



Group Assembly Process (GAP) - Stirring Paper

How to produce for degrowth?

Rediscovering manual skills and peasantry

by Sylvain Fischer

Degrowth breaks myths of our time. It leads us to reduce and redefine our consumption, to adopt a simpler and happier way of life. It also pushes us to also rethink our occupations. Today the chances of finding “good” jobs are reduced. So why not take the opportunity to learn and practice a meaningful skill, so as to offer something socially useful, in reciprocal exchanges, within local networks? To fulfill ecologically our basic needs, we require that many of us express our passion and creative forces in the recovery of manual skills and peasant life. Are you ready to take the plunge?

Our epoch has its myths. Degrowth deconstructs some of them: we all had faith in *economic growth*, to produce and consume more and more ... until it became unsustainable. We've complied with a *developmentalism* that on five continents has broken the balances of indigenous and peasant self-sufficient life. *Technical progress* promised abundance but global malnutrition is slowly increasing and now affects over 800 millions people. *Industrialism* claims to save a lot of time, but the middle and upperclasses are under stress, from a “lack of time”. We trusted in *sciences*. But the scientific approach is compartmentalized, measuring necessarily subjective and self-serving narrow criteria. Oriented by fund-raisers and claiming to be the most reliable way for understanding the world, it disregards oppositions, even the majorities against nuclear or GMO. Most financed researches from bio- to nano-technologies are useless AND dangerous. World wide preindustrial knowledges are discarded and alternatives are denigrated or banned. If we decolonize our imaginary from those beliefs, what kind of producers would we want to be?

The crisis is presented by the press as speculative and temporary. Nevertheless it could last, since it also ensues from geophysical limits: *peak oil* is a case which shows that the times of energy abundance and waste are ending. Easy to extract hydrocarbons are getting scarce because of geological shortages and high demand... Crude oil prices already multiplied by 5 since the year 2000. So the middle classes are progressively moving away from the overconsumption experienced in the twentieth century. If we want to

prevent cuts from being imposed authoritatively, we have to reinvent ourselves another life with less waste of materials and energy.

Chasing social prestige... Parents and teachers push new generations toward university and occupations in the service sector. Only when we're rejected by school do we touch the tools of the trades... We become specialized as "intellectuals", who cannot imagine working with our hands, or "workers", who suffer from the failure complex and inhibit ourselves from exploring alternative and self-manage productive activities. With the crisis our specialization makes us almost useless: there are fewer jobs and we can produce very little by ourselves to contribute to our local community. If we still are employe we often just work for money, we don't really believe in the social benefit we offer through our occupations.

To become a peasant or a skilled worker? Today manual labour is undervalued and considered out of date. Nevertheless rediscovering it allows us to reconnect with our bodies and our emotions, with the materials we transform, and with an esthetic sense that dramatically disappears in industrial production. The peasant draws the landscape, and artisans put emotions into our objects. We have to end with the separation between manual and intellectual work, by enabling ourself for both! Craft production in a degrowth perspective needs little capital to get started, and producers can easily join together. Then we gather in our own hands the capital and labour which allow us to be masters of our production redefining new ways of managing and exchanging.

Unemployment is over! The Senufo, a African peasant ethnic group that distrusts progress, questions us "ingenously" about our jobs: "if everybody does paper work, what will we eat?"... For them it is incongruous that everybody works in offices. But everyone who wants can be peasant... Then we can meet our needs for food, housing through self-production. And preserve our health through healthy eating and producing. Here in northern countries most agroecological producers were conventional salaried intellectual workers years ago. They made the plunge and today they feel incomparably happier since they now produce in a useful, healthy, meaningful, self-managed way... In practice, there is no unemployment for those who are dedicated to agroecological production: farmers in Western Europe represent just a small percent of the population. Deindustrialization and relocalization of our food production requires millions of new farmers. To fulfill our other needs from raw local materials will also require millions of people to rediscover forgotten skills. "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." If you are attracted by a particular trade, please at least begin to learn... and you will quickly notice that you are useful!

How do we get started? To retrieve a skill it's best to begin learning through a conventional or even better an ecological course or job. If you already are a craftsman, you are probably specialized in a single technique. It's necessary to unlearn some habits and to investigate much further for ecological techniques and self-management tools. In any case learning a full craft requires years of passionate effort and creativity, rich in human

encounters. We can keep learning with farmers and artisans who often need committed apprentices. We may also reconnect with elders asking about other ways of producing and living. And if we travel, we can learn in countries which perpetuate or recover skills. For a very first vision we can also spend just few weeks sessions as volunteers in agriculture or building workcamps. At the same time, we must be leery of the romantic dream of returning to the countryside without a trade and knowledge of how to get along in rural areas. To reduce environmental impacts, in particular transport, we have to anticipate how to live, work and relate in the same spot. We should especially avoid buying vehicles and driving to find work. Having a trade will make us useful and more able to integrate wherever we go.

Exchanging locally. Through shorter distribution channels, producers directly feed consumers. But isn't it time today for all of us to be consumers AND producers, that is "*prosumers*". To generate prosumer networks, we have first to strongly reduce our conventional consumption. This allows us simultaneously to live with less, to be generous for helping the entering local producers, to restore "less profitable" trades and to exchange with social currencies, time banks, barter or gifts ...

The knowledge to be recovered for peasant life is as broad as that of universities. Instead of studying for more master's degrees and waiting for the end of the "crisis", why don't we acquire skills which are consistent with our feelings and allow us to produce, exchange, and live in solidarity?

We are off, will you join us?