

Vulnerability and conflict: implications for human wellbeing in a society embarking on degrowth

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The compound social, political and environmental crises tend to continuously enhance one another and can thus be hardly conceived in isolation. Similarly the responses to these crises emerging within for instance degrowth theory and practice are largely in the process of taking shape so that new, different and multi-scale narratives can be enacted. The current session aims at exploring certain key factors and processes that are relevant for the individuals when thinking about the narratives of a good life for all.

On the first place, these are the visible and invisible intra-personal conflicts and tensions associated with a narrative of a good life for all which requires quite strong changes on the individual level, such as different lifestyles, practices, or perceptions.. Intra-personal conflicts emerge both within people engaging in the alternative movement of autonomous communities or eco-villages, as well as within people working in conventional organizations, such as universities and public institutions in general. –Those conflicts arise because of contradicting needs or values. They seem to be intensified by the acceleration of lives, the visible and invisible use of rank and power, or by the very sense of lacking meaningfulness. The key pursuit here is that intra-personal conflicts associated with pursuing lifestyles leading to a good life for all or politically correct message in a mainstream context exist; and while there are multiple ways to deal with them, it may be enriching to have those conflicts. Addressing them, without necessarily solving them, makes us get in touch with our deeper levels of perception and see potential ways out of the wrong-versus-right duality of understanding. The exploration of conflicts could potentially guide the way to the culture of co-operation, co-creation and co-recreation much needed for a great transformation.

The second and related research question that this session will explore deals with vulnerability. The idea of limiting exposure to vulnerability is deeply nested in the corporate limited liability structure, and hence in the society of growth. These so-called structural limits to reducing vulnerability are co-evolving with the human and psychological limits to experiencing it. The search for safety, comfort and high-ranking achievements is guiding economic and technological progress by way of limiting vulnerability. Yet, removing vulnerability also means ostracizing those relational goods and processes that are time-intensive, non-reciprocal and non-utilitarian. Deep connectedness and hence – living fulfilling lives –necessarily includes the possibility of experiencing a relational wound. A good life for all, we will argue, is only perceivable when opening space for vulnerability and therefore deep connectedness with the other(s).

Format:

We will use an interactive format applying appropriate facilitation methods.

The session will consist of three parts:

1. Check-in to get familiar with the main topics of the session: vulnerability and conflicts in pursuing a good life for all
2. Three short inputs
3. Interactive discussion (method depending on the number of participants, possibly in groups) and harvesting of key messages.