

Open-localism: degrowth as a way to challenge social closure

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Long Abstract

Gated communities, people closing doors, fear of foreigners, vote for extreme rights, tightening of borders, are few visible signs of closure that are happening with the advent of the crisis. On one hand the right for migration and passing doors is fundamental for many people that leave an unbearable situation. On the other hand: how can we secure commons, avoid anonymity that occurs when people do not involve locally on the long run?

The debate could be presented as a divide between 'communitarian' and 'cosmopolitan' models. On one hand the communitarian model stresses the importance of a given community as opposed to others. On the other hand, the cosmopolitan model tends to be associated with the vision of an open individual that would not be constrained by communities.

We defend the idea that we do not need to be restricted to these two options. On one hand communities can be open, individuals can be part of different communities, and communities can refer themselves to negotiable identities and have blurred frontiers.

These key issues are for now largely disregarded by ecologists. A few prominent ecologists have had some stands in favour of closing borders and closed identities. The idea of bioregionalism could lead to the creation of new closure. On the other hand cosmopolitanism does not need to escape from attachment to the local.

Degrowth gives a lot of importance to the idea of limits, and the idea of threshold (cf Illich). But we are not using these notions to restrict liberty of movement, but on the contrary to restrict what would affect it. The idea of frontier is often about securing a wealth for a few against others, about liberty sometimes but only for the ones on the right side. With the notion of open localism, we would like to reduce distance between producers and consumers, not by setting a border, but rather by fighting large-scale and fast transport infrastructures.

A few misconceptions

1 "The global (capitalist) growth has enabled to open borders"

Supposedly the advent of capitalism has come with a reduction of violence, with openness of borders. This is only a reality for the rich part of the world population which has the privilege of travelling where it wants, unlike 80% of humanity, as a consequence of laws favouring western travellers (visas) and wealthy individuals.

2 "The global (capitalist) growth has helped diversity"

This might have been true for some time, but the reverse process is occurring now. The globalised market led to the generalization of products from multinationals (coca cola, being the most well-known), as well as generalization of the western lifestyle. In general the idea of maximization of utility, the base of capitalism is reaching all corners of the world, reducing the space left for other

types of relations, especially the gift & care relations which leave space for much wider diversity. Neo-liberalism and Keynesianism, two faces of the “growth coin” are two logics that create a strong dependence into the growth of production, consumption and exploitation. As resources are limited, both neo-liberalism and Keynesianism growth lead ultimately to closure.

### 3 “Criticizing growth is always reactionary”

Supposedly degrowth would be a call for going back to “identitarian” closed-communities against the liberal democracy and the “open-society”. Although neo-liberals defend the idea of open-society through economic growth, economic growth in the real world, the one which has limits, leads to resources scarcity and ultimately exclusion. Growth in a finite world leads to a lack of resources and to economic difficulties for a large part of humanity. Reacting to those crises without challenging high consumption lifestyles (the western way of life that reached the global middle class) will lead to resource scarcity and intensify competition for good jobs positions. This will likely create a fear of those who might 'steal' resources (bread usually) and jobs, in all likelihood the immigrant or the 'other'. As a consequence, we expect, and experience already in this present crisis, the closing of doors and borders.

### 4 “Criticizing growth is always emancipatory”

Most of extreme right is fiercely pro-growth. However there are recently extreme right groups of the new right who adopted an anti-growth discourse, like the followers of Alain de Benoist. Their ideas lead directly to ethnic segregation and cultural separatism. Also several renowned ecological economists have been supporting the Carrying Capacity Network, a USA lobby with a strong discourse against illegal immigrants. Discourses calling for closure of borders to save the environments have been developed.

### An alternative project: the cosmopolitan localism / cosmopolitan autonomy /open localism

Localism does not need to be closed. Within degrowth we talk about the importance of supporting, practicing and theorizing the so-called «open-localism», or "cosmopolitan localism". Open-localism has been mentioned several times since the development of degrowth as movement and political proposals. It means a type of localism which does not create frontiers, which cherishes diversity and multi-level thinking while promoting the creation of open and integrative local projects as well as slow travels. Problems are multi-level and need adapt to its levels of relevance. One of the axes of open localism is the fight against large infrastructures of transport, understanding political backgrounds & promoting solidarity. We want to be in relation with our surrounding environment, to reduce the distance between consumer and producers (or be "consumers-producers"), be sensitive to what we can see and feel, while being cosmopolitan and recognize the multi-level character of many aspects of present life. This is line with Diogenes (possibly the first degrowth philosopher, and inventor of cosmopolitanism). Our identity is about acting in coherence, and certainly not given by consumer products, or exclusion.

There are several reasons why degrowth is fundamentally a project of open localism challenging closed identities.

The transformations of lifestyles related to degrowth leads to giving up all sorts of strong identity attributes associated with consumption items such as cars or large houses. In this context changing consumption patterns for degrowth means changing the constituents of our identity. Will it fall in a new dogma? It does not need to, because degrowth can be applied a thousand different ways. Each degrowth lifestyle could be generalized, but is unique in practice. We fundamentally acknowledge that the need for identity, one of the needs defined by Max-Neef, can be satisfied in many diverse ways. Degrowth actually implies a rethinking of personal satisfiers and a collective & deep democratic debate on collective satisfiers as the best way to fulfil given societal needs. The identities brought by degrowth are negotiable and are not cemented on given satisfiers. Within the degrowth movement, a very wide combination of concerns and approaches have been identified that makes degrowth very far from an ideology or any norm in thinking (Demaria et al. 2013). Proofs of this are the vibrant and rich debate and conflicts existing within the degrowth movement (Duverger 2011).

We argue that the discourse of the degrowth process and project, if taken into consideration with all its philosophical origins, dimensions and strategies can actually be a remedy for identity closure and exclusion. We conclude that the key difference between the degrowth movement and the reactionary elements of society (that can sometimes be against growth) is at the level of identity closure. Degrowth requires going out of closure by developing communities of projects, and challenge the idea of non-negotiable identitarian communities.