



EDITORIAL

Editorial: Arts Special Issue

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This the very first Special Issue exploring the intersection of artistic practices with degrowth. It is a call for artists to join in discussing how art is, and has been, a legitimate and impactful means to research and advance the goals of degrowth. What are the potentials, tensions, contradictions, and important questions? We hope that our work serves as a touchstone for interested authors and practitioners to collectively advance and explore this political agenda going forwards. We wish to spark discussion and establish the possibility of future linkages between art and “growth-critical” approaches, asking how degrowth can be practised and brought to life through art.

Before the term “degrowth” existed, artists had long engaged with socio-political and environmental issues in ways aligned with degrowth values and objectives. For instance, the Situationist International - a revolutionary group of artists and intellectuals - influenced degrowth in its early years within the French-speaking world. Situationist works, posters and theories, such as *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord, 1967/1994), provided important underpinnings for the uprisings of May 1968, and aimed to create "situations" in which individuals would be free from the increasing alienation of contemporary social structures (Hemmens & Zacarias, 2020). More broadly, since the 1970s, during the privatization of public services and commodification of social relations, artists responded by making socially engaged and anarchical interventions motivated by care, inclusivity, commoning and community building - for example by growing vegetables for AIDS sufferers (Roberts, 2015). Simultaneously, academia began to adopt tools from the arts as research methods (arts-based research, ABR) in order to challenge expertism and “revolutionize institutionalized classist, racist, and colonializing ways of experiencing and discoursing about human experience” (Finley, 2008: 73).

Degrowthers have noted the importance of connecting degrowth to such arts initiatives, as with the organisation of DOCUMENTA, an art fair, by an Indonesian collective *ruangrupa* whose work challenged the elitist, colonial histories of "the art world" by adopting horizontal modes of organisation and platforming commoning practices.¹ Increasingly

¹ Our mention of *ruangrupa* here intends to highlight how degrowth has engaged with the arts to date. For example, the

artists who see their work as advancing socio-political, environmental agendas are explicitly framing their practice as degrowth: in Pontevedra, the combined ESEE/Degrowth Conference (2024) showcased a breadth of methodologies, such as theatre and dance, exploring and expressing degrowth themes. This conversation is not confined to degrowth academia, as per the Joint Research Centre which produces evidence for EU policy making and recently listed "degrowth" as a research topic for art and science collaborations exploring the legal rights of Nature (European Commission, n.d.).

Our Special Issue adds to this discussion and takes stock of these dynamics. Julian Wilming offers a timely literature review which maps the current state of discourse across academic and popular articles to elucidate three primary clusters of degrowth thinking about art. Literature is asking how art can amplify and communicate degrowth visions, how degrowth-oriented changes can be made to the institutional art world, and questioning the potentials of making art *in se* for prefiguring degrowth. The remaining and multidisciplinary perspectives offered in the Special Issue speak to Wilming's clusters.

Laura Donkers shows how curation is not solely an elitist and market-oriented activity which generates inequality and celebrates the 1%. Through her discussion of the Blue Radius project, a public exhibition she curated in New Zealand, Donkers highlights how curators engaging in strategic community engagement and behaviour change projects are advancing critiques and visions aligned with degrowth thinking.

Artist Ailie Rutherford shares work which contributes to the research and imagination of feminist, socially just, economic futures. Rutherford's printmaking workshop, *Mapping Women's Work*, builds upon the novel research on the study of "Women in multiple low-paid employment (MLPE): pathways between work, care and health" (2020-2024), held at the University of Glasgow. Rutherford shares outcomes from this workshop in a piece co-

Degrowth Conference in Zagreb 2023 invited *ruangrupa* to a panel discussion. Documenta is also briefly discussed by Julian Willming in this special issue. We would like to acknowledge that Documenta has also been discussed extensively across news sources in relation to an anti-semitism scandal. This issue has been covered from many different perspectives and there is no consensus on whether it was resolved. In our reference list, we include some of that coverage to provide information on the debate.

authored with the lead researcher Louise Lawson, University of Glasgow, and the curator Caroline Gausden of the Glasgow Women's Library. The prints make visible the multiple paid and unpaid roles taken on by many women whilst providing collective visualisations of how a more equitable economic exchange might look.

Through an interview with Annagreta König Dansokho, we see how textiles can also express criticisms of injustice within a world driven by capitalism and profit-orientation. Dansokho's speculative clothes collection, *Touché: A Mediterranean collection*, presents a fictitious scenario in which a fabric producer offers materials suitable for the crossing of the Mediterranean. This work highlights the tragic dimension of illegal migration which is driven by hidden mechanisms within the market economy, marked by dehumanisation, and a silent or implicit acceptance of death at sea.

Degrowth also grapples with the problem of unmaking the growth-oriented "imaginary" of society (Castoriadis, 1975/1987). Mathilde Schoenauer Sebag and Eloïse Bodin discuss the potentials of sound and theatre to undo this hold through their play, *The Dynamic Ministry of Subordination*, which unfolds in the year 660 after the honey strike in an era called the *flegmocene*. In this animist future, microphones decide to stop diffusing sound, trees contribute to environmental debates, and research teams are interspecial. Through dialogue, the artists highlight the absurdity of modern society and allow for critiques of real-world issues which humorously inspire action towards "flegmatic", joyful futures.

More broadly, discussions of degrowth and technology question the socio-material relations fostered by artefacts, proposing "appropriacy" and "adaptability" as useful concepts for innovation (Pansera & Fressoli, 2021). Artist Dominika Sobolewska responds to this literature with a Design perspective, giving a spectrum of examples from her platform, *the Mindful Design Studio*, wherein students create objects that promote awareness, empathy, and sustainable interactions between people and the environment whilst addressing functional problems.

Finally, we engage with Céline Keller's recent comic, *Who's Afraid of Degrowth*, which is

reviewed by Elizabeth Allyn Woock, a historian of medievalism in comics. Woock interviews Keller and contextualises her work, providing us with the tools to analyse why comics are an effective means to communicate degrowth concepts. In this spirit, Woock presents her review in a comic book format and has generously made the full interview available as audio on her website.

Naturally this spread leaves many practices and perspectives uncovered. The process of pulling together this Special Issue has been critical and reflexive, yet imperfect. The work began during the preparation for the Pontevedra conference for which Sofia was granted a budget to show artists' work. Unable to show many submissions, Sofia invited shortlisted artists to discuss their work in the Special Issue, and aimed to include a diverse range of practices and perspectives. We next invited perspectives deemed to be missing. As such, we have voices speaking from New Zealand, Poland, Czech Republic, Scotland, Germany and France.

The issues which have emerged during this process highlight continuing barriers to bridging degrowth with the arts. Interested artists were independent and unaffiliated, thus they required financial support but could not be compensated for their work. No perspectives were initially submitted from the so-called Global South and the overall balance is skewed towards Europe which highlights problems with reach, relatability, the structuring of the call, and Anglo-centrism. Further, artists who applied could see the alignments between their work and degrowth but were not familiar with the literature. We strongly feel that, in this case, the burden should not lie on one party, here the artist, to prove their "relevance". To successfully bridge arts and degrowth we need to facilitate a two-way, equal and open conversation wherein connections are mutually identified and co-produced across disciplinary expertise. We would like to thank our peer reviewers who made key suggestions in this regard.

With this in mind, we have sought to open up a space at *Degrowth* for the arts and look forward to a continuous interdisciplinary exchange advanced by further submissions and special issue proposals from our research community. It is our hope that this exchange

facilitates network building and fruitful transdisciplinary collaboration between artists and degrowth scholars. There is huge potential here for like minded actors to find each-other and work together on transdisciplinary projects and calls.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our peer reviewers and allies with whom we have consulted throughout the process: DISNOVATION, Kim Carlota von Schönfeld, Maren Hobein, Caterina Benincasa and Adriaan Eeckels of the SciArt project at the Joint Research Centre, and ruangrupa.

This Editorial will initially be accompanied by three publications from the Special Issue, with the remaining perspectives published in due course. The remaining publications will include the “ManiQuesto”: a piece co-produced with the wider research community (Greaves, n.d.). This ManiQuesto, rather than presenting a dogmatic manifesto, is conceptualised as a collective, reflexive artwork composed of ideas and questions which spark further discussions and contributions. The ManiQuesto will can be revised across each Arts Special Issue as debates and concerns evolve, and may successively take different formats beyond the written word. This is the *Degrowth Arts ManiQuesto No. 1*: an international, collectively created research agenda and reflection upon the potentials of bridging the arts with degrowth.

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