

## Political Ecology and Degrowth

*“If we do not dare the impossible, we shall be faced with the unthinkable”*

The ecology of freedom, Murray Bookchin

Degrowth is the backbone of political ecology and political ecology is at the core of degrowth. Political Ecology was born, as a movement and at academic level, already by the 1960s but expanded mainly during the 1970s, through a holistic critique on growth, productivism and consumerism, in relation to the carrying capacity (natural limits) of the planet, as well as, in relation to the environmental crisis which had already begun to emerge. Matters such as pollution and water quality, nuclear energy, desertification and protection of biodiversity, chemical agriculture and the effects on human health, living conditions in the cities and overpopulation, began to enter public debate. The dynamic social movements of the 1960s - 1970s; the anti-war, the feminist, the human rights, the non-violent civil disobedience and the nature conservation movements were transformed and found common grounds through political activism on ecology, which incorporated much of their potential and dynamics.

### The politicization of ecology

At an academic level, Murray Bookchin already in 1962 released his book *«Our synthetic Environment»*, in which he made a first interrelation of environmental problems (pollution, urbanization) with the social and productive processes. During the same year a book which had a profound influence on the ecological movement was published, Rachel Carson's *«Silent Spring»*, who opposed the use of chemicals in (industrial) agriculture. In 1964 Murray Bookchin in his essay *“Ecology and revolutionary thought”*, makes a first attempt to link ecology with radical political theory, which took shape through important books of the ecological movement (Bookchin 1971, 1980, 1982, 1990a) and led to the development of the social ecology discipline (Bookchin 1992), the philosophical movement of dialectical naturalism (Bookchin 1990b), as well as, the proposal for libertarian communalism (Bookchin and Biehl 1998), a decentralized sociopolitical organization based on ecological and democratic principles.

Bookchin thoroughly analyses the hierarchical structures of society and the authoritarian exploitation of nature by humans, as well as, the exploitation of man by man. He makes a differentiation of political ecology from environmentalism and eco-Marxism, mainly because of his approach towards degrowth (although he never mentions the term), while proposing the reconstruction of sociopolitical structures at a local level and a critical analysis of socioeconomic factors which create ecological problems, in order to

effectively address them. He is critical towards technocracy, the doctrine of antagonism in unrestrained growth and over-consumption, as well as, towards the Darwinian concept of evolutionary progress, meaning the "rational" exploitation of humans upon the other species and nature. He preaching instead about complementarity and symbiosis of species, he is doubtful of the hierarchical institutions and he is seeking freedom and emancipation of the individual within a new ethical framework of communal self-management, in harmony with the natural environment.

Eric Wolf, in his article "*Ownership and political ecology*" (1972), is the first one to make use of the term Political Ecology, attempting to analyze the relation of power (authority) between political economy and nature, by describing how local rules of ownership and inheritance "mediate between the pressures emanating from the larger society and the exigencies of the local ecosystem" (Wolf 1972, p. 202). During the same year the Club of Rome publishes the controversial but influential "*The limits to growth*" (Meadows *et al.*, 1972) and the British magazine "Ecologist" (1972) the "*Blueprint for survival*", both recognizing that continuous economic growth, which is characteristic of the industrial (capitalist) way of life, is not sustainable on a planet with limited resources and that a viable society should not depend on continuous growth but on stability (zero growth), self-sufficiency and small-scale decentralization.

The following year yet another emblematic book on ecology was published, "*Small is beautiful: economics as if people mattered*" (Schumacher 1973). Small is beautiful, apart from becoming a catchword (slogan) of the ecological movement during the first years of its existence, it became the starting point of Ecological Economics and the search for less intensive economic processes, which will be in harmony with natural laws since we cannot be talking of unlimited growth on a finite planet (Georgescu-Roegen 1971), as well as, smaller in scale institutions, closer to the earth and humans.

On the same spirit, Ivan Illich (1973) stresses that the modern man refuses to imagine that growth and modernization means using less energy and not more, while Andre Gorz in his writings (1975, 1977, 1979, 1991, 2010) undertakes a thorough criticism on the industrial way of life, the deification of technology and capitalism, by stressing that (political) ecology is a science deeply subversive and anti-capitalist, while praising the importance of self-restraining our needs and rejecting an economy based on productivism and continuous growth. As he characteristically mentions the issue is not how to abstain more and more from consuming, but how consuming will become less and less (Gorz 1975).

All of the above mentioned theorists of political ecology fully expose the lack of any correlation between economic growth and social prosperity, while rejecting productivism, technocracy, bureaucratic and totalitarian regimes, massive

consumption, monocultures, the use of chemical pesticides and urbanization. In parallel, they propose a localized economy structured on community ties, they talk about decentralization, the use of traditional/mild/ convivial technologies, crop rotation and natural fertilizers, self-sufficiency, reducing the size of cities and many more degrowth characteristics.

### **What is Political Ecology?**

Joan Martinez-Alier (2002) defines Political Ecology as the study of conflicts over ecological distribution, such as control and access to natural resources. Political Ecology emerged as a social response to the depreciation of nature by political economy, and as a field of theoretical research and political action to address the complex environmental crisis, that is the destruction of conditions and prerequisites for the viability of the human civilization caused by the predominance of monetary economy and technology. In this context political ecology analyzes the history of nature's exploitation and explores the power structures and conflicts over natural resource distribution, contained in vested interests, institutions, knowledge and the imaginary that compose human societies. Political ecology is a field of emancipated thought, ethics and political practice, where power strategies are developed to deconstruct the unsustainable rationality of modern global markets and to mobilize social structures in order to build a sustainable future and an alternative environmental rationality (Leff 2012).

Political Ecology gives prominence to the need of making modern society more sustainable by confronting the problematic nature of many modern society features, such as the blind faith in technology and science, the dependence on economic growth, as well as, the leveling of traditional social and cultural institutions (M'Gonigle 1999). Political ecology, like degrowth, pairs up the imperatives of political autonomy as expressed by Castoriades (1974), eco-sufficiency and self-management at community level according to Bookchin, mutual aid (Kropotkin, 1902), the liberatory emancipation of Marcuze (1972, 1992), utopianism of Huxley (1962) and Callenbach (1975), while it composes a holistic and revisionary tool in order to comprehend and solve the contemporary environmental problems, as well as, to confront their social and structural causes.

Political Ecology is a deeply anti-capitalist political theory and practice, perhaps more penetrating than neo-Marxism and the imperatives of the Left, because it has by definition incorporated the principles of sustainable degrowth, while standing critical and detached from the imaginary of growth and economism. Under the light of an eco-centric and post-materialistic approach, in contrast to the anthropocentric and materialistic approach of the Left, Political Ecology is trying to give answers to questions such as what kind of growth do we want and how we wish to live, what to produce, why and how to produce it and how

much should we consume, always in relation to a natural resource economy and the endurance of the biosphere. To the contrary, the traditional Left has focused on distributional issues, the increase of productive forces and the state ownership of production means, unable to be detached from a well-established productivism acquired since the 19th century, according to which economic growth and production is not only desirable but it would be greatly expanded under a socialist regime.

For Castoriades, one of the forerunners of degrowth according to Serge Latouche, ecology is subversive because it calls into question and disputes the capitalist imaginary which dominates upon the planet. It denies complying with the main capitalist imaginary, according to which our destiny is to relentlessly increase production and consumption. It shows the devastating impact of capitalist logic upon the natural environment and the lives of human beings (Castoriades, 2010). For the Greek philosopher ecology is a deeply political issue, more so than scientific, while it constitutes the understanding that social life must take into direct account the environment in which it unfolds and functions. According to Castoriades, the idea that our only purpose in life is to produce and consume more and more is absurd and should be abandoned, like the capitalist imaginary of the pseudo-rational pseudo-sovereignty of unlimited growth (Castoriades, 1993).

### **The criticism of Political Ecology to the Left**

Several ecologists argue that Political Ecology is "neither left nor right, but a way forward", since they believe that capitalism and socialism are equally "anti-ecological", because they both accept the doctrine of perpetual (economic/ industrial) growth and productivism (Lipietz 1995, Blühdorn 2009). Although Political Ecology has a theoretical starting point at neo-marxism (eco-socialism), during its course has been differentiated as criticism on economism and productivism intensified, especially by Bookchin, Castoriades and Gorz. Main points of criticism and differentiation from Marxism are based on the fact that the Left and socialism are viewing the human being, social classes and productive forces as the starting point, while Political Ecology focuses on the planet and ecosystems, energy flows, natural resources and the flow of materials.

As opposed to the boundless anthropocentric idea of growth and progress that is rooted in the Age of Enlightenment, that is the rational domination of humans upon nature, the Eco-centric approach places up-front the idea that the non-human world is not simply a storage of resources of utilitarian value, but it has a moral and intrinsic value (Eckersley 1992). An important role towards the documentation of the Eco-centric approach, which permeated the ecological movement, was introduced by Gaia theory (Lovelock 1979), that presents the planet as a self-managed complex system, as an aggregated

organism, self-adjusting in order to provide suitable living conditions to the species she is hosting. Likewise, Political Ecology examines societies and the hierarchical relations of exploitation between people and nature in a holistic manner, under the scope of the planetary system and not detached from it.

However, the essential argument of Political Ecology is focused upon the expectations of continuous economic growth and economism. As aptly stated by Gorz (1975) capitalism that has growth as an incentive has died, while socialism driven by a growth model so much resembling that of capitalism, is nothing but a perverted reflection of the past and not the future. He is also among the first ones to use the term "degrowth" (Gorz 1977). In the same state of mind, Ivan Illich (1978) reproduces the saying of Jose Antonio Viera Gallo that "*socialism can only arrive on a bicycle*", meaning to prove that the environmental problems can only be solved through a holistic criticism on growth, industrial technology and productivism, in this particular case reflecting the energy crisis of the 1970s.

Bookchin characterizes Marxism as a more sophisticated ideology of advanced capitalism, as being "married" to the archaic myths of technological progress and economic determinism (Bookchin 1980). The theorist of social ecology believed that unlimited growth has turned the clock of evolution backwards, since it has transformed fertile ground into sand, forests into lunar landscapes, rivers, lakes and oceans into sewers. As far as Bookchin is concerned, growth can only be restricted if the authoritarian and hierarchical institutions imposing the competition of financial markets and consumption society change radically, and only if the roots of unlimited growth are addressed: accumulation of profit, industrial onslaught and the matching of progress with corporate speculation (Bookchin 1989).

In a similar wavelength, Castoriades (1993) argued that Marx fully participates in the capitalist imaginary, because according to him and the dominant ideology of his time, everything depends upon the growth of the productive forces. No one can find in Marx any criticism of the capitalist technique, neither in terms of production methods nor as to the type and nature of the generated products. Castoriadis proposes leaving behind the dominant imaginary of growth, the doctrine of "I consume therefore I exist", by arguing that we should desire a society in which economic values will have ceased to occupy a central (or even unique) role, in which economy would have taken its rightful position, namely to become a mere instrument of human social life and not the ultimate purpose, therefore, we should give up this insane race towards an ever-increasing consumption. According to the Greek philosopher, this is not merely necessary to avoid the irrevocable destruction of earth's environment but it is rather necessary in order to get out of the mental and moral impoverishment of modern human societies (Castoriades 2007).

Further points of fundamental difference between Political Ecology and Marxism, relating to the imperatives of degrowth, are the use of technology and technocratism, political and economic decision-making, as well as, the way in which human nature and needs are perceived. The deification of technology throughout the social classes, from socialism to capitalism, the technological, administrative and productive centralization, as well as, the transformation of human desires into needs, can only find Political Ecology critically opposed.

Quite aptly Georgopoulos (2006) points out the ideological "backbone" of political ecology and green political discourse which is based on non-violence, limits on growth, reduction of production and consumption, sustainable economy, reduction of working hours and increase of free time, decentralization, participatory (direct) democracy and autonomous communities. Criticism upon consumerism (which distinguishes the ecological movement as a political one) concentrates on promoting a better quality of life with fewer goods, based on self-sufficiency and voluntary simplicity, on the "economy of enough" instead of the "economy of more". Ecology seeks a radical redefinition of needs (with what and with how much are we happy?), taking into consideration the cost of our consumption habits, focusing on what, how and where it is produced and who is planning the production, instead of just creating new working positions by all costs. Ecology is proposing as an antidote a decentralized, democratic society that functions by taking decisions on, as much as possible, small scale institutions, through autonomous and self-governed communities (Georgopoulos, 2006). Therefore, the key issues of degrowth are answered by Political Ecology, and contribute towards the critical differentiation of Political Ecology from the Left.

### **The Green movement and Environmentalism**

It is important at this point to distinguish Political Ecology from Environmentalism, by attempting a critique on the concept of "sustainable development", as well as, on the proposal for a Green New Deal (Lipietz 2011) coming from the mainstream Green movement, as expressed by modern Green parties in Europe and worldwide. As Bookchin wrote (1990a) talking about "limiting growth" in a capitalist market economy is like talking about limiting war in a warrior society. Capitalism cannot be persuaded to limit growth and accumulation of capital, the same way a man cannot be persuaded not to breathe. All efforts of making capitalism 'greener' in order to become more ecological are doomed from the very nature of capitalism as a system of endless growth.

The dynamic ecological movement of the 1970s which was ingrained with the above mentioned ideas, acquired a unified political dimension with the emergence of the Green political movement in the early 1980s, first in Germany and Europe and then around the rest of the world. This new "anti-

party" (Kelly 2001) which initially functioned more like an alliance of social movements rather than a traditional parliamentary party, took its decisions locally, in a direct-democratic manner, while its interventions were a sweeping ecological critique on many aspects of the political dialogue, from urban planning, energy use and transportation, to nuclear disarmament and the strengthening of democracy (Tokar 2008).

The prevalence of the neo-liberal capitalist model in the 1980s, through a relentless war for continuous growth and overconsumption at the expense of the environment and societies (characteristic examples the accidents at Bhopal and Chernobyl, dioxins, the ozone hole, extensive deforestation and soil pollution) confirmed the initial critique of the theoretical ecologists. However, in combination to the expansion of middle-class consumer society and the increased influence of (non-partizan) environmental organizations (i.e.: Greenpeace, WWF), a very large part of the Green movement shifted towards environmentalism. Already by the early 1980s, initially within the German Green Party and later in other countries, two dominant trends were carved out: the Foundis (deriving from the radical and eco-socialist imperatives of ecology which focused on local political interventions and direct democracy) and the Realos (who supported more moderate, realistic policies and focused on parliamentary representation). The main point of disagreement between the two trends was parliamentary representation at national level, particularly the issue of governmental cooperation with other parties, for example the Social Democrats (Wall 2010). However, throughout the 1980s and the early 1990s critique against industrial development, on environmentally damaging and socially unjust growth of the capitalist economy and opposition to the consumer society, were the common denominators that held the two trends together at a political level (Blühdorn 2009).

Due to the increased public awareness on environmental problems and in fear of profit and power loss, many world leaders and businesses began also to show an inclination towards environmentalism. The concept of "sustainable development" was introduced in the Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987) and then became mainstream at the 1992 Rio World Summit. It was catalytic by all means as it was seen as a conquest of the environmental movement, and was initially embraced by the Left and supporters of state-controlled development. "Sustainable development" argues that economic growth can be ecologically viable and became essentially a mixture of capitalism and environmentalism. It became an effort to maintain economic growth rather than replace it by sustainability, an effort to manage the odious effects of continuous growth, rather than to eliminate them along with their causes. For that reason the harmonization of the environment with market economy and trade rules was pursued, for example through emissions trading schemes and offsetting the right to pollute. In this way consumer lifestyle and environmental degradation became

compatible so long as the environmental impacts are managed towards efficiency and natural resources are priced in monetary value.

Characteristic examples of this failure are the “paper commitments” and the travelling circus that followed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on climate change. Twenty years after the Rio Summit and 15 years after the Kyoto Summit there has been no substantial change. Instead we follow a “business as usual” scenario regarding the domination of profit culture and economic growth upon the environment and social prosperity, in the form of a “green-washing” of corporate responsibilities on behalf of the economic elites. It is of no coincidence that the greatest achievement of sustainable development is the privatization- internalization of the environmental crisis, by transferring responsibility to the consumer-citizen who must focus on his/her own behavior rather than the behavior of multinational corporations and financial lobbies which are behind the problems of continuous growth and environmental destruction (see for example the annual “Earth Hour”).

As such, during the 1990s and until 2005 the Green movement was transformed into a parliamentary instrument of policy making in several Western European countries, with more predominant the German Green Party, which resulted in losing its radical movement character, but winning a place in the mainstream political scene, even in coalition governments. There have been several achievements especially regarding nuclear energy issues, renewable energy, transport and human rights. There was, however, a complete absorption of the sustainable development (growth) imaginary of globalized economy and the techno-managerial paradigm of “ecological modernization” that ultimately helped the environmental issues to be incorporated in political programs of other parties as well (Blühdorn 2009).

From 2005 onwards there has been a resurgence of the political dialogue and fermentation within the Greens on the issue of post development- degrowth. The triggering events were the discussions on the reconstruction of the political program of the German Greens, towards a radical realism of political ecology in 2006 (Blühdorn 2009), and the proposal for a Green New Deal in order to address the credit crisis, climate change and high oil prices in England (NEF 2008) that was further promoted as a policy proposal by the European Green Party (GEF 2009).

The Green New Deal is basically a green Keynesian recovery plan of targeted public and private investments in social and environmental sectors, towards the ecological transformation of the economy, the promotion of green technologies and the creation of green jobs. The Green New Deal as a means of temporary social relief, an aspirin against the headache of capitalism, may sound attractive in a period of severe financial crisis like the one we are facing. Indeed, a well-known degrowth researcher of ecological economics believes



that a short-term green Keynesian recovery plan to curb unemployment may be desirable towards the exit from the crisis and is considered consistent with the degrowth imperatives, that is contributing to a smooth transition towards sustainable degrowth, as long as it does not evolve into a doctrine of continuous "green" economic growth (Martínez Alier 2009). Nevertheless, Green New Deal seems to be a financial proposal with a focus on economic growth (although with limits and ecological direction) within a market economy, which simply perpetuates the inherent problems of capitalism (accumulation of profit, inequalities, environmental destruction), on a planet with finite natural resources.

## **Greens and Degrowth**

At the same time, around 2005, there was a more substantial and meaningful political dialogue among the Green parties inspired by the imperatives of degrowth, as a result of the engagement of their members with the alter-globalization, environmental justice and transition movements. In 2007, Yves Cochet, a French Green MEP realized a personal campaign for degrowth (Baykan 2007), in April 2009 the European Green Party (EGP) in collaboration with the Club of Rome organized a conference in the European Parliament in Brussels on socially sustainable degrowth (Club of Rome 2009), while within the next two years Professors Tim Jackson and Serge Latouche were also hosted by the Green Group in the European Parliament. Even Daniel Cohn Bendit (2010) has acknowledged the need for selective degrowth of specific productive sectors in combination with green and social investment programs, such as the Green New Deal, for the green transformation of the economy. Furthermore, the European Green Foundation has recently dedicated a volume of its journal on the dilemma growth vs. degrowth (GEF 2012), while the European Federation of Green Youth have realized the importance of the degrowth proposal from the beginning of the crisis (FYEG 2010), and is contributing positively to the public debate. Nevertheless, the term degrowth is not mentioned in the EGP programme and even makes many Green politicians feel uncomfortable.

In Greece since 2009, the Green Ecologists hosted degrowth events with Professors Giorgos Kallis and Serge Latouche, while the Green Institute in cooperation with the European Green Foundation held a degrowth debate in 2013 with Professor Mauro Bonaiuti among other speakers. However, although criticism on ecocide growth and the unsustainable development model that Greece follows since the 1960s is highly visible in their program, degrowth is not mentioned, not even as a term. Rather they persist on the paradigm and the narrative of "sustainable development" and "sustainable prosperity", while providing vague proposals within the context of the Green New Deal ("green" transformation of the economy, efficiency of production with simultaneous rationalization of consumption patterns and creation of green jobs). Degrowth, as a concept, has been limited to internal debates and has been mainly used as

a catchword for intra-party opposition, rather than a substantial shift in policy narrative.

Contrary to the alternative movements, from which the Greens originally emerged and came into existence, the modern Greens in Greece and in Europe, as well as their supporters, do not wish to liberate from the well-established established socio-political norms and growth imaginary, to live an alternative lifestyle and pursue a differentiated organization of the society and economy. They have dissociated themselves from the movements, with the exception of a very small minority, and wish to participate in the predominant middle-class consumption culture, just like a great part of the Left.

### **In Greece during the crisis**

The crisis is no longer simply a credit one and financial. It is structural, environmental, and social; it is a crisis of values, morals, politics, culture and aesthetics. The recent credit/debt crisis imposed dramatic solutions and rendered the texts of the first political ecology theorists to resemble self-fulfilling prophecies. While the global GDP has quadrupled since the 1970s, social and economic inequalities are greater than ever, environmental problems have swelled up dramatically despite all proclamations about sustainable development, while capitalism continues to rampage and produce structural crises which result into real human casualties, not mere numbers. Economy and the financial system continue to produce debt and to perpetuate the worship of money, aiming to drive us spend more than we have or need and to exist simply for consuming (Graeber 2011). In Greece unemployment and poverty have mowed down the population, reaching unprecedented levels, while the environment in the mercy of the fiscal crisis and the austerity memorandum, has been sacrificed on the altar of privatization and development with "fast-track" procedures. Even the concepts of "sustainable development" and "green economy" have been tactically removed from the vocabulary of politicians, apart from very few exceptions.

Already since 2010 and as a response to the economic, social and environmental crisis and the neo-liberal shock doctrine (Klein 2007) being tested in Greece, all around the Greek territory hundreds of movements and citizens' initiatives have been sprouting up like mushrooms, aiming at reclaiming life, common goods, free and creative time, as well as, the productive processes. These movements offer valuable inspiration and optimism, while demonstrating clearly that another world already exists and is not just feasible (Iliosporoi, 2013). Beyond the dictatorship of capitalism, private banks and neo-liberal markets, local communities and affinity groups are taking matters into their own hands and get self-organized within the framework of an economy that does not depend upon money and profit. They redefine their needs, reduce consumption, exchange and share, self-manage

their subsistence and energy needs, localize production and are becoming more self-sufficient and autonomous. They learn how to be better off by consuming and owning less, working less and having more free time for a simpler and more enjoyable life, emphasizing on interpersonal relations and civic participation.

In Modern Greece what we need is a catholic “change of narrative”, a change of the collective imaginary and a paradigm shift, and now it is a historic opportunity to achieve this, by learning from our mistakes which led us to the current crisis. We need to develop a collective outlook beyond the crisis by exploiting the opportunities arising from it, in order to achieve radical changes in economy and the society. An alteration of the collective imaginary regarding growth and consumption is necessary in order to avoid further degradation of social prosperity and the depletion of natural resources. We have to overcome the obsession with continued economic growth (GDP) and to focus on everything that substantially improves living conditions and reduces inequalities, i.e: to have a satisfactory job but work less hours in order to have enough free time and spend quality time with our beloved ones within a friendly and sustainable environment. We must invest upon a cultural and institutional decolonization from economism and the religion of growth, to invest in nature and the alteration of our consciousness, to take matters into our own hands.

### **Revitalization of Political Ecology through degrowth**

The degrowth movement and the hundreds of initiatives stemming from below, can give new perspective to the Ecological and the Green movement towards a coordinated institutional and extra-institutional intervention in the political process of the country. In particular for Green parties in Greece and Europe it is an opportunity for a political restart, within and along the movements, not above them, an opportunity to rediscover their lost ecological and political direction and become detoxified from the fetishism of (sustainable) growth. The experience of the last 20 years has proven that "sustainable development" cannot be ecologically sustainable, since it continues to deplete resources and has neither improved prosperity nor quality of life, nor has contributed to isonomy and equality. Degrowth, on the other hand, as an ensemble of ideas, practical solutions and policy proposals, is a path towards social justice, prosperity and sustainability which has detached the meaning of life and freedom from the notions of consumerism and rampant materialism.

Political Ecology, just like Degrowth, is a vehicle for the radical transformation of society and the economy. This does not simply mean the greening of industry and the economy, green technologies and green jobs, but rather the radical transformation of production and consumption patterns, the radical reform of democratic institutions and social structures, the elimination of social

inequalities and the safeguarding of rights, individual freedoms and inter-generational justice. It means to achieve progress without growth, to focus on qualitative indicators of prosperity and not on factitious growth rates, while at the same time pursuing a deep and wide application of democracy in our societies. It means to strive for variety and to respect diversity, to apply solidarity and cooperation in order to deconstruct the structural immorality of neo-liberal capitalism, individualism and competitiveness and the dominating relations they impose, so that we can find again the path to harmony with our natural world and ourselves.

Political ecology by definition can only function critically and detached from neo-liberal capitalism, "free markets" and "free trade", the unequal distribution of resources and the abuse of rights and freedoms. It can only be opposed to violence, war, poverty, racism and nationalism. Political Ecology is a daily revolution, the creation of another world here and now, a realistic utopia based on the principles of sustainable degrowth that places up-front concepts such as cooperation, solidarity, need reconstruction, symbiosis, offering and sharing. It is the creation of a new anthropological type (Kolempas and Billas, 2012) who will again give importance to small, inherent human values such as joy, vision, dignity, quality and meaning of life. That is, a redefinition of *well-being*.

Localization of production and consumption; cooperative economy; mutual aid, autonomy and self-sufficiency; direct democracy; multiculturalism and respect for diversity; the protection of individual rights and freedoms; conservation and preservation of natural resources; the protection and safeguarding of public goods (eg water, coasts, forests); decentralization; agro-ecology; non-dependence on nuclear energy, oil and mineral resources; the use of cycling and the depreciation of private cars; energy autonomy based on renewable sources both at home and community levels; self-management of health and alternative therapies; opposition to mining and large infrastructure projects, (i.e: nuclear power plants, waste incineration plants, dams, highways); reuse, recycling and local-decentralized waste management; minimization of the production and consumption of meat; protection of the rights of animals and those of Mother Earth; these are ecological values and proposals which distinguish Political Ecology from the mainstream environmentalism that many modern parties have adopted.

The political proposals of degrowth have a lot in common with Political Ecology and at the same time they give to it a new impetus by bringing Political Ecology in the limelight again, as a realistic yet revolutionary alternative for exiting the multifaceted crisis, in response to the TINA (There Is No Alternative) austerity doctrine, which the neo-liberal ideology is spreading. Proposals such as: less working hours but work for everyone, guaranteed minimum income, local currencies and local non-profit micro-finance institutions, small self-managed cooperatives and banks, barter exchange systems, taxation on advertising and

ad restrictions from public spaces, transformation of road infrastructure into cycling, walking and open spaces, regulatory and tax incentives to discourage over-consumption of disposable products and under-consumption of multipurpose products, re-distributional and ecological taxation, de-commercialization of politics and strengthening of the active and direct involvement of citizens in decision-making (International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity, 2010), might seem radical to some but are more than feasible for many as they are widely applied all over the world.

At a practical level, the movement of degrowth by taking the torch forward and giving new impetus to the ecological movement, was expressed radically through the development of many bottom up initiatives in order to create a different world on the spot. Initiatives which are offering everyday alternatives against the growth imaginary, which go beyond the crisis and the market economy: Eco-communities and eco-villages, reclaiming of agricultural land, occupation of inhabited buildings, co-housing, producer-consumer cooperatives, communal self-managed farms and orchards, permaculture and organic biodynamic cultivation, seed banks and seed exchanges, labor collectives, ethical banks, self-managed social centers, local exchange networks of products and services without money, time banks, alternative educational and cultural structures, public assemblies and participatory budgets at community level, are tested proposals which compose a multiform and diverse puzzle of alternatives in response to the multiple crises we are experiencing.

All of the above constitute everyday cracks upon the imaginary of capitalism (Holloway 2010) which we must multiply if we wish to change the world without taking Power (Holloway 2002), according to the imperatives of degrowth and ecology. We must think about bottom up democracy, collectively, like in the struggles against the privatization of water or against gold mining, or simply as a daily struggle in order to live with dignity. The world is full of these cracks, as well as, full of important challenges ahead such as climate change, reduction of biodiversity, nuclear pollution and the depletion of natural resources.

With Degrowth and Political Ecology as guides we can overcome the crisis, which is a result of unsustainable growth that signals the failure of "economism" (Kallis *et al.* 2009) and to seek a radical transformation at the individual and collective levels in order to reduce the pressures upon human societies and ecosystems. We have to overcome the imaginary of growth, passing from the macro-economics of markets and surplus trading to the solidarity- cooperative economy of natural resources, from the debt crisis and the neo-feudal memorandums, to a self-organized, egalitarian society, a re-distributional, decentralized economy, and self-managed local structures, aiming to self-sufficiency, well-being, ecological balance and freedom. As it has

been nicely said, degrowth and ecology does not mean a return to the past and primitivism, but a return to a utopian future which we envision and anticipate, a society of equality, isonomy, ecological wisdom and sharing.

Degrowth and Political Ecology are not a panacea, nor they are an easy and quick procedure. Yet, this is a different, creative way to change our lives for the better, to experience the reasons why one deserves to live freely and hope for a better future with dignity. We have a historic opportunity to plant the seeds so that the utopia of today will become the reality of tomorrow.

## REFERENCES

- Baykan, B.G. (2007), From limits to growth to degrowth within French Green politics, *Environmental Politics*, 16:3, 513-517.
- Blühdorn, I. (2009), Reinventing Green politics: on the strategic repositioning of the German Green party, *German Politics*, Vol. 18, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 36-54.
- Bookchin, M. (1962). *Our synthetic environment*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Bookchin, M. (1964), *Ecology and revolutionary thought*, Comment (republished in the British monthly *Anarchy* in 1965).
- Bookchin, M. (1971), *Post scarcity anarchism*, Berkeley: Ramparts Press.
- Bookchin, M. (1980). *Toward an Ecological Society*.
- Bookchin, M. (1982), *The ecology of freedom. The emergence and dissolution of hierarchy*, Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books.
- Bookchin, M. (1985), *Radicalization of nature*, Athens: Eleftheros Typos.
- Bookchin, M. (1989), Death of a small planet, *The progressive*, August 1989, pp 19-23.
- Bookchin, M. (1990a), *Remaking Society*, Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books.
- Bookchin, M. (1990b), *The philosophy of social ecology. Essays on dialectical naturalism*, Montreal/New York: Black Rose Books.
- Bookchin, M. (1992), *What is social ecology*, Athens: Vivliopelagos.
- Bookchin, M. and Biehl J. (1998), *The Politics of Social Ecology: Libertarian Municipalism*, Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Callenbach, E. (1975), *Ecotopia*. New York: Banyan Tree Books

- Carson R. (1962), *Silent Spring*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin
- Castoriadis K. (1974), *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Athens: Kedros.
- Castoriadis K. (1993), The global imbalance and the revolutionary power of ecology, *Nature and Society* (September-December).
- Castoriadis, C. (2007), *The Rise of insignificance*, Athens: Ypsilon.
- Castoriadis K. (2010), *Society Adrift: Interviews and Discussions 1974-1997*, Athens: Eurasia.
- Club of Rome (2009), *Socially Sustainable Economic Degrowth*, Editors: Leida Rijnhout and Thomas Schauer, Proceedings of a workshop in the European Parliament on April 16, 2009, upon invitation by The Greens / European Free Alliance: <http://goo.gl/DWMnb>
- Cohn Bendit, D. (2010), *What can we do?*, Athens: Kedros.
- Ecologist (1972), *A Blueprint for Survival*, Penguin Books.
- Eckersley P. (1992), *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Toward an Ecocentric Approach*, Albany: State University of New York Press.
- FYEG - Federation of Young European Greens (2010), *Beyond a Green New Deal - Transforming the System*, political statement produced by the Green Economy Seminar held in Thessaloniki (Greece) from the 24th to the 29th of November 2010, <http://goo.gl/mhRPD>
- GEF - Green European Foundation (2009), *A Green New Deal for Europe: towards green modernization in the face of crisis*, A report by the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy commissioned by GREENS/ EFA in the European Parliament, GEF Brussels: <http://goo.gl/bHmjz>
- GEF - Green European Foundation (2012), *Beyond growth- degrowth*, Green European Journal Volume 3, September 2012, <http://goo.gl/l4DAO>
- Georgescu-Roegen, N. (1971), *The entropy law and the economic process*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Georgopoulos, A. (2006), *Ecology and autonomy, can the green movement establish a distinct and realistic political alternative?*, in Collective: "Political ecology in Greece", Evonymos Ecological Library, Athens, pp. 24-48.
- Gorz, A. (1975), *Ecology As Politics*, Paris: Galilée.
- Gorz, A. (1977), *Écologie et liberté*, Paris: Galilée.
- Gorz, A. (1979), The social ideology of automobiles, *Ecologica*, Vol. 1, May-August 1979: pp. 22-25, 56. Available at: <http://goo.gl/lweIO>
- Gorz, A. (1991), *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, Paris: Galilée.

- Gorz, A. (2010), *Ecologica*, London and New York: Seagull Books.
- Graeber, D. (2011), *Debt the first 5000 years*, Brooklyn- New York: Melville House.
- Huxley, A. (1962), *Island*, London: Harper and Brothers, <http://goo.gl/aT2YK>
- Holloway, J. (2010), *Crack Capitalism*, New York: Pluto Press, <http://goo.gl/VjPOI>
- Holloway, J. (2002), *Change the World Without Taking Power: The Meaning of Revolution Today*, New York: Pluto Press.
- Illich, I. (1973), *Tools for conviviality*, New York: Harper & Row.
- Illich, I. (1978), *Toward a History of Needs*, New York: Pantheon.
- Iliosporoi (2013), List of social resistance movements: <http://goo.gl/i8QsP> and Documentary "Another World": <http://youtu.be/fX8cEfV8I4U>
- International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity (2010), *Degrowth declaration*, 26-29 March 2010, Barcelona: <http://goo.gl/q4EfQ>
- Kallis, G., Martinez- Alier, J., Norgaard, R. B., (2009), Paper assets, real debts: An ecological-economic exploration of the global economic crisis, *Critical perspectives on international Business*, Vol. 5 No. 1/2, 2009.
- Kelly P. (2001), *Nonviolence Speaks to Power*, Center for Global Nonviolence Planning Project, Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawaii, Honolulu.
- Klein, N. (2007), *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Knopf Canada.
- Kolempas C, Mpillas G. (2012), *The anthropological type of degrowth - localization*, Athens: SynEditions.
- Kropotkin, P. (1902), *Mutual aid: a factor of evolution*, Boston: Extending Horizons Books.
- Leff E. (2012), *Political Ecology - A Latin American Perspective*, in Culture, Civilization and Human Society, [Eds. UNESCO-EOLSS Joint Committee], in Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS), Eolss Publishers, Oxford, UK.
- Lipietz, A. (1995), *Green hopes: The future of political ecology*, Oxford: Polity Press.
- Lipietz, A. (2011), *Fears and Hopes: The Crisis of the Liberal-productivist Model and its Green Alternative*, διαθέσιμο στο: <http://goo.gl/oP4EV>
- Lovelock, J. (1979), *Gaia. A new look at life on Earth*, Oxford: Oxford University



Press.

Marcuse, H. (1972), *Counterrevolution and revolt*, Boston: Bacon Press, <http://goo.gl/yPd6m>

Marcuse, H. (1992), *Ecology and the critique of modern society*, Capitalism, nature, socialism, Vol. 3, No. 3, <http://goo.gl/Agvpj>

Martínez Alier, J. (2002), *The environmentalism of the poor*, Paper prepared for the conference on: The Political Economy of Sustainable Development: Environmental Conflict, Participation and Movements, United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), <http://goo.gl/jXSFO>

Martínez Alier, J. (2009), *Herman Daly Festschrift: Socially Sustainable Economic Degrowth*, The Encyclopedia of Earth, October 9, 2009, <http://goo.gl/lKSVx>

Meadows, D.H., D.L. Meadows, J. Randers & W.W. Behrens III (1972), *The limits to growth*, New York: Universe Books.

M'Gonigle, R.M. (1999), Ecological economics and political ecology: towards a necessary synthesis, *Ecological Economics* 28 (1999) 11-26.

NEF - New Economics Foundation (2008), *A Green New Deal*, London, <http://goo.gl/tefC1>

Tokar, B. (2008), On Bookchin's social ecology and its contributions to social movements, *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, vol 19, number 1 (March).

Wall, D. (2010), *The No-Nonsense Guide to Green Politics*, New Internationalist Publications, Limited.

Wolf, E. (1972), *Ownership and political ecology*, *Anthropological quarterly* 45(3):201-205

World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, <http://goo.gl/Y7seZ>