The Case for Solidary Degrowth Spaces. Five propositions on the challenging project of Spatializing Degrowth

The case for solidary degrowth spaces. Five propositions on the challenging project of spatialising degrowth

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Abstract

If degrowth as a project of socio-ecological transformation is to become real, it needs to become a reality in space. But how? Will the macro-political implementation of degrowth automatically lead to different places and spaces? Or vice versa, can degrowth only be implemented in concrete places? Beyond such a dualist and passive vision of space and its relations to other realms of the social, we formulate five propositions which reflect the complex interaction between the general proposal of a just and selective reduction of production and consumption and the diversified geographies in which this needs to be spatialised. We argue that rather than assuming the local as the privileged scale, a degrowth transformation can only occur in a multi- and trans-scalar perspective and with a relational understanding of space. In making the case for 'solidary degrowth spaces,' spatial relations must be reshaped from exploitative to solidary (1), the global social metabolism reduced in sheer quantity (2) and places transformed by the principles of sufficiency, sharing and reuse (3). Ultimately, a strategic pluralism (4) is paramount to a new cultural hegemony to be spread through trans-local ties and alliances (5). Without a pretension of completeness, these propositions draw transversal connections between issues frequently discussed or underrepresented in the literature and, while mindful of our European positionality, we try to relate them to diverse geographical realities.

Keywords

Degrowth, space, scale, urban planning, socio-ecological transformation

Introduction

How could the spaces of degrowth look like? As degrowth sets out from a critique of current human metabolism, imagining degrowth spaces can neither mean to develop ideal models of community, nor can degrowth spaces be imagined according to universal rules true everywhere. We reflect here on what could be principles for the degrowth transformation of spaces and places in the Global North and their connections around the globe. There is no universal utopia of a degrowth city (or rural area), context is crucial, which means that degrowth transformations need to critically explore, re-imagine and re-inhabit existing geographies shaped by growth imperatives and the imperial mode of living (Brand & Wissen, 2021; Latouche, 2019).

Standing in the tradition of degrowth as both an academic debate and an activist call for action, this chapter presents five propositions about how to spatialise degrowth, referring and adding to the emerging debates at the intersection of degrowth, space, planning and cities (Mocca 2020; Xue 2021; Savini 2021; Krähmer, 2022; Schmid 2022; Khmara & Kronenberg 2022; Xue & Kębłowski, 2022; Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). Rather than providing a comprehensive synthesis of the debate, our propositions work out transversal arguments that we consider crucial in it – arguments which are controversial (propositions one and two), widely discussed (proposition three) or, thus far, underrepresented (propositions three and four).

As we embrace a relational and multiscalar understanding of space and its socio-ecological transformation, degrowth transformations cannot be limited to the local scale and the meaning of localism in degrowth needs to be reassessed. Rather than a project of

‘utopian’ localism, i.e., imagining a world of even-sized communities, degrowth should work towards furthering a framework that we term ‘solidary degrowth spaces’:

- following the relationality of space, strategies to transform material and immaterial relations in space must be directed at a qualitative change from exploitative to solidary;
- also, setting limits to and in some cases reducing the size of local and global metabolisms is crucial;
- specific places at the intersections of relations across space require situated perspectives of transformation that can nevertheless be guided by the principles of: sufficiency, reuse, and sharing;
- strategic pluralism, i.e., the combination of multiple logics of change, with a constant focus of promoting counter-hegemony, is needed to achieve solidary degrowth spaces;
- experiences in building networks via mobile policies and trans-local municipal networks help to move degrowth politics beyond the nation-state.

In the next sections, these propositions are presented and discussed. Concluding observations and suggestions for future research are provided in the final section. These propositions are not supposed to be complete or all-encompassing. However, we hope that they can inform, provoke or accompany current and future debates around realising and spatialising degrowth.

Proposition one: To spatialise degrowth and build solidary degrowth spaces, it is necessary to adopt a relational conceptualisation of space that recognises the importance of connections and relations between places. Then, strategies are required

for a qualitative transformation of material and immaterial relations in space from exploitative to solidary.

The local scale has played a crucial role in the degrowth debate when imagining degrowth's spatial dimension. Following Mocca (2020), localism in the degrowth literature can be distinguished in a 'pragmatic' and an 'utopian' localism. Pragmatic localism refers to local action here and now, a way of pinning down the abstractness of degrowth's larger goals, through concrete local, often collective, nowtopian projects, be it tiny houses (Anson, 2018), cohousing (Litaert, 2010; Cucca and Friesenecker, 2021) or squatting (Cattaneo and Gavalda, 2010). On the other hand, in utopian localism, the process of 'relocalisation' becomes a central project of degrowth, for instance in Serge Latouche's '8Rs' (e.g., Latouche, 2014), often pictured in utopian scenarios (cf. Gerber, 2020; Widmer & Schneider, 2018; Trainer, 2018; Vansintjan, 2018). Relocalisation is intended here as the reorganisation of human inhabitation as small and autonomous human settlements as well as the reorganisation of economics and politics at a local scale.

While this may seem an intuitive answer to the symptoms of an excessive and destructive capitalist globalisation, it is sometimes surprising how disproportionate the proposed solutions appear in relation to the analysed problems of global scale. There is nothing intrinsically false in proposing an urban gardening project in response to the damages produced by extractive global food chains, yet when remaining alone and isolated in bubbles (Brokow-Loga et al., 2020), such practices of pragmatic localism are insufficient for wide-ranging change. Proposals of utopian localism have received much critical attention in a second wave of literature on degrowth and space, highlighting the physical obstacles and ecological unsustainability of building a world of ecovillages (Xue, 2014), the 'thin' theorisation of the political and the 'idyllic' imaginary of local community implicit in such versions (Mocca, 2020), as well as their ignorance of real spaces and places, their complex

interrelations and diverse geobiophysical, socio-economic, historical, and cultural backgrounds (Krähmer, 2018, 2022).

We propose to take this debate pro and contra localism one step forward, beyond a counterposition of arguments on localism in general, to a reframing of what localism in degrowth should mean precisely. We employ the notion of the relationality of space (as proposed, for instance, by Massey, 2005), understanding space not so much as a physical surface on which social and economic activities occur, and places as smaller – 'local' – pieces of space, but rather, conceiving space as made by human (and non-human) relations and places as where relations meet and intersect. Considering space in relational terms has at least three implications for the discussion on localism. First, the definition of the local itself blurs if one recognises the global making of the local as much as the local making of the global through relations of travel, migration, trade etc. (Massey, 2005). Hence, the borders between the different imagined locals become a very troubled concept. Yet to establish some ideal number such as 500, 10,000, or 300,000 of inhabitants of a presumably basic and ideal spatial unit (cf. Gerber, 2020), a clear conception of (new) borders would be required. Not that the local and the global cease to exist but they exist in relation to each other rather than in opposition (Massey, 2005). Second, these relations themselves, between places, across space, gain fundamental importance – even when we look at the local, we must do so considering its connections and relations to other places. Third, as these relations, at least the material and energetic part of it, could also be described by the term of human metabolism, which degrowth crucially proposes to limit, the proposal of localism gains a different sense for degrowth, having to do much more with relations than with borders. Spanier and Feola (2022) remind us that in the multiscalar entanglements of place and space, there are not only relations between local and global, and Global North and South, but also between urban and rural and that all four of these conceptual couples should not be understood as dichotomies

but rather as degrees on scales that intersect, mix and hybridise. Our central argument in this first proposition is that the *quality* of global flows and trans-local relations, which remain, even if reduced in quantity, should be rethought and reorganised to be transformed from extractivist to solidary with all participants. Thus, how the multiscalar relations between places are organised becomes a crucial normative question, as one dimension of the 'solidarity' of degrowth cities that Brand (2020) or Eckardt (2020) reflect on. In this sense, solidarity points in the direction of striving for a mode of living that is not at the expense of other people, nature or future generations (I.L.A. Kollektiv, 2019, p. 18). An obvious point of departure to achieve this transformation could be the principles of fair trade, which should become general principles rather than elitist exceptions to an unjust majority model of trade (cf. Krähmer, 2023). Small steps in this direction are, for example, the laws to increase the fairness of international supply chains through laws adopted in recent years in European countries such as Germany and France (Krähmer, 2023).

The relations across space Massey (2005) refers to are of course not only trade relations and Brand's (2020) proposal of a Solidary Degrowth City equally contemplates solidarity towards migration movements. In other words, there is a responsibility to pay attention to the multiscalar entanglements of a city's life and economy when taking local decisions, to consider impacts produced in other places near and far, avoiding superficial solutions like those of Copenhagen (Krähmer, 2020) and Freiburg (Mössner & Miller, 2015), which have been described as 'islands of (apparent) sustainability' made possible by the externalisation of social and ecological impacts.

Proposition two: Localism in solidary degrowth spaces should be understood as a *quantitative tendency* of the limitation and reduction of selected social metabolic relations (e.g., trade). While setting and institutionalising limits is becoming crucial, the

interpretation of concrete strategies for spatial transformation must remain open and flexible.

The concept of solidary degrowth spaces is not limited to a change in the quality of relations between places. It also includes a strong stance towards a quantitative but selective limitation of the volume of relations, specifically their material component. This perspective is also substantially informed by the focus on relations across space rather than the construction of ideal places, which we introduced in the first proposition. As degrowth sets out to politically institute societal limits, localism should be intended as a tendency of reducing and limiting human metabolism in quantitative terms. This would imply an inversion of the tendency of unlimited growth of the human metabolism that has unfolded during the past decades – that is, of economic flows and its spatial counterparts: the world of logistics, the transport of goods, energy, and so forth (cf. Krähmer, 2022). As global production chains are to be shortened and unbundled, Wolfgang Sachs' (1993) call for 'unbundling' ('Entflechtung') hints at a spatial realisation of an extensive reduction of relations in quantitative terms. However, this is not to be confused with an attempt (doomed to failure) to roll *back* globalisation as such. Pre-globalised times should not be glorified, which is why we reject the term '*re*-localisation.'

The element of localism in solidary degrowth spaces thus is not the search for an ideal dimension or model of community, rather a recognition of limits of the expansion of cities in a physical sense and of the metabolic flows that keep a city or a village (meaning the whole of the urban built environment including people and economic activities) alive. This can be a general principle to guide differentiated projects to re-inhabit very different existing spaces and places, *transforming their way of operation more than their physical form*. Thus, rather than a merely philosophical concept, the actual translation into practice is at the core of our proposition.

This flexible conception of localism can be related to diverse existing social, cultural, economic and institutional contexts. It takes the idea of an ‘open localism’ (Nelson & Schneider, 2018) one step further: it is not only conceived as open in respect to its relations with the outside, but also open in relation to the forms it may assume. This conceptualisation does not require an illusionary naturalisation of borders, as utopian localist projects need. The fundamental prescription is to not rely, through the way we inhabit the world for our social metabolism, on exploitative relations with other places – a prescription which includes both a qualitative component on the way these relations function (see proposition one) and a quantitative component in recognising that beyond certain dimensions, such flows and relations become intrinsically harmful and unsustainable.

Imagining the concrete application of such an understanding of localism in a European city would imply, in the first instance, an assessment of how life in the city depends on external relations and at which scales: for food, energy, materials, travel, migration and so forth. An assessment that combines quantitative and qualitative elements, discussing how harmful or beneficial these relations are for other places. Most likely, lives of many in the city currently would require more energy and resource consumption than the respect of criteria of global ecology and equity would allow. It would thus be necessary to politically discuss which of these relations to eliminate or reduce (because more harmful there, less beneficial here) and which to reorganise according to principles of solidarity (cf. proposition one). Projects such as the expansion of an airport (cf. Brand 2020), the building of a new shopping mall or even more so the construction of luxurious new neighbourhoods, would be limited by such principles, as they have significant requirements in terms of material and energetic flows across space (see also proposition three).

These discussions should not focus only on ‘urban’ spaces, as who lives today in a ‘rural’ space in the Global North tends to lead a life equally dependent on supralocal relations

(Krähmer & Cristiano 2022).

Proposition three: In solidary degrowth spaces, the right to the city is the right to not always have to want more: places in the Global North must guarantee a good life for all with less material abundance. For this scope, principles such as sufficiency, sharing and reuse must be spatialised.

If the proposals made in propositions one and two are enacted, in places in the Global North, in cities and also rural areas, lifestyles must change, away from contemporary productivism and consumerism. A rethinking of relations is closely entangled with the organisation of places we (in the Global North) live in. Concretely, we would need to rely to a lesser degree on imports, on metabolic flows from around the globe that through unequal exchange allow us today to live (on average) exuberant and unsustainable lives (Chancel & Piketty, 2015). In addition, these flows would not only be reduced in quantity but would also become costlier if they were reorganised in a logic of solidarity (see propositions one and two). In order to avoid that this transformation comes about as one of scarcity and restrictions, we must build different imaginaries of what a 'good life for all' means. The addition of 'for all' makes the good life a point of reference for emancipatory movements – and a connection to questions of (in)justice and de(privileging), to avoid the poorer parts of our societies paying the price. While this relates to state-wide social policies as much as local urban and regional policies, it also implies imagining and building places where we can live well while producing, owning and consuming less. This proposition is inspired by Uta von Winterfeld's (2007, p. 53) protective right of sufficiency that affirms, 'no one should always have to want more.' The question of how to live good lives owning and consuming less has been a central preoccupation of the degrowth literature (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022). We propose that in particular three guiding principles – sufficiency, sharing and reuse – can be taken from this

literature and applied to a spatial perspective to help to imagine, concretise and build places in which such modes of living can be situated.

In a perspective of ‘private sufficiency and public luxury’ (Monbiot, 2021), degrowth places should offer more public space and facilities where one can enjoy life, while private housing may decrease in size. Such a principle of *spatial sufficiency* can be applied to many aspects of urban and non-urban life. It can be played out when debating urban expansion (do we need a new shopping mall or are the places of consumption we have enough? Is it more important to grow food on the agricultural lands we would destroy?), as much as in relation to questions of housing justice (how much space per capita is needed? How unequally is living space distributed?) and other fields. Sufficiency (the decisions about what is sufficient need to be the object of political debate) allows social and ecological questions to be considered together: it implies upper limits to wealth and accumulation as well as minimum standards of what is needed for a good life and thus provides a rule to distribute enough space (and metabolic flows) to everyone without menacing ecological thresholds (Bohnenberger, 2021).

For sufficiency to not become austerity, sharing and togetherness (Jarvis, 2019) are principles that need to be combined. Sharing spaces of housing (e.g., in cohousing projects Cucca & Friesenecker, 2021; Lietaert, 2010) can help to achieve high qualities of housing without needing excessive amounts of space, while state intervention can help to avoid this leading to the creation of elitist enclaves (Cucca & Friesenecker, 2021). More public space can be made available to spend time which would be liberated from paid work and consumption, instead of dedicating it, for instance, to parked cars. Sharing needs to become a principle for urban policies and planning instead of an individual habit in order for it to become a structural feature of places. Sharing, in this perspective, can also be applied to property and ownership: instead of fostering individualised accumulation of wealth,

collective and anti-speculative models of property such as the *Mietshäuser Syndikat* (Hürlin, 2018) can help to contrast the commodification of land (see Baumann, Alexander & Burdon, this volume) which constitutes an obstacle to the changes proposed here, as the 'profitable' use of land, imposed through scarcity and zoning based on private property rights, favours places of consumption and building for speculative purposes (Savini 2021). In order to achieve these wider goals, beyond single bottom-up initiatives, important though these are as experiments, land should be seen as the common good it actually is. Too often, the value created through public investment and community initiatives is privately appropriated by investors who see cities as a place to secure their finances to a concrete economic good, treating land as a 'pure financial asset' (Harvey, 1982, p. 346). This financialisation of housing is one of the causes of gentrification processes, promoted, in a context of a speculative land market, also by 'ecological' urban transformations (Dooling, 2009; Rice et al., 2020). These processes of 'ecological gentrification' are not only socially unjust, expelling poorer inhabitants to other neighbourhoods but also ecologically ineffective, as Rice et al. (2020) demonstrate: wealthy people may, after such processes, have a lower carbon footprint in relation to housing, but due to their high levels of consumption, their overall footprints remain unsustainably high. A broad application of the principles of sufficiency (not too much for anybody but enough for everybody) and of sharing (of the city, of urban spaces, of land and housing ownership) can help to avoid such outcomes, considering ecological sustainability and social justice together.

Reuse is another important principle which includes existing debates about the reuse of buildings and urban spaces and their need of refurbishment (Ferreri, 2018). In addition, reuse in the context of solidary degrowth spaces might also relate to the challenge of many areas nowadays dedicated to urban activities which are fundamentally unsustainable, such as parking lots or shopping malls. Dedicating such buildings to other uses might help to respond

to the demand for housing and more public space for all. Partly, and according to the evolution of specific situations of specific cities, they might also be spaces left to renaturalise (Espín, 2022). The principle of reuse can be applied in general to human settlements, in the sense of ‘re-inhabiting’ differently existing places (Alexander & Gleeson, 2019; Krähmer, 2018; Latouche, 2019), instead of imagining building new idealised settlements. In doing so, the growth-fixation of the building industry and its political influence must be critically evaluated, as its conversion is needed to favour (socially just) retrofitting over new urban expansions. Reuse in a degrowth perspective should avoid forms of ‘incremental reuse’ (Krähmer and Cristiano, 2022), i.e., the reuse of buildings or neighbourhoods with the principal scope of fostering economic growth as in many contemporary projects of urban renewal.

Sufficiency, sharing and reuse are concepts grounded in both the theoretical and empirical literature of degrowth. At the same time, they are highly suitable for adaptation within the planning systems at different scales and in different places. Understanding them as wide principles to imagine and build places of degrowth in the Global North, with multiple possible applications, adds to this literature a strategic perspective of how to imagine places in solidary degrowth spaces.

Proposition four: Strategic pluralism is needed for systemic change to build and govern solidary degrowth spaces and places. These are not only defined by their physical reality, their relations and the principles according to which they change, but also by the political question of how decisions on their government are taken. The proposal of strategic pluralism offers a perspective on how to build such a counter-hegemonic project.

As Latouche (2013) demonstrated, the logic of economic growth can be seen as a driver of

discourses not only at global or national scales, but of local development too. The hegemony of growth is not only manifested in the global order and flow of goods (Schmelzer, 2015 and cf. Proposition one), but also inscribed into particular forms of local and urban growth regimes, policies and constellations. Green growth approaches and even more dominant narratives of the 'entrepreneurial city' (Jessop, 1998) or of cities as 'growth machines' (Molotch, 1976) shape the everyday lives of billions of inhabitants around the globe – especially because these ideas are made to sound and appear 'normal' and hence, hegemonic. Safeguarded by state actors and rooted in the everyday practices of people, the imperial mode of living and production (Brand & Wissen, 2018), i.e., the mode of living of the Global North of material abundance based on the exploitation of nature and people elsewhere, is in a hegemonic position. As long as domination along class, gender, race, global and other lines is accepted by the dominated, alternatives remain marginalised. The hegemony of growth, made possible by the imperial mode of living, is deeply rooted in spatial structures. These structures work trifold: physically through urban design, e.g., of car-centric spatial distribution of traffic space, institutionally through policies and regulations, e.g., as privileged groups have influence on decision-makers and mentally through habits and desires, e.g., as the concept of an individual 'good life' is still often connected to living in a detached house on the outskirts or maybe to a loft in a newly gentrified neighbourhood. In this manner, places play a significant role in maintaining the growth-centred status quo. Planning processes often foster this effect, as they set 'economic growth as the primary goal and pursue sustainability, attractiveness and liveability partly for the sake of being competitive. Urban planners, willingly or not, often adopt an urban green growth agenda' (Xue, 2022, p. 414). This primacy of growth remains even in apparently virtuous cases like Copenhagen, in which sustainability policies are promoted as much for the sake of growth as for the sake of sustainability (Krähmer, 2020), with sustainability policies used as a 'fix' to capitalist

growth (Holgersen & Malm, 2015; While et al., 2004). In such a context, isolated policies such as the successful promotion of cycling in Copenhagen remain, finally, ineffective, as their sustainability achievements are consumed by other, growth-oriented policies such as airport expansions or the growth of spaces dedicated to shopping, with social and ecological impacts externalised, away from local carbon accounting (Krähmer, 2020), if not simply by physically moving less sustainable car based lifestyles out of the city, rather than transforming them, as in the case of Freiburg (Mössner & Miller, 2015).

Thus, for a degrowth transformation of places and spaces, a degrowth transformation of the society is needed (Latouche, 2016): the systemic logic must change (Cristiano et al., 2020). This is, in other words, a question of (cultural) hegemony. We argue that if degrowth perspectives are to rise to become counter-hegemonic (D'Alisa & Kallis, 2020) it is necessary to integrate a wide range of logics of transformation, rather than preferring any particular scale of action as complex solutions are needed to address complex challenges (De Angelis, 2022). Whereas urban and regional planning are usually considered the most effective instruments to move *cities beyond the market economy* (Savini et al., 2022), histories and practices of degrowth movement(s) are able to enrich these perspectives with grassroots approaches (Treu et al., 2020). Erik Olin Wright (2013) found that successful transformation movements usually involve not only a *variety*, but also a *combination* of different strategic logics of transformation. A thorough understanding of the different impacts of these logics could possibly contribute to 'radical flank effects,' how Haines (2013) and others describe positive (or negative) effects that radical activists have on more moderate activists, media and society.

On the one hand, initiatives – often in the vein of a pragmatic localism – such as house projects, squats or wagon squares show that new ways of relating to each other are already possible and feasible in the cracks and niches of capitalist cities. Wright (2013, p. 20)

frames these as *interstitial* strategies, a term borrowed from biology: building alternatives serves as a critical ideological function by showing that another city, place-making or way of relating is possible even under the current circumstances. The TINA (there is no alternative) logic is led *ad absurdum*. While social movements can be identified as main actors using this strategy, administrative and planning actors still have a role to play. Administrations use their own (limited) scope for action to work on progressive agendas and projects, mitigating climate change or tackling social inequalities. Additionally, partisan planning can be oriented towards institutional backing up of lived alternatives (Sager, 2019), which expands the scope for degrowth initiatives and institutionally safeguards their successes. This is a crucial effect, given the ambition of institutionalising degrowth-oriented places. Beyond that, *symbiotic* forms of politics (Wright, 2013, p. 20) through the involvement in participatory processes, lobbying, political practice in city or district councils enable the protection of the successes won by social movements – and the defence against neoliberal or racist rollbacks. Furthermore, planning actors should act to reform planning instruments to drive *exnovation* (Krüger & Pellicer-Sifres, 2020). Exnovation refers to the intentional displacement (or deconstruction) and elimination of harmful (especially resource-intensive) practices, products, technologies and infrastructures. Furthermore, symbiotic politics could start to promote and normalise principles such as sufficiency, sharing and reuse (cf. proposition three).

Ultimately, disruptive and conflict-oriented groups work towards a break with existing power relations through protests and blockades and shift lines of discourse. These revolutionary or *ruptural* transformations aim at shifting power relations, rapidly transforming state structures and deprivileging current planning systems. For actors within the (local) governmental systems, this means entering into conflicts with profiteers of the growth society in order to translate democratically legitimised goals into planning practice

and to put an end to destructive practices. Chertkovskaya (2022, p. 60) adds, ‘Understanding of ruptures as small-scale and temporary […] opens an important direction for pursuing social-ecological transformation. An act of disobedience like blocking a coal mine (…) can be seen as an example of a temporary rupture that empowers and encourages other forms of action.’ Thus, even without claiming a *system-level revolution*, this strategy breaks with the institutions of the growth society and builds up power and momentum needed for counter-hegemony.

It can be argued that such a pluralist strategy of *transformation* carries implications also for an imaginary of ‘degrowth *institutions*’ to govern place and space: an imaginary which speaks of a variety of actors collaborating at different scales in relation to the specificity of the respective problem to be tackled, rather than preferring, again, a single specific scale. Such a generic definition of course might as well be applied to neoliberal forms of governance (cf. Micciarelli, 2022). Fundamental are thus the systemic goals, as well as the questions of specific power balances. Micciarelli (2022) provides an example of how the question of governance has been approached in the process of building the model of Naples’ urban commons. Here, an interstitial strategy of ‘legal hacks’ has been applied to creatively invent a model of an assembly-based, collective, open and non-profit oriented model of governance for occupied, abandoned and interstitial urban places. At the same time, the space of action for this model has been widened by a symbiotic strategy that has achieved the formal recognition of the model (rather than of single people or subjectivities) by the municipality. It could be argued that the establishment of this ‘civic use’ model of urban commons has, in perspective, a ruptural potential, as it has established a new type of institution oriented at collaborative use, rather than the economic valorisation of urban places.

In conclusion, as much as systemic change is needed, this can hardly be defined in one coherent masterplan – the challenges are too complex to do so (Cristiano, 2020). Instead

of exclusions and debates on the ‘correct’ strategies, a whole prism of strategical logics must be applied in order to implement and experiment with solidary degrowth spaces.

Proposition five: Building networks means forging trans-local ties, alliances and politics. If the challenge of a degrowth transformation of spaces and places is multiscalar, so should be the development and diffusion of policies and practices. This implies establishing ties of dialogue and cooperation between places in solidary degrowth spaces.

When taking the state into consideration, one could wonder why the analysis of ‘the state’ is still mainly limited to the scale of the nation-state (Fitzpatrick et al., 2022), in a curious tension with the degrowth preference for the local (Mocca, 2020). Degrowth should open up the debate for a closer look at transformation processes and leverage points at the scale of the local state, beyond a fixation on nation states. Understanding the local not simply as equivalent to community initiatives, but rather zooming in to political actors and processes of the local state is a crucial pillar of this endeavour – the waves of (new) municipalisms worldwide might provide valuable experiences (Russell, 2019). However, as Mocca (2020, p. 89) suggested, ‘degrowth proponents fail to construct a persuasive argument about the scalability […] capable of going beyond the communitarian utopia.’ This chapter does not argue for the local level as the optimal scale for transformation but in a relational approach we propose to look at the ways localities exchange transformational knowledge and build networks beyond both growth- and nation-centrism. A roll-out of degrowth politics with a spatial dimension benefits, first, from progressive mobile policies moved and adapted from place to place and second, from trans-local municipal networks to spread knowledge and organise mutual support.

First, as pointed out in proposition one, places are not disconnected and concept (and

utopia) of degrowth spaces and places emerge through processes that constantly shift between site-specificity and mobility to or from other places. Instead of believing in a certain ideal or model of a degrowth city, developing and expanding scope for action in different places is becoming crucial. The argument is that ideas for municipal or regional transformations towards degrowth are not only fought for locally, but also set in motion *trans-locally* (cf. Peck & Theodore, 2010). To understand how urban policies for degrowth are transformed as they travel and are adopted elsewhere, the concept of (urban) policy mobility can be helpful. This approach 'denies the existence of localised best practices and models of good governance by introducing a relational view on continuous transformation and adaptation processes and their underlying driving forces' (Affolderbach & Schulz, 2016, p. 1948). As Clarke (2012) shows, the global circulation of knowledge and policies is highly dependent on ties and connections often rooted in transnational social movements. The policy mobility perspective[1] goes beyond unidirectional policy transfer and places emphasis on individuals, actor groups and their perspectives, situated knowledges and contexts in these processes (McCann, 2011; McCann & Ward, 2012).

One example degrowth movements can learn from is the Climate Emergency Declarations buzzing around the globe between 2016 and 2022 and bringing about more than 2,150 municipal resolutions towards climate action (CEDAMIA, 2022). Whereas the concrete effects are still under-researched and whether the declarations actually resulted in more ambitious climate action planning and implementation remains disputed, their quick dissemination contributed to raising awareness and 'situating local governments as crucial agents bridging global and local action agenda' (Ruiz-Campillo et al., 2021). Surely, actors striving for (green) growth regimes are active in the realm of travelling policies, too, with large transnational companies, venture capital and municipal administrations (cf. van den

1 Another related entry point is the assemblage approach, providing conceptual dimension of complex processes of translation of policies or adoption of technologies over time and space: Blok (2013):'urban green assemblage.'

Buuse & Kolk, 2019) circulating and implementing dominant neoliberal ideas, be it Business Improvement Districts (McCann & Ward, 2010) or Smart Cities (Wiig, 2015). . Again though, it is local resistance and trans-local mobilisations that question flagship projects of this specific capitalist model of urbanity, for instance in Toronto, where Alphabet Inc.'s plans for the waterfront showed post-political modes of urban governance, but 'controversies surrounding the project (...) stirred a civic discourse that might signal a return of the political' (Carr & Hesse, 2020, p. 69).

Second, we turn towards the ever more prominent role of trans-local networks: for strategic agenda-setting and exchange of experiences, especially for the rough waters of governing climate change through limiting resource throughput, engaging in *transnational municipal networks*[2] (TMNs) is essential (cf. Kern & Bulkeley, 2009). While nation states seem less and less able to deal with global issues such as responses to climate warming or inequality, municipalities worldwide position themselves as problem solvers and participate in transnational networks of local governments, such as C40, ICLEI (Local Governments for Sustainability), Covenant of Mayors (for climate governance) or Human Rights Cities, Eurocities Solidarity Cities (for the field of migration) etc. Transnational municipal networks include an increasing number of municipalities and 'are widely considered of high potential relevance' (Haupt & Coppola, 2019). However, research findings indicate that, instead of radical alternative pathways, the politics of these municipal networks (as well as urban mobile policies) too often point to a *municipal sustainability fix* (Temenos & McCann, 2012) accommodating both profit-making and environmental concerns, allowing status quo urban development to proceed. Moreover, these new trans-local and global governance arrangements tend to reproduce inequality and power relations between Global North and South, as Bouteligier (2013) indicates by focussing on informational and ideational flows in transnational municipal networks. Any future degrowth-oriented trans-local network must

2 Other common terms to describe this phenomenom are 'inter-urban networks' or 'socio-ecological urban networks,' (Mocca, 2017).

pay attention to these pitfalls.

The quest for spatialising degrowth under the given circumstances of current global power relations raises the question of how far trans-local transformation processes between municipalities and social movements can tame the *wicked problems* cities are facing today (for insights related to urban climate change strategies, see Kemmerzell, 2019). What are the *actors* and *activities* that are needed to bridge the multiscalar nature of actions towards degrowth-oriented places? How, then, are *forums* and *processes* designed, in which learning from practices elsewhere can be facilitated, that are neither Eurocentric nor enclosed by green growth regimes? Many questions need to be clarified, however, it seems to us that urban policy mobility as well as trans-local networks might prove helpful in expanding the scope and scale of degrowth approaches. The strategic use of progressive mobile policies and cross-boundary networks could serve to diffuse ideas and practices on how the principles of sufficiency, sharing and reuse can be applied, but also how places in the Global North can build solidary relations with places from which they receive their resources and potentially help to move from a logic of competition to a logic of cooperation between places.

Conclusions

We have formulated five propositions about how degrowth can be spatialised to build what we have called solidary degrowth spaces. These entail an idea of a tendency of localisation in the sense of limiting the amount and speed of the global social metabolism to an ecologically feasible level while considering that relations across space at all scales will persist but should be transformed in a perspective of solidarity. In this context, places in the Global North need to be re-inhabited following the principles of sufficiency, sharing and reuse. To work towards such a transformation, counter-hegemony (also at the scale of the local state) is needed and can potentially be achieved through strategic pluralism. In this, trans-local municipal

networks and progressive mobile policies can play a crucial role. This framework embraces the idea of a relational space, of counter-hegemonic interventions and the need for multiscalar transformations. On the other hand, it rejects ideas of a single privileged scale of action, as well as of a neat opposition between the urban and the rural, considering that, nowadays, at least in the Global North, areas generally considered 'rural,' are permeated by the same unsustainable lifestyles[3].

The proposed framework goes beyond the question of the pros and cons of the application of certain specific technologies, which is often considered crucial in the challenge of building cities in the face of climate and ecological crisis: this is not to say that technologies are irrelevant, rather that we consider them as secondary to the systemic (re-)orientation of urban and territorial systems (Cristiano et al., 2020). This is in line with the degrowth literature that has analysed how the implementation of certain technologies alone, be it widespread cycling or electric cars, remains insufficient for the achievement of social justice and ecological sustainability (Parrique et al., 2019).

The proposed relational understanding of space seems highly compatible with degrowth as part of a pluriverse of alternatives (Kothari et al., 2019). The proposal of solidary degrowth spaces with regard to the reorganisation metabolic relations according to a tendency of reduction of global social metabolism and a logic of solidarity between places can be a way to frame these pluriversal interconnections, especially when combined with networks for mutual learning and exchange, as proposed in proposition five. However, as this text is influenced by the limited European perspective of the authors, this is not intended to suggest an automatic global explainability or transferability of its propositions.

These propositions do not design a clear form of what a degrowth city or territory might be. We argue that attempting to do this in the abstract is a vain attempt, instead, they

3 The question of the urban-rural relation would need further discussion. In the context of the propositions presented here, one can say (1) that a neat opposition of urban and rural cannot be uphold, with many intermediate forms existing and 'urban' lifestyles permeating 'rural' areas, while this does not imply that the rural as such does not exist anymore and (2) that this relation nowadays must be rethought at different scales, local, global and intermediate scales and can be partially juxtaposed with global North-South relations.

are to be seen as a set of principles, adaptable to diverse places and spaces. As much as profit, economic growth and efficiency are guiding principles of contemporary urban policies and strategies of transformation, here we propose that sufficiency, sharing and reuse, in the context of localism as a tendency and solidary relations across space, are principles that can inform degrowth strategies to re-inhabit cities and territories, transforming them into places in which the right to the city is the right for everybody to live well without exceeding ecological limits. These principles are based on and in dialogue with precedent proposals such as Savini's (2021) triad of finity, habitability and polycentric autonomism or the idea of an *open* localism (Nelson & Schneider, 2018). Following on from this, this fundamental 'openness' responds to the risk of the governance of limited resources becoming a 'dark side of sustainability,' as 'scarcity may be used to control resources and people, and that emotions can be used as a way to achieve such objective' (Santangelo, 2018). In closing our reflections on how to spatialise degrowth, we want to emphasise the idea that any open localism includes the idea that localist tendencies should not lead to exclusionary closures, but rather guarantee the free movement of people across human-made boundaries, also and in particular migrants, in the limits of a sustainable transport system. The concept of solidary degrowth spaces may be disputed, overcharging or difficult to implement, however, either it exists for everyone or it does not exist at all.

Acknowledgments:

Karl Krähmer thanks Silvio Cristiano for the collaboration on their Italian book 'Città oltre la crescita' which has been crucial also for this chapter. Anton Brokow-Loga thanks Frank Eckardt for the ongoing joint elaborations towards the 'Postwachstumsstadt'. Both authors would like to thank the anonymous referees and the editors for valuable comments that improved the quality of the article. The interaction with members of the Spaces Beyond

Growth: Municipal Degrowth Network was a constant enrichment, for which we are very grateful.

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