

DESIGN FOR DEGROWTH: DRAWING ECOLOGIES TOGETHER

WORKSHOP

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ABSTRACT

In this workshop we will explore design for degrowth in a collaborative manner. In the first part of the half-day workshop we will discuss in a playful way different visual notions of growth and possible future notions of post- or degrowth. The participants are asked to submit visual material enabling us to create a conversational tool. While taking different roles in the discussion, we will select topics together that seem important to be further worked on. In a second session the participants will split up in smaller groups sketching ideas collaboratively on how a degrowth scenario in the Anthropocene could look like.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of a degrowth or postgrowth society is getting more and more academic support during the last years. While the European political institutions are promoting the austerity state throughout Europe and rightwing, anti-European, anti-immigrant parties are getting more and more popular, the European Design Leadership Board published a report on “Design for Growth and Prosperity” in 2012 (European Design Leadership Board 2012). The report draws on the basic idea of an economic system focused on growth – indeed it seems the only possible solution to keep the current creative economy running. Although the Global Financial Crisis is far from being over and is creating a whole youth generation without economic independence and future perspective, the old paradigm of growth is still quite vivid. Also wrapped now in terms like “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (European Design Leadership Board 2012, p.3) it is still the same story: if we want to thrive again we will have to consume more –

although maybe not in a quantitative sense. A world without growth seems not possible even though the “Limits to Growth” have been acclaimed since the Club of Rome report in 1972 (Meadows et al 1972).

Nevertheless more and more initiatives and academics are promoting a row of ideas that point towards a possible and desirable future without growth or even with degrowth (D’Alisa et al 2014). Their scenario presumes not only a society that can not count on the driving economic forces of fossil fuels any more within a world with limited resources, which are already being heavily exploited (Rockström et al. 2009). But it entails the vision of a society which focuses on different values. It is based basically less on consumption and more on reproduction, reduction and relations. We can already find a good amount of examples where the old design paradigm “Less is more” is getting a whole new meaning. Design for Less (Tonkinwise 2013) could be a new paradigm, that still needs a lot of exploration.

But while the design research agenda is more and more focused on topics like Design for Social Innovation (Manzini 2008), Transformative Services (Sangiorgi 2011) and alike, our visual culture is still dominated by the aesthetics of growth – the growing graph seems to be burned into our collective unconsciousness. The role models presented in advertising and media as well as the present role models of a successful lifestyle are alike: They focus on an ongoing economic uprising.

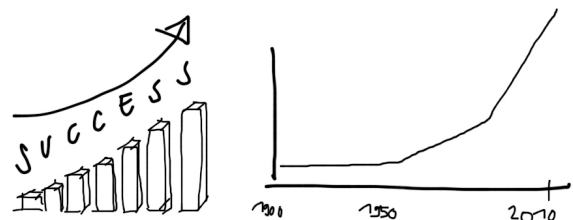


Figure 1: Visual representation for “Growth” (left) and “The Great Acceleration” (right)

Another issue regarding images of ecologies is the idea of the Anthropocene. Taking the Anthropocene as a given we will question the current images of the human footprint which are formally closely related to the model of growth. The terms used in combination with images

for the fundamental ecological and social transformations, such as “Long Now”, “The Great Acceleration” or “Deep Time”, also reveal the abstract and metaphorical notion of the conference issue (Anthropocene Campus, 2014).

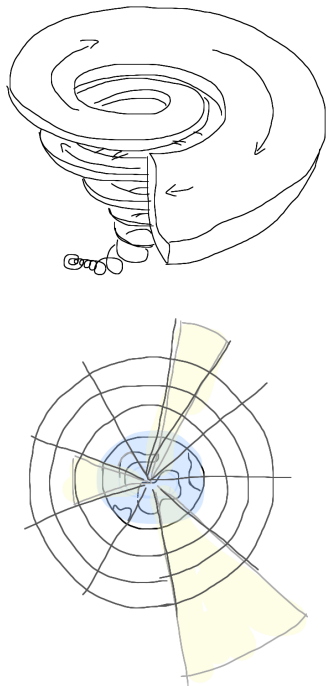


Figure 2: Models of “Deep Time” (top) and “Planetary Boundaries” (Rockström et al. 2009)

Some of the questions we would like to discuss and draw together in the workshop are: How can we create visual alternatives that take the limits not only of the planetary boundaries into account but also the limitation of our own lifespan? How can human and nonhuman relations be visualized?

How could we draw together alternatives to the current economic model? How could a design for degrowth look and feel like? What kind of diagrams could envision possible futures of the planet ?

PROGRAMME

The workshop will consist mainly of two activities: First, a playful conversation on visualisations regarding the three topics: ecology – slow media – degrowth; and second, collaborative drawing experiments.

For the playful conversation we will adapt a tool developed by artist-researcher Philippine Hoegen (Hoegen 2014): “Tool for a Conversation”. In this memory-style game, participants will be invited to share visualisations on the above mentioned topics beforehand. The facilitators will create memory-cards showing either two visuals or a visual and a word. Four different roles are played by the participants: The Maker, the Pirate, the Joker and the Storyteller. By changing the roles between players and also adding new cards created ad hoc the game is a fruitful base for a rich discussion, aiming at getting stories to be explored more in detail in the following collaborative drawing sessions.

The use and making of images is understood as a language equal to spoken and written words. With the direct and quick articulation through drawing with pencil and paper we want to achieve an enhancement of visual expression and collaborative thinking. The sessions are experimental and require the engagement and improvisation with presumably “slow media”, and other materials at hand.

REQUIREMENTS

The organisers will distribute texts related to the subject before the conference. The reading is mandatory for a common knowledge basis of the workshop theme.

Each participant is asked to submit an original image (preferably a diagram, drawing or sketch) and a short statement (max. 150 words) before the conference relating to one of the three themes: ecologies, slow media, degrowth. Please send the scanned images and the statement to Laura Popplow via email: mail@makeandthink.de.

The workshop organisers plan to setup a website on visualisations for degrowth and the workshop serves as a starting point for a collective visual archive. The workshop participants are invited to share their ideas and results of the workshop on the website.

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