

RU PARTICIPATING

MEMBERS | NETWORK PROJECTS | SOLIDARITY

From the Education & Skills Team

- Team Meetings:**
 The team meets every Tuesday at 9pm UTC. Every other week the members try to discuss various perspectives of kinship and the imagined participatory society versions. Everyone is welcome to these discussions.
- Session on biodiversity with Ian Pfingsten:**
 The team held a session with Ian Pfingsten on March 18th on environmental justice and economic externalities. The session was recorded and the video is accessible on RU google drive. Mark Evans is kindly going to edit the video.
- RU 2 book:**
 The book is coming along slowly. The team is in discussion with Cynthia Peters to contribute an article or a chapter on kinship.

From the Site Team

- Updated maps:**
 The team updated the map on members page and fixed the map on the home page. They have discussed new version of the site (RU2) and will continue to work on this.
- Mobile version of the new homepage:**
 The team updated the mobile version of the new home page following Richard's feedback.



Banksy in Boston (Photo: Chris Devers)

Nobody's Fool

Topaz

Have you ever wondered what Isaac Newton and Wiley E. Coyote have in common? They are both famous for their relationship with gravity! And, curiously, a reflection of their attitudes has parallels to a few articles in the April issue. I'm sure that Isaac Newton didn't walk around saying "Isaac Newton Supra-Genius," which is to say he was thought efficient. In other words, Newton had not read Christopher Howell's book, "How to Squander Your Potential," which is one of the books, along with two of Michael Albert's (Parecon: Life After Capitalism and Remembering Tomorrow) that RU member Paulo Rodriguez suggests in his self interview. Thank you Paulo! In his defence Wiley E. Coyote MUST HAVE read "How to Squander Your Potential," if his devotion 1) to plans which don't work, and 2) utilize the same premise over and over can be considered to be reflective of his thought process. Speaking of utilizing the same premises over and over, Michael Albert touches on that idea in his article, "Degrowth? A Succinct Reaction." With his question summarizing that Degrowth offers nothing new, the idea of putting 'gravity' back in the public eye, which our Coyote friend (and Albert) does with flair and elan, IS what Degrowth offers. How old is gravity? Who cares? How can gravity be utilized to catch the pesky road runners of equality, justice and autonomous sovereignty for those who want self responsibility? Those are the questions to ask. Those are essentially, the 'ACME' of political thought, and for those of us who may still be on the road to a better tomorrow, I can only offer two words of encouragement: meep meep!

From the Outreach and Events Team

- **Podcasts:**

Team is planning to record podcasts on various topics. The details still to be discussed.

- **Monthly events What RU talking about?:**

The team is planning to organize recurrent outreach events. This is a suggestion how such an event might be planned: "Why participatory theory matters?"

1. Outreach team member designs the flyer and sends it to the whole Real Utopia Outreach Team for review.
2. If approved, Outreach team member provides a date a month from the delivery of the flyer, after discussing with the RUG project.
3. Date gets added to the flyer and given to Outreach Team.
4. Flyer gets promoted on the following social media by the Outreach team: - Mailing List RU - ZNet - Real Utopia Website - Participatory Economics site - Twitter - Facebook - Instagram - Mastodon - Reddit - Snapchat
5. Guest speaker gets updated on the final date so he/she can prepare for the talk.
6. A week in advance, technical requirements are checked: does the guest have a good enough technical understanding of his tool of choice (Discord, Zoom, Skype, ...), is the internet connection good enough, confirm it is okay to record and/or stream).
7. Stream and record the event. Possible collaboration in organizing these events with Education and Skills team.

Why RU Participating, Paulo?

Paulo Rodriguez

Tell us a bit about yourself. What kind of work do you do? What are your interests? What is your all-time favourite book, film or piece of music? Anything that you feel comfortable sharing.

Hi all. My name is Paulo, and I'm 45 years old. I was born and raised in Panamá in a small city called Chitré, but moved to Belgium not long after Operation »Just Cause« (the American invasion of Panama that deposed General Manuel Noriega), and have been living there since.

I currently work as a self-employed system engineer, which basically means that I set up and maintain computer systems of all varieties for various types of organisations (seldom progressive ones, sadly). When I'm not sticking my hands in computer guts for our capitalist overlords, I enjoy reading, listening to all types of music, reading non-fiction and science-fiction, and when time and motivation permits, I stare at and turn knobs on those amazing sonic inventions called synthesizers. Occasionally I attend a rave or two, but I'm getting a bit too old for that, and I no longer inhabit the body of an 18-year old.

Asking for a favorite book is a difficult one, as there are so many genres, so many interesting topics... In terms of fiction, the books that marked me the most were either the »Dune« epos by Frank Herbert and the Hyperion Cantos by Dan Simmons which both blew my mind as a teenager, Isaac Asimov's robot stories, and oddly enough Stevenson's »Treasure Island«, which was one of 3 books I took with me before leaving Panamá, so it has a special place in my heart.

In terms of non-fiction... Albert's »Parecon: Life after Capitalism« is certainly the biggest on the list, as it shook my economic worldview the same way a three-year old kid shakes a snowglobe, and then some. »Killing Hope« was a punch to the gut, but still a must-read, while Zinn's »The People's History of the United States« and Fisk's »The Great War For Civilisation« also come to mind almost immediately. Isaac Asimov's memoirs »It's Been a Good Life«, Albert's »Remembering Tomorrow« and Christopher Howell's »How To Squander Your Potential« close the list.

Film-wise, Achbar and Abbott's »The Corporation« was to me the documentary to watch and while it might have aged, it still gets to me. I have pretty warm memories of watching Loach's »Land and Freedom« with my best friend and dreaming of being as committed to any cause as the people in that movie were.

Did you have any significant events in your life that ignited your interest in politics and social justice?

Obviously the invasion of Panama and the ensuing move to Western Europe. It opened my eyes to the ridiculously huge disparity in economic circumstances between the haves and have-nots in a way I don't think I would have realised otherwise.

The assassination by decapitation and dismembering of Hugo Spadafora in 1985 by Noriega's forces, whose body was found in a sack of potatoes. As he

From the Membership Team

- Welcome meetings:**
 Membership team runs open ended welcome meetings for new and current members every Tuesday at 4 pm EST. If you haven't been, come join us for a chat.
- Local chapters:**
 Bylaws changes that lay out how RU local chapters work have come into effect on April 4th so Membership team will look to facilitate and encourage the establishment of local chapters. We invite anyone who would like to start organizing on the ground in their area to contact our team and we will assist as we can. Team is preparing assistance, mentoring and material as a kind of starter kit for local chapters to assist in setting them up and kicking off activities.
- Discussing quorum solution:**
 Team discussed how to solve potential problems with the way quorum for meetings is defined in the Bylaws. Will present solutions at next Member's Council meeting.
- New paying gig channel:**
 We opened a new discord channel where members can post job openings for activism related gigs they come across.
- New round of 1 on 1 meetings incoming:**
 With new members coming into RU we invite you to join our 1 on 1 meetings program. It is a program run by membership team to pair random members of RU for online 1 on 1 meetings in order to get to know each other better. Just let us know if you want to be added into the rotation.

was the brother of my sister's teacher, it happened uncomfortably close to home at an age I wasn't quite ready to comprehend what the hell was going on, but I never forgot.

What attracted you to RU? Why did you join?

What attracted me to Real Utopia in the first place, was that most of its staff participated in a very active capacity in a project called the International Organisation for a Participatory Society, which sadly met its demise before it could grow to its full potential. In a sense, I believe that RU might be its spiritual successor and might even become what IOPS didn't.

Which aspect of RU appeals to you the most?

Its focus on vision and strategy. Plenty of places to read up on criticism and analysis but very few on building vision and strategy. It's a no-brainer to me!

Are you engaged in any other organisations? If so, which ones? What appeals to you about them?

Most of the activism I do today is with the Worker's Party of Belgium, which has grown from a fringe marxist groupuscule to a political factor to take into account in Belgian and even to an extent European politics. While I disagree with some of their organisational choices (democratic centralism being the one bugging me the most), they have succeeded in changing the discourse around race, economic policy and feminism in Belgium, while simultaneously providing with social services and aid to those in need («Medicine for the People» which provides those with no economic means access to decent local, medical care; »Solidateams« which assisted those affected by the recent floods to clean their houses; and so on). Additionally, they organise a yearly cultural festival called Manifiesta, which I can warmly recommend anyone to attend.

What are your hopes for RU and the progressive left more generally?

More vision! More strategy! Less defeatism! More insights on how to get from here to the future we want. And very importantly, I would love the left to finally become that welcoming place where diversity of opinions, clarity of purpose and mutual solidarity and respect are ever present.

Newsletter Team

- Seeking new members:**
 We are looking for members to help out with the newsletter project. Our hope is to keep the newsletter going on a monthly basis but to do this we need more help. To help you to consider whether this is an option for you we have put together a simple chart that shows where we need help. No particular skills are necessary, if you are able to send an email you are qualified. If you are interested in helping out with this project and feel that you would like to take on board some of the responsibilities highlighted below then please get in touch.
 - Doing Layout (designing the newsletter),
 - Writing editorial text (preferably rotating),
 - Interviewing RU members,
 - Compiling updates on RU teams' activities,
 - Finding images and Memes
 - Articles - nudging RU members to submit articles

Please, contact us (Urška Breznik, Mark Evans, Yohaán).

Degrowth? A Succinct Reaction

Michael Albert

Degrowth is a vague term. On the one hand, Degrowth arouses fear of personal impoverishment. On the other hand, Degrowth encompasses a wide array of policies that seek social enrichment. While Degrowth emerged from many sources and while it features many facets, it has few if any positive institutional commitments. Instead, Degrowth mainly features a thematic commitment. To avoid ecological disaster and even total ecological collapse, society needs to substantially cut production and consumption. Some Degrowthers say we must cut by as much as 90 percent. Other Degrowthers have in mind an unspecified but much lower reduction.

In most accounts, the origin of Degrowth traces back to the 1970s and particularly, though not exclusively, to the work of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen. A survey undertaken in 2014 found 220 Degrowth-focused texts. A similar survey in late 2020 found 1166 such texts. Other accounts now report upwards of 3,000 or more. So Degrowth is a growing focus in academia, but it also stretches beyond campuses, particularly in Europe (especially Spain) and to a lesser degree in North America.

One theme common to virtually all variants of the Degrowth school, movement, or perspective, (which of these you call Degrowth depends on how you assess it), is the observation that infinite growth on a finite planet must result in escalating ecological crises and eventual collapse. This observation owes first to Roegen who derivatively felt that even no growth, often called a steady state economy, wasn't viable. Roegen argued that society instead needed (and now needs) serious cutbacks. Regarding Degrowth writ large, it is often overlooked that the basic theme that you can't build infinitely on a finite foundation is trivially true. It is also often overlooked that to use this truism to argue for Degrowth would by the same logic motivate that there should have always been Degrowth on our always finite planet. More, unless elaborated, the finite planet argument doesn't say why particular outputs are bad. It doesn't say how to determine the worthiness or badness of production choices. It doesn't tell us under what conditions production we deem bad should be reduced or eliminated.

What then, we might reasonably ask, is likable about Degrowth? If you seek to transcend gender, sexual, race, religious, ethnic, class, and political hierarchies of income, wealth, circumstance, and power, if you seek to attain a society that delivers diversity, solidarity, equity, self management, internationalism, and ecological sustainability/reciprocity, what should you like about Degrowth?

It turns out, you should like quite a lot. Degrowth seeks decline of environmental pressures and avoidance of



ecological crises and collapse. It seeks emancipation from certain ideologies deemed undesirable. It calls for sufficiency and care. It seeks to diminish gaps in income, wealth, knowledge, infrastructure, resources, and time within and between countries. It seeks to guarantee universal provision of fundamental human needs. It seeks to decentralize decision-making and to defend and reclaim the commons. Likewise, Degrowth frequently recognizes and rejects diverse social ills and often quite explicitly rejects colonialism, capitalism, and markets. Also likable are many of Degrowth's specific proposals for ecological improvements like developing public transport, promoting collective rather than private goods, cutting luxury production, and (surprisingly not often mentioned) cutting military production.

Okay, but then what, we might reasonably ask, might people who seek to transcend gender, sexual, race, religious, ethnic, class, and political hierarchies of income, wealth, circumstances, and power dislike about Degrowth? What might put off people who seek to attain a society that delivers diversity, solidarity, equity, self management, internationalism, and ecological sustainability/reciprocity?

First off, the name "Degrowth" is dislikable. To many people, it connotes impoverishment. Likewise Degrowth's absence of positive institutional commitments even while calling itself a societal vision is dislikable. So too is Degrowth's tendency to go from observing that we live in a finite world to rejecting infinite growth which no one proposes and which, more importantly, tends to pinpoint only amounts of stuff. Degrowth sometimes comes across as context and need independent. Degrowth sometimes treats all outputs

as, well, generic outputs, with little attention to differences in kind, value, and even impact. It tends to dismiss people's desires for "stuff" as nearly universally wrong-headed or greedy and thus as part of the problem. And not uniquely, Degrowth also often ignores the attractive or repelling effects of its words on certain wide audiences.

It should be noted, however, that Degrowth likability and Degrowth dislikability come in many and often entangled packages. The most dislikable Degrowthers make little mention of its worthy aspects while they call for essentially genocidal cutbacks and castigate all but survival consumption. The most likable Degrowthers successfully avoid Degrowth's problematic aspects and put forth only its worthy proposals and sentiments. But most Degrowthers, I think it is fair to say, offer some from "column likable" and some from "column dislikable." When described in terms of its half full likable aspects, the Degrowth school, movement, or perspective has many virtues and one might even see it as consistent with a campaign aimed toward achieving a participatory economy and participatory society. But the same school, movement, or perspective, when described in terms of its half empty aspects, has many debits and one could even see it as seriously detrimental to outreach due to its off-putting aspects. One might see half empty dislikable Degrowth as an obstacle to clear thinking about production and consumption due to it often lumping everything into one category called "too much output" which obscures important distinctions between different outputs—as well as due to its implicit denigration of advocating institutional alternatives due to its not advocating any.

So now what? Should we advocate for or should we denigrate Degrowth?

This is actually a question with wider applicability. Many schools of thought, movements, or perspectives have half full and half empty versions. In such cases, should we celebrate what we like and ignore what we dislike so as to fully positively advocate the orientation? Or should we instead castigate what we dislike and ignore what we like so as to fully reject the orientation? Be positive or be critical, that is the question.

A friend once told me of instructing his young child, "you can do x or you can do y, but you have to choose." And the little fella replied, "but daddy I don't like x and I don't like y." While sometimes "binaries" are real and we must choose one over the other, other times "binaries" are false and to choose either is senseless. Support or reject Degrowth? Which will it be?

What if you feel that your whole-hearted support would give unwarranted credibility to the harmful aspects? What if you feel that your whole-hearted rejection would rob warranted credibility from the helpful aspects? What if for those reasons you don't like either option? What if you want to favor the good in hopes you can help enlarge the good

and what if you want to simultaneously critique the bad in hopes you can help transcend the bad?

Conclusion: One should not be chased away from criticizing Degrowth by Degrowth advocates who say, "come on, stop nit-picking. Look at all the good stuff. Get on board. This train has traction." Well, maybe it does, but identifying serious problems is not nitpicking, and a train with serious flaws may be moving but it won't arrive where you want to go.

Similarly, one shouldn't be chased away from delivering compliments by Degrowth opponents saying "are you kidding me? Lay waste to it, and in any case, certainly don't praise it. This train misleads, it distracts. The flaws are the heart of it." Well, maybe so, but trying to retain the positive is not alibiing the negative. It is trying to ensure that the train does good.

The point is, regarding Degrowth, we shouldn't be entirely rejectionist or entirely celebratory. We should support the likable elements and simultaneously reject the dislikable elements.

Consider an analogy. Many and arguably most critics of injustice see positive and negative aspects in the school, movement, or perspective called Marxism Leninism. But a great many let what they find positive about Marxism Leninism (for example support for struggle and rejection of private ownership, of exploitation, and of capitalist economic rule) close their eyes to what they would otherwise find negative. Many others let their sensitivity to what they find negative about Marxism Leninism (for example authoritarianism, economism, support for the corporate division of labor, and enabling coordinator class economic rule) close their eyes to what they would otherwise find positive. Eyes wide in every direction is most often better than eyes closed in all but one direction.

Okay, but having gotten this far, suppose someone who has been a long-time progressive, radical, or revolutionary and who has therefore always believed in equality, environmental sustainability, a vastly reduced military, etc., were to ask me, "what does Degrowth add to my politics? Don't what you call the good parts of Degrowth overlap with other left ideologies, offering nothing new, and the parts that don't overlap, those are the parts you reject as bad?"

I would have to answer that "yes, I think what you say is accurate," but then I would add that "not all of society is as progressive, radical, or revolutionary as you are. The Degrowth train, spurred by highly aroused ecological concern, is taking on passengers and also taking on lots of familiar movement insights. It also has some serious problems. So shouldn't we seek to have it jettison its bad aspects and enlarge its allegiance to the good aspects, as well as add more?"

Member's Picks

Articles:

Analyse This: Why Should I Vote?

by Bridget Meehan, Stephen R. Shalom:

Analyse That Again: Vote, But Know That Is Not Where The Change Happens

by Matic Primc

Why Vision? Why Strategy?

by Bridget Meehan

The Deafening Silence of Intellectuals in The Fact of Growing Global Conflicts

by Boaventura de Sousa Santos

Existing Climate Mitigation Scenarios Perpetuate Colonial Inequalities

by Jason Hickel, Aljoša Slameršak

Books:

Less is More (2021, Penguin)

by Jason Hickel

If we want to have a shot at halting the crisis, we need to slow down and restore the balance. We need to change how we see nature and our place in it, shifting from a philosophy of domination and extraction to one that's rooted in reciprocity and regeneration. We need to evolve beyond the dogmas of capitalism to a new system that's fit for the twenty-first century. But what about jobs? What about health? What about progress? This book tackles these questions and offers an inspiring vision for what a post-capitalist economy could look like. An economy that's more just, more caring, and more fun. An economy that will not only lift us out of our current crisis, but also restore our sense of connection to a world that's brimming with life. By taking less, we can become more.

Movies:

Triangle of Sadness, dir. Ruben Östlund, 2022

A wicked class satire at sea.

Song:

Road to Joy

by Bright Eyes



"Let me never fall into the vulgar mistake of dreaming that I am persecuted whenever I am contradicted."

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it's personal.

And the world won't end.

And the speaking will get easier and easier.

And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had.

And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don't miss them.

And new ones will find you and cherish you.

And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, 'If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution.'

And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking."

- Audre Lorde

RU Serious?

... it's memeing time.



CEO Relieved AI Can Never Replace Him If He Already Contributes Nothing To Company



Sarah Kliff @sarahkliff

Only in the United States could the government run a public health campaign centered on fears of large, unexpected medical bills.

CDC @CDCgov · 1d

Hospital stays can be expensive, but COVID-19 vaccines are free. Help protect yourself from being hospitalized with #COVID19 by getting vaccinated.

Hospital stay = \$\$\$
COVID-19 vaccine = Free

The average hospital stay related to COVID-19 can cost thousands of dollars. A COVID-19 vaccine is free and drops your risk of being hospitalized from COVID-19.



Get vaccinated. www.vaccines.gov

cdc.gov/coronavirus

