



THEME WORK

SUB-THEME:

Equity, inclusion and social rights

TITLE OF WORKSHOP

**Green, red, individual or social? Degrowth, the
challenge of social justice**



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BUILDING A COLLECTIVE SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY TO REDEFINE THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE

Elena Dal Santo, Jean Louis Aillon

Paper Abstract

In 2000, 189 nations committed themselves to the Millennium Development Goals, namely a promise to free people from extreme poverty and deprivations. Unfortunately, UN reports and estimates show that MDGs are far from being achieved. Although the objectives are certainly ambitious, the lack of improvements in the basic life conditions of the world population is strictly connected to the fact that these 189 nations have identified fundamental goals without challenging the current system: despite adjustments and resolutions, the present model of development, based on economic growth and profit, will never reduce poverty and improve equality.

On the contrary, the Western paradigm of progress itself has been the origin of severe disparities and human rights violations, that the international community is now unsuccessfully trying to address. The damage directly or indirectly caused by the consumistic-capitalistic model includes climate change, environmental crimes, human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, land grabbing, dumping of hazardous substances and e-waste, disasters and conflicts.

As long as the global system is based on the selfish search of profit, it will be difficult to actually address the basic needs and rights of the world population. Given that a wide-ranging change is unlikely to begin from the governmental and financial sector, the improvement of rights protection and human equal development relies upon a rising in global awareness. It is necessary to increase consciousness on the fact that every action accomplished implies consequences for the environment and the human kind and affects others' opportunities: what Western citizens buy or consume is often a surplus, while what is taken away from others through that action is not a surplus but a fundamental right, for instance, the right to a minimum standard of living or the right not to be held in slavery.

The concept of degrowth supports a critical approach to consumption, which is essential in a cultural revolution aimed at reshaping life-styles and the idea of justice itself. A widespread sharing and implementation of a conscious and voluntary simplicity may lead to a new formulation of the term justice: from a negative concept of direct justice, based on the principle of "freedom from" and applicable at the micro-level, to a re-conceptualization on an indirect level. In this sense, for example, the use of throwaway objects may be conceived as a crime



since it violates the rights of someone both in the present and in the future. A step forward would be a further re-formulation of the concept of justice in a positive development, both at micro and macro level and in a direct and indirect sense: in this case, citizens would be stimulated to assume virtuous attitudes in order to promote rights and well-being of present and future generations.

A re-conceptualization of the notion of justice may also include amendments in the national legislation. Wastage might be sanctioned or fined. Nevertheless, it results to be extremely difficult to define what could be considered superfluous as it is a subjective assessment. Consequently, the best way to create a more equal and fair society has to be found not (only) in the rule of law but mainly in a cultural revolution, as proposed by the degrowth movement, aimed at increasing awareness and consciousness concerning the sense of justice.

TACKLED ISSUES:

- Social and distributive justice
- Inclusion of worker unions and left activists in the degrowth movement
- Danger of degrowth: focus on individual values and actions towards personal happiness
- Corporate social responsibility
- Public/private action
- Voluntary simplicity as green paradigm/conservative
- Privatization of sustainability
- Problem of taking for granted that the individual unity of society is a grown up and healthy male individuum

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS, MESSAGES & COMMENTS:

- Rules and legislations as a mean for justice?
- How to empower a critical education?
- Manipulation of terms as “sustainability”: how to get them back? Or finding new ones?
- Individual steps to make a change