



## DEGROWTH: IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

From the illusion of green growth to a democracy of the earth

### The starting point

Despite the reassurances of the dominant narratives, we are increasingly reached by **news, data, images and testimonies that show the unsustainability of the system in which we live**. This powerful flow of messages, if not accompanied by proposals, strategies and collective attempts to provide change, risks eroding even our own sensitivity. We can see traces of this erosion in the indifference with which we watch, as if we were accustomed to it, the wars for resources, the extinction of living species, the commodification of everything, the violence against other people and animals, the recurrent shipwrecks of migrants, the spread of zoonoses and pandemics, the disruption of the climate and the increase in extreme climatic events.

All this is accompanied not by a real rethinking of our social and productive systems, but rather by a proliferation of imagery and language - under the big umbrella of "sustainable development" - that aims to reassure and bring everything back into predefined tracks. This narcotizing language conceals the fact that **the market itself is more interested in ensuring the durability of business rather than the reproduction of life**. In other words, it hides the conflict surrounding the priorities that must guide our political, economic, social and health choices. Thus, many ideas and key words proposed over the years by the alternative movements have somehow been subsumed by the capitalist market and transformed into instruments of power or profit: sustainability, transition, resilience, circularity, organic, etc.

But the word 'degrowth' resists this co-optation. It still remains a disturbing idea, regarded with condescension or contempt. It resists because it reminds us that technologies alone will not save us and that we need **to question our claims and priorities in order to distinguish what is worth living and working for and what we should instead discard without regret**. It reminds us that there is no way to achieve sustainable production unless we also rethink our forms of consumption and attack the indiscriminate growth in demand for material resources, energy and goods. By accepting - to use an economic language - that demand has to come to terms with supply, that supply is limited and that the prices of production are environmental but also social, and that there are injustices to be dealt with.

**The word "degrowth" reminds us that to achieve a form of prosperity fair and democratisable (i.e. not achieved at the expense of others) we must be willing to choose.** It reminds us, ultimately, that we need to question privileges in order to share rights. It aims at real, shared prosperity. The point that the economic and political elites pretend not to understand, is therefore that degrowth has nothing to do with pauperism, with the rejection of technology or with some uncritical nostalgia for past times. On the contrary, the degrowth proposal is an absolutely profound and topical question about the meaning of what we are used

to take for granted - that is, the idea and the forms of well-being, progress, wealth - with the awareness that the answers and solutions we have given so far do not really answer the question of a "good life". Not only for others, for the excluded, the marginalised, the exploited, the women, who for centuries have paid the highest costs of this destructive capitalist development, but also for those at the 'centre' of the system who for decades believed they could benefit from the processes of innovation and globalisation and who now find themselves exposed and impoverished, deprived of the conditions of subsistence and often of adequate social networks. It is not only environmental devastation, growing inequality and the spread of new forms of poverty that threaten to drive us away from a life worth living, but also the loss of autonomy and increasing dependence on the market for all our needs.

It is no longer time, therefore, for wait-and-see or for hiding behind pretences or labels of convenience. It is necessary to have the courage and confidence to undertake real paths of transition and transformation. Thinking about degrowth means renouncing the recipes of the past, accepting that it is necessary to have the maturity and lucidity to face now a new era, refusing to believe that the goal of societies is the constant expansion of production and consumption; **it means opposing the spreading depression and the passive acceptance of ecological catastrophe and instead relaunching faith in humanity and in its ability to live together with the different living forms, promoting forms of post-growth and post-development prosperity.** Only through the collective creation of a different imaginary, decolonised from the currently dominant one, and the concrete experimentation of new forms of listening and recognition, of property and management, of education and work, of production and reproduction, of sharing and exchange, of consumption and regeneration, of ways of living and travelling, will we be able to achieve a form of subsistence - of different prosperity - that is up to our time because it finally puts the care and regeneration of life back at the centre, rather than the pursuit of profit. A collective experimentation that recalls in its methods and objectives the challenge of a great (and real) ecological, democratic and peaceful transition.

**Degrowth is not so much a necessity imposed by the reality of the physical world, but rather a positive choice to live a full and peaceful existence.** In fact, today we can affirm - overturning what was announced over half a century ago in a famous encyclical - that **not development but degrowth is the new name for peace and care for life.**

### **What do we propose?**

Almost 10 years ago, in September 2012, a wide network of associations and institutions organised in Venice the Third International Conference on Degrowth, Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity, with the title "The Great Transition. Degrowth as a transition of civilisation". For five days almost a thousand people participated in the meetings, workshops and parallel activities. At the time, the conference contributed to taking the idea of a degrowth society out of the realm of intellectual provocation and into the direction of a concrete transformation project. Since then, a powerful scientific elaboration has demonstrated incontrovertibly that continuous economic growth (measured by GDP) is incompatible with the preservation of life on the planet, even in its 'green' versions. Since then, an increasingly significant number of rural and urban, indigenous and social movements, in impoverished countries as well as in more industrialised countries, have been experimenting with resistance and system alternatives in different forms. In Europe, feminist movements, movements for the commons, for the defence of territories, for the dignity of workers, form an archipelago of communities intent on overcoming capitalist productive and social relations (competitive, utilitarian, consumerist) and on building human relations based on the values of care for oneself, for others and for the environment.

10 years after that Conference, we intend to involve a new network of associations and institutions to promote another three-day meeting in Venice, to take stock of the situation and to relaunch concrete ideas and proposals and to make visible that profound change in the model of civilization to which we are called; to apply the knowledge and experience developed during this decade to the current challenges and to the

policies of ecological transition, which without a free and collective elaboration risks being diverted towards a continuity with the usual profit and ecological unsustainability and social inequity.

**We imagine this new Conference as an opportunity not only for confrontation and discussion, but also as a highly proactive moment for presenting projects and proposals for common work, with open methodologies and in-depth workshops aimed at elaborating shared campaigns and initiatives.**

Venice 2022 should not, however, be understood as an isolated moment, but rather as a working perspective. It must be the horizon of **a year-long journey of meetings, events, seminars, workshops, training and experiential activities, organised by the different realities in the different territories, to prepare the collective appointment.** Among the topics we intend to address, there are climate change, agro-ecology and the food chain, the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, health protection, rethinking production, reproduction and care, and the fight against sexual, generational, racial and sexist abuse and discrimination. **All these issues are not separate questions, they are intertwined aspects of the project of a democracy of the earth**, that is, a democracy finally aware of the complex web of relationships that bind human communities - their regeneration and their destiny - to a wider living community, beyond the separations and splits through which we have been used to think.

**Signed by:**

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**How to participate in the process?**

Associations, institutions, movements and also informal groups can join the network promoting Venice 2022 by writing to [info@venezia2022.it](mailto:info@venezia2022.it) to promote meetings, discussions, events and enter the calendar of initiatives.

**Location and dates**

The event will be held at the [Iuav University of Venice](#), on 7-8-9 September 2022.

For further information, please visit [www.venezia2022.it](http://www.venezia2022.it) o [Verso Venezia 2022 – Decrescita](#)

The event is part of the International Conference Series on Degrowth, Ecological Sustainability, and Social Equity, and received the patronage of [Università Iuav di Venezia](#), [Università degli Studi di Udine](#), [Università Ca' Foscari Venezia](#)