



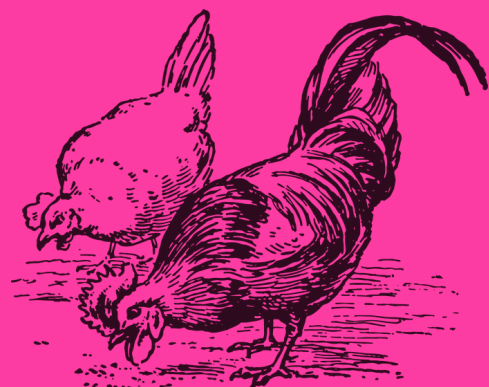
Research & Degrowth International

# DEGROWTH RURAL FUTURES

Reclaiming the agrarian in the socio-ecological struggle



"Deep Dive" online course  
by Donatella Gasparro



Second Edition Nov / Dec  
2025  
*Syllabus*

Amb el suport de





Amb el suport de  
l'Ajuntament de  
Barcelona



# INTRODUCTION TO THE ONLINE "DEEP DIVE" COURSES

**The Deep Dive Online Courses** offered by Research & Degrowth (R&Di) are an educational initiative designed to explore focused themes through the lens of degrowth – such as policies and degrowth, the sea and degrowth, agriculture and degrowth, and more. These high-intensity courses are created for those who seek more than an introduction: researchers, activists, professionals, and curious minds ready to engage critically with the challenges and possibilities of social-ecological transformation.

**Each Deep Dive consists of five live online sessions (2.5 hours each, totaling 12.5 hours) with no more than 25 students.**

**Research & Degrowth** is a think-and-act-tank dedicated to the radical transformation of our economies and societies through research, advocacy, education, training and events around degrowth. For more than fifteen years, R&Di has successfully organized summer schools and university master's programs focused on degrowth. The online course represents a new educational format to reach out to a broader audience. Upon successfully completing the online course, all participants will receive an **official certificate** issued by R&Di.



After "Policies for Degrowth", the second Deep Dive we are offering is **Degrowth Rural Futures: Reclaiming the agrarian in the socio-ecological struggle**, taught by **Donatella Gasparro**, with classes of 2.5 hours each Monday starting on **November 24th till December 22nd**, from **5pm to 7.30pm**.

We have been working hard to create this online course and are excited to be launching it to you. We're looking forward to this educational journey together!



"Deep Dive"  
Online Course

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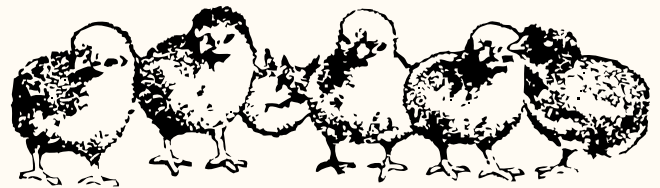


# COURSE FORMAT

## The Deep Dive at a glance

Rurality and agrarian liveworlds have long been relegated to being a residue of the past, a stronghold of conservatism and a symbol of unbearable toiling. Yet in any desirable degrowth future – in which the environment is thriving and work is justly redistributed – rural space and agrarian lifeworlds are an **indispensable ingredient** of the struggle, and the material substrate for **socio-ecologically sound societies in balance with their ecosystems**.

This course sketches an ambitious journey across degrowth-aligned disciplines, movements and visions that together **rethink, resignify and relaunch the rural as key in shaping desirable futures**, with a focus on European countryside. With the intent of rescuing rurality from its past-offworld relegation, we will draw on **critical rural geography, political agroecology, critical agrarian studies, eco-marxism, materialist ecofeminism**, and rural social movements to rethink rural space, people and livelihoods as active and indispensable agents in making the degrowth future we wish for.

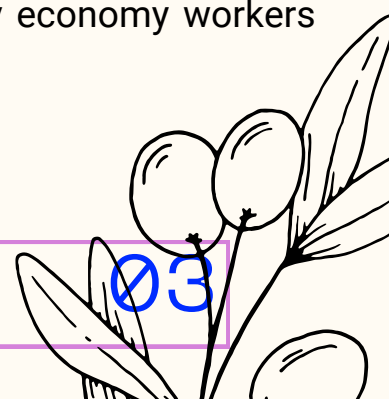


## Requirements

Knowledge of degrowth theoretical foundations; acquaintance with political ecology; an interest in rural areas, agriculture, and land. For an overall introduction to degrowth, check our course “Introduction to degrowth” on our webpage.

## Target

The course is aimed at all those who intend to deepen their knowledge of degrowth-related agrarian and rural studies at a higher-education level. Bachelor and Master students, PhD researchers, activists, agroecology practitioners, NGO members, policy makers, private sector actors working in rural areas and solidarity economy workers are some of the potential students.





# Class format & learning tools

The course is taught with a **variety of teaching methods** that include frontal lectures and peer-to-peer learning moments such as plenary debates, facilitated discussions, group work in break-out rooms, and multi-media educational material.

There will be the optional opportunity of doing a **self-led excursion** to a rural area of the students' choice, with a **written output** to reflect upon the themes of the course applied to the students' context.

Participants should be ready to come prepared to class with doing the necessary reading, to foster active and informed participation and ensure a fertile learning environment for everyone.

## Timeline

After "Policies for Degrowth", the second Deep Dive we are offering is **Degrowth Rural Futures: Reclaiming the agrarian in the socio-ecological struggle**, taught by **Donatella Gasparro**, with classes of 2.5 hours each Monday starting on **November 24th** till **December 22nd**, from **5pm to 7.30pm (CET)**.

**Nov 24th** - Switching our gaze: looking at the countryside from the country's side

**Dec 1st** - Feeding the revolution: degrowth ecosocialist countrysides, beyond localisms

**Dec 8th** - Reproduction rewired: rethinking Northern agrarian questions from the degrowth ecofeminist standpoint

**Dec 15th** - Political Agroecology: emancipatory rural politics, commons and convivial tools for degrowth in the rural

**Dec 22nd** - Reinventing the wheel? Between recoding "tradition" and real-existing degrowth



# THE TEACHER

**Donatella Gasparro** is a PhD researcher at **Scuola Normale Superiore** (Florence, Italy), Faculty of Political Science & Sociology, and a collaborator with ICTA-UAB at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, within the project **"REAL – A Post Growth Deal"** where she focuses on advancing research on Real-Existing Degrowth. Donatella researches, teaches and disseminates at the intersection of **critical agrarian studies, degrowth, ecofeminism and political (agro)ecology**. Donatella's research focus are the subsistence-oriented economies that persist in Southern Italian remote rural areas, and their potential for degrowth futures.

Donatella's passion for, and connection with, rural areas has deep familiar roots, and besides critical social sciences she has a background in **agroecology and agronomy**, and has been active in a peasant agroecology association in Southern Italy for more than a decade. Donatella has gained experience in **international higher education** by teaching political ecology and rural geography at the University of Muenster (Germany), environmental sciences at the University of Leiden (The Netherlands) and Agroecology at Wageningen University (The Netherlands), and by leading several workshops and lectures for the broader public.



She is active in **spreading degrowth** in Italy, and is part of the editorial collective of the Italian degrowth quarterly **"Quaderni della Decrescita"** (Degrowth notebooks), for which she's curating a special issue on degrowth and rurality. [Here](#) an overview of her recent work and events.





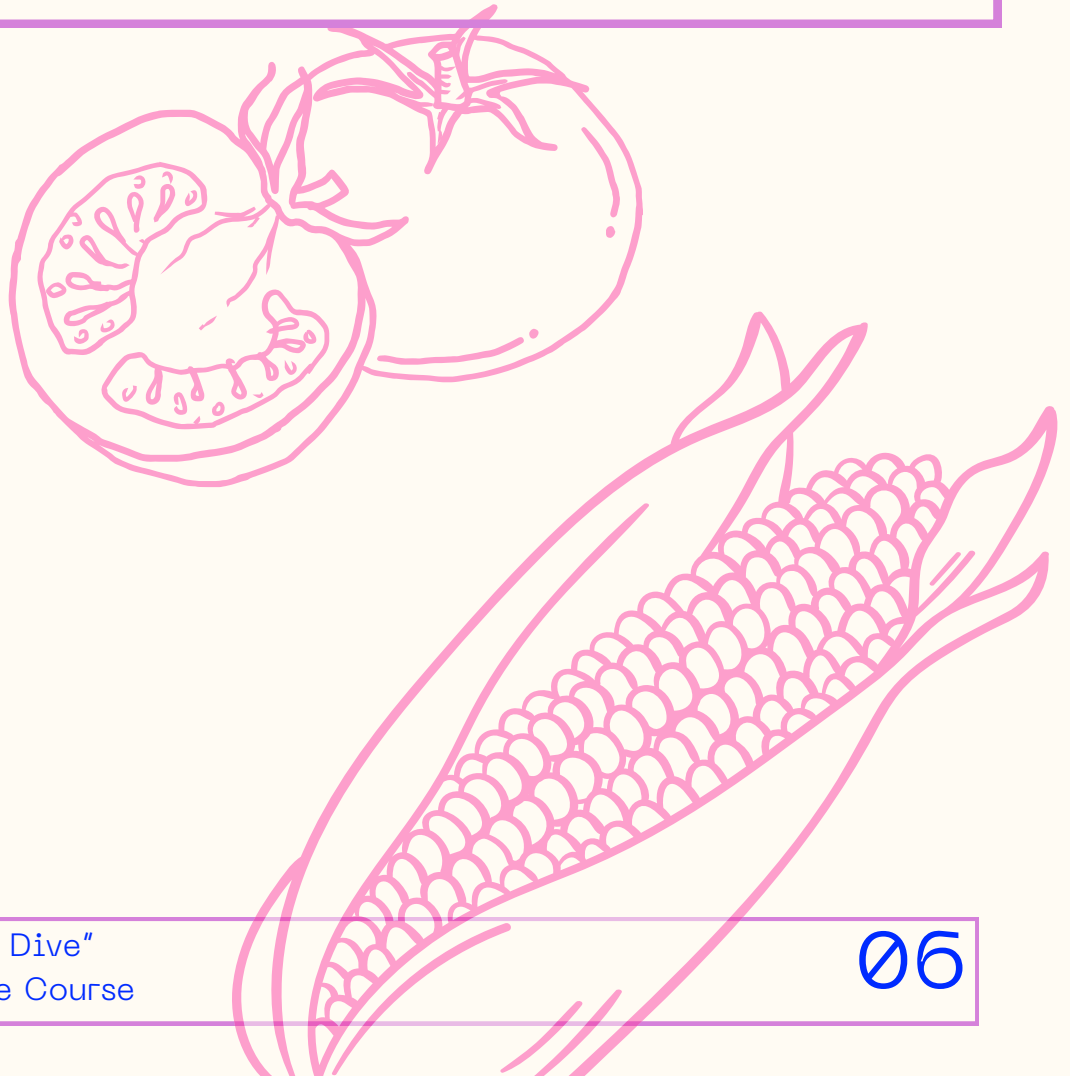
# PRICE

## 250 Euros

The basic fee of 250 Euros covers all costs for the course. This consist in five classes of 2.5 hours with a maximum capacity of 25 people. Classes allow interaction and exercise between lecturer and peers.

## Two scholarships

The scholarships are intended for individuals who face significant financial barriers and would otherwise be unable to attend the course. To apply for a scholarship please explain your situation to us (see application form).



# Session 1 - Nov 24, 2025 5 pm CET

## Switching our gaze: looking at the countryside from the country's side

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**Description of the class:** Before moving onto charting degrowth visions for emancipatory rural futures, this opening session will be dedicated to giving a **nuanced look at the capitalist core's countrysides today**. Together, we will address the question: why is it important to bring the rural back into analyses, visions and programs of degrowth and ecosocialism today, also in the capitalist cores – while in radical alliance with anti-imperialist, Global South struggles?

Ridden by multiple **crises** – from marginalisation, depopulation and 'sacrifice zones' to industrial agriculture, land ownership concentration, touristification – Northern rural areas appear deemed to be '**operational landscapes**' to be absorbed into the urbanising forces of capital's tentacles. How does a growth-oriented capitalist economy look like in the European countryside today? What are the **root causes** of a rurality in crisis?

Building on rural geography, ecological Marxism and critical agrarian studies, we will explore '**the agrarian question**' today and the growth-driven socio-economic dynamics that (have) shape(d) the countryside, its material reality, its economy, its daily life and its ecology, starting to glimpse **ways ahead other than endless growth** and top-town rural development, from a specific degrowth perspective.

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### Mandatory readings

Book chapter: *Nurturing the post-growth city: bringing the rural back in*. Spanier, J. & Feola, G. (2022) Chapter 11 In *Post-Growth Planning: Cities Beyond the Market Economy*.

### Going deeper:

- Blog entry: [Beyond \(against?\) urban gardens](#), by Donatella Gasparro, Research & Degrowth blog
- Book chapters: "Approaching the Rural" and "Exploiting the Rural" in the book: *Rural* by Michael Woods. Routledge, 2012
- Journal article: [Beyond the urban shift: towards a relational degrowth spatial politics](#). Varvarousis, A., Kallis, G., et al. (2025).
- Journal article: Gerber, J. F. (2020). [Degrowth and critical agrarian studies](#). *Journal of Peasant Studies*
- Journal article: Guerrero Lara, L., et al. (2023) [Degrowth and agri-food systems: a research agenda for the critical social sciences](#). *Sustainability Science*

## Feeding the revolution: degrowth ecosocialist countrysides, beyond localisms

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**Description of the class:** In this session we will recast rural space, agroecological production and agrarian lifeworlds as **essential elements of degrowth-oriented ecosocialist transformations** – not only in the majority world, but also in core countries.

In an effort to break free from the localist, intentional-community-oriented, urban-garden-centered clichés, we will draw from agrarian ecosocialist scholars such as Max Ajl, Kai Heron, June Borrás and Jasper Bernes to give back to the rural a place in the revolution, and rethink agrarian economies as **collective emancipatory projects**, rather than escapist utopias. From radical visions to potential non-reformist reforms, this class aims at **broadening the scope of thinking and action** on the countryside today.

How does a post-capitalist, degrowth countryside look like? Why is the rural a pivotal element in achieving a degrowth ecosocialist society? How can we rethink our scale of action, **between the macro and the micro**, and beyond the metropolis boundaries? What could agri-food and rural degrowth “non-reformist reforms” look like?

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### Mandatory readings:

- Book chapter: The hypertrophic city versus the planet of fields. Ajl, M. (2014), in *Implosions/explosions: Towards a study of planetary urbanization*.

### Going deeper:

- Essay: The Belly of the Revolution: Agriculture, Energy, and the Future of Communism. Bernes, J. (2018) in *Materialism and the Critique of Energy*.
- Magazine article: Towards the Abolition of the Hinterlands. Heron, K., & Heffron, A. (2022).
- Book chapter: Nishat-Botero, Y., & Thompson, M. (2025). The land question and postcapitalist countrysides: Towards a town-country synthesis. In Postcapitalist Countrysides.
- Journal article: Borrás, S. M. (2020). Agrarian social movements: The absurdly difficult but not impossible agenda of defeating right-wing populism and exploring a socialist future. *Journal of Agrarian Change*.
- Magazine article: Marxism & the agrarian question. Jacobin.



## Reproduction rewired: rethinking Northern agrarian questions from the degrowth ecofeminist standpoint

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**Description of the class:** In this session we will look at socio-ecological reproduction theory and Marxist ecofeminism as tools to re-read the rural as fundamental **means of reproduction**. Drawing on the work of Stefania Barca, Nancy Fraser, Maria Mies, Corinna Dengler and other ecofeminist scholars, we will get back to the land question starting from the intent of **subverting the subjugation of reproductive labour to productive labour**.

Following exploitative dynamics along the geographical, (neo)colonial, gender and class axes, we will ask ourselves: who does the necessary **socio-ecological reproductive work** in today's cores? Which bodies, territories and labours are exploited, for the benefit of whom? What does feminism have to do with agroecology, land and the environment? How are agrarian lifeworlds central to degrowth visions that put back socio-ecological reproductive labour at the centre?

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### Mandatory readings:

- Book section: Barca, S. (2020). Forces of reproduction: Notes for a counter-hegemonic Anthropocene.

### Going deeper:

- Essay: Le Guin, Ursula (1986) The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction
- Journal article: Dengler C. & Strunk B. (2018) The Monetized Economy Versus Care and the Environment: Degrowth Perspectives On Reconciling an Antagonism, Feminist Economics, 24:3, 160-183, DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2017.1383620
- Journal article: Gregoratti, C., & Raphael, R. (2019). The Historical Roots of a Feminist "Degrowth": Maria Mies's and Marilyn Waring's Critiques of Growth. In Towards a Political Economy of Degrowth.

## Political Agroecology: emancipatory rural politics, commons and convivial tools for degrowth in the rural

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**Description of the class:** This week we will look at the role of agroecology, rural social movements and **anti-capitalism from the countryside**, exploring the potential of rural initiatives in resisting, dismantling and creating alternatives to dominant capitalist structures, while looking at real-world cases.

In this journey, we will **reclaim agroecology** from its institutional and technical co-optation, sketching emancipatory rural politics that rethink propriety and **access to land** through land **commons** and re-appropriate **technology** through convivial agricultural tools.

How can we rethink technology so that it **serves people** and doesn't harm the environment, especially in the context of the countryside, while reimagining degrowth futures? How does access to land look like in a degrowth-oriented society, beyond large estates and private propriety?

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### Mandatory readings:

- Booklet: Transforming agriculture & beyond. Infrastructures, Tools and Tactics for Agroecological Struggles and Their Allies. Pages 6 to 27 (Chapters: "Introduction" and "Land") By Common Ecologies collective, 2023

### Going deeper:

- Book chapter: Radical transformation: Creating alternatives to capitalism in the countryside. By Dietz, K and Engels, B. Chapter 71 in Akram-Lodhi et al. (2021) Handbook of Critical Agrarian Studies.
- Journal article: Giraldo & Rosset (2022) Emancipatory agroecologies: social and political principles, The Journal of Peasant Studies
- Journal article: Pantazis, A. & Meyer, M. (2020). Tools from below: Making agricultural machines convivial. The Greek Review of Social Research, 155, 39–58.

## Reinventing the wheel? Between recoding “tradition” and real-existing degrowth

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**Description of the class:** When looking for alternatives to the capitalist order, we often turn to prefigurative, intentional experiments. But **what if we look back**, to long-gone and not-so-gone “traditional” agrarian pasts?

This class challenges the relegation of “tradition” to backwardness, toiling and conservatism, drawing from research on widespread **food self-provisioning**, the emerging “**real-existing degrowth**” stream, and “**postfigurative**” ideas to reclaim traditional, **peasant-like economies** and rethink them from a degrowth perspective.

What traces of **degrowth-akin rurality exist today**? What can we learn from “Souths-within-the-North” where non-capitalist modes of living persist? How can we reclaim **emancipatory elements of rural pasts**, and recast them as futuristic? Can these traces be “politicised” and made agents of change?

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### Mandatory readings:

- Journal article: Southern thought, islandness and real-existing degrowth in the Mediterranean. Kallis, G., Varvarousis, A., & Petridis, P. (2022). World Development

### Going deeper:

- Journal article: Movement without a movement: Food self-provisioning in Eastern Europe and the Balkans as emergent transformation towards a degrowth mode of living. Domazet, M. & Lubbock, R., (2025). Journal of Political Ecology
- Journal article: Postfiguring degrowth: How traditional popular culture challenges growth-oriented common senses. Muñoz-Sueiro, L. & Kallis, G., (2024) Journal of Political Ecology 31(1), 951–971.
- Book chapter: Real-existing degrowth and its challenges. By Tsagari et al. in Routledge Handbook of Degrowth 2025
- Magazine article: “A pig on the tracks. The village economy beyond commodification” Donatella Gasparro in Hinterlands, Magazine for Rural Realities

# Contact

## Course coordinators



**Lorenzo Lonardi** is a project coordinator at Research and Degrowth with a master's degree in Political Ecology, Degrowth, and Environmental Justice from ICTA-UAB. He is passionate about promoting degrowth ideas and creating accessible educational programs. As the coordinator of the "Introduction to Degrowth" online course and the "Deep Dives" online courses, Lorenzo focuses on organizing and delivering a program that supports learning and collaboration around sustainable and just alternatives to growth-focused economics.



**Federico Arcuri** is a project coordinator at Research and Degrowth. He is also an alumnus of the master's in Political Ecology at ICTA-UAB, with a thesis on a "Post-growth deal for Italy". He is interested in environmental conflicts, post-growth policy and geopolitics, especially with respect to EU-China relations. He co-organized the last two editions of the Degrowth Summer School, coordinating the bike caravan weeks and facilitating counter-cartography workshops. Co-organizer of the Beyond Growth conference Italia (April 2024), he is active in the Italian degrowth movement.

If you have questions about the "Deep Dives" Online Course feel free to contact Lorenzo or Federico:

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