



Building alliances.  
Political Ecology, Democracy,  
& Complexity.

# Degrowth, Democracy and the Mafia. How do we face the issue?

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## OUTLINE





“We are part of a research group at the University of Catania – Department of Architecture, in regional and urban planning, that has been involved in **Participatory Action Research** (PAR) projects (Whyte 1989; Saija and Gravagno 2009; Saija 2014) since 1995, with a specific interest in the intertwined connection between **social and ecological systems** (Gunderson and Holling 2001; Pizziolo and Micarelli 2003); we are animated by nonviolent principles of Gandhian inspiration (Sanfilippo 2005; Dolci 1964).”



# Participatory Action Research

Focus on

## Social-ecological Systems





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# Participatory Action Research

# PAR



**BUILDING RECIPROCAL PARTNERSHIPS AMONGST  
SCHOLARS, NON-GOVERNMENT AND GOVERNMENTAL  
INSTITUTION. DOING RESEARCH TOGETHER; LEARNING  
BY DOING; IMPROVING REALITY WHILE LEARNING  
(Saija Forthcoming)**



The need for detoxifying western societies from the grievous effects produced by the myths of growth has been widely debated in various streams of thoughts (see the recommended literature for the conference). In order to walk toward this desirable destination, the practical paths may be manifold. At the same time, the discussion about 'how do we get there' (in other words 'how do we pursue degrowth') has to consider the way societies are organized and the form of governance societies choose. That is to say that the way toward degrowth is not a rigid one. **As a matter of fact, each community needs to find its way starting from its identity and peculiarities.** In a global overlook and perspective, we need to consider the differences amongst the various 'northern' and 'southern' communities, using a very general and broad classification. Specifically, in this paper we refer to those 'southern' communities within the 'western' civilization.

**Finding our way in a “south”  
of a “northern economy”  
within “western” civilization**

**Western societies are based on democracy** as the only organizational structure, which is widely recognized as legitimate. Notwithstanding, western societies struggle with several issues connected with the limits and difficulties of implementing democracy. Using Putnam et al. (1994) words, the discussion becomes **'how to make democracy work'**, as a necessary premise when asking **'how to make degrowth possible'**. Bobbio (1984) has discussed various aspects related with the issue of keeping the promises of democracy; he identifies several reasons that may influence the way democracy is inflected. Amongst them, there are: equity in distribution and allocation of resources; the way knowledge and information are produced and shared; **transparency within relations of power.**



**Democracy** ← → **Degrowth**

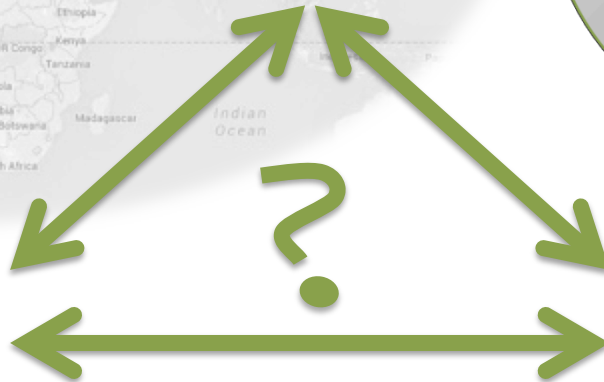


While the first aspects are widely debated within current degrowth discourses, **we want to light a candle on the third one, i.e. on all those forms of obscure relations of power which nurture, for example, controversial financial lobbies, having an apex in criminal organizations.** Obscure relations of power have strongly influenced regions of southern Europe and southern Italy (Santino 2007); in these contexts, criminal organizations such as Mafia, 'Ndrangheta, Camorra, Sacra Corona Unita, **have driven the political and economic agenda, influencing not only the local scale, but also a more globalized scale,** as described for example by Saviano in Gomorra (2006).

# Obscure relations of power (a.k.a. the Mafia)

Democracy

Degrowth



- **Organized crime groups** aimed at **gaining power** (political and socio-economic power) through various forms of **illegal control over local communities**
- Although nowadays the Mafia invests in **global finance**, it is a **territorial phenomenon**, i.e. it needs to control specific local communities
- For these reasons, the Mafia is strictly related to the causes of *struggles* (what mainstream calls *underdevelopment*) in the “**western northern-south**”

## Obscure relations of power (a.k.a. the Mafia)



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## Obscure relations of power (a.k.a. the Mafia)

For example....



Father Ciotti, the founder of the **anti-mafia association** “Libera” that is aimed at **community-based management of seized mafia-owned lands**, has been recently **threatened** by the boss Totò Riina, who is currently in jail.

# Mafia

The macro-system

≠

# Mafia-genic

Social ecological relationships  
that allow the Mafia to exist



# Mafia

The macro-system



Prosecuted by  
**MAGISTRATES**

(picture: Dr. Falcone and  
Dr. Borsellino, killed by  
the Mafia in 1992)



# Mafia-genic

Social ecological relationships  
that allow the Mafia to exist



Contrasted by  
anti-mafia movements

**COLLECTIVE  
MOVEMENTS**

(such as Libera...)

# Building an alliance between De-growth movements and the anti-mafia movements



Prosecuted by  
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(picture: Dr. Falcone and  
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Contrasted by  
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**COLLECTIVE  
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(such as Libera...)



**How do obscure relations of power impact western societies in maintaining the promises of democracy?**

**How do they threaten the efforts of implementing degrowth practices?**

**What do degrowth processes need to consider, in order to deeply change societies through a community-based approach in contexts where obscure relations of power affect functioning democracy?**

*Specifically we focus on the Mafia in its peculiar forms that shape social relations in Sicily, looking at the effects that organized crime produces in contexts where it operates. We highlight what risks and problems need to be considered in order to practically start degrowth practices struggling with the Mafia.*

2014

**DOMENICA 26 GENNAIO**

al CAMPO SAN TEODORO LIBERATO

via del Giaggiolo 5, Librino

**#1. San Teodoro.**  
Community gardens in an  
occupied rugby field.

**#2. Terre Forti.**  
Community of itinerant  
*Rural-Keeper*s.

Two experiences that follow  
different paths with some  
contact points.

**MERCATO BIOLOGICO****“TERRE FORTI”****DEI PRODUTTORI LOCALI**

con ortaggi, frutta, vino e pane

- dalle ore 09.30 **MERCATO TERRE FORTI**  
 ore 12.00 **“Buen Vivir. Per una nuova democrazia della Terra.”**  
 con Giuseppe De Marzo (responsabile nazionale campagna Misericordia Ladra)  
 ore 13.00 **PRANZO SOCIALE con prodotti biologici locali**  
 ore 15.00 **Lab. di riciclo creativo per bambini**  
 ore 15.30 **Lab. e spaccio di Pasta Madre**  
 ore 16.00 **Lab. realizzazione cestini in vimini**  
 ore 16.30 **Lab. di saponi naturali**  
 ore 17.00 **spettacolo di marionette CANTI E CUNTI DI SICILIA**  
 a cura di Salvatore Ragusa  
 ore 18.00 **spettacolo “Le tentazioni di una maschera”**  
 a cura di Lomax Teatro  
 ore 19.00 **APERITIVO MUSICALE jam session**

Terre Forti nasce dal lavoro di rete fra produttori e consumatori con l'obiettivo di incentivare l'economia di relazione a discapito dell'economia di mercato dominante, perché consente di stabilire forme di solidarietà tra chi è accomunato da obiettivi comuni, quali la sostenibilità ambientale, la salute, la dignità del lavoro e la voglia di rilanciare l'agricoltura biologica su larga scala oltre la nicchia ristretta di consumatori informati.

Siamo per un'agricoltura naturale che rispetti i valori etici e favorisca le relazioni sociali all'interno di un quadro di sovranità alimentare ed economia solidale. Intendiamo andare oltre la certificazione del biologico intesa come approdo burocratico al quale attenersi, cioè un marchio e niente più, rispetto alla riscoperta di un rapporto di fiducia leale tra produttore e consumatore basato sull'autocertificazione partecipativa garantita.



# #1. San Teodoro. Community gardens in an occupied rugby field.

Investigator: direct engagement in an ongoing process. Storytelling plus collective interviews.





## #2. Terre Forti. Community of itinerant *Rural-Keeper*s.

Investigator: participant observer in an ongoing process. Storytelling plus collective interviews.





*1. How do obscure relations of power impact western societies in maintaining the promises of democracy? → how does the mafia affect our society?*



INVESTIGATOR'S  
SYNTHESIS

“It is the control over our lives, not only in terms of food and products, but also in the way our relationships are shaped. It is not only an economic problem. It is a problem of social rights, common goods, self-determination of local communities, that are not often in the political agenda of institutional decision-making processes.”

## 2. How do they threaten the efforts of implementing degrowth practices?

→ *how does the mafia affect your work?*



### INVESTIGATOR'S SYNTHESIS

“We experienced several problems related with the destruction of our physical structures. We also experienced the need to have more people engaged in our work. People do not care, they are afraid of changing, they do not believe things can really change. They (we all, probably) are trapped in a mafia-genic mindset.”



3. What do degrowth processes need to consider, in order to deeply change societies through a community-based approach in contexts where obscure relations of power affect functioning democracy? → *how may your work affect the mafia-genic system?*



INVESTIGATOR'S  
SYNTHESIS

“We need to reach more people, to explain why we are operating in a certain way, to educate and to work with children because these changes take time and they will affect future generations. But we have to act now. Only by changing people’s mindset, day by day, we can affect the macro-systems, in terms of anti-mafia and in terms of degrowth.”

How do these obscure relations of power impact western societies in maintaining the promises of democracy?

**THE FORMS OF GOVERNANCE, PRODUCTION AND CONSUMPTIONS ARE AFFECTED BY MECHANISMS OF EXTERNAL SUPREMACY AND ABUSES OVER LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

How do they threaten the efforts of implementing degrowth practices?

**THROUGH DIRECT INTIMIDATION, INDIFFERENCE AND RESIGNATION  
PROPER OF A MAFIA-GENIC MINDSET**

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**LIBERATION FROM VARIOUS FORMS OF OPPRESSION, RISING AWARENES AND  
IMPROVING COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS**





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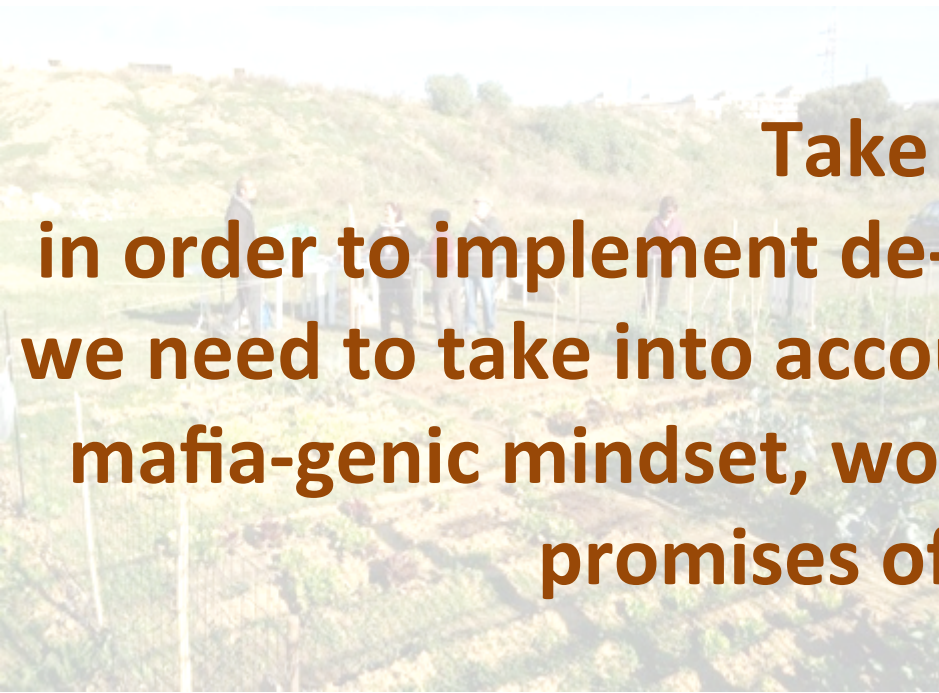
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**Take away:**

**in order to implement de-growth practices [in Sicily] we need to take into account how to deconstruct the mafia-genic mindset, working in order to fulfill the promises of democracy.**



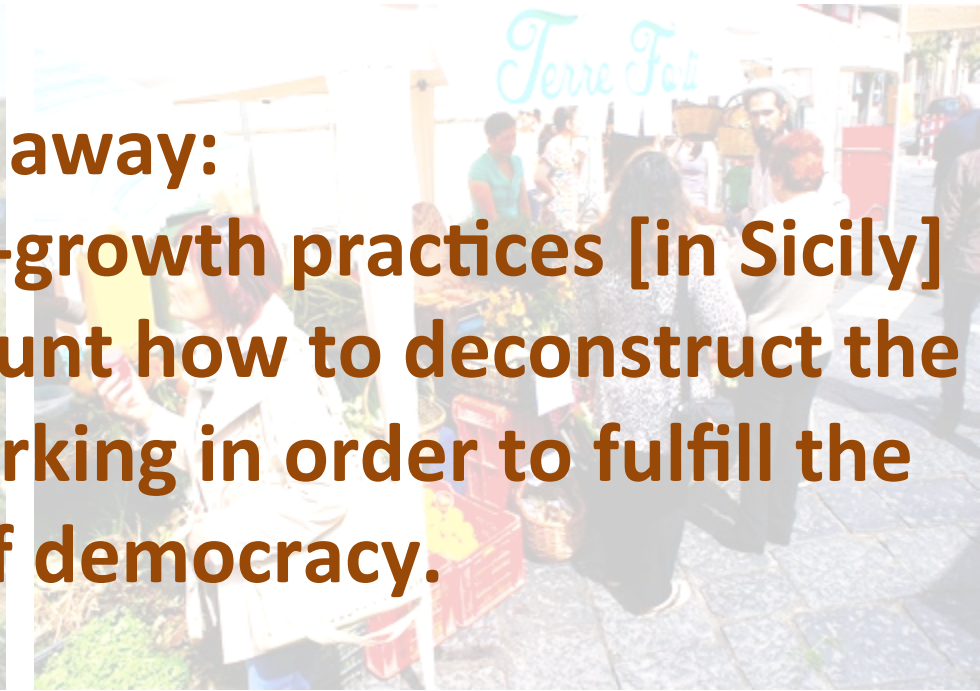
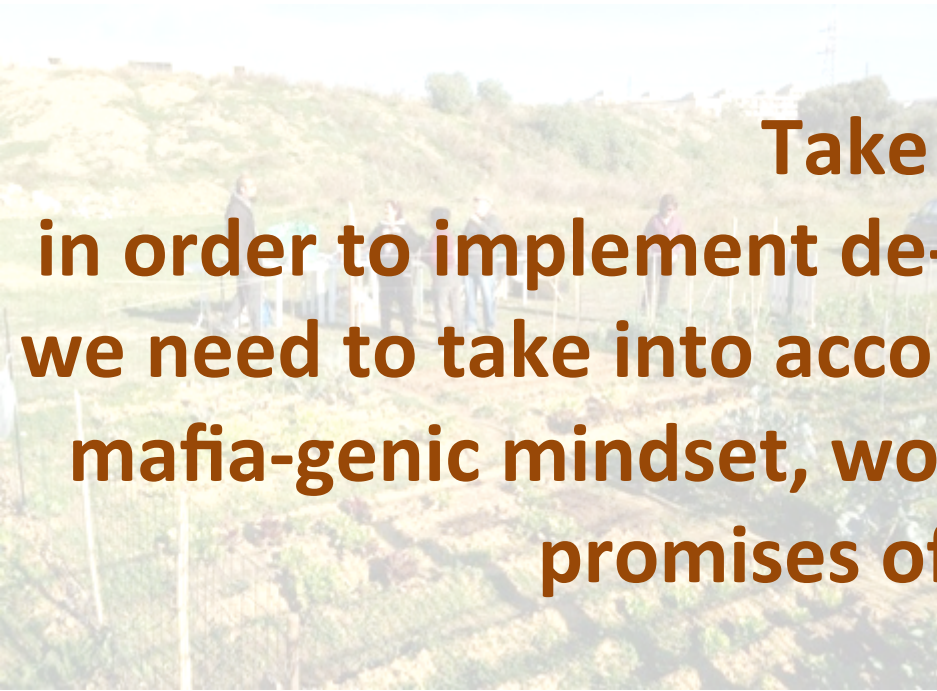
# WORKING AGENDA AND FURTHER RESEARCH

## IMPLEMENTING PAR

- Building reciprocal partnership in order to impact reality while learning together
- Promoting cooperation between community-based movements, scholars, schools and, when possible, governmental institutions
- Constantly highlighting the nexus: collective anti-mafia / degrowth / democracy

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**Thanks! Questions? 😊**