



**Barcelona Conference, 26-29 March 2010,
Report
Research & Degrowth**

The Barcelona conference is the second international conference on economic degrowth for ecological sustainability and social equity. It follows the success of the conference in Paris, April 2008, where the general principles about degrowth were developed. The second conference has been focusing on developing clear policy proposals and strategies for action on degrowth and define the key open questions and research agenda. The conference promoted interaction between participants. Neither an exclusive high-level scientific conference, nor a social forum, the conference succeeded in conglomerating academics, civil society and practitioners in a unique mix highlighting the diversity of ideas, concepts and strategies behind degrowth as well as the importance of connectedness and exchange between science, governance and civil society.

I. Aims, organisational principles and preparation

The main novelty in the conference model has been the dedication of substantial amount of time to open participation in thematic working groups and fomenting individual contributions in the more visible and communicative poster format.

The conference aims included:

- Creating cooperative research around the topic of degrowth that brings together scientist from diverse backgrounds and civil society;
- Elaborate, discuss and develop concrete policy proposals and research questions in a wide range of areas;
- Testing a model of organizing academic events based on direct participation, consensus and cooperation for the development of policies and research priorities around the topic of degrowth

The conference was held over four days, two of which (the first and the last ones) were open to the general public in order to widen the outreach of the degrowth idea. The major principles applied in the organization of the event can be summarized as follows:

- using methods that increase collaboration and visibility,
- having diversity of attendants (from academics to practitioners and civil society members),
- horizontality, inclusion, conviviality and volunteerism in the preparation, implementation and management of the event,
- financial independence from large private profit-based enterprises (including banks and shareholder-based companies), implying smaller budget and larger organizational effort,

- seeking sustainability in the overall catering and logistics.

The preparation of the conference was coordinated by an organization committee of about twenty active members and twenty support ones, who met on regular basis to discuss a wider range of issues related to the overall organization of the four day event including: conference budget, program, logistics, working groups, keynote speakers, oral sessions, poster sessions, translation, venue and menu, website, abstracts, flyers and publications, publicity, social events, registration, volunteers. Major decisions on the conference were taken by consensus at the regular meetings and different teams were responsible for the preparation, coordination and organization of each of the items listed above. Decisions and discussions of each meeting were noted down in a memo and circulated within the organization team thereafter. A special list serve for the coordination of the event was made. Each team in the organization committee worked with a wider group of people engaged in the putting together specific parts of the conference so that a hub or a spider web of individuals and groups were interwoven in making the event happen. The organisation of the event was made possible thanks to more than 40 volunteers and 25 working group facilitators and note takers that, who contributed to the organization both before and during the conference.

The actual preparation for the conference started in August, 2009, with the last three-four months being intensive.

II. Conference program and elements¹.

The conference included a range of elements, among which

- *Keynote speeches*, taking place on the first and last days.

Presenters included a mixture of established scientists in the field of degrowth, ecological economics, Social sciences, feminist studies, representatives of the South and representatives of civil society and local movements.

- *Oral presentations*, taking place on the third day of the conference

These included several parallel sessions with 15-20 minutes oral presentations of authors who had submitted high quality abstracts and present ideas which cannot be easily presented visually. See topics and authors in conference booklet (footnote 1).

- *Poster sessions*, taking place on the second day of the conference

These included several parallel sessions with 15-20 minutes oral presentation of a poster, which is also exhibited in paper format in the common hall of the conference building. See Appendix 2.2 for a detailed explanation of the poster sessions.

- *Working groups*

These representing teams of 15 to 20 people working collaboratively on building

¹ See conference program at: <http://www.degrowth.eu/v1/index.php?id=5> and conference brochure at: http://www.degrowth.eu/v1/fileadmin/content/press/Booklet_Degrowth_Definitivo.pdf

proposals and research questions for degrowth. We obtained proposals from each group, presentation in form of posters at the end of the sessions and the open day on the monday. See Appendix 2.1 for a detailed report of the working groups process.

– *Talking heads*

Several of the keynote, oral speakers, representatives of the conference gave 3 minutes interviews, which were uploaded at the conference web-page, making it possible for the ones not attending to have a feel of the conference

– *Social events*

On the second of the conference evenings a concert and a meal for all conference participants was organized in a volunteers self-managed social center in Barcelona. The last day of the conference a trip to the social center of Can Masdeu was organized, where participants were introduced to the various functions, and self-organizational principles of the centre. That involved a tour through the communal gardens and buildings and explanation of the sustainable consumption and production principles, put into practice in the place.

– *Networking time*

A special session of the conference was dedicated to networking between all conference participants. It was attended by about 40 people, and resulted in a list of networking proposals, the major one being a website with each participant, organization and group profile. This proposal is currently being developed.

– *Declaration*

The session for writing the conference declaration was attended by one representative of each working group. At the meeting a decision was taken to establish a wiki page where a declaration draft is placed, and comments by all working group representatives are welcome. As a result, the declaration has just been released after being drafted and discussed by the organization team, and placed on the wiki for feedback from the working group representatives.

– *International network and follow-up*

The day after the conference, about fifty participants stayed for strategic discussions on the need to create an international network on degrowth. The meeting included day-long workshops and brainstorms using creative facilitation techniques on the possible identity, objectives, organization, projects and website of the network. As a result the first international degrowth project has just taken place. See <http://picnic4degrowth.net/>.

– *Online participation*

With the help of the newsletter the Broker the online participation in the conference was made possible

– *Press coverage*

A press conference and a press release were organized prior to the conference. See appendix 1 for a short list of media clippings

III. Conference results, evaluation and follow-up

The conference results can be summarized in the following main points:

- A mailing list with 400 people registered in the conference (which does not include participants of the open-days) and a many other contacts made during the organisation, was made.
- The unedited summaries of the working groups process was now available online and can be used for bringing the two-day discussions to the next level.
- All conference materials (posters, articles, stirring papers, videos, keynote speeches) are available online.
- A conference declaration has been prepared after consultations with the conference organisation team and widely distributed.
- Attention from the local and international press was high: postings in more than 20 local and internal media have been found.
- A local academic and civil society collective interested in degrowth is now active.
- Soon: the conference proceedings and further publications will be available.

The organization of the big conference event with all its innovative elements required detailed evaluation. That was done with a questionnaire, distributed among all conference participants and a two-day evaluation and follow-up meeting for all conference organizers and volunteers in the village of Rupia, (Spain) May, 2010. The meeting included analysis of the conference participants responses to the questionnaire and internal evaluation, ideas for follow-up and improvement of the methods and frameworks used for the organisation of the conference.

Shortly about the questionnaire results: the conference features which participants liked the most were:

- the spirit of collaboration and the way the conference was organized
- its low impact, organic and local food and its participative organization
- the openness, social events and diversity of international participation, including them, the mixture between activists and scientists
- the inter-personal encounters
- the innovative and coherent content

Appendix 1: Media coverage

WORLD

IPS news

<http://www.ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=51040>

SPAIN

TV3

An exclusive interview

20 minutos

<http://www.20minutos.es/noticia/647269/0/decrecimiento/mejor/menos/>

TV Spain

<http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20100326/decrecimiento-economico-propuesta-para-salir-crisis/325455.shtml>

Noticias.com

1 - <http://www.noticias.com/una-conferencia-sobre-decrecimiento-economico-aboga-por-reducir-la-jornada-laboral.194467>

2 - <http://www.noticias.com/el-crecimiento-no-da-mas-felicidad.191851>

3 - http://noticias.lainformacion.com/economia-negocios-y-finanzas/agencias-de-empleo/una-conferencia-sobre-decrecimiento-economico-aboga-por-reducir-la-jornada-laboral_DBw66uKdVp3ygUfj6CV877/

La Vanguardia

29/3/2010

<http://www.lavanguardia.es/ciudadanos/noticias/20100329/53899147812/el-movimiento-del-decrecimiento-analiza-las-estrategias-para-reducir-el-consumo-estados-unidos-reino.html>

<http://www.lavanguardia.es/ciudadanos/noticias/20100328/53899120357/trabajar-menos-protege-el-planeta-barcelona-canada-seguridad-social-oxford-street-universidad-navida.html>

30/3/2010

http://www.lavanguardia.es/lv24h/20100330/imp_53899289666.html

FRANCE

Le Monde

http://www.lemonde.fr/opinions/article/2010/03/30/objecteur-de-croissance-par-herve-kempf_1326340_3232.html

BELGIUM

De wereld morgen

<http://www.dewereldmorgen.be/artikels/2010/03/26/nadenken-over-een-krimpeconomie>

Mondial news

[http://www.mo.be/index.php?id=63&tx_uwnews_pi2\[art_id\]=28087&cHash=1fd0d03fd0](http://www.mo.be/index.php?id=63&tx_uwnews_pi2[art_id]=28087&cHash=1fd0d03fd0)

DENMARK

www.information.dk

<http://www.information.dk/229022>

ITALY

Carta

<http://www.carta.org/campagne/decrecita/19367>

Green report

http://www.greenreport.it/_new/index.php?page=default&id=4012

GERMANY

<http://www.wir-klimaretter.de/index.php?>

[option=com_content&view=article&id=5455:endloses-wachstum-ist-nicht-moeglich&catid=59:standpunkte&Itemid=275](http://www.wir-klimaretter.de/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5455:endloses-wachstum-ist-nicht-moeglich&catid=59:standpunkte&Itemid=275)

Appendix 2

2.1. Working groups

The working groups concept emerged in the search for an alternative model of interaction from the usual conference sessions set-up based on presentations followed by discussion. Their operation of the groups was based on two main principles. Firstly, working groups required collaborative work and the active participation on the part of all members. Secondly, groups had particular goals to pursue, namely the building of key and specific proposals and research questions in the context of degrowth. Thus there was an expectation that the discussion ends up with some particular results.

The preparation process of the working groups was highly demanding. Initially a list of topics and key questions related to them were selected from the major issues that have been arising at preceding conferences on degrowth. These served for setting up 29 working groups. (see Table 1).

Table 1. List of working groups topics and key questions around which the discussion was centered and proposals developed

1. Money and currencies

What alternative monetary system could we develop in the pursuit of degrowth and how?

2. New financial institutions

How should we change credit institutions in the pursuit of degrowth?

3. Social economy, changing the corporation status

What are the options for collective production action (non-profit organization, limited profit organisation (Limited Corp etc.), for-profit cooperative status, etc)? What types of non-profit status models can we develop and how?

4. Property rights

How can we reform property rights beyond the public-private divide? What property rights and institutions for a degrowing economy?

5. Work-sharing

How can we implement a 3-day working week? How will domestic and voluntary work

6. Moratoria on new infrastructures

Which infrastructures should we limit, where and how?

7. How to deal with advertising

Should we limit advertising and how?

8. Reduction of natural resource exploitation

What political tools can we use to leave natural and biological “resources in/on the ground” and how can they become effective?

9. Zero-waste

How can we minimize the production of waste?

10. Degrowth in water consumption

How can we reduce – real and virtual - water consumption in the “Global North” to 25% of its current levels (factor 4 reduction)?

11. Reusing empty houses and co-housing

How can we change future forms of housing to occupy empty houses and develop shared (communal) housing? How can we promote mutualisation of goods in general?

12. Basic income and income ceiling

How can we politically implement a basic income for all? How can we reform taxation and other policies to impose a ceiling on high incomes?

13. New technologies

Are new technologies tools for degrowth or Pandora's boxes of resource consumption? How to shift research from growth-oriented technologies to innovations for frugality and sharing?

29. Education

What is the role of teaching and training for degrowth? How can we introduce the idea of degrowth in education?

14. Social metabolism and transitions

What do we know from previous, big socio-ecological transitions that is relevant in the context of a transition to degrowth? Is a degrowth transformation feasible and how?

15. Cities and degrowth

How will cities look after degrowth? Can we plan for degrowth and how (multifunctional urbanism, etc)?

16. Agro-ecology, food sovereignty and degrowth

Can we feed the world with locally produced, organic food and if yes, how?

17. Trade degrowth

Should we limit global trade for degrowth and if yes, which trade and how (institutions, international organizations, etc)?

18. Participative/direct democracy

What forms of “deep” democracy for a society that degrows?

19. Political strategies

What is the relative role of political parties, social movements, unions, groups practicing degrowth and academics-intellectuals in making the degrowth idea dominant in society? Which existing parties or movements can adopt the idea of degrowth?

20. Demography and degrowth

Where and why should population de-grow? Which bottom-up movements initiate voluntary population control and how?

21. Demilitarisation and Degrowth

How can we implement a general armistice? How can the military-industrial sector reduce?

22. Energy degrowth and the transition to renewable energies

What sort of renewable energies for degrowth? Is degrowth in energy consumption a better strategy for transition to renewable than “burning our way fast” to renewable?

23. Environmental justice, the environmentalism of the poor and degrowth

How can degrowth “translate” to non-western contexts and who would be its allies in the “Global South”?

24. Social security and pensions

How to secure pensions in a degrowth society? How to deal with potential intergenerational conflicts?

25. Human nature and degrowth

What do we know from evolutionary biology, anthropology, cultural studies and sociology about human nature that is relevant to degrowth?

26. New (macro)economic models for degrowth

Can we model and simulate non or de-growth economic pathways and how?

27. Indicators for degrowth

Do we need to measure progress towards sustainable degrowth and if so, how?

28. Economic De-growth and the Steady state

How can the two proposals and communities cooperate more? Which are the differences and similarities?

Next steps involved approaching academic and civil society experts in each field to prepare a 2-3 page document which provides background on the topic and draws possible proposals that lead to degrowth. The papers were aimed to prepare conference attendants for the discussion in the respective working group and stir-up the debate in there. The background papers were thus later titled “Stirring papers”. To avoid the domination of the expert opinion and proposals in each of the working groups, it was not made mandatory for stirring paper authors to attend.

The process of finding stirring paper authors, communicating the working group concept to them, receiving, improving, translating and uploading online the documents they prepared took half an year full-time work for two people. Majority

of the stirring papers were uploaded online two to three weeks before the start of the conference. Upon registration participants selected the two working groups they would later join, respectively on the second and third day of the conference. It was thus expected that participants stay in the same groups. In total more than hundred and fifty potential authors were contacted, among which about ninety responded and eventually submitted stirring papers.

In order to facilitate the collaboration and creative construction of proposals in the groups a special format and time schedule was elaborated. This involved consultations with professional facilitators, testing and discussions within the organization team. Once the structure of the activity in each working group was developed, a pre-conference trial was made with a group of researchers at the ICTA institute at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. That led to further transformations and improvement of the format.

Preparation further required selecting facilitators for each session and elaborating detailed guidelines which could help the process of collaborative work and construction of proposals within the working group. Special attention was paid to steering the general discussion towards joint construction of proposals. For the purpose consensus-based methods and an environment of listening and responding to all concerns were key. The last amendments in the structure came from the feedback of the people who were expected to facilitate the debates in the working groups.

The format of the working group sessions finally chosen consisted of two sessions with an assembly for preliminary results exchange in between. The first session started with ice-breaking exercises and refreshing the main proposals addressed in the stirring papers, done by the facilitator. Next, a round of concerns and new proposals were brought up by all group members. This was the creative and “deliberately messy” part of the discussions, when a wide amplitude of opinions were expressed and proposals put forward. Attention was paid to making sure that no single expert dominates the discussion and the widest possible range of participants express their concerns. Next, a process of proposal prioritization took place, where concrete suggestions and questions were put forward, taking the concerns earlier expressed into consideration. The prioritization was based on consensus-based methods. Facilitators also tried to stress the importance of innovative proposals, which often do not receive much attention at first as they sound strange and uncommon. The first session was finalized with a joint formulation of a summary of the discussion where the main proposals discussed within the group were clearly stated, together with any doubts, points of disagreement and questions that need further research. Before the end of the session the group chose a reporter who reads the text to the assembly.

Working group participants then split into two parallel assemblies and a reporter from each group presented the key proposals to one of the assemblies. Each reporter had about 2 minutes to read the summary of their working group. Presentation were followed by a minute of silence during which the people present in the assembly could write down any responses, concerns, questions or new proposals inspired by the respective working group results. The written responses were then put in “mail-boxes” corresponding to each working group. After the end of the assembly, the group facilitator collected all concerns and 2-3 “postmans” arranged them for presenting in the next working group session.

Thanks to the assembly process all working group participants were able to hear the proposals, discussions, doubts and questions put across by the other thematic groups. Assemblies were thus aimed to create complementarity and cohesion between the various aspects of degrowth proposals which emerged during the first working group session. The process of feedback provision and sharing the result of each group with the rest of the conference participants within the assembly also functioned as a spontaneous quality check. In that way any serious omissions or dubious proposals could be spotted and commented upon. Collaboration between different working groups was crucial because of strong synergies and mutual-dependence between the proposals that emerged as a result of the discussions.

Before the start of the second session, a representative of each working group gathered and classified all assembly responses, paying special attention to the unique ones. The bigger-size working groups splitted into smaller units during the second session in order to deepen the discussion on the various assembly concerns, left over points together with any internal concerns. This implied discussing, reformulating or changing the identified key proposals and research questions taking the feedback into consideration. The process then continued with all working group members getting together to re-formulate the joint proposals and research questions on the basis of what has been proposed, debated, agreed or disagreed upon in each of the sub groups. The last quarter of an hour was spent formulating a summary of the working group debate, proposals and research questions, done with the help of the note-taker. The final result was a one page document that includes: a list of all innovative proposals and questions that came up; a paragraph with the key proposals and research questions which the group agreed upon and; some points of disagreement.

The summary of each working group discussion served as a basis for the conference declaration and is released on the conference website. The results of each working group were highly complementary and inter-dependent, so that any topic omissions by one group were often dealt with or discussed by another. The working groups sessions finished with each team writing down their proposals by hand and bringing them and patching them next to each other on the walls in the communal hall so that all conference participants could read, comment, compare and discuss the results.

The working groups results were also presented shortly to the general assembly and wider audience on final day of the conference (Monday, March 29th). From there on the results have been used twofolds: as inputs for the conference declaration and for the development of joint research plans between alliances of participants. Please visit <http://www.degrowth.eu/v1/index.php?id=121> where the unedited summaries of the working groups results can be found.

In terms of the participants' feedback, some of the main points for improvement which have been stressed include:

- the need to allow for more time and more movement between working groups and for having explicit rules for debating, more accurate facilitating method, define any terms which might be unclear in advance
- the importance of presence of the authors of the stirring papers and well-established researchers in the working groups, in order to warm-up the discussion and serve as a reference point

- the possibility of having conceptual and academic presentations, which introduce the main issues to be debated on the first day, and discussions in the working groups and campaigns on the second
- the importance of avoiding results-oriented facilitation, the combination of "profiles" (university teachers, students, politicians, practitioners) and male/female "distribution" in the groups.
- the need to dedicate more time to open discussions, and moving prioritization of important issues towards the end.

2.2 Posters

By introducing the working group process, we faced a shrinking in the time for classic oral presentation. On the conference time schedule, we could not count for the afternoons, entirely dedicated to the working groups. Nor was there motivation for having a longer conference, accepting less individual contributions, or in increasing the number of parallel sessions. We could count only on 2,5 hours for presentation time on each of the two full conference days (Saturday and Sunday) and we were willing to accept between 100 and 150 individual contributions. This implies allocating an average of 10 minutes for presentation, in rounds of 10 parallel sessions. Given this time limitation, we understood that a poster presentation would be more feasible given this short time constraint.

This decision turned out to be a useful one, characterized by a win-win scenario: not only could we manage individual contributions in a shorter time, but their visibility, and hence communication potential, was improved by the poster format. In fact posters were made visible throughout the entire conference. If one could not attend all presentations, the physical disposal of poster was still hanging in the conference space for reading, commenting and discussing.

We attempted at breaking the old dichotomy that were posters are seen as "second tier" contributions. Here, only 25% of submissions were in the form of a classic paper presentation, of 20 minutes, in 6 parallel sessions on Sunday. Proposals took a oral presentation or poster form on the basis of their visual presentability. For highly conceptual submissions we sought a standard oral power-point presentation format, and for all the rest, a poster. We dedicated Saturday to posters so that their physical visibility could be enhanced throughout the entire conference.

Once submission deadline was over, abstracts (180) were sent for evaluation, in order to categorize them for oral presentation (about 25% of all accepted) or posters (the remaining part of all accepted). Over 100 abstracts were categorized as posters. In classic conferences, posters are usually few and constrained within one "poster tour", displayed in one particular place. However, as the majority of the contributions were posters, one single poster tour was not viable. Presenting 100 posters within 2,5 hours, and allocating 15 minutes to each required about 10 parallel sessions. Poster abstracts were groups in 11 categories, which we later named "poster tours". The topics were identified were:

- Work and employment
- Degrowth: Theory and ideas (I) and (II)
- Climate change and energy
- Resources and waste

- Degrowth beyond Europe and the West
- Degrowth economic, the crisis and businesses
- Food and agriculture
- Knowledge, education and technology
- Politics and democracy
- Indicators and methods
- Transport and cities

In the case of “Degrowth: Theory and Ideas” we created two separate tours, for the high number of contributions in this category.

Shortly after the selection of the abstracts, we explained the visibility advantage and special role of posters in the conference, as we did not want authors to drop-off for not being selected for oral presentation, explaining them how to produce a paper poster.

The idea of having parallel poster tours was the first element of similarity with conventional oral sessions at conferences. While the physical posters were hanged in the courtyard outside the rooms used in the conference, the actual poster tour occurred in electronic format within closed rooms (more comfortable, easy for concentration). It ended up being not much different from an oral paper session, but instead of an electronic presentation of many slides, a “one slide presentation” in the form of a poster was presented.

Time constraint was key, thus posters were collected beforehand, so that they were all ready before the parallel sessions started. Like in any parallel sessions, participants were free to move between rooms, from a tour to another in order to follow other presentations. For this, volunteers were asked to follow the same presentation order that appeared in the booklet given to all participants. The posters were quickly passed to the web-master for uploading on the web.

Possibly, the most interesting lesson learned along this process, is the possible mix between oral session characteristics and poster hanging advantages. In fact a conference could be organized where all oral sessions can be made in the form of posters, so that they are both in an electronic and a physical format, hanged in a visible space.

As well, something we did not experiment during this conference and is the possibility of dedicating some extra time for each author to stand in front of her poster, for interacting with that part of the audience who could not attend the room session. In terms of evaluation, participants recommended dedicating more time, consolidated under fewer subject headings to this module of the conference, including more time to read the paper posters and direct discussion with the authors.