Grassroots – Journal of Political Ecology Vol. 32, 2025

Movement without a movement: Food self-provisioning in Eastern Europe and the Balkans as emergent transformation towards a degrowth mode of living

Mladen Domazet[1] and Rowan Lubbock[2]

Abstract

The intimate links between agri-food systems and degrowth economics has only recently been addressed in the extant scholarship, much of which centers on the contributions of "food self-provisioning" (FSP) as a type of (often urban and peri-urban) practice nurturing communal autonomy, healthy/organic food, and environmental sustainability. While FSP within Western Europe is often celebrated within environmentalism and agri-food studies, its practical scope remains limited. In contrast, FSP within Eastern Europe (EE) and the Balkans is widespread, yet overlooked with regards to its potential insights, or simply fetishized as a type of crisis-induced "scarcity" narrative. Echoing more critical scholarship on FSP within the EE/Balkans, we argue that FSP within this overlooked region constitutes real movement towards a degrowth paradigm. However, we seek to better understand both the potentials and limits to the politics of alternative foodways. We suggest that FSP's potential contribution to a degrowth paradigm might be enhanced by raising its voice, rather than staying silent. Drawing on a broadly Marxian approach to political economy, degrowth, and critical agrarian studies, we argue for the strategic necessity of embedding FSP practice in a context of political organization that aims to shift the balance of forces across the strategic terrain of the capital-state nexus. In doing so, we aim to shed more light on the material-economic and politico-institutional space(s) in which FSP within the EE/Balkans (and beyond) may evolve from a movement without a movement towards an emergent collection of social forces building a degrowth mode of living.

Keywords:
Degrowth, Food Self-Provisioning, Eastern Europe, Balkans, Metabolic Rift

1. Introduction

Criticism of growth, and post-growth scholarship, have a lengthy tradition (Daly, 1996; Gorz, 1980; Meadows, Meadows & Randers, 1972; Mishan, 1993). More recently, critical political ecology has pivoted into the call for "degrowth" (Demaria & Latouche, 2019). While post-growth and degrowth could have, at one point, been considered interchangeable, today they are at odds with the question of the strategies needed to attain a radically reduced throughput in overdeveloped societies of the Global North. Post-growth advocates claim it focuses on the transition practices already established as effective, rather than spending further time on studying those that are not ("A Post Growth Event", n.d.). In that respect, it could be the umbrella term for "home gardening" as a practice enhancing autonomy and resilience of the communities gathered around it.

Degrowth, in contrast, rests on the ambitiously holistic demand that growth-driven environmental harms require a socio-cultural, as well as economic and technological transformation, implying that we "do it all differently" (Hickel, 2022; Kallis, 2018). Focusing intently on the contradictions of an endless growth regime,

[1] Institute of Philosophy, Zagreb; Corvinus Institute for Advanced Studies, Budapest. Email: mdomazet@ifzg.hr.
[2] Queen Mary, University of London, UK. Email: r.lubbock@qmul.ac.uk.

degrowth seeks to find new ways of living, producing and consuming without adding further stress to the ecological base, but also with changing power relations within human society to lessen the motivation for the current level of exploitation. The global food system is one of the single biggest contributors to anthropological climate change (UN News, 2021). As with the nature of the current climate crisis itself, the solutions to this crisis will be globally diverse, with different practices, institutions and scales emphasized in different regional contexts, with guiding principles inter-locking into an emergent degrowth paradigm to cap environmental impact whilst providing a foundation for sustainable wellbeing.

One emergent aspect of degrowth politics is Food Self-Provisioning (FSP), a distinctly local approach to food production that offers pathways out of the commodified food system and the destructive consequences of industrialized agribusiness, by nurturing alternative practices centered on sufficiency, equity, inclusiveness, environmental justice, socio-ecological well-being, popular sovereignty, and solidarity (Jackson, 2016). This article seeks to unravel the potentials and limits of FSP to contributing towards a degrowth paradigm and its attendant politico-economic transformations. In doing so, we hope to open up the debate about FSP practice and its positionality within the wider fabric of degrowth politics and post-capitalist futures. A particular lesson for this transitional path to post-growth food systems is based on research insights about this practice obtained primarily in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

2. The promise of food self-provisioning

As a reflective community, we know that to lessen the agri-food system's environmental impact and contribute to a more just and sustainable nutritional base for a global population, it must morph into resilient, accessible and sustainable alternatives (Guerrero Lara *et al.*, 2023; UN News, 2023). The scope of alternatives includes a prominent role for the less vocal but socio-structurally and geographically widespread form of engagement with agri-food systems of "growing your own" or "food self-provisioning" (FSP). It is only recently, however, that FSP scholarship has begun to break out of the rather staid narrative contrasting Food Self Provisioning as a heroic practice in the Global North (specifically Western Europe) on the one hand, and as a desperate survival strategy across Eastern Europe (EE) and the Balkans on the other. In the former case, FSP is regularly described as "sustainable materialism" or "everyday material environmentalism" (Holloway *et al.*, 2006; Renting *et al.*, 2003; Schlosberg & Coles, 2016), and as a realistic alternative to large-scale agri-business. Despite this romantic portrayal of FSP in Western Europe, its scope remains decidedly limited, and almost insignificant in food provision and the social networking it supports.

FSP in the EE/Balkans region, in contrast, has been traditionally characterized as a "coping strategy", or a knee-jerk reaction to crisis and survival imperatives (Alber & Kohler, 2008; Rose & Tikhomirov, 1993; Seeth *et al.*, 1998). This negative connotation assigned to FSP in EE/Balkans by (mostly) Western researchers tends to suppress its counterhegemonic potential, as well as to obscure its readily available instruments for upscaling. However, more recent critical scholarship (particularly among Eastern European scholars) has shown FSP in the EE/Balkans region to be grounded in voluntary, consciously constructed norms centered on sustainability, autonomy and community. Furthermore, its scale and scope go significantly further than the scattered examples found in Western Europe (see Jehlička, Ančić, Daněk & Domazet, 2021; Jehlička, Daněk & Vávra, 2019; Smith, Kostelecký & Jehlička, 2015).

Contrary to the survival strategy narrative, FSP in the EE/Balkans is a socially diverse practice, including all social classes in significant numbers (Ančić, Domazet & Župarić-Iljić, 2019). Previous research based on representative surveys has found that, depending on the country and period, between 30% and 60% of the population reported engaging in FSP (Alber & Kohler, 2008; Jehlička, Ančić, Daněk & Domazet, 2021). These rates did not correlate with national wealth or levels of industrialization. A comparative study of Czechia and Croatia finds that around a quarter of residents in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants engage in FSP (Jehlička, Ančić, Daněk & Domazet, 2021).

Participants themselves, regardless of the class they self-identify with, do not predominantly name economic hardship as their primary reason for engaging in self-provisioning. Their main stated motivation for

taking part is access to "healthy food" and "food that is fresh" or cannot be procured through the market at all. Some researchers conclude that this is a directly anti-hegemonic practice because it limits market dependence and the commodification of food (Domazet, 2019; Jehlička, Daněk & Vávra, 2019). For producers of food (who are also recipients of sharing, as FSP inherently encourages exchange of and pride in produce), the contribution to wellbeing and nutritional resilience outweigh all other possible motivations across all social classes (Dorondel & Șerban, 2019; Jehlička, Ančić, Daněk & Domazet, 2021). Case studies in Czechia, Slovakia and Poland have found that FSP's norms of autonomy and counter-hegemonic alternatives date back to the socialist states that tended to over-organize production of both food and work (Smith, 2002). They see FSP as an autonomous alternative to the satisfaction of needs, as well as a space of resistance to centralized organization (Smith & Jehlička, 2007). There is also an element of "voluntary simplicity" involved, which conforms directly with degrowth-compatible attitudes. Fostering social relationships is a part of this material practice, as important as the alternative provision of food (Smith, Kostelecký & Jehlička, 2015). In line with degrowth's foundational principles of increased autonomy (Deriu, 2015), complex and time-consuming FSP attracts the majority of its participants because they seek greater autonomy and control over knowingly healthy nutrition (Jehlička, Daněk & Vávra, 2019).

The same studies find that most FSP practitioners, particularly in the Balkans, share their produce outside the market and maintain an appropriate materially supported social network. In Croatia, for example, 71% of the non-practitioners surveyed receive food gifts through such networks and thus have access to the producers and their produce (Ančić, Domazet & Župarić-Iljić, 2019). This prevalent integration into FSP networks thus offers a window into the future potential for alternative foodways that go beyond the industrialized food system based on ever-larger carbon throughput, ecological degradation, and the homogenization of diets. FSP practitioners exhibit greater well-being and self-reported resilience to climate change challenges, as well as resilience to social shocks through enhanced sharing networks (Ančić, Domazet & Župarić-Iljić, 2019; Pungas, 2019). Coupled with existing movements and organized political platforms, the normalized practices and values they embody could be the foundation for substantive social change (Domazet & Ančić, 2019). However, FSP practitioners, especially those from the post-socialist region, seem to shy away from even seeing themselves as a movement and tend to forsake unidirectional organization for political change (Ančić, Domazet & Zuparic-Iljic, 2019; Smith & Jeklicka, 2013). Indeed, despite the various benefits accrued by FSP practice, particularly that of environmental protection/sustainability, these very benefits tend to remain "unintended", rather than systematically planned (Jehlicka *et al*., 2020).

3. Rethinking community, resilience, and transformation within FSP

How, then, might FSP contribute to a degrowth future? We argue that FSP in its current form can be seen as an emergent property within the wider push towards a degrowth society, even if not yet a substantive component of degrowth politics. Despite justified celebratory depictions of FSP, contemporary scholarship also highlights the transformative constraints within these bottom-up practices (although such critiques are implicit rather than explicit). For instance, it has been noted that despite the widespread motivations of joy, community-building and enhanced social trust, FSP does not pose a direct or intentionally organized challenge to agri-food corporations or to industrialized capitalist food systems (Daněk & Jehlicka, 2021, p.42; Domazet, 2019; Jehlička, Daněk & Vávra, 2019). More concretely, its autonomous practices may, in fact, lead to a further strengthening of capitalist society, as the time, skill, and energy pumped into FSP networks amount to a "free gift" to capital, with individuals reproducing themselves outside of the circuit of capital, rather than through the appropriation of value (i.e., through wages) from that circuit (Pungas, 2019).

This insight speaks to the wider contradiction among FSP practitioners. If the environmental and sustainability benefits from FSP are not the practitioners' foremost intention, a deeper unintended consequence of FSP centers on its relative separation from the wider social strategies and conflicts prevalent in capitalist society. The ubiquitous notion of "resilience" within FSP scholarship is a case in point. While resilience suggests the strengthening of communities and communal bonds, these ideas also find sharp resonance with elitist discourses that view resilience as a form of burden-shifting onto subaltern populations. The cultivation

of resilient actors, communities, or civil society may end up reproducing the status quo, rather than confronting or challenging the very systemic crises that require resilience in the first place (Chandler, 2014; Chandler & Reid, 2016; Neocleous, 2013; Walker & Cooper, 2011).

It remains vitally important to focus on the positive aspects of FSP practices and their normative content that works against more hegemonic aspects of capitalist sociality. Even the broader critique of resilience thinking should not lead us to believe that FSP-ers are responsible for saving the planet. To paraphrase Domazet (2019, p.160), it can be considered unfair to expect FSP practitioners in the semi-periphery to do this when it is the rich world located in the global 'core' that has both the responsibility and resources to do so. Nevertheless, our interest here is to tease out some of the hidden limits and contradictions within the critical scholarship on FSP and its relationship to a potentially radically transformative degrowth paradigm. In line with broader scholarship and critical reflection on Alternative Food Networks (AFN) (Daněk, Sovová, Jehlička, Vávra & Lapka, 2022) across the Global North, it is worth considering how much of a challenge to the agrifood system FSP can present if it does not position itself as a social and political counterweight to the dominance of capital and the death-drive of endless growth (Byung-Chul, 2021). In order to unpack the immanent relations between FSP and degrowth future(s), our argument centers on the internally related dimensions of capitalism's "metabolic rift", the form and function of the capitalist state, and the concomitant need for concerted social organization as a means of shifting the "imperial mode of living" (Brand & Wissen, 2021; Kruger, 2020) towards a degrowth mode of living.

4. Taking FSP from an emergent property to a fundamental component of degrowth

As critical FSP scholars rightly point out (Danek *et al.,* 2022; Danek & Jehlička, 2021; Pungas, 2019), Marx's understanding of a "metabolic rift" within capitalism helps to ground the immanent determinations of FSP within degrowth politics. In starting from Marx's observation that capital accumulation "'undermines the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker" (1982, p. 638), John Bellamy Foster (2000) posited the notion of "metabolic rift" underpinning Marx's ecological critique of capitalism. However, the idea of a metabolic rift has undergone a productive (if not complex) proliferation since Foster's original intervention (Pungas, 2019). Kōhei Saitō (2023, p.23ff.), for instance, speaks of an ecological, spatial, and temporal rift constitutive of capitalism as a historically specific mode of production. These rifts correspond to the disruption of natural cycles (particularly the nitrogen cycle within soil systems); the spatial separation of town and country into radically uneven geographies of development, and the broader project of frontier-making during the settler-colonial era. Finally he argues there is an increasing compression of the turnover time of capital that is only made possible by the further aggravation of the first two rifts, particularly through the ever-increasing application of fertilizers and pesticides (see Mann, 1990; Moore, 2000; Stoll, 2002). McClintock's (2010) earlier triadic conception also maps onto this schema, though with a particular focus on the scalar dimensions of "rift." As well as engendering the classical macro-level ecological rift, capitalism also presupposes a meso-level social rift (separation of the direct producers from the means of subsistence, or "primitive accumulation"), and a micro-level individual rift (the functional outcome of the social rift, given our separation from nature once primitive accumulation is "complete", and our separation from the direct fruits of our labor once commodification is "complete").[3]

These myriad rifts and shifts constitutive of the capitalist mode of production coalesce around the "imperial mode of living", one that emerges from the bloody consecration of the settler-colonial project, feeding off the immense power of fossilized resources, and reproduced through hierarchies of race, gender and class (Brand & Wissen, 2021). Yet this mode of living does not divide neatly across the Global North and South. Rather, "the upper (and middle) classes of the global South must be understood as important forces of the imperial mode of living… [A]s the dominant forces of their societies they also organize the extraction of resources or foster resource-intensive patterns of industrial development" (Brand, 2022, p.30). But what is the

[3] Though this notion of 'completion' viz. primitive accumulation and commodification is merely analytical rather than real. See *inter alia*, Harvey (2007); Hesketh (2016).

way into this conundrum from the viewpoint of FSP practitioners, social movements, or radical social forces seeking to affect real change towards degrowth? One of the difficulties here concerns how we pose the problem in the first place. Much of the critical scholarship on capitalism's rifts tends to take a somewhat structuralist patina, with the deluge of rifts seemingly falling from the sky. While there is certainly mention of primitive accumulation and social classes, they are also presented as if they are *fait accompli,* rather than processes and outcomes that contain their own politics and historicism. In other words, if we are intent on giving visibility to the agency of FSP-ers (and other progressive movements), it is equally vital to grasp the agency of the ruling classes (Nilsen, 2009). Or to put it another way, social agents cannot struggle against a "rift"; they can only struggle against other agents.

From the perspective of degrowth politics, the principal agents responsible for the climate catastrophe are those with the closest proximity to the "capital-state nexus" (van Apeldoorn *et al*. 2012; see also Tilzey, 2024); those ensembles of people and things that govern the production of surplus-value and the production of political order. At the micro-level, this would correspond, in the first instance, to the workplace, and workers' struggles over not simply the rate of exploitation (wage level), but also the division between manual and intellectual labor (control and management of the means of production) as a crucial step on the road to a green transition, and potentially a degrowth future (Hampton, 2018). Yet as Dimitris Stevis reminds us, worker-led struggles against the death-drive of capital

> …requires that unions— across the board—take on the challenge of reclaiming, expanding, and democratizing the public sphere. This will require a move beyond narrow initiatives, whether green schools or buses, and towards a cohesive agenda that integrates transportation, buildings, energy, services, and the broader economy" (Stevis, 2018, p. 465)

This will include the way individuals interact with the very materiality of food systems that sustain them and their communities.

As Stevis' intervention suggests, thinking through the politics of production within the context of a degrowth paradigm—as a means of disrupting the production of surplus-value and endless accumulation—immediately implicates the state apparatus itself as a means of disrupting and transforming the rhythms of political order. But this does not mean treating the state as if it were a walled citadel separated from the rest of society, only to be engaged during electoral cycles. As Nicos Poulantzas argued, the capitalist state extends itself from bureaucratic loci through to the relations of production. Thus, the "institutional materiality" of the state is affected across its entire strategic terrain, from the workplace to the ballot box (cf. Domazet, 2019, p.162-3; Poulantzas, [1978] 2014). In other words, the making of a degrowth future takes place at the level of the relations of production (a garden plot, a farm, or a factory), as well as the relations of social reproduction (institutions, laws, centers of knowledge production, social policy, political planning) (Bhattacharya, 2013; Koch, 2022). This two-pronged attack against those at the helm of the state-capital nexus is more than a diversification of rebelliousness; it speaks to the fundamental problem from which so much of our current morosity emerges. As Nikos Trantas so nicely puts it, what we currently suffer from most is "the paradox of having a lot of information and not enough change" (Trantas, 2021, p.225). No matter how many images we see of polar bears floating on ice, the planet still gets hotter. This is not because we don't like polar bears; rather, it is because "[g]rowth is the ideology of capitalism, in the Gramscian sense" (Hickel, 2021, p.1107).

Hickel's reference to Gramsci opens another avenue through which to connect the previous analysis of the capital-state nexus with the material-institutional content of society's dominant ideas and how they might be shifted across the strategic terrain of the state. For Gramsci, the power of "common sense" goes beyond the mere realm of "ideas" per se. Rather "common sense" refers to a set of ideas that has its own "material force" by virtue of their naturalization among society as a whole: "The analysis of these [common sense] propositions tends… to reinforce the conception of historical bloc in which precisely material forces are the content and

ideologies are the form" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377).[4] In grounding the power of common sense within the material basis of social (re)production, we can better appreciate the ways in which FSP practice (in its current form) might appear as "arbitrary", insofar as "they only create individual 'movements', polemics and so on" (Gramsci, 1971, p.377). In contrast, mobilizing the values, norms and materiality of FSP towards an historically organic (or "hegemonic") set of ideas and practices requires their integration into a different socio-political terrain altogether, furnishing "a validity which is 'psychological'; they "'organize' human masses, and create the terrain on which men [sic] move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377).

The ideological formation that dominates a given society—its "common sense"—is thus a vital part of degrowth critique and action, given that the fundamental dilemma facing "modern" capitalist societies rests on the contradictory idea that "no healthy longevity [can be had] without the ills of thermo-industrial capitalism" (Domazet, 2019, p.161). So long as this common-sense notion dominates, the possibilities for the upscaling of FSP remains entirely constricted, not least due to the fact that FSP practices do not encroach onto the very materiality that makes these ideas dominant. Moreover, if FSP practice should be "scaled up" (which is already implied by a "degrowth mode of living"), it can only do so with the necessary conditions of possibility that would allow the popular classes *en masse* to engage with their own food provisioning and sharing. This would require not only the space and infrastructures for food production (urban gardens, communal plots etc.) but also the loosening of capital's grip on people's time and energy (reduction of the working week, Universal Basic Income, etc.),[5] which they may then redirect to food production/distribution (Krüger, 2020, p. 267-268; Knight, Rosa & Schor, 2013). When combined with other popular struggles around values close to the hearts of FSP supporters—communal power, organic/healthy food, etc.—we may begin to see FSP practice as more than an "arbitrary" response to the metabolic rift. Integrating widespread FSP practice, ideas and values into broader degrowth networks that attempt to engage and transform the state-capital nexus helps to ground the notion of healing the metabolic rift into its historically and institutionally specific contexts (Krüger, 2020, p. 259-260).

5. Confronting the "absurdly difficult but not impossible" task of radicalizing FSP

One of the problems with integrating FSP supporters into wider networks of degrowth politics is the somewhat depoliticized nature of their "quiet sustainability" (Smith & Jehlicka, 2013; Smith, Kostelecky & Jehlicka, 2015). This characteristic of FSP relates to broader notions of "quiet food sovereignty", in which local groups or communities function "without any organizations that could formulate outspoken discourses or coordinate actions" (Visser *et al.*, 2015, p. 514). But as our analysis above hopes to show, if FSP is to be framed as an answer to capitalism's multiple rifts, then it may have to start raising its voice, rather than staying quiet. However, this brings yet further problems. Concrete individuals engaging in FSP may not be interested in, or perhaps be hostile to, politics in general (Pungas, 2023, p. 12-13), or to the type of politics immediately associated with the degrowth paradigm. Indeed, as Saturnino Borras notes, "some members of the [global peasant movement] La Via Campesina from Central and Eastern Europe do not want to hear anything about socialism, especially of the type that existed in their region in the past" (2018, p.13). Our contention, however,

[4] It is important to note that Gramsci's division of material content and ideological forms was more 'didactic' than substantive, "since the material forces would be inconceivable historically without form and the ideologies would be individual fancies without the material forces" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 377).

[5] The literature on 'Universal Basic Income' (UBI) has flourished in recent years, in light of a variety of interconnected contradictions with late capitalism, particularly the tendency towards unemployment, precarious employment, higher rates of exploitation (i.e. lower real wages), and increased household debt, all of which biases the distribution of surplus-value to higher income brackets. UBI thus short-circuits this tendency through radical redistributive measures that minimize vulnerability to the broader population, increase material and mental security, and enhance social cohesion. See, *inter alia*, Croker (2020; Manjarin & Szlinder (2016) and van Parijs (2013). With specific reference to FSP, others have suggested the need to move towards 'Universal Basic Services' or 'Universal Basic Infrastructures', each of which would be complementary to UBI, and potentially contribute towards healing the metabolic rift through maximizing social infrastructures necessary for a degrowth mode of living (Lombardozzi & Pitts 2020).

is that there is a route to connect the movement for social and ecological justice, degrowth thinking and strategies, and practitioners FSP in the region.

The first step along that route is a broader understanding of the terrain of struggle itself. Put differently, the challenge of politicizing the movement towards a degrowth horizon does not rest squarely with practitioners of FSP. As Domazet and Ančić (2019) show from their survey of environmental justice (EJ) movements in Croatia, the degrowth paradigm is certainly acknowledged yet only tentatively embraced. While Croatian EJ movements are substantively mobilized around the environmental impacts of infrastructure projects, urban development and tourism, they do not tend to see their collective strategies as explicitly tied to degrowth politics. Indeed, even if most respondents saw their actions as containing an immanent element of the degrowth paradigm, they remain skeptical of its relative abstraction and intellectualism. As one respondent noted: "…without authority, without monopoly [on power …], I think that [implementation of environmentally beneficial policies] cannot happen. And in that sense, degrowth also won't happen without the intervention of the state, but that state, that state can be us, right?" (cited in Domazet & Ančić, 2019, p. 126).

Whether from the perspective of affecting "environmentally beneficial policies", or the scaling up and institutional support for FSP practice, these very different actors find an immanent convergence across the horizon of political possibility. In other words, lines of cross-class solidarity (i.e. between activists, FSP practitioners, and farmers) are always or already intertwined, manifesting through a variety of implicit connections, synergies and forms of political consciousness that work towards a common goal (or in Gramscian terms, a new historical bloc) (see Svensson, Balogh & Cartwright, 2019). It is merely a question of how these lines become intersected, and what they might bring to the broader strategy of a degrowth project? What can academics learn from social movements and food self-provisioning about the everyday practices of organization, resistance and alternative foodways? How can social movements benefit from instruction in hands-on food growing and building community? And might food growers benefit from dialogue with EJ movements, farmer organizations and academics about some of the shared challenges and hopes for the future among those seeking a way out of the nightmare of fossil capitalism? We leave these questions as merely speculatory, but in the hope they might raise further questions, and nurture ongoing conversations.

6. In lieu of conclusions: FSP as an emergent property of a "degrowth mode of living"

Our contribution to the burgeoning literature on FSP politics makes a simple yet elusive argument. The identification of FSP as a significant, if not prefigurative, component of degrowth politics, should not be overlooked. The widespread, autonomous and implicitly radical social practices engendered by FSP in Eastern Europe and the Balkans provide much food for thought about what a post-capitalist future might look like. Notwithstanding, it also inhibits our post-capitalist imagination, by virtue of its fragmentary existence, its minority position in food supply for the population (even within Eastern Europe and the Balkans), and its relative disconnect to the spaces of power and politics. Our contribution should not therefore be taken as some kind of demand, or injunction, to practitioners of FSP, which would be both unethical and foolhardy. To repeat, it would be unfair to place the burden of degrowth onto the shoulders of FSP networks as if we expect them to be the vanguard of a post-capitalist future. And yet, precisely because FSP practice provides incisive lessons about what can (and should) be done with respect to our relationship with the Earth (and each other), it behooves us to think through the implications of what taking FSP "to scale" might mean.

However, such a collective intellectual (and political) project is also elusive, given the myriad challenges thrown up by capitalism and its imperial mode of living. These challenges are, like capitalism's multiple rifts, diverse yet interconnected. Fortunately, ways to address them exist and these are interconnected and multifaceted. They may need a more explicit re-connection to a well-entrenched, transnational and trans-class political force. Academic research in Eastern Europe and the Balkans is increasingly explicit about the transformative potential of FSP and its possible connections to broader movements, calling for substantive socio-ecological change that may begin the long process of healing the metabolic rift. We argue that these connections must be amplified many times over, and with a sensitivity to specific social contexts (in the region and beyond). This imperative for amplification is itself reflective of the balance of social forces currently

confronting those seeking to reclaim life from the death-drive of capital. It is not enough to evoke the values of sustainability, green living, resilience, or "equitable food systems", precisely because these discourses are essentially contested between a variety of different actors, and with differing normative positions. Indeed, in most cases, "corporate voices and perspectives tend to be louder than those of producers, workers, consumers, reflecting and reproducing the power imbalance within policy negotiations and the global society more broadly" (Juskaite & Haug, 2023, 9).

Degrowth as a movement for radical social change, beyond what is "proven to work", can help practitioners of FSP take that crucial step out of the domain of "quietness" and private "resilience", just as FSP can provide practical, on-the-ground examples of what a degrowth mode of living might look like in essence. However, in this instance, the invitation to connect must come from a large enough group of FSP practitioners, emboldened by the political recognition of a broad, socio-structurally diverse and materially connected constituency. The role of academics, in partnership with other individuals, movements, and groups seeking to affect real change, cannot be overstated; a meaningful and progressive voice is required to amplify a hitherto "quiet" practice.

Funding

Research and co-writing for this article has been supported by Corvinus University of Budapest, a Corvinus Institute for Advanced Studies (CIAS) Senior Research Fellow grant (Mladen Domazet), and a Junior Research Fellow grant (Rowan Lubbock), 2022-2023. This paper was also partially produced within the project Ethics and Social Challenges (EDI) at the Institute of Philosophy, reviewed by the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia, and financed through the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021–2026 of the European Union – NextGenerationEU.

References

A post growth event: Free money day. (n.d.). Retrieved November 23, 2023, from Degrowth website: https://degrowth.info/blog/a-post-growth-event-free-money-day

Alber, J., & Kohler, U. (2008). Informal food production in the enlarged European Union. *Social Indicators Research*, *89*, 113-127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-007-9224-1

Bhattacharya, T. (2017). How not to skip class: Social reproduction of labor and the global working class. In Bhattacharya, T. (ed.) *Social reproduction theory: Remapping class, recentering oppression*. (pp. 68-93). Pluto Press.

Borras Jr, S. M. (2020). Agrarian social movements: The absurdly difficult but not impossible agenda of defeating right-wing populism and exploring a socialist future. *Journal of Agrarian Change*, *20*(1), 3-36. https://doi.org/10.1111/joac.12311

Brand, U. (2022). The global political economy of the imperial mode of living. *Global Political Economy*, 1(1), 26-37. https://doi.org/10.1332/PEIR2693

Brand, U., & Wissen, M. (2021). *The imperial mode of living: Everyday life and the ecological crisis of capitalism*. Verso Books.

Chandler, D. (2014). *Resilience: The governance of complexity*. Routledge.

Chandler, D., & Reid, J. (2016). *The neoliberal subject: Resilience, adaptation and vulnerability*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Crocker, G. (2020). *Basic income and sovereign money: The alternative to economic crisis and austerity policy*. Springer.

Daly, H. E. (1996). *Beyond growth: the economics of sustainable development*. Beacon Press.

Daněk, P., & Jehlička, P. (2020). Quietly degrowing: Food self-provisioning in central Europe. In Nelson, A. & Edwards, F. (eds.). *Food for degrowth*: *Perspectives and practices.* (pp. 33-44). Routledge.

Daněk, P., Sovová, L., Jehlička, P., Vávra, J., & Lapka, M. (2022). From coping strategy to hopeful everyday practice: Changing interpretations of food self-provisioning. *Sociologia Ruralis*, *62*(3), 651-671. https://doi.org/10.1111/soru.12395

Demaria, F., & Latouche, S. (2019). Degrowth. In Kothari, A. *et al*. (eds.). *Pluriverse: A post-development dictionary*, (pp. 148-151).Tulika Books.

Deriu, M. (2014). Autonomy. In D'Alisa, G. *et al*. (eds.). *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era.* (pp. 55-58). Routledge.

Domazet, M. (2019). Degrowth-compatible common senses in Croatia. *Südosteuropa Mitteilungen*, 05-06, 158-168.

Domazet, M., & Ančić, B. (2019). Complementarity between the EJ movement and degrowth on the European semiperiphery: An empirical study. *Ecological Economics*, *157*, 120-128. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2018.11.006

Dorondel, S., & Şerban, S. (2019). Dissuading the state: Food security, peasant resistance and environmental concerns in rural Bulgaria. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, *40*(4), 564-579. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2018.1498326

Dzenovska, D. (2020). Emptiness: Capitalism without people in the Latvian countryside. *American Ethnologist*, *47*(1), 10-26. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12867

Foster, J. B. (2000). *Marx's ecology: Materialism and nature*. NYU Press.

Gorz, A. (1980). *Ecology as politics.* Black Rose Books.

Gramsci, A. (2020). Selections from the Prison Notebooks. In Prentki, T. & Abraham, N. (eds.). *The applied theatre reader* (pp. 141-142). Routledge.

Guerrero Lara, L., Van Oers, L., Smessaert, J., Spanier, J., Raj, G., & Feola, G. (2023). Degrowth and agri-food systems: A research agenda for the critical social sciences. *Sustainability Science*, *18*(4), 1579-1594. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01276-y

Gunvald Nilsen, A. (2009). 'The authors and the actors of their own drama': Towards a Marxist theory of social movements. *Capital & Class*, *33*(3), 109-139. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816809033003050l

Hampton, P. (2018). Trade unions and climate politics: Prisoners of neoliberalism or swords of climate justice? *Globalizations*, *15*(4), 470-486. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1454673

Han, B. C. (2021). *Capitalism and the death drive.* John Wiley.

Harvey, D. (2011). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press.

Hesketh, C. (2016). The survival of non-capitalism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, *34*(5), 877-894. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775816639313

Hickel, J. (2022). *Less Is More: How degrowth will save the world*. Penguin Books.

Hickel, J. (2021). What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification. *Globalizations*, *18*(7), 1105-1111. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2020.1812222

Holloway, L., Cox, R., Venn, L., Kneafsey, M., Dowler, E., & Tuomainen, H. (2006). Managing sustainable farmed landscape through 'alternative' food networks: a case study from Italy. *Geographical Journal*, *172*(3), 219-229. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4959.2006.00205.x

Jackson, Tim. (2017). *Prosperity without growth: Foundations for the economy of tomorrow*. Routledge.

Jehlička, P., Ančić, B., Daněk, P., & Domazet, M. (2021). Beyond hardship and joy: Framing home gardening on insights from the European semi-periphery. *Geoforum*, *126*, 150-158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2021.05.018

Jehlička, P., Daněk, P., & Vávra, J. (2019). Rethinking resilience: home gardening, food sharing and everyday resistance. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies/Revue canadienne d'études du développement*, 40(4), 511-527. https://doi.org/10.1080/02255189.2018.1498325

Jehlička, P., Grīviņš, M., Visser, O., & Balázs, B. (2020). Thinking food like an East European: A critical reflection on the framing of food systems. *Journal of Rural Studies, 76*, 286-295. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2020.04.015

Juskaite, G., & Haug, R. (2023). Multiple meanings of "equitable food systems': Food systems and discursive politics of change. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, 7*, 1127562. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2023.1127562

Kallis, G. (2018). *Degrowth*. Agenda Publishing.

Knight, K. W., Rosa, E. A., & Schor, J. B. (2013). Could working less reduce pressures on the environment? A cross-national panel analysis of OECD countries, 1970–2007. *Global Environmental Change*, 23(4), 691-700. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.02.017

Koch, M. (2022). State-civil society relations in Gramsci, Poulantzas and Bourdieu: Strategic implications for the degrowth movement. *Ecological Economics, 193*, 107275. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107275

Krüger, T. (2020). Identifying strategic entry points for transformative politics towards a degrowth society: how to operationalize the concept of the "imperial mode of living' for empirical research. *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, *33*(2), 257-275. https://doi.org/10.1080/13511610.2020.1732196

Lombardozzi, L., & Pitts, F. H. (2020). Social form, social reproduction and social policy: Basic income, basic services, basic infrastructure. *Capital & Class, 44*(4), 573-594. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309816819873323

Manjarin, E., & Szlinder, M. (2016). A Marxist argumentative scheme on basic income and wage share in an anti-capitalist agenda. *Basic Income Studies, 11*(1), 49-59. http://doi.org/10.1515/bis-2016-0010

Mann, S. A. (1990). *Agrarian capitalism in theory and practice*. University of North Carolina Press.

Marx, K. (1982). *Capital: A critique of political economy, Vol I*. Penguin Books.

McClintock, N. (2010). Why farm the city? Theorizing urban agriculture through a lens of metabolic rift. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 3*(2), 191-207. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsq005

Meadows, D. H., Meadows, D. L. & Randers, J. (1972). *Limits to growth*. Universe Books.

Mishan, E. J. (1993). *The costs of economic growth*. Rev. ed. Praeger.

Moore, J. W. (2000). Environmental crises and the metabolic rift in world-historical perspective. *Organization & Environment, 13*(2), 123-157. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086026600132001

Neocleous, M. (2013). Resisting resilience. *Radical Philosophy 178*, no. Mar/Apr: 2–7.

Poulantzas, N. (2014 [1974]) *State, power, socialism*. Verso.

Pungas, L. (2023). Dachas and food democracy—What makes a (good) food citizen? *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, 7*, 1052298. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2023.1052298

Renting, H., Marsden, T. K., & Banks, J. (2003). Understanding alternative food networks: exploring the role of short food supply chains in rural development. *Environment and Planning A, 35*(3), 393-411. https://doi.org/10.1068/a3510

Rose, R., & Tikhomirov, Y. (1993). Who grows food in Russia and Eastern Europe? *Post-Soviet Geography, 34*(2), 111-126. https://doi.org/10.1080/10605851.1993.10640922

Saitō, K. (2022). *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the idea of degrowth communism*. Cambridge University Press.

Schlosberg, D., & Coles, R. (2016). The new environmentalism of everyday life: Sustainability, material flows and movements. *Contemporary Political Theory, 15*, 160-181. https://doi.org/10.1057/cpt.2015.34

Seeth, H. T., Chachnov, S., Surinov, A., & Von Braun, J. (1998). Russian poverty: Muddling through economic transition with garden plots. *World Development, 26*(9), 1611-1624. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0305-750X(98)00083-7

Smith, A. (2002). Culture/economy and spaces of economic practice: Positioning households in post-communism. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 27*(2), 232-250. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-5661.00051

Smith, J., & Jehlička, P. (2007). Stories around food, politics and change in Poland and the Czech Republic. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 32*(3), 395-410. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-5661.2007.00258.x

Smith, J., & Jehlička, P. (2013). Quiet sustainability: Fertile lessons from Europe's productive gardeners. *Journal of Rural Studies, 32*, 148-157. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2013.05.002

Smith, J., Kostelecký, T., & Jehlička, P. (2015). Quietly does it: Questioning assumptions about class, sustainability and consumption. *Geoforum, 67*, 223-232. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.03.017

Stevis, D. (2018). US labour unions and green transitions: depth, breadth, and worker agency. *Globalizations, 15*(4), 454–469. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2018.1454681

Stoll, S. (2002). *Larding the lean earth: Soil and society in nineteenth-century America*. Hill and Wang.

Svensson, S., Balogh, P., & Cartwright, A. (2019). Unexpected counter-movements to nationalism: The hidden potential of local food communities. *Eastern European Countryside, 25*(1), 37-61. https://doi.org/10.12775/eec.2019.002

Tilzey, M. (2024). Food democracy as radical political agroecology: securing autonomy (alterity) by subverting the state-capital nexus. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems, 8*, 1044999. https://doi.org/10.3389/fsufs.2024.1044999

Trantas, N. (2021). Could "degrowth' have the same fate as "sustainable development'? A discussion on passive revolution in the Anthropocene age. *Journal of Political Ecology, 28*(1), 224-245. https://doi.org/10.2458/jpe.2362

UN News (2021). 'Food systems account for over one-third of global greenhouse gas emissions', Retrieved Feb 9, 2025, from https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1086822

UN News (2023). 'FAO report reveals hidden costs of agrifood system', Retrieved November 6, 2023, from https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/11/1143242

Van Apeldoorn, B., De Graaff, N., & Overbeek, H. (2017). The reconfiguration of the global state–capital nexus. In *The state–capital nexus in the global crisis* (pp. 5-19). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2012.699915

Van Parijs, P. (2013). The universal basic income: Why utopian thinking matters, and how sociologists can contribute to it. *Politics & Society, 41*(2), 171-182. https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329213483106.

Visser, O., Mamonova, N., Spoor, M., & Nikulin, A. (2015). 'Quiet food sovereignty' as food sovereignty without a movement? Insights from post-socialist Russia. *12*(4) https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2015.1005968

Walker, J., & Cooper, M. (2011). Genealogies of resilience: From systems ecology to the political economy of crisis adaptation. *Security Dialogue, 42*(2), 143-160. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611399616