



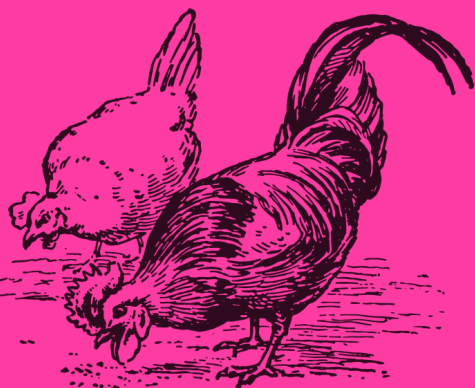
Research & Degrowth International

DEGROWTH RURAL FUTURES

Reclaiming the agrarian in the socio-ecological struggle



"Deep Dive" online course
by Donatella Gasparro



Second Edition Set/Oct
2026
Syllabus





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 many 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 30 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.



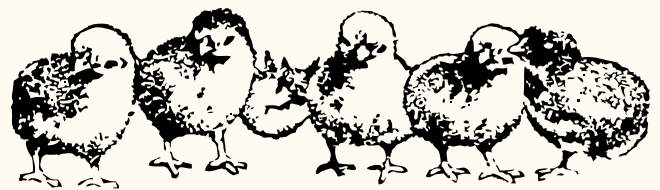
After successfully running the first edition last year, we are delighted to announce the second edition of Degrowth Rural Futures: Reclaiming the Agrarian in the Socio-Ecological Struggle, taught by Donatella Gasparro. The course consists of six 2.5-hour classes held **SELECTED Tuesday from September 22 to November 3rd from 17:00 to 19:30 (except for the first class, which will run from 16:30 to 19:30)**

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-off world relegation, we will draw on **critical agrarian studies, critical rural geography, political agroecology, 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.

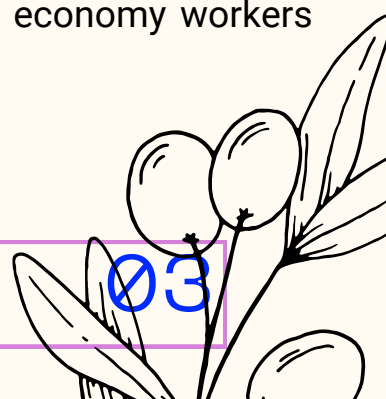


Requirements

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

Degrowth Rural Futures: Reclaiming the Agrarian in the Socio-Ecological Struggle, taught by Donatella Gasparro, **will run from 22 September to 3 November 2026**, with six 2.5-hour classes held on **selected Tuesdays**, from 5:00 pm to 7:30 pm (CET). After the first two consecutive sessions (22 and 29 September), there is a one-week break before 13 October, another one-week break before 27 October, and the final session takes place on 3 November. With this timeline students have more time to digest the readings.

Sep 22nd - Switching our gaze: looking at the countryside from the country's side

Sep 29th - Feeding the revolution: degrowth ecosocialist countrysides, beyond localisms

Oct 13th - Reproduction rewired: rethinking Northern agrarian questions from the degrowth ecofeminist standpoint

Oct 27th - Political Agroecology: emancipatory rural politics, commons and convivial tools for degrowth in the rural

Nov 3rd - Reinventing the wheel? Between recoding "tradition" and real-existing degrowth

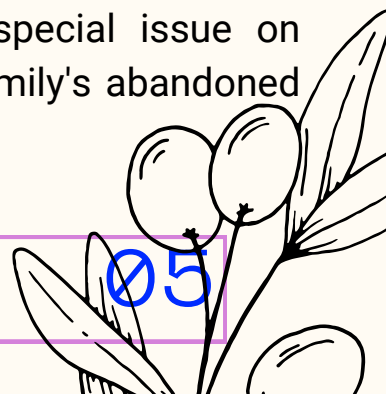
THE TEACHER

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

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, schools and lectures for the broader public.



Active in **spreading degrowth** in Italy, she co-founded the degrowth collective **Numega**. She serves on the scientific committee of the Londa School of Economics (not London), which rethinks heterodox economics from rural perspectives. She is also a member of the editorial collective of **Quaderni della Decrescita** (Degrowth Notebooks), for which she edited a special issue on degrowth and rurality. In her spare time, she is restoring her family's abandoned olive grove in Southern Italy. <https://linktr.ee/donatellagasparro>



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 - Sep 22nd, 2026 16:30-19:30 PM CET

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

Before class: round of introductions to get to know each other

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.

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:

- Book chapters: "Approaching the Rural" and "Exploiting the Rural" in *Rural* by Michael Woods. Routledge, 2012.
- Interview: From Capitalist Food Systems to Degrowth Agrarian Futures, Donatella Gasparro interviewed by Gisela Ruiseco, Sufficiency & Wellbeing magazine
- 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 article: Guerrero Lara, L., et al. (2023) Degrowth and agri-food systems: a research agenda for the critical social sciences. Sustainability Science

Session 2 - Sep 29th , 2026 17:00-19:30 CET

Feeding the revolution: degrowth ecosocialist countrysides, beyond localisms

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, Jun 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?

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*.
- Essay: Towards the Abolition of the Hinterlands. Heron, K., & Heffron, A. (2022).
- Journal article: Ecosocialism and critical agrarian studies. Saito, K. (2026). *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 1–23.
- Book chapter: The land question and postcapitalist countrysides. Nishat-Botero, Y., & Thompson, M. (2025). In Postcapitalist Countrysides.
- Journal article: Agrarian social movements: The absurdly difficult but not impossible agenda of defeating right-wing populism and exploring a socialist future. Borrás, S. M. (2020). *Journal of Agrarian Change*.

Reproduction rewired: rethinking Northern agrarian questions from the degrowth eco-feminist standpoint

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?

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.
- 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

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 it 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?

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

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 agrarian territorialisations 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?

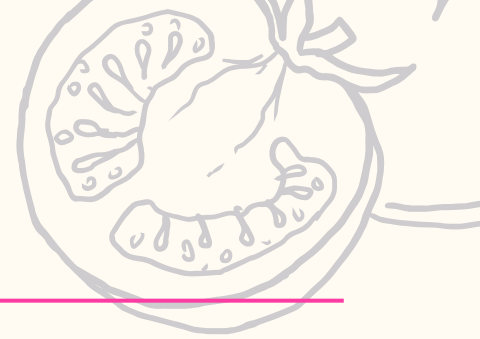
Mandatory readings:

- 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: Encountering degrowth. Gilbert, D., Gasparro, D., Kallis, et al. (2026). Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space.
- 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.
- 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:

✉ Email: project@degrowth.org; fede.arcuri@degrowth.org

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