

Train-the-trainer module

a reader for future trainers on degrowth



v2.0beta
2014-06-11

With the support
of the Lifelong
Learning Programme
of the European Union



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Our philosophy for teaching and learning degrowth

Degrowth requires an epistemological and methodological framework capable of critically assessing the steps taken by the movement or movements that build up around the concept. The methods and techniques of teaching and learning within every GROWL course attempt to be coherent with degrowth ideas and promote a deconstruction and dialectic of both society mechanisms and the own degrowth movement dilemmas.

On the other hand, while a lot of practice-based materials exist (for example in the fields of permaculture, DIY, etc.), it is rare to find articulations between the concrete skills being learned and their (potential) contribution to degrowth. An effective praxis of degrowth can therefore only be established by framing existing local actions within degrowth historical, economical, political, cultural and sociological background. To this purpose, a combination of content and methodology is crucial, as well as of expert and lay knowledge is crucial.

We avoid the hierarchical structure of transmission of knowledge and experience and try to create an atmosphere of equality and exchange. It is more about sharing knowledge than about teaching and learning. In spite of the fact that in any kind of social experience we encounter power relations, we try to build non-hierarchical structures. The trainer is not only the person who knows but he is a regulator of power relations, he keeps time, takes care of the right of everybody to participate and speak, etc. The participants are an important source of content, a resource, and the trainer should know how to explore it. The GROWL process of learning is also participatory. That means that every participant should be included in the process.

We also use “head, heart and hands” approach in which all these three dimensions of experience are equally important. We think, analyze and discuss. We feel and express our feelings in order to make an experience of learning more personal. Finally we learn by practice, by doing. Learning opportunities can and should take place within local communities, provided both by skilled trainers (e.g. craftsmen), or in peer learning across communities of practice (e.g. exchanging good practices and experiences among similar initiatives).

Continuous reflection on the process of learning and self-reflection are essential. Participants can reflect and decide on what they want to learn and how they will do it. The space to express concerns has to be provided and organizers should react to participants’ needs.

Our way of working also brings a lot of degrowth dilemmas. The fact that we are an international project makes many of the participants of the courses take the plane to learn about degrowth. This is an obvious incoherence as far as degrowth values are concerned. It can be especially difficult issue if we are working with very critical people. We need to be aware of possible critiques towards the GROWL project and be open to address these dilemmas by using the methodology of ethical dilemmas.

The GROWL training method is also based on the constructivist philosophy. That means that we believe that the realities are socially constructed and in order to get to know them we should deconstruct them, search for their social origins and trail their history in the critical way. Constructivism also means that there is not only one through but many different views on the

reality, depending on individual and group experiences.

Constructivism and deconstruction are the key aspects of GROWL method. First, we help the participants to un-learn: to analyze their own ways of thinking, the origins of their worldviews and that way encourage them to open to the change in their mental structures. The objective of the deconstruction is to re-learn, to help people to change their way of thinking. In order to do this, apart from the deconstructure we have to assess the reconstruction. We want to help the participants to construct their alternative reality. It may be done as a last part of the individual processes of participants, starting with their presentations and ending with the visualizing themselves in the new world

Learning about degrowth in the group process, criticizing the mainstream reality and proposing radical alternatives may have important psychological impact on the learners. That is why we have to be attentive to the human process, pay attention to individual evolutions and revolutions. Moreover, as we want to accompany the participants in the construction of their own alternative realities we should start with the diagnosis of where they come from. The proper presentation is needed in order to become familiar with the social background of participants. Every participant comes from different initiative, different movement. We want to invite them to the process of self-reflection during the course. How they can change their perspectives and realities. We want participants to reflect and exchange reflections on how they can apply into their lives what they have learned during the course. In order to close the process appropriately and leave the participants with constructive energy to apply vital change in their realities we propose to introduce the visualizing exercise at the end of the meeting and positively empower people. It is an important task, as during the course we deconstruct a lot and do not want to let people go with negative impressions.

The goal of this process is to empower people, helping one to make the right questions and be critical on the own proposals of the movement. Ideally every participant should be able to undertake action after the training and keep learning through his or her actions in the groups he or she works with, including its peers at the GROWL network, therefore supporting a process of open knowledge production and innovation on the theory and praxis of degrowth.

Politics

Steps to design a politicized and connected to local context TTT.

0. *Explain why TTT (to organize DG courses) and GROWL has a political context.*

1. Selection of topic. In order to find a topic that connects to local context and population, it is important to list existing local projects that could be understood within the Degrowth premises. The criteria in order to select a good topic much include the analysis of: how long the project exists (how resilient it is)? How close it is with degrowth theory (low resources? How local population identifies with the project (accepts or rejects)? The fact that it is a topic that has already been worked on the region, means that it will be easier also to find personal to provide technical training during the TTT.

2. Target group. The selection of participant for the TTT shall give preference to those already developing local development projects, research or any sort of activism. This will improve the outcomes of the project and help providing a critical political perspective to the courses they are themselves supposed to organized.

3. Self-representation. Start the session by asking them to present themselves, why they are there, in which projects that have been involved, or why they got the motivation of joining a TTT module and become politically active. Use self-representation approach as a means to raise the idea of self-determination of wills and needs, and not accepting that other entities than themselves can represent or produce their own ideas.

4. Network. Use this opportunity to form a local network of activists, researchers, and practitioners, which may not know each other from before, and that may be spread in the neighboring localities. This network will also help each other developing each course, since they will have to develop similar courses with the same steps, so that if they cooperate will be easier.

5. Local political institutions. Avoid creating political concerns about the development of courses as such, by communicating first to local authorities and explain the project, and its benefits for the achievement of policy goals for the region. (...) Use this opportunity to bring also other local / regional / international alliances.

6. Popular Degrowth activities. Organize practical experiences with the local population (e.g. planting a public food forest)

7. Public events. During the courses, some public events can be done in public spaces, such as traditional dances, talks, etc. in local language.

Organisation and network

Our vision on training for degrowth is that we need to learn a diversity of skills, useful to address the multiple crises in a diversity of contexts. Even where experiences look only to be relevant on a specific place and situation, they can nevertheless provide resources and inspiration for trainers elsewhere.

Our knowledge builds up from the contribution of everyone in our network. We form a community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1998): people like you and me sharing a common interest on degrowth, which is what brings us together.

We have built GROWL network based on principles of openness, sharing and collaboration, which allow us to build up on experiences and knowledge across people, initiatives and trainings on degrowth. We encourage you to get inspired by what you find on our network and share back your experiences with the other participants of the community.

GROWL started with the support of an EU Grundtvig partnership grant that funds 9 partner organisations in 8 countries between August 2013 and July 2015. As part of it, nearly every partner is working on an own module and organising a course, with the aim of forming the pioneer trainers of this international network. A virtual community where trainers and learners can communicate, access and produce resources has been created on co-munity.net.

It is important for trainers to have a common understanding on the definition and concepts that form this network and where to get the necessary information, online and offline, to build a course. This section provides you a walk through on the organisation of our "open knowledge base", the concepts of modules and courses and things you should look at when organising your courses.

Modules

Modules are pieces of content that form the building blocks of courses. In its ideal form, the module aggregates information that can, for example, be directly printed as a booklet on the topic. As part of the module can be collections of contributed texts, images, resources such as presentations, references for additional reading, etc.

Although modules have a coordinating organisation and/or person, they are always open for feedback and improvement by any person in the network.

The following modules are being developed as part of the GROWL Grundtvig partnership (August 2013-July 2015):

Core modules:

- Degrowth theory
- TTT (trainers resources and methodologies)

Context/thematic modules:

- Degrowth & Agriculture

- Degrowth Public Policies
- Mental Infrastructures and Degrowth Transformation
- Local Economic Alternatives
- Solidarity economy
- Work in a degrowth society
- Dimensions of Community Building: Living, Working and Learning together

Courses

Courses are training opportunities in the GROWL network. They are typically formed as a combination of the core modules (degrowth theory and train-the-trainer) with a thematic module.

The choice of modules for a course can be guided by the philosophy and political aspects of the GROWL trainings, that you find on other sections of this booklet. You can decide to use one of the existing modules and methodologies, or develop something new for your course (in which case you are kindly invited to contribute back to the network!).

While planning and preparing a course, you are advised to follow the "Think-about".

Trainers resources

In this section you can find all kinds of resources for trainers.

Most of the current resources have been developed as part of the Train-the-Trainer module. However, as a trainer, you are invited to also contribute any resources you have to the network.

What resources can you find or contribute to this section?

- description of methodologies
- presentations
- videos
- training materials

Virtual community

We have are setting up a virtual community for GROWL on the degrowth.co-munity.net platform. All modules, courses and materials will be made available here, free for use and adaptation by anyone.

With the aim of developing and continuously improving an open knowledge resource base, we encourage all trainers and future trainers to actively use and contribute to this space with their questions, experiences, materials and opinions.

References:

Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger. 1998. "Communities of Practice." Retrieved June 9: 2008.

Be aware...

a "think-about" for course organizers

degrow the program!

To build a degrowth society we also need to degrow our life! Many activists overburden themselves with a lot of engagement. Although we want to work together we don't want to become overworked. We want and need time for awareness, for permanent feedback and evaluation, for fun and conviviality...

Think about time for relaxation, for dancing, singing and music, for outside activities and games. Common evening activities can be great fun.

We need perturbation! Find a person to who is aware of the atmosphere, a person to interrupt and make a short intersection.

before the course...

It is good to know who is coming. Ask for the role of participants in the registration form, about their interests in degrowth (agriculture, transportation, participative processes etc.) and the specific subject as well as their experiences and educational work.

Make clear to the participants that they are part of a functioning whole and that they have to be present from beginning to the end of a course. Late arrivals and early leavings disturb the workflow and atmosphere at the courses.

Have all necessary information available beforehand. Send a document with the final program and all practical information (address, map, contact details) at least one week in advance.

The GROWL project is dedicated to networking and sharing information, knowledge and practical skills. Find local or related initiatives, support them and get inspired by them!

Don't overburden yourself! Try to find people who will help with the logistics (food, childcare, translation).

welcoming people

It is always difficult to arrive in a new place, feel comfortable and reorientate. Help people to do so!

Be there for people when they arrive, have a place for them to feel comfortable.

We want to get to know the place where we stay and where you live or work! welcome people in the place, explain where we are and what this place is (the building, the area...).

Share practical information: rules of the place (is it vegan?), (not) to-do's, tasks and how to share them among everybody. Make it easy to find where things are, such as a guide-system, maps of the place and around.

during the course

We want to get to know each other! Think about time slots for name- or other „who-is-who“- and group-building-games. Let participants present themselves or each other. May be even have a foto

of everybody. There will be international as well as local learners. Be aware that there are the partners, who know each other, and new people, who don't. Try to lower the split between them. Share information! Participants should know each others roles and also their responsibilities. Clarify the different roles and tasks (course organizer, cook-in-charge, stable project partner, project partner just for one meeting, local participant, person who wants to become a trainer) to make clear who you can ask when you have questions.

Arrange an information point where people can find important information: what is where (kitchen, shower, garbage)? Who is organizing what? When do we meet where? Have a program visible for everybody. May be even print it for everyone to have and keep it. Maybe have big papers to write on to enable an exchange of information. Let people make themselves a name batch, they can wear during the first course days.

It is helpful to have time and room for daily reflection, coordination and decision-making. We recommend to have a short assembly every morning: present the program, ask for questions and concerns etc. Here is also the place to keep everyone updated so that noone will feel lost: what will happen today? has the program changed? does anyone have a discussion or party proposal for the evening?

Maybe have as well time for evaluation in the evening: how do I feel in the group? was my learning style met?

communication

Degrowth presupposes a new form of social organization. We want to listen to everybody and give every person time, room and the opportunity to raise concerns. Think about that some people need more time for that and might not feel comfortable speaking in front of many people!

Make sure that people feel safe and heard throughout the course! In discussions and working groups a facilitator is needed. Another person should take care that everybody can speak. Watch out that everybody can finish a talk. Ask people who have not spoken if they want to say something.

Use hand signs in assemblies. Explain them beforhand! There might be persons who do not know them.

Have a person (or more) one can go to when you feel alone or uncomfortable in the process.

food

Food is very important! We want to have enough time to eat together and use this time to get to know each other better.

In a degrowth society food and its production and its producers will have another importance than in a growth society. Think about an organic, regional, vegetarian or vegan food supply. Make clear where the food comes from? Support local initiatives. Let us meet them.

Make clear who is responsible and communicate tasks and responsibilities. We want to help together but we also need the time for the course. Better have a person (or more) being responsible for food preparation.

Ask beforhand (in the application form) about allergies. Be aware that some people, including many children, are very sensitive to spices and try to prepare some basic food without any spices (potatoes, cooked vegetables...).

Invite and motivate people to bring their children to the courses!

In a degrowth society children have their place in the normal life with other generations, instead of being 'stored' somewhere else. At the same time we have to be aware that children have other needs than adults. They probably don't want to stay concentrated for a long time hearing a presentation, and would rather to play and move more (this does not only have to be true for children...). They cannot adapt to meal times, especially when dinner is very late.

Organize space, share but also specify space for adults and children. Participants come to work together so they also need to have the possibility to work quietly and concentrated. Activities such as cooking and handicrafts along the course are possibilities for children (and meeting-tired adults) to work together for the well being of the rest of the group and have a good time at the same.

Organise a person who takes care of the children. Note that also language is an issue here! If one cannot talk with the children it might be very exhausting for both sides after a while.

Think about fundraising for organized childcare.

language

In your course there will be local and international participants. For local people the local language is most possibly the most comfortable one. English is understandable for most people nowadays but for many it is less comfortable and they might not speak up as much as they would like to. Think about the possibility of having more than one language.

Organize personal translation (chuchotage – whispered interpreting).

Consider using cheap, DIY translation devices, such as spiders. If you make a one time event, you can rent them or ask in the network - some of the organisations bought these equipments and will probably be available to lend you them for your course.

documentation

Not only for our sponsor we want to document what we are doing. A good documentation is important to share all information with those who are not able to take part in the course and to enrich our pool of common knowledge. Also for future course organizers to learn from mistakes, from what has run fine or not so well.

Speak with the communication&outreach team. Have an extra computer for taking minutes and a camera to take pictures and another one for filming. Make sure that the batteries are charged in the morning and there is a hard drive to download the SD Cards regularly.

Help afterwards with processing, structuring and systematising all written, sent, filmed and photographed documentation on the online GROWL co-munity space.