

Theoretical and political journeys between environmental justice and degrowth

Organizers and chairs: Federico Demaria (ICTA UAB), Bengi Akbulut (Independent) and Joan Martínez Alier (ICTA UAB)

Joan Martínez Alier (2012) has argued that “EJOs (environmental justice organizations) are potential allies of the environmental groups in rich countries that criticize the obsession with the narrow economic measure of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, which defines economic growth in the mainstream and permeates the political sphere. These groups form the degrowth movement (Latouche 2007), whose origins partly lie in the field of ecological economics.”

Both, environmental justice and degrowth groups question development based on economic growth, and sometime also development itself (Kothari et al 2015). They oppose certain socio metabolic (re-)configurations and the uneven distribution of benefits and burdens (Martínez Alier 2002; D’Alisa et al 2015). In this session, we propose to explore these and other dimensions: be them political, like rapprochement of climate justice, anti-coal mining and degrowth (or *postwachstum*) movements in Germany; or, be them theoretical dimensions where cross-fertilisation can be explored. For example, if and how concepts that are part of the degrowth vocabulary, like autonomy, simplicity or care, are mobilized in environmental justice struggles, and viceversa (e.g. ecological debt, ecological unequal exchange or popular epidemiology).

Questions to be explored during this session include: Which commonalities and differences exist among these different theoretical and political communities? How could this be turned into an enriching diversity, rather than a source of division? How shall we envision theoretical and political confluences, without subordination?

For instance, the same Martínez Alier (2012) has argued that “The demand that the North repay the climate debt to the South and that this debt should increase no further reinforces the degrowth movements in the rich countries.” The issue of debt, economic or ecological, has been at the center of both political ecology and ecological economics (Kallis et al 2009).

This session aims to explore elements for all types of alliances between these two frames (or movements), and possibly also with others such as commons, feminisms, spiritual ecology, post-extractivism and post-development. This session is based upon the assumption that these research and activist communities share a common quest for radical socio-ecological transformations towards justice and sustainability, and that an alliance among them is essential.

References

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