

Stirring Paper

Title: How to built, organize and manage degrowth movements rooted in the territory?

Author: Jean-Louis Aillon,ⁱ Marta Guindani,ⁱⁱ Dal Santo Elena,ⁱⁱⁱ Stefano Zummo,^{iv} Alessandro Montis,^v Maurizio Pallante.^{vi}

Proponent subject: “Movimento per la Decrescita Felice” (MDF) - Movement for Happy Degrowth

Thematic threads: Organizing society (Societal organization and coordination beyond growth; Social movements, self-organized projects)

Narrative steps: Visions and strategies for transformation.

This paper is aimed at promoting a discussion on how to organize society in order to spread degrowth thought and practices. It focuses the attention on how to built, organize and manage national degrowth movements rooted in the territory, thus with local basis. The discussion will touch on four main topics:

- 1) How to built, organize and manage degrowth movements at national level
- 2) How to built, organize and manage degrowth associations at local level
 - a. What to do? Theoretical and practical activities
 - b. How to do it? The “spirit”/culture of the association (values, principles, habits, ways of doing things),
 - c. How to organize the association (e.g. type of association, management and regularity of meetings, democratic criteria for decisions, sub-division into working groups, communication and informatics tools, etc.)

In order to enhance a discussion deep-rooted in real and actual practices, we would like to present and discuss within the GAP session the “case-example” of the Italian “Movimento per la Decrescita Felice” (MDF) - Movement for Happy Degrowth.¹

Below it is described the Italian experience of MDF following the four topics above mentioned.

1) How to built, organize and manage degrowth movements at national level

MDF was founded in 2007 by individuals and groups who identified themselves within the theoretical frame outlined by the book “La Decrescita Felice” (Happy Degrowth), published by Maurizio Pallante.² It consists of a federation of autonomous associations, spread locally throughout the country and called “Circoli per la Decrescita Felice”,³ which belong to the national movement and adhere to its principles and purposes.^{4 5}

The principal characteristic of MDF is a "pragmatic" approach to the issue of degrowth. MDF would like to be a sort of

¹ For more information: <http://decrecitafelice.it>

² Pallante M., *La decrescita felice; la qualità della vita non dipende dal pil*, Edizioni per la Decrescita Felice, Roma 2009.

³ The English translation of club or association does not express completely the Italian meaning for “Circolo”. Thus, we choose to use the Italian word. For the sake of simplicity, we will use the singular form “Circolo” for “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice” (Association for Happy Degrowth) and the plural form “Circoli” for “Circoli per la Decrescita Felice” (Associations for Happy Degrowth).

⁴ For more information: <http://decrecitafelice.it/chi-siamo/>

⁵ Formally The Italian Movement for Happy Degrowth, as the “Circoli per la Decrescita Felice”, are “associazioni di promozione sociale” for the Italian law. The entire statute (available only in Italian) is available at this internet address: <http://decrecitafelice.it/statuto/>

catalyser in order both to spread degrowth and to provide an opportunity for people that recognize themselves in degrowth thought and lifestyle to meet each others, discuss, draw together a new cultural paradigm, facilitate its dissemination, and above all to put into practice the degrowth message “here and now”, on local basis. “Circoli” are the tool to achieve this goal, the hearth of MDF.⁶ The principal aim of MDF is, thus, to coordinate and support them.

Actually, in Italy there are 24 active “Circoli” working on the territory, mostly located in big urban areas.^{7 8} “Circoli” are almost completely autonomous in their organization and management. The only duty to respect is to carry out activities compatible with the degrowth framework. Furthermore, there are other possibilities to be part of MDF:

- “*Associazione Aderente*” (Adhering Association): pre-existing associations that work in the field of sustainability and which declare to adhere to the principle and purposes of MDF can be affiliated and become part of it. Actually, there are 7 adhering associations.

- “*Gruppi Tematici*” (Thematic Groups): they consist in groups of people from every part of Italy that work on specific topics, mostly through the internet but sometimes also meeting concretely. The aim of the groups is to develop degrowth thought in a particular field of knowledge, to promote discussion within MDF, national conferences as well as practical activities on these topics. Actually, there are three thematic groups: “Health and Degrowth”, “Territory and Human Settlements” (city planning), and “Agriculture and Nutrition”.⁹

- “*Gruppi per la Decrescita Felice*” (Groups for Happy Degrowth): before becoming a formal association (“Circolo”) we promote an informal period in which groups of people can start to organize themselves on local basis.¹⁰ Currently in the MDF there are 22 Groups.¹¹

MDF is coordinated at national level by a national board actually composed by 11 members that every 2 years are elected by some delegates of “Circoli” and adhering associations. The work of the national board is essentially aimed at outlining the political and theoretical lines of the Movement (theoretical work is supported by a scientific committee), organizing national events or campaigns, and coordinating and supporting the work of “Circoli” and new-born groups. The support to “Circoli” and groups is carried out by specific members of the national board with the help of specific tools that have been developed both for the bureaucratic and general management. Another important task of the national board is to coordinate the communication, for which we use different communication medias.¹²

⁶ Generally, they work mainly in the following four areas: lifestyles, technologies, politics and culture. These four lines are for us as a stool, which consists of three strong legs - lifestyle , technology and politics - which take up the shelf of culture. Each part is fundamental. As a matter of fact, if one of these legs is missing, the stool will not stand.

⁷ The location of “Circoli” (violet icons) is available at this internet address:
<https://maps.google.it/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=214730953364334530756.0004b9630882af75ad9b9&hl=it&ie=UTF8&t=m&ll=42.682435,11.557617&spn=12.917813,11.381836&z=5&source=embed>

⁸ More information about “Circoli” is available at this internet address: <http://decrescitafelice.it/circoli/>

⁹ For more information: <http://decrescitafelice.it/gruppi-tematici/>

¹⁰ The location of the groups (yellow icons) is available at this internet address:
<https://maps.google.it/maps/ms?msa=0&msid=214730953364334530756.0004b9630882af75ad9b9&hl=it&ie=UTF8&t=m&ll=42.682435,11.557617&spn=12.917813,11.381836&z=5&source=embed>

¹¹ A groups is generally made by 5-10 people that start to meet themselves regularly and to do some theoretical or practical activities. Normally, after a period of 3-12 months, the group can become an official “Circolo”. However, a group can be made also by one or two people that declare to be available to become a contact person for anyone that is interested on degrowth in a specific local area. As a group we put a flag in the online map of associations (with an email address). Hence, every person who will consult our website will be able to see if there is someone else interested about building a “Circolo” in that area.

¹² There is a national website where there is a space for both general information about degrowth and a specific area for “Circoli” activities. Furthermore, we have a monthly newsletter (googlegroups), a facebook page, and an account twitter for

At the moment there are not employees in MDF, but we have occasionally hired some consultants for technical assistance.

2) How to built, organize and manage degrowth associations at local level

It is difficult to standardize the activities carried out by “Circoli” on the territory, because every reality is particular and different from the others. However several similarities can be described. Here, we will illustrate, as an exemplification, the reality of the Turin “Circolo”, one of the first and most active in MDF. This local association was born in 2010 and now counts about a hundred members and at least thirty active volunteers. It is responsible for the promotion of sustainable lifestyles and public awareness concerning degrowth. The aim of the “circolo” is to affect as many people as we can with the message of the degrowth and to do so through targeted and concrete actions at the local level.¹³

a) What to do?

1. Practical activities

The “Circolo” organizes a series of activities aimed at disseminating degrowing thought in civil society. Concretely, we do so through the practice of small individual actions such as self-production and exchange of goods according to the logic of the gift, contributing at the same time to reducing our ecological impact and augmenting our well-being.

The Turin “Circolo”, specifically, has two sub-groups: UNISF (the University of Self-Production)¹⁴ and a Food Garden Group. The aims of these groups is to re-discover and spread practical skills, to build a network of social ties and regain a sense of conviviality that is apparently lost.

UNISF, on one side, monthly organizes practical lessons on self-production, while the Garden Group, on the other side, offers the opportunity to practice horticulture in the urban context.

2. Intermediate (politics).¹⁵

A group is currently working on three major axes: the definition of municipal degrowth policy guidelines; activities for or against specific projects in Turin and Piedmont (i.e. mobility, public spaces, urbanisation processes); organization of conferences to present our ideas and compare them with those of political parties.

3. Theory

“Circolo” of Turin is active in creating groups for debating degrowth theory and spreading it all over the society. A group for the internal training and one for the external divulgation of degrowth are working in order to achieve these goals.

The training group seeks to be a laboratory for learning and provides members with articles, books, movies, as well as opportunities to discuss together. The group intent is to expand training both inside and outside of the “Circolo”. It organizes once a month a training on degrowth topics, and every week it organizes a 15 minutes presentation about the topic of the month.

spreading news together with the website and an open-access facebook group that we use as a forum for discussions. In addition, we developed several “communication kit” for helping “Circoli” in the their communication needs (logo, flag, large stripe of the association, draft for flier, ppt template, web-site template, etc.) and in order to make it easier for them to use communication tools.

¹³ For more information consult Circolo di Torino web site: <http://www.mdftorino.it/>

¹⁴ For more information: <http://decescitafelice.it/unisf/> or http://www.mdftorino.it/?page_id=813

¹⁵ Politics is one of the pillar of the degrowth project. We cannot act only on the territory in order to change society. We must act also at higher levels combining the “decolonization of the imaginary” at the bottom with a change at the political level.

The other group is, instead, focused on the divulgation of degrowth theory to all those realities interested to know and deepen it. It organizes meetings mainly for schools, but also for associations and other subjects.

b) How to do it?

We try to be friendly and open-minded, organizing game moments and, once a month, a “convivial dinner”, in order to facilitate relationships.¹⁶ Specific attention is paid and special meetings are organized for new people in order to introduce them easily in the association.

The main principles that guide our activity are to make the most pleasant and enjoyable what we are doing and to remind that the means that we use to achieve our goals are also an important goal.¹⁷

c) How to organize the association?

Turin “Circolo” members meet every week¹⁸. During the meeting we always attempt to foster dialogue and debate and try to give a voice to all. We decide by consensus and, only if strictly necessary, by vote. To simplify the discussion process, we use gestures to express assent or dissent. Because of the amount of people, we have created sub-groups on specific activities where people can engage easily, facilitating the streamlining of meetings.

The “communication group” has worked hardly in order to strengthen our image and created a “vademecum” with all the instructions that are useful to manage the “Circolo” and informatics tools.¹⁹

The main difficulty could be identified in being able to involve committed people. It is essential to be open to everyone and try to avoid support/endorsement to political parties: this could distance potentially interested people who may have different preferences.

We think our strengths are the presence on the territory and the contact with people as well as the convivial spirit in our everyday life.²⁰

¹⁶ After every weekly meeting we usually go out together for a dinner in conviviality (what we informally call “Beer Group”!). At the same time, we try to avoid excessively bureaucratic meetings in order to promote the opportunities for discussion and training.

¹⁷ The organization of MDF itself reflects the content of the thought of degrowth: MDF reflects the characteristics of a “degrowing person”, “Circoli” organize themselves with autonomy and there are no activities planned from above. “Circoli” often cooperate in a bottom-up approach, money plays a secondary role within the association, resources are maximized and meetings of the national board are organized on the basis of hospitality, in the sense that the hosting “Circolo” offers accommodation and logistical support.

¹⁸ The meeting lasts two hours: one hour for the plenary assembly (organizational management) and one hour for subgroups meeting

¹⁹ E.g. Googlegroups, newsletter, google drive, google sites, website members section, facebook, library, etc.

²⁰ For more information consult “Circolo di Torino” web site: <http://www.mdftorino.it/>

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Medical Doctor, trainee in dynamic psychotherapy, vice-president of “Movimento per la Decrescita Felice”. Member of “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice di Torino”.

Address: fraz. Excenex-meylan n.1, Aosta, Italy; tel: 00393287663652; email: jean.aillon@gmail.com

ii

Master degree in economics, president of “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice di Torino”

iii

Postgraduate student in Human Rights and Genocide Studies at Kingston University. Member of “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice di Torino”

iv

Master degree in Philosophy, national secretary and “Circoli” responsible of “Movimento per la Decrescita Felice”. Member of “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice di Torino”

v

Bachelor in marketing. National responsible of communication of “Movimento per la Decrescita Felice”. Member of “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice di Torino”

vi

Master degree in Literature and Philosophy, founder and president of “Movimento per la Decrescita Felice”. Member of “Circolo per la Decrescita Felice di Torino”