.org/interview/an-ecological-technology/>
- Balkans / SEE: <https://www.plavoizeleno.rs/mreza> & <https://dovoljzavse.si/> & <https://issa-school.org> on Vis
- <https://thesunmagazine.org/issues/304/saving-the-indigenous-soul>: *>A ritual gift equal to the amount that was removed from the other world has to be put back to make up for the wound caused to the divine. ... We inflict violence upon each other as a way to replace what we steal from nature because we've forgotten this old deal that our ancestors signed so long ago.*

Julia & Winnie & Marija & Lea & Valeria...



There were so many more workshops, lectures, encounters, inspirations... it's impossible to add them all here! I have many pages in my notebook filled with colorful scribbles; so many downloaded papers; lots of contact email addresses to still reach out to... And Inari was there too - in his RIPE meeting T-shirt!

Some highlights:

- Julia is one of my idols - scientist AND activist! - and she will speak again in 2024: <https://esee-degrowth2024.uvigo.gal/en/team/juliasteinberger/>
- Marija Bartl from Amsterdam! <https://www.uva.nl/en/profile/b/a/m.bartl/m.bartl.html>
- Valeria (Marcel's wife!) from Pirate Care! <https://pirate.care/pages/concept/>
- <https://www.commonsnetwork.org>
- Feminism and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA) : <https://degrowth.info/en/fada>
- & lessons from Dutch reproductive caring commons by Winne van Woerden

DeGrowth & Tech & GeoPolitics!

There was very little focus on technical solutions - very refreshing change from most of my other conferences & communities. There was a track "tech & science" but... I was one of the most technical people there, and that says much ;-) .. so it was mostly "science"... and I was not very impressed...

However, there was one topic that intersects the hackers/techies & Internet Governance & political movements: HOW TO MAKE SURE that the "liberating technologies" are still possible, available, designed, built & maintained! (e.g. current Twitter would not be a tool for the new Arab Spring. What can be used instead?!)

e.g. https://media.ccc.de/v/36c3-11008-server_infrastructure_for_global_rebellion

Some more links:

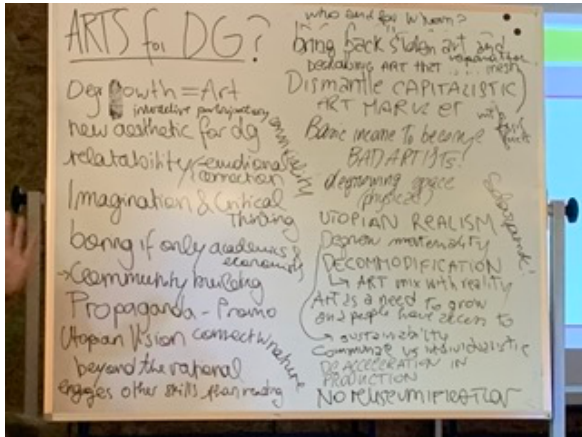
- <http://odrast.hr/thematic-streams/#technology>
- https://zagreb.degrowth.net/en/9_int_dg_conf/public/events#technology%20and%20science%20for%20degrowth
- NL: <https://www.postwachstum.de/degrowth-in-the-netherlands-an-overview-20201008>
- <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2023-09-29/degrowth-for-engineering-and-engineering-for-degrowth/>

OTOH, geo-politics workshop was amazing: we explored how to prepare for conflicts & what would "degrowth diplomacy" be; how to make cultural alliances across "national" "borders" and not just economic alliances; what types of conflict resolutions or non-state resistance exists or existed; how can feminist approaches to care fit into "justice models" ...

I was reminded of my other favourite resources:

- HANDY study about egalitarian societies && 2000-Watt society
- altruistic views of "human nature" based on (radical) anthropology & paleo sciences & UnCiv
- vs: WEIRD models (western, educated, individualistic, rich, "democratic")
- "Between Us" book: <https://www.batjamesquita.com/book/between-us>
- Governance of Commons by Elinor Ostrom & even multi-stakeholder Internet Governance models!
- Mesha Networks: <https://wiki.techinc.nl/MeshNet>
- <https://labs.ripe.net/author/becha/ripe-community-resilience-every-society-has-the-internet-they-deserve/>

Art, Buen Vivir, Conviviality, Music



The conference ended with a festival -- we had some art workshops, lots of pie/burek, and a community-composed & performed song with Darko Rundek, and then some more live music by him!! I met Sanja who makes radio & art, Nikolina & Vedran joined too, we all danced on the grass & said our goodbyes: till the next time!

DeGrowth Movement History - & Future

- Decroissance (degrowth) was born with the publication of a special issue of *Silence* in February 2002.
- 15 years of international degrowth conferences (2008-2023): Paris (2008), Barcelona (2010), in Montreal and Venice (2012), in Leipzig (2014) Budapest (2016) and in Malmo, Mexico City and in Brussels at the European Parliament in 2018; 2020 Vienna (& online), Manchester (2021 & online), The Hague (2021), beyond-growth-2023.eu conference at the EU Parliament (2023) (<https://sflab.eecs.kth.se/pub/xjlo816a/release/4>)
- 28.8.2023. [4th International Assembly of the Degrowth Movement](https://sflab.eecs.kth.se/pub/xjlo816a/release/4)

If you want to keep on exploring DeGrowth, you can:

- join **10th** International Degrowth Conference in [Pontevedra in Spain, 18-21 June 2024](https://www.degrowth-world.org/10th-international-degrowth-conference).
- subscribe to the Mailing List : degrowth-world@lists.riseup.net
- & read up here: many more links: <https://wiki.techinc.nl/Sustainability#DeGrowth>

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