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Building solidarities and alliances between degrowth and food sovereignty movements

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Abstract

Degrowth and food sovereignty movements share commitments to social-ecological transformation, democracy and the flourishing of human and non-human life. Encounters between the two movements have been relatively limited, however. This contribution is based on a literature review and a workshop held at the 9th International Degrowth Conference in Zagreb, Croatia, in 2023, where activists, academics, and practitioners collectively explored alliance formation between degrowth and food sovereignty movements. It explores the barriers, gaps, and differences in their political and organizing traditions that may block opportunities for collaboration in different contexts. It also investigates cases of mutual support and collective organizing for transformation already in existence.

Keywords

degrowth; food sovereignty; alliance formation; social movements; social-ecological transformation.

1. Introduction

Degrowth and food sovereignty movements share commitments to social-ecological transformation, democracy, and the flourishing of human and non-human life. While encounters between the two movements have been limited, in the current era of polycrisis, establishing coalitions and alliances[10] between social movements and progressive civic actors working towards post-growth futures is of urgent importance. Recent work has therefore highlighted the importance of alliance-building between the degrowth and food sovereignty movements, bringing conceptual debates and practices into conversation (Gerber, 2020; Hickel *et al.*, 2022; Plank, 2022). To date, concrete explorations of cooperation are still rare. Notable exceptions are Salzer and Fehlinger (2017), who explored the relation and commonalities between the two movements, and Spanier-

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[10] We use the terms 'alliance' and 'coalition' interchangeably.

Guerrero Lara and Feola's (2024) analysis of the potential for an alliance between the community-supported agriculture (CSA) and degrowth movements in Germany.

The food sovereignty movement challenges the global food system while highlighting the destructive impacts of the agri-food industry on ecosystems and smallholders' livelihoods. It promotes alternatives that respect peoples' right "to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems" (Nyéléni Forum for Food Sovereignty, 2007). Self-identified "peasants", small-scale fishers, and mobile pastoralists within the food sovereignty movement understand themselves as engaged in (re)production motivated by values very distinct from the logic of capitalist growth (van der Ploeg, 2013; Scoones, 2022; Fischer *et al.*, 2022). The degrowth movement, meanwhile, emphasizes the necessity of "a planned reduction of energy and resource use designed to bring the economy back into balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being" (Hickel, 2021), and promotes alternatives to the unsustainable growth-based capitalist economy and society (Kallis, 2011). Neither movement is homogenous, and both embrace a range of theoretical and political stances and embedded practices. Despite overlapping interests, specific practitioners and organizations often identify primarily or exclusively with one movement. The degrowth movement, with its epicenter in Europe, represents a mostly theory-focused counter-narrative to capitalist hegemony. Meanwhile, the practice-oriented food sovereignty movement materializes through on-the-ground struggles against the exploitation of human and natural resources within the context of uneven development, unjust capitalism and the corporate, extractivist food regime. These struggles are more widespread and explicit in the Global South, while they often take more tacit and implicit forms in the Global North.

As a group of activists and scholars, who advocate for both degrowth and food sovereignty, we are convinced that degrowth cannot happen in empty discursive space, divorced from the material conditions of (re)production, and without supporting the struggles of the food sovereignty movement to create a fertile space where degrowth can flourish. Alliances with such living and replicable examples of sustainable non-growth-compelled practices could inspire solutions for wider social-ecological transformation.

We, therefore, decided to collectively explore and unpack possibilities for alliance formation between the degrowth and food sovereignty movements by organizing a workshop at the 9th International Degrowth Conference in Zagreb, Croatia, in August 2023, primarily focusing on the alliance-building of these two movements within Europe. In addition to the original team of six workshop organizers, the author team for this article also includes four workshop participants.

This article's structure largely follows that of the workshop. In section two, we outline our theoretical framework for alliance building within the current strategies of the two movements. In section three, we introduce our methodology, the workshop process and the positionality of the authors and workshop participants. In section four, we introduce the outcome of the workshop, complemented by a literature review, aiming to inspire further research and cooperation.

2. How to foster alliance-building within the current strategies of the degrowth and food sovereignty movements?

To better understand alliance building between the degrowth and food sovereignty movements, we combine social-ecological transformation research with social movement theory. Whereas the former provides an analytical perspective to better understand the context in which the movements are embedded, the latter explains the organization of the movements themselves (Barlow *et al.*, 2022, 2024).

Strategies to foster social-ecological transformation

Eric Olin Wright (2010) differentiated between three modes of transformation beyond capitalism. Simply put, interstitial modes of transformation operate within niches and primarily outside of state institutions; symbiotic modes seek reforms within existing political and institutional structures; and ruptural ones aim to dismantle specific institutions of capitalism and the state.

Most of the current actions of the degrowth movement examined within academic literature, specifically within the realm of critical analysis of food systems, aim to establish alternative ways of living and producing,

such as food co-ops, urban gardening, community-supported agriculture, or eco-villages (Brossmann & Islar, 2020; Kallis & March, 2015; Nelson & Edwards, 2020). Symbiotic modes of transformation try to expand the space for democratic participation in existing institutions by compromising with dominant social forces (Wright, 2010). The degrowth literature has not discussed these modes much in relation to food, but it has served as a framework for analysis, for example of the Green Deal (Ossewaarde & Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, 2020). The food sovereignty movement, however, has been politically active for multiple decades – e.g., trying to influence the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union (ÖBV - Via Campesina Austria, 2021), the operations of the FAO, and the architecture of global trade. In this sense, radical reforms may well disrupt or even overcome capitalist logic. Existing structures could, for example, adopt stricter emission limits in law, socialize corporations along the food chain in the long term, or reduce working hours for wage labor (Chertkovskaya, 2022).

Ruptural modes of transformation seek to dismantle specific institutions of capitalism, including the capitalist state. This can happen spatially – by creating autonomous spaces or territories not governed by state institutions or capitalist principles – or temporally, for example in temporary field occupations against the development of infrastructure projects that can provide access to land (Pieper, 2013). So far, ruptural strategies have been under-considered by degrowth, although this is starting to change. For example, Herbert *et al.* (2021) call for a reconsideration of ruptural strategies and further exploration of how different strategies can create synergies. Similarly, the AKC collective (2023) presents a variety of autonomous and territorial struggles from which degrowth has drawn inspiration (e.g., in Rojava, Chiapas, and Notre-Dame-des-Landes). The authors point to the clear ruptural dimensions of these struggles and their intrinsic links between food sovereignty, democracy, and collective self-determination.

Overall, it is important to consider potential complementarities between different modes of transformation. Ruptural strategies, such as occupying land designated for an airport expansion, can lead to further interstitial strategies (e.g. if the land is used for gardening instead). Similarly, creating a law that prohibits, for example, the import of industrially produced feedstock, could, in turn, provide fertile ground for developing small-scale farmers' activities. Building explicit alliances with movements that have different strategic foci could empower this complementarity of strategies and contribute to fostering degrowth societies. The food sovereignty movement already draws on a bundle of multiple strategies; this is made explicit in the slogan "Resist-transform-build alternatives!" Degrowth proponents can learn from this use of different strategies and build stronger alliances with the food sovereignty movement. This could, in turn, also facilitate stronger links to the Global South.

Alliances and coalitions

Alliances are important vehicles for instigating social and political change and are therefore key to social-ecological transformations. They can mobilize wide support around a particular issue by reaching large numbers of people, facilitating access to resources, and broadening both the choice of tactical repertoires and the collective identity of movements (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017; Wang *et al*., 2018). Social movement theory understands coalitions as "organizations […] or networks that animate […] collective action [and act as] structuring mechanisms that bridge political organizations and the looser, more permeable, social movements" (Brooker & Meyer, 2019, p. 253).

Coalitions can vary in their form, duration, and formalization (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). Many coalitions constitute short-lived configurations, typically spontaneous and informal, and "created for a particular protest or lobbying event" (Levi & Murphy, 2006, p. 655), such as the recent protest of the climate and peasant movements against the EU-Mercosur trade agreement. Groups and movements may also build "long-term cooperation with chosen partners" (Levi & Murphy, 2006, p. 655), so-called enduring or issue-based coalitions. These may involve formalized agreements, for instance regarding the use of resources and means of coordination (Brooker & Meyer, 2019; Wang *et al*., 2018) and require a greater degree of ideological and cultural fit (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). The EU Food Policy Coalition of civil society organizations working towards sustainable food systems at the EU level is a pertinent example of an enduring coalition. In addition, alliance building occurs across – and is shaped by being situated in – different contexts and regions

(Zajak & Haunss, 2022). Social movements and activist groups are not restrained to nationally defined contexts and "often connect across borders and regions" (Zajak & Haunss, 2022, p. 3).

Several factors can influence the establishment and longevity of a coalition. **First**, ideological compatibility or alignment is often regarded as the basis for coalition building (Staggenborg, 2010). Framing processes are often used both as a proxy for, and to foster, ideological alignment between social movements (Brooker & Meyer, 2019). More inclusive master frames can help transcend differences and resolve potential conflicts among coalition partners (*ibid*.). However, competition and rivalry between aligned movements over resources or preferred tactics and strategies is nonetheless not uncommon. **Second**, so-called "brokers" or "bridge-builders" are key for forging coalitions and alliances. Such individuals are engaged in multiple movements and can point out shared struggles and interests (Brooker & Meyer, 2019; Van Dyke & Amos, 2017), contributing to establishing mutual trust and comprehension (Arnold, 2011). **Third**, a more formal internal structure, such as having a division of labor and representatives of the movement, can be conducive to coalition work (Van Dyke & Amos, 2017). Lastly, access to resources and the institutional, political and cultural environment, such as the presence of opportunities and threats, also matter for coalition formation (*ibid*.).

Coalitions can exist across differences. Although challenging to build, such coalitions can be particularly enriching and hold strategic value, since new perspectives and experiences are shared (Gawerc, 2020, 2021). This article therefore responds to the recent calls for further exploration of political alliances across differences (Guerrero Lara *et al*., 2023), particularly between the food (sovereignty) and degrowth movements (see Salzer & Fehlinger, 2017; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023), exploring barriers and opportunities for building these in different contexts.

3. Methodology

The article draws on data obtained via literature review and the outcomes of a workshop organized at the 9th International Degrowth Conference in Zagreb, Croatia, in August 2023. The two-hour workshop was prepared by six members of the author team and organized by five of them. It was attended by 20 conference participants, four of whom agreed to become co-authors. The ten-member author team includes: food system transformation researchers (CP, IL, JF, JSm, JSp, LGL, LS, LR, MP); social movement researchers (LGL, MP); community organizers (LR, KS); food sovereignty activists and researchers in support organizations (CP, JSp, KS, LR); degrowth activists and researchers (CP, IL, JF, JSm, JSp, LGL, LS, MP); farmers and practitioners (LS); gardeners (JF, JSp, KS, LR, MP); and those with a farming family background (IL); and rural background (JSp, LR). The backgrounds of other participants were not explored further. We anticipate a bias towards degrowth activists and scholars, as members of the food sovereignty movement are not typical attendants of degrowth conferences, especially those from the Global South. Participants' places of residence include Switzerland, Hungary, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, Italy, Czechia, and Croatia.

In the first part of the workshop, we provided participants with some theoretical background on coalitions and alliances and an overview of the different strategies that the degrowth movement has used in the realm of food. Then, three break-out groups discussed 1) barriers, 2) opportunities for alliance formation between degrowth and food sovereignty movements, and 3) the influence of various contextual factors on this alliance formation. Each participant had an opportunity to join two of the break-out groups, which each lasted about 30 minutes. The final part of the workshop was dedicated to a plenary discussion and to collectively summarizing the workshop insights. Subsequently, the insights of each break-out group were analyzed by the author team to identify the main themes and tendencies. These were explored and discussed in more depth and complemented with data and available literature during the writing process. The collected data was discussed within the author team but not shared with the other workshop participants.

4. Context, barriers and opportunities for alliance building

How does context influence alliance building?

Our workshop revealed that the presence, size, structure, reach, militancy, and political influence of movements are shaped by myriad factors, from geographic and ecological particularities to historical developments and current political and regulatory landscapes. Alliances between food sovereignty and degrowth cannot be built without exploring the contexts in which movements emerge, exist, and evolve, and which also determine the barriers and opportunities for different modes of interstitial, symbiotic or ruptural transformation at different scales.

While both the workshop and this article primarily focus on food sovereignty in Europe, workshop participants repeatedly pointed out its notable difference from food sovereignty movements in the Global South, which may also be relevant for alliance formation with degrowth. Food sovereignty movements in the Global South are much larger and more militant. This is particularly due to the persistence of highly unequal exploitative systems that have evolved from colonization, and the comparatively large number of people who remain reliant on accessing land for cultivation purposes, pursuing small-scale food production such as agriculture, fishing and mobile pastoralism (see Rivera-Ferre *et al.*, 2014). In the Global North, these movements take a wide range of forms. Most do not explicitly work under the umbrella of food sovereignty, and many practitioners are not personally involved in formally constituted spaces of the international food sovereignty movement (e.g., the Nyeleni process or the International Planning Committee on Food Sovereignty). Their practices are nonetheless conducive to the movement and its principles, many of which also overlap with degrowth principles. These projects encompass family farms or farm enterprises implementing various approaches to ecologically beneficial agriculture; projects producing goods through solidarity-based business models and initiatives with local, non-industrial food, such as community-supported agriculture (CSA) operations. They also include informal food cultures based on traditional food self-provisioning practices, sharing and foraging, which contribute significantly to East European food systems (see Jehlička *et al.*, 2020), at the level of individual households. Global North food sovereignty projects also include initiatives and networks focused on generating broad support for (agro-ecological) transformation, such as the Hungarian Agroecology Network[11] or Uniterre[12] in Switzerland, which center on connecting farmers, food system actors and citizens, knowledge sharing, and political advocacy. Potential political alliances and their effectiveness are impacted by the variability between movements in different countries and regions.

The degrowth and the food sovereignty movements are embedded in different political-institutional systems, policy environments and agricultural systems. Especially in a symbiotic mode of transformation, it is important to consider which local, regional, national, or global policies shape possibilities for transformative food system change, as these policies affect the possibilities for food producers' livelihoods and political action in countless ways. What farmers, fishers and pastoralists produce is influenced, among other factors, by national and EU-level production priorities. At the intersection of symbiotic and interstitial modes of transformation, it is also important to consider educational institutions and support systems for food producers, which shape dominant practices, and the likelihood of adopting alternatives. The number and reach of transformative projects in a region can be impacted by training and outreach support opportunities available to food system advocates.

Important contextual factors that shape the emergence, formation and impact of grassroots movements also stem from the heritage of the agricultural systems, which includes the historic state management of agriculture and the legacies of grassroots movements for change. Key historical factors here include support policies, market orientation, land reforms, educational and other supports for institutional organization, technological development, food cultural heritage, and political identities and sensitivities. For example, the influence of former socialist management systems in Central and Eastern Europe, followed by periods of rapid

[11] https://www.arc2020.eu/agroecology-grows-in-hungary/

[12] https://uniterre.ch/de/

post-regime transition and European Union accession, have continuing impacts on contemporary agriculture, food markets, and the mindset of producers and consumers. This, in turn, also influences the willingness of food movements to pursue solidarity collaborations and non-traditional market activities or to engage in ruptural modes of transformation (see Pixová & Plank, 2024).

Barriers to alliance-building between degrowth and food sovereignty

Forging stronger alliances between the degrowth and food sovereignty movements will require overcoming several (potential) barriers related to the movements themselves and the conditions in which they are operating. These barriers were identified by workshop participants, but many have also already been extensively dealt with by researchers. Therefore, this section is more comprehensively complemented by existing literature than the results of the other two breakout groups.

The different natures of movements

Differences in the social identity of movements can act as barriers to establishing alliances between them (Beamish & Luebbers, 2009; Obach, 2004). This observation was also shared by the workshop participants, who argued that degrowth movements are overwhelmingly made up of academics and urban-based activists (see also, Chertkovskaya *et al*., 2019), while food sovereignty movements comprise a diverse, largely agrarian-activist community (see Alonso-Fradejas *et al*., 2015). They also differ in their realms and the bases of their struggles, the former being primarily intellectual and the latter largely material (see Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2024).

The workshop participants stressed that different identities and experiences may lead to divergent worldviews, common senses, and cultures, evident especially in different uses of language. The abstract, academic language of the degrowth movement may feel detached from the concrete everyday experiences and struggles of food sovereignty practitioners and activists, potentially hindering constructive communication about common values, interests, and goals – which is a prerequisite to struggling collectively. For example, speaking about growth ideology or anthropocentrism in ways divorced from how these concepts materially affect people's lives can be elitist and alienating. Spanier-Guerrero Lara and Feola (2023) observed that members of the German CSA movement embraced aligning values and opinions about the capitalist food regime, but also expressed skepticism about the advantage of publicly taking "a certain stance on economic politics" while they were busy fighting the concrete vanishing of smallholder farming. For them, understandably, this struggle is too urgent and time-consuming to allow involvement in intellectual debates (*ibid*.). Existing literature shows that this skepticism towards elite institutions is neither new nor unfounded. In fact, the food sovereignty movement, in part, emerged as a counterforce to the dominance of scientists and institutional actors in policymaking in the name of food security and to the creation of a narrative that marginalizes the voices and interests of smallholders and Indigenous peoples (Patel, 2009).

Aside from these discrepancies in institutional access, workshop participants also pointed out the differences between the largely urban-based academic degrowth movement, on the one hand, and the largely rural and practice-based food sovereignty movements, on the other. These differences, also expressed in different material investments in public services of rural and urban areas (see Ferrer *et al*., 2023), and in farmers' experiences of undervaluation in modern society (see Wheeler *et al*., 2023), need to be considered. Paradoxically, while degrowthers sometimes find themselves accused of desiring a "ruralization" of society (Gomiero, 2018), Guerrero Lara *et al*. (2023) find that degrowth scholarship has predominantly engaged with food production in peri-urban and urban areas.

Workshop participants pointed out that unaddressed differences in languages and realities of degrowth activists and food sovereignty practitioners could hinder the building of trust between the two movements. This particularly concerns the academic work of degrowth scholars, many of whom are attuned to the risk of academic extractivism (see, e.g., Aguiar *et al*., 2023). Still, they run the risk of (being perceived as) prioritizing their own academic agendas and expertise over the practical knowledge and experiences of farmers; embracing theoretical abstractions to the exclusion of farmers' lived experiences and empirical observations, or even trying to tell farmers "how to farm." Workshop participants believed that the food movement's concepts and slogans

(e.g., "food sovereignty") – the outcomes of decades-long struggles – should not be adopted or co-opted by degrowth scholars unless they can support grassroots movements at the same time. In particular, highly funded research projects, for instance, should prioritize direct contributions of resources to these struggles.

Disadvantageous conditions for alliance building

Other obstacles in alliance-building relate to the limited capacities and resources of movements (Plank *et al*., 2020; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2024). Lacking financial, temporal and human resources obliges movements and their members to prioritize some activities over others (*ibid*.). This then limits opportunities for finding complementarity in different modes of transformation. Unlike activist scholars, farmers may not engage in degrowth debates, but bear the risk of practicing degrowth on the ground (Duncan *et al*., 2021), struggling in terms of resources, overwork, or emotional burnout (Szakál & Balázs, 2020). One workshop participant observed the impossibility of attending a week-long degrowth conference for people who cannot easily leave their farms and lack funding for travel and conference participation. Full-time farmers might choose to spend their limited leisure time otherwise, rather than engaging in utopian strategizing or abstract debates, potentially remote from their everyday reality. At the same time, many degrowth activists are employed in academic institutions that still privilege the creation of academic output over engaged research that involves community organizing and political work (see, e.g., Mountz *et al*., 2015). Despite criticizing the competitive academic system in their writings, many degrowth scholars are trapped in the reproduction of neoliberal output-driven work that is at the heart of economic and socio-cultural growthism. These constraints are particularly difficult to overcome for early and mid-career researchers, which includes a large share of degrowth activist-scholars.

Another constraint for alliance building between the two movements lies in the emergent character of the degrowth movement itself (Burkhart *et al*., 2022; Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023). Many agroecological producers are organized in networks – such as the various farmers' organizations that are members of the global agrarian movement "La Via Campesina" (e.g. Arbeitgemeinschaft Bäuerliche Landwirtschaft in Germany, Toekomstboeren in the Netherlands, and Confédération Paysanne in France[13]). However, the degrowth movement is still in the process of developing its organizational structure, both globally and in various national and local contexts (Asara, 2022). The international degrowth network, aimed at facilitating collective organization, was not launched until August 2023 (members of the open collective ODN, 2023). Degrowth groups across Europe often comprise looser platforms for exchange and (various forms of) collective action, rather than structured networks. In some regions and countries, local and regional sub-groups are not gathered together or represented by any umbrella organization.

Consequently, many degrowth groups are not (yet) in positions to actively seek out alliances or prioritize building alliances, lacking capacities to follow all possible connections to other movements. Some degrowthers also focus on science-based collaborations with agricultural networks, rather than engaging with them in a framework of political movement-building (see Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2024). For smallholder associations and agroecological networks, then, this discrepancy between the movements' levels of formalization makes it difficult to identify individuals to reach out towards, to initiate a conversation with degrowthers. It may also remain unclear if their goals and strategies align with those of degrowth, whose key values, mission and visions are still subject to an ongoing debate (Asara, 2022; Rilović *et al*., 2022).

[13] https://www.eurovia.org/about-us/#our-members

How can the points of difference, tensions and obstacles be overcome? What are concrete opportunities for alliance building?

Building mutual trust and understanding

Cooperation and alliances between two movements require addressing differences related to their respective contexts. Based on input accumulated during the workshop, we propose the following steps to pave the way to mutual trust and understanding.

The first step consists of conducting a mapping exercise of movement actors and learning about the contextual factors of potential allies (see section 3). This includes exploring different actors, their everyday realities and historical struggles as well as mapping existing networks, campaigns, and relevant institutions operating at different scales (civic movements, governmental and private support organizations, activists, researchers, educators) and within different modes of transformation. This can shed light on local power relations, strengths, challenges, progress on social-ecological transformation, and suitable alliance partners and strategies for increasing support mechanisms. A mapping exercise of this kind has been commissioned by the Hungarian Agroecology Network to provide a background for future cooperation amongst agroecological initiatives (see Balogh *et al*., 2020).

Terminologies, and their definitions, used in alternative food movements vary and carry different connotations depending on the context. Hence, striving for concrete definitions and ensuring shared understandings of the exact practices at issue is crucial to finding allies for symbiotic modes of transformation. For example, while European Union law defines certain practices as essential for organic certification, terms like "ecological", "soil and ecosystem friendly" or "biological agriculture" are applied differently in different languages, creating confusion. Emergent farming and food community movements with guiding principles not defined by law (e.g., agroecology and regenerative agriculture) can be interpreted and applied with differing levels of credibility, highlighting the necessity for continuing work on holistic quality certification processes that avoid the degradation of integrity through formalization. Local procurement can have credibility in one region (see e.g. Plank *et al*., 2023) while the CSA structure has greater influence elsewhere. Precise understanding of regional terminology for food and farming alternatives, and the underlying political tendencies associated with them, is key to identifying relevant narratives driving food system transformation and recognizing the impacts of unique local interpretations on potential alliances.

Food sovereignty and degrowth movements also need to find a common language – for example, by exploring shared principles, values, concerns, and other topics in common. Examples of such commonalities include calls for soil care or criticism of the corporate-dominated food system. Active listening, reflection, and considering contextual factors are important. During the workshop, the cases of Czechia and Croatia were mentioned to point out the importance of avoiding concepts associated with socialism and a critique of capitalism in some regions, and of possible resistance to ruptural modes of transformation. Fruitful examples of building a common language can be found in the way specific thematic networks, such as the Hungarian Agroecology Network, have organized regular meetings with this aim.

Bridge-builders – individuals or organizations active in both movements (see also Brooker & Meyer, 2019; Van Dyke & Amos, 2017) – such as food practitioners attending degrowth conferences or scholar-activists bringing degrowth topics into farmers' meetings, can play a critical role in overcoming a paucity of meeting spaces.

Equally crucial are everyday forms of solidarity and cooperation for building and strengthening the social fabric between movements. Coalition partners need to be attentive to each other's needs and offer practical support. Scholar-activists can, for example, support peasant struggles through academic competencies and networks, such as writing grants and articles, or help in the field during a busy growing season, advancing degrowth in practice (see Strenchock, 2020 for an auto-ethnography on Zsámboki Biokert farm), as well as potentially enabling practitioners to engage in conferences, campaigns and other political work. In addition, as also highlighted by Duncan *et al*. (2021), engaging with the food sovereignty movement as scholars requires reflexively questioning existing power relations. Degrowth activists should show solidarity too. One workshop participant mentioned the cooperation of a student eco-socialist collective, which embraces degrowth ideas,

with the Alnarp's Agroecology Farm,[14] a student-run project in Sweden. The collective is connected to the farm via a CSA-system and collectively organized a food festival. These forms of solidarity and reciprocity can reduce alienation, increase mutual trust, and facilitate further cooperation.

Co-creating social-ecological transformation

High complementarity between degrowth and food sovereignty, identified by Gerber (2020) and Roman-Alcalá (2017), can be conducive to co-creating corresponding strategies within different modes of transformation.

While aligning strategies and visions is useful for coalition work, alliances can also be built around complementarity in meeting shared needs (see Spanier-Guerrero Lara & Feola, 2023), avoiding redundancy or ineffective repetition in strategic political work. Creating regional alliances and building capacities for complementary work on agendas that are highly effective and have tangible added value for both movements would be a useful shared step. By co-creating shared demands, allies can identify concrete steps to be taken together, such as supporting each other's events or cooperating in a research project. Research budgets should benefit practitioners as well as scholars, and the co-optation of the knowledge and resources of either movement should be strenuously avoided.

The political potential of alliances can unfold through joint mobilizations in coordinated actions at different scales, finding complementarity in mobilizing within and across different modes of social-ecological transformation. In one possible "division of labor", the food sovereignty movement could mobilize a mass base for ruptural strategies, while the degrowth movement employs symbiotic modes of transformation within existing institutions, influencing policymaking, navigating complex political and legal landscapes, or finding legal and regulatory loopholes. Finally, there is also potential to explore various unusual potential alliances among actors whose problem frames diverge significantly, but who must cooperate tactically to advance particular demands. An example might include national and EU lobbying and advocacy by Hnutí DUHA – Friends of the Earth Czech Republic, which also assists the interests of smallholders within the Association of Private Farming of the Czech Republic.

5. Conclusion

The everyday reality of food sovereignty movements revolves around the struggle within and against our global industrial food system, which accumulates profits from mass-produced food at the expense of people and the planet. Degrowth is a powerful counter-narrative against the hegemony of capitalism and economic growth, which stand at the root of the polycrisis we face today. The degrowth and food sovereignty movements are therefore fighting the same enemy. Their alliances could strengthen both struggles and deepen solidarities across the rural-urban spectrum.

Our workshop at the 9th International Degrowth Conference in Zagreb discussed how the two movements could forge alliances in Europe, the degrowth movement's epicenter and the context that the workshop participants were most familiar with. The workshop discussed some of the main differences in the two movements' natures, contexts, and strategies, examining which differences could foster synergies. Myriad contextual factors were identified that contribute to the extreme diversity of the two movements across Europe, influencing their sizes, structures, modes of transformation employed, and the potential to form fruitful alliances. Aside from geographical-historical factors, these include different political-institutional systems, policy environments and the heritage of agricultural systems. Experiences from practitioners have also shown that differences can be overcome by building mutual trust and understanding. Finding a common language revolving around shared concerns, values, and principles, as opposed to dwelling on ideological differences, is one crucial element. Mapping exercises are a useful tool for surveying the shared context and network of two movements. These can help to identify bridge-builders, facilitate contact, and lead to co-creation of content and coordinated action towards transformative demands with increased levels of mobilization. Although

[14] https://www.alnarpsfarm.se/

difficult to build and sustain, we share a belief that alliances between degrowth and food sovereignty movements hold significant unrealized potential for socio-ecological transformation.

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