

Corinna Burkhardt, Matthias Schmelzer and Nina Treu (eds), *Degrowth in Movement(s): Exploring Pathways for Transformation*, Alresford: Zer0 Books, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-78904-186-6 (paper); ISBN: 978-1-78904-187-3 (ebook)

The subtitle of *Degrowth in Movement(s)*, edited by Corinna Burkhardt, Matthias Schmelzer and Nina Treu, *Exploring Pathways for Transformation*, situates quite clearly the main focus of the book. It aims to investigate the concrete ways in which degrowth ideas are being applied in different practical alternative projects and social movements. A lot of attention is thus paid to the synergies and contradictions that degrowth ideas face while being taken up by multiple movements focusing on socio-ecological transformation.

The editors are very explicit in claiming that they don't see degrowth as *the* social movement bringing much-needed systemic transformations, but rather that "the next cycle of a larger counter-hegemonic bloc of social movements and political forces opposing both neoliberal globalism and authoritarian nationalism should integrate key critiques, perspectives and proposals from the degrowth discussion" (p.24).

The idea of this book emerged during the 2014 International Degrowth Conference for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity in Leipzig, and the book was officially released during the Degrowth Vienna 2020 conference on Strategies for Socio-Ecological Transformation. The long gestation period of the book is evident in the clarity that each chapter has in addressing the main aim of the book.

It is divided into 22 chapters, with contributions from activists engaged in a mosaic of alternative projects and movements such as solidarity economy, urban gardening, free software, food sovereignty and radical ecological democracy. Each chapter has a specific section dedicated to the overlaps between the respective movements or initiatives and degrowth to reflect strategically for building a larger alliance towards global socio-ecological justice and equity.

Possibilities for Alliances for Broader Systemic Transformations

Each of the chapters illustrate the different ways in which it is possible to build an alliance. For some chapters, the overlap is understood as employing degrowth principles. For instance, the chapter on basic income by Ronald Blaschke (Chapter 4) explains how it engages with the degrowth principles of social security and redistribution, democracy, solidarity economy and individual and collective time sovereignty. The chapter on *buen vivir* by Alberto Acosta (Chapter 5) discusses an alliance between degrowth in the North and post-extractivism in the South.

The book also highlights the different strategic implications of forming such alliances. For example, in the chapter on commons, Johannes Euler and Leslie Gauditz (Chapter 8) question whether the commons movement should be a part of degrowth or vice versa. The book also does a good job of showing contradictions and overlaps when movement with seemingly different ideologies come together. For instance, Jana Flemming and Norbert Reuter in their writings about trade unions (Chapter 21) argue that despite the inherent contradictions between degrowth ideas based on phasing out fossil fuels and trade unions of coal companies, an alliance could be formed based on ideas of work-time reduction and economic democracy which would allow employees to have a stake in the decision making processes of companies. This would in turn benefit degrowthers since trade unionists have extensive expertise on implementation of political demands.

Insights from Self-Reflections of the Movements

A chapter by the editors (writing with Dennis Eversberg) condenses insights from a number of movements (Chapter 9) to reflect on the differences that each movement has based on five key aspects – moral frame of references, engagement with anti-capitalism, the scale aspect of the transformation strategies, reflections on power structures and internal hierarchies, and organizational structure and ways in which each movement forms alliances with the others. In addition to this, there is an element of self-reflexivity in most of the chapters as well as engagement with other movements, which I found very refreshing. For instance, on ecovillages Christiane Kliemann (Chapter 11) reflects on the criticisms they face as being

apolitical as well as drawing parallels with the discourse on care work.

The Need for a Decolonial Degrowth for Real Change

In the recent past, the need to account for global dimensions of degrowth so as to not continue colonial patterns has been put forward (Dengler and Seebacher 2019). The ultimate aim of degrowth's socio-ecological transformation should be decolonization (Tyberg 2020) which can be met by critical analyses of how structural inequalities and power hierarchies work, as well as by incorporating more voices from the majority world (Hanaček et al. 2020).

In this context, Friederike Habermann's chapter on Peoples Global Action (PGA) (Chapter 15) explores what counts as a truly global grassroots resistance and how voices from the global South protesting against the current growth and development model for more than three decades must be properly acknowledged. She argues that "today it comes as no surprise that former PGA activists, and consistently dissident grassroots movements from the global South – for example, against the Narmada Valley dam in India, or the Kuna of Panama movement – have established contact with or are part of conceptually similar parts of the degrowth movement" (p.238). She further warns that "if activists from the global North remain surrounded by their own kind, the consequence is the threat of climate colonialism and environmental racism" (p.240).

Olaf Bernau also brings much needed insights from the refugee movement and the obvious link with degrowth ideas since migrants' movement directly or indirectly stems from a capitalist growth imperative (Chapter 18). Despite that, he shows concerns about the lack of inclusivity in the degrowth movement. Providing examples of the degrowth summer schools, which were organized from 2015 to 2018 in German mining areas to seek socio-ecological transitions with participants from various social movements, including the refugee movement, he points out how "despite a clear display of solidarity ... the social composition was somewhat unsettling: predominantly white, young and academically qualified" (p.282).

Although most of the chapters were quite critical and self-reflective in terms of dismantling in-built and new power hierarchies, contradictions between ideas and actions,

and being careful to offer voice and space to people from multiple backgrounds without any form of explicit or hidden discrimination, I found a couple of chapters where this could have been expanded further.

Living in Barcelona for the last three years, I have spoken to many activists and participants of the 15M mobilizations and heard first-hand accounts of both the good and the bad experiences faced. Eduard Nus' account of 15M (Chapter 2) seems to gloss over much of the pitfalls that the movement faced in terms of processes of decision making. A more critical, self-reflective piece would have added more value to understand the nuances of such a largely unorganized movement and how degrowth can draw inspiration from it by not repeating the mistakes.

John Jordan's chapter on activism (Chapter 3) would have gained much from being critical about who can afford to be an activist. I missed the self-reflective angle which most other chapters contain, since this chapter didn't mention at all how the magnitude of danger faced by non-white bodies is much different from that faced by white bodies carrying out activism.

All in all, I found the book to be very informative about how a broader alliance for socio-ecological transformation can be forged. I found it very interesting that in a lot of chapters, there were examples and analyses of how different movements speak with each other, and not just unilaterally with degrowth. For example, open software, ecovillages, solidarity economies, food sovereignty and repair cafés all mention how they learn from each other. It would be interesting to further investigate how all these multiple movements cross-pollinate, beyond solely their alliances with degrowth.

I must congratulate the editors of the book for a very commendable job of bringing together insights from degrowth activists involved in different movements (although mostly focused on Europe). The book also takes on the very important job of raising awareness about the need to be more critical of visible and invisible patterns of inequalities and power dynamics within degrowth. With its multiple examples and accounts, the book shows how this to be an essential first step towards the ultimate aim of a forging a world of social and

ecological justice and equity, breaking free of colonial patterns of extraction of resources and knowledges.

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