Report on the 10th International Degrowth Conference and the 15th Conference of the European Society for Ecological Economics

In June, the *10th International Degrowth Conference* and the *15th Conference of the European Society for Ecological Economics,* were hosted jointly on the campus of the University of Vigo in Pontevedra, Spain.

The conference programme fostered a critical space for learning and exchange on the latest degrowth research. Further, its social programme which took place across the city, was oriented towards citizen engagement and open to the public, and included various formats of contributions, such as performances, workshops, lectures, and movie screenings.

For each conference day, I provide a summary of my key take-aways from sessions I participated in, one of which on *"Harnessing the collective power of community-led initiatives as enablers of a Post-Growth European Green Deal",* I co-facilitated together with Juan del Río.

Against my background of membership in the ECOLISE Council (2019-2021), my work in the advocacy domain (2021-2023), and my eagerness to bring five years of valuable experience and knowledge into a fruitful exchange with the degrowth discourse, I discuss my key highlights of the conference in light of the following questions:

1. What is the relevance of the conference discussions to the movement of community-led initiatives and vice versa?
2. Which steps could be taken for further collaboration?

For more in-depth insights into the discussions and my reflections on these questions, read my conference blogpost series. You can find the appropriate links at the end of this article.

Monday, June 17th

Prior to the official start of the conference on Tuesday, the 5th International Assembly of the Degrowth Movement, took place on June 17th in a hybrid format, with people participating on the Campus of the University of Vigo and others joining online.

It was organized by the International Degrowth Network (IDN) — an umbrella network of degrowth-affiliated groups and individuals, which aims to provide a space for collaboration, strategy development and communication, in order to collectively advance and build support for a degrowth agenda.

During event, the different IDN sociocratic circles presented their work. From my perspective, particularly the *Practice Circle,* and the *Europe Circle*, hold great potential for collaborating on shared aims with community-led initiatives and ECOLISE.

Why so? In short: Community-led initiatives can be understood as prefigurative models of degrowth put into practice. The *Practice Circle* aims to foster more engagement with the practical, applied dimension, of the degrowth movement, which is currently more research-oriented.

The *Europe Circle*, in turn, aims to provide an overview of Degrowth-related events happening across Europe. Further ideas on the purpose and actions of the *Europe circle* were discussed in an Assembly breakout session.

Tuesday, June 18th

The conference officially began with an opening ceremony in a large auditorium in Pontevedra. Central points during this inspiring contextualization of the discussions to follow included:

- An overview of the conference and its local situatedness in Pontevedra by Mario Pansera, whose remarks included mention of the realisation of the city's mobility concept to now have implemented a car-free city centre.
- A humorous story told by Dan O'Neill of the difficulty of using AI to produce a Degrowth Album Cover; "funny" because he encountered resistance by a growth-based programmed AI, that would not draw a decreasing graph of economic development.
- An outlook on the next Degrowth conferences in 2025 and 2026, by Brototi Roy and Vincent Liegey, with the overall aim of Linking Theory to practice and fostering more exchange between research, science and activism.
- Insights on the risks and dangers of innovations in an era of colonial capitalist expansion - discussed by Annapurna Mamidipudi and Samer Abdelnour.
- Key characteristics of ecological economics, degrowth and post-development, reflected upon by Giorgos Kallis, Brototi Roy and Joshua Farley.

Wednesday, June 19th

Highlights of Wednesday included the sessions:

"Exploring Self-Organized Neighbourhoods: Social Innovation by Implementing Degrowth Approaches for Resilient Communities" led by Cléo Mieulet and Maximilian Mauracher, who presented their learnings of engagement with several neighborhood initiatives, in particular regarding good practices that support the initiatives' success. Attendees were invited to develop action plans for setting up their own local degrowth neighbourhood initiatives, such as food gardens; to car sharing initiatives; libraries of things and much more.

During the "*Policy workshop on a Green and Social Deal beyond growth: an intergenerational discussion"* led by Michaela Karamperi and Martina Sole (Generation Climate Europe (GCE)); Katy Wiese (European Environmental Bureau) and Maria Zinutti (Wellbeing Economy Alliance - WEAll), we learnt about political attitudes of the Youth in the context of the EU elections, as well as Youth perceptions on the growth-based economic system and its alternatives. We also discussed elements of a Green and Social Deal that would promote the values of intergenerational justice.

The day concluded for me with the *"Documentary Screening: Alter Nativas. Building Possible Futures"*, facilitated by Juan del Río - the film's director. The documentary showcases socio-ecological transition initiatives across Spain and provides an analysis of how they address the current systemic crisis. During the discussion that followed in a local cinema, we reflected upon the potential for inspiring our collective imagination, and on the dangers of telling (too) hopeful stories, which could reduce the sense of urgency of the planetary crisis.

Thursday, June 20st

Thursday we celebrated the Global Degrowth Day. It was also the day on which Juan del Río and I facilitated a workshop an ECOLISE workshop. My personal highlights:

Firstly, the interactive session on the EU Horizon-funded research project *"FULFILL: Fundamental Decarbonisation through sufficiency by lifestyle changes"*, which explores enablers and barriers of sufficiency-based lifestyle changes at the micro- macro- and meso level. Interestingly, intentional communities and initiatives supporting lifestyle changes, such as ecovillages, transition towns and community energy projects, are an explicit focus of the research project.

Secondly, the interactive session on *"Harnessing the collective power of community-led initiatives as enablers of a Post-Growth European Green Deal"*, which Juan del Río and I co-facilitated. We introduced participants to ECOLISE, including our campaign on the Time for Collective Action Manifesto, which you can read and sign here: https://timeforcollectiveaction.eu

The following interactive part involved a discussion of participants on policy pathways to promote community-led action in Europe, exploring synergies between their theoretical knowledge on degrowth and the arguments laid out in the Time for Collective Action Manifesto.

Finally, the day ended with a joyful celebration of the Global Degrowth Day at the Protestival in the city centre of Pontevdra.

Friday, June 21st

Due to my experience working in the ECOLISE advocacy domain over the last few years, I dedicated the last day of the conference to learning more about degrowth-informed policy proposals. Hence, I participated in two academic sessions that were part of the session track on *Policy Assessment, Critique, and Alternative Proposals*. The presented studies revolved around critical themes such as universal basic services, agri-food transitions, a sufficiency campaign, missions and labs.

My personal favorite was the study on the Catalonian Shared Agenda "RIS3CAT 2030", which followed an action research approach. As part of the EU's Research and Innovation for Smart Specialization strategy, the researcher Diana Velasco from IGENIO and Transformative Innovation Policy Consortium (TIPC), provided a theoretical framework for shaping regional development strategies to address systemic challenges; they collaborated on this project with Tatiana Fernandez, head of Economic Strategy in the Catalonian Parliament.

Further, I joined the two sessions facilitated and recorded in the plenary tent:

Dialogue 5, "Rethinking Innovation: Alternative Approaches for People and Planet" was moderated by Aviram Sharma. The panel contributions by Paola Andrea Jiménez, Adrian Smith, and Alejandra (Sandra) Boni, then addressed the question: "How can we re-imagine a post-growth critique of innovation from a decolonial lens?" One key take-away was that innovations can both contribute to (re-)producing power relations and oppression, however, also be designed, used and adapted to resist and challenge the status quo of profit- and growth-orientation.

Finally, Dialogue 6 on "Degrowth and Climate Change", was moderated by Mario Pansera. Carlo Buontempo, explained findings from the Copernicus Progamme's report on the European State of the Climate in 2023. Julia Steinberger gave a presentation on the European Research Council (ERC) synergy project "Real - A Post-Growth Deal", which she leads together with Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis. The EU Horizon-funded project is structured around aspects necessary to realize postgrowth, e.g. democratic provisioning, mapping, addressing the problem of unequal exchange between the Global North and Global South, and evaluating and prototyping real cases of post-growth.

The day concluded with a concert and ritual ceremony to celebrate the holiday of "San Juan", bringing in more local culture, in addition to the veganized traditional Galician cuisine served the preceding days, and to the exchange with the local population, supported through hosting some public events in Spanish and Galician language.

Reflections

Overall, participation in these two conferences in Pontevedra was an extremely valuable experience.

In the spirit of the call to foster more engagement with practice, activism and politics, that was expressed in various ways at the conference, I was enabled to explore in more depth the many synergies and congruences between the movement of community-led initiatives and the degrowth movement. This perspective, that guided my participation in the conference, and my following reflections, leads me to conclude here with an enhanced sense of the transformative potential of strengthening the collaboration between research and practice.

While researchers and practitioners can only be considered as distinct categories in an ideal-typical manner, as interactions and overlaps between them exist, it's useful to think about each of their respective qualities and resources. Shedding light on their roles and functions in society, can contribute to a better understanding of how they may support each other in the pursuit of shared aims.

Researchers are generating a wealth of empirical and theoretical insights that are continuously being systematized for a better understanding of pathways towards the realization of a post-growth society. This is often done by observing, analyzing, and evaluating "real-world cases" of degrowth. Findings address critical questions such as how do these cases contribute to the aims of the degrowth movement? Or, what are the challenges that they face and how can they be overcome, e.g. through institutional and policy changes, grounded in knowledge about transformations and system change?

Practitioners, in contrast – e.g. citizens involved in local Community-led initiatives (CLIs), collectively organized networks such as ECOLISE - are in a position of actually implementing the changes. Designing and implementing diverse local projects that mitigate and adapt to the planetary crisis, CLIs promote alternative values such as sufficiency, conviviality, and localization and practices such as sharing economies, commons-based governance and social innovations. Within the context of ECOLISE, they exchange knowledge, collaborate on projects to drive more European community-led development, and advocate for political support.

To effectively harness each of the qualities and resources that these groups possess, and thereby ultimately foster more impact on cultural, societal and political change, more effective collaboration between researchers and practitioners is arguably necessary. In this light, it is my hope that the reflections shared here and in my blogpost series can contribute to a wider exchange between the researchers and practitioners. Clearly many more synergies and actions remain to be explored, both between the groups emphasized here, but also with other actors needed in the pursuit of a post-growth society, such as activists, artists, the media, policy-makers and businesses.

The upcoming Degrowth conference in 2025 in Oslo with the theme of "Linking Theory with Action", will also set an important framework to progress this discussion. Finally, the venue for 2026, is yet to be determined – and the call has been made in Pontevedra, to locate in a location that reflects the values of the degrowth movement.

You are invited to read the articles in my blogpost for more in-depth insights into the content discussed and my respective reflections on its relevance for ECOLISE and the movement of community-led initiatives:

- Part I on Monday, 17th of June
- Part II on Tuesday, 18th of June
- Part III on Wednesday, 19th of June
- Part IV on Thursday, 20th of June
- Part Von Friday, 21st of June