Session IV.

Degrowth in Scotland: Ideas and Practice

Themes

- **Opportunities for degrowth economics in Scotland**
- **Reclaiming the commons and the story of community land**
- **Influences on an emerging degrowth discourse**
  - **a radical heritage of grassroots resistance and activism**
  - **critical, cultural & intellectual wells**
- **Challenges: urban and rural**
- **Degrowth in practice - developments in Scotland**

 *All overview reading and context written by Mairi McFadyen unless otherwise stated

A. Introduction

As we discussed last week, the degrowth imaginary centres around the *reproductive economy of care:* non-commodified spaces of social reproduction that include relationships, networks, practices and struggles that are accessible to all and not mediated by the state or market. Caring in common is embodied in new forms of living – such as cooperatives or community land trusts. This week, in relation to the theme of 'degrowth in practice', we will pick up on the language, idea and imaginary 'the commons' as a way of naming a vision and practice that describes the kinds of relationships between people, resources and power that foster community resilience, ecological stewardship and democratised decision making.

While degrowth discourse is only really emerging in a Scottish context, there are rich critical, cultural and intellectual wells to draw upon, alongside a rich radical heritage of resistance and activism in both urban and rural contexts. In this session, we will explore various resonances with and influences on this budding discourse, with a particular focus on the community land movement (which had its beginnings in the Highlands and Islands). We will also reflect on the legacy of devolution and the independence movement, a growing climate activism and current discussions on race, decolonisation and social justice in the wake of the Black Lives Matters movement here in Scotland and across the globe. Our group discussions will focus on an idea central and vital to commoning in practice, 'conviviality', seeking out those places and spaces where the impulse and catalyst to strike and kindle sparks of change, creativity and transformation are to be found.

Overview Readings

B.   Reclaiming the Commons

The 'commons' is a social form that has long lived in the shadows of our market-driven culture. It expresses a very old idea: that some forms of wealth belong to all of us, and that these community resources must be actively protected and managed for the good of all. The commons is both material and symbolic; it includes natural resources – land, water, air, forests, food, minerals, energy – but also encompasses our cultural inheritance in the form of the traditions, practices and shared knowledge that make society possible and life meaningful. Put most simply, perhaps, the commons is that which we all share that should be nurtured in the present and passed on, undiminished, to future generations.

The language and idea of the commons, of course, starts with the *land*. It comes from the struggle of English commoners against the 'enclosures' of the 15th, 16th & 17th centuries, where a rising class of gentry expropriated common land for their private use. Resources that

had historically been stewarded by communities were privatised into commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace. This process of enclosure severed a deep connection to the land and destroyed local cultures, paving the way for industrialisation, colonisation, and empire in a modern world. Modernity saw the start of resource extraction for a new global market, and with that, the emergence of an economy of plantation (sugar, tobacco, cotton) that fuelled the slave trade and the commodification of wage labour. Scholars such as Mignolo (2011) have argued that modernity is inherently colonial, inextricable from the oppressive practices used to dominate and exploit indigenous and marginalised people across the globe. By the end of the 18th century, the process of enclosure had catalysed the capitalist relations of dispossession, displacement and the concentration of land ownership.

B1. The 'New Enclosures'

In the 21st century, it is not just common land and resources that have been enclosed by capitalism. In the UK, most recently we have witnessed this enclosure of the commons in terms of both privatisation and neglect, through budget cuts under the name of 'austerity'. What Christophers (2019) and others call the 'new enclosures' can be seen in the ongoing privatisation of land and intellectual property; in the ideology of 'new managerialism' (the organisational arm of neoliberalism, a mode of governance driven by a market logic of efficiency, productivity and competition) where a class of 'professional managers' wield control – over local government, health and education; in the patenting of genes, lifeforms, medicines and seed crops; in attempts to transform the open internet into a closed, proprietary marketplace and shrinking the public domain of ideas; with academic knowledge locked up behind paywalls and in the use of copyright to lock up creativity and culture, among many other examples.

One strong current in degrowth literature is the criticism of commodification, i.e. the process of conversion of social products, services and relations into commodities with a monetary value. This modern tendency towards enclosure, commodification and the financialisation of almost all aspects of life has been described by commons scholar Bollier as 'the great invisible tragedy of our time'. The endgame of this process is the *enclosure of the mind*. We are up against the formidable capacity of global capitalist and colonial systems of power to enclose our very sense of the possible. The absolute triumph of this system is demonstrated by the fact that so many of us have lost the ability to even imagine our way out. As Klein (2014) has written, we are 'locked in, politically, physically and culturally' to the world that capital has made. Bollier & Helfrich (2019) reflect,

> "Conventional minds always rely on proven things and have no courage for experiments, even though the supposedly winning formulas of economic growth, market fundamentalism, and national bureaucracies have become blatantly dysfunctional."

This idea of 'reclaiming the commons', then, is about reclaiming what has been lost through the hegemony of ongoing capitalist appropriation and accumulation and the exploitation and commodification of our lives.

Across the globe, a growing commons movement is prefiguring cooperative, egalitarian and participatory alternatives to growth economics. In practice, as a verb, the idea of 'commoning' involves finding those cultural practices – those that exist in present, those that have always been there (and are now only being rediscovered) and those that are being created now for the future – which restore life and community. It is important to emphasise here that this is not about a nostalgic return to a romantic past, but rather about reclaiming radical, rooted and life affirming practices in a contemporary context. We will pick up on this idea of 'degrowth in practice' in section D.

B2. *Ceist an Fhearainn* / The Land Question

In Scotland, documentation from the middle ages (Wightman 2011) shows that, at one time, one-half of the entire area of Scotland was common land of one kind or another (in Scots, this was known as 'the commonty') (Wightman 2011). The process of enclosure took place first in Lowland Scotland and then, much later, into the 18th and 19th centuries in the Highlands and Islands with the Clearances, or *Fuadaichean nan Gàidheal.* Following Culloden in 1745 and the destruction of the old clan system, a new breed of commercially-minded landowners claimed the common land, replacing its settled communities first with sheep, and then deer. This violent displacement perpetuated coloniality elsewhere: many who emigrated to the 'New World' reproduced the violence that was meted out to them under the protection of the British Empire. This speaks to the psychology of colonialism: the coloniser is internally colonised, and this damage to the fullness of their humanity is what enables the reproduction of oppression on others. McIntosh (2020) draws a direct line through the historical and collective trauma of clearance and colonisation with the psychology of modern consumerism and destruction, suggesting an answer to the crises of our time being the 'rekindling of community.'

In the Highland and rural context, the historical injustices of the clearances are still felt, with very visible reminders of this process in the landscape alongside huge cultural loss. Today, after years of sheep and deer farming – together with the most inequitable patterns of land ownership in Europe – many of these landscapes are in a state of degradation. To give one

example, as the Revive campaign[1] has shown, almost a fifth of Scotland's land is now used for grouse shooting as part of a carefully maintained economic and political ideology, with devastating environmental and social impacts. Red deer – now a hundred year problem – represent a major obstacle to any attempts at reforestation, with overgrazing making natural regeneration all but impossible (deer population is currently concentrated at 15 – 16 deer per km2, when 1 – 3 per km2 would be natural and sustainable). With the reform of ownership patterns it is possible to imagine a different future beyond such monocultural regimes, with ecological restoration, reforestation, repopulation and rural regeneration.

In an urban context, the effects of enclosure are less visible, but housing, streets and land are acutely affected by economic policies and ideological forces. In cities, history gets buried under concrete, rubble and new foundations – a kind of social violence that breaks the ties that connect people through generations to a place. While the effects may be less visible, the scale of injustice and rate of turnover of land, from social housing estates to luxury developments, is much faster. For example, the rentier economy is driven by profits, which have increased in real terms as the poor have been denied social housing and instead compelled to pay increased rates for ageing private stock. When it comes to urban regeneration and renewal – and when laws of the market are the rule – creative strategies such as 'placemaking' or 'community engagement' offer ideological cover for market-driven or state-assisted gentrification, whilst continuing to oppress and displace communities of place.

There is a positive side to this story. In recent decades, the movement towards local and community buy-outs has revitalised many communities, both urban and rural. With the Highland and Island buy-outs of the 1990s leading the way – Assynt, Eigg, Gigha – to the urban take-back of civic buildings and spaces in more recent years, the community land movement shows how people – working collectively – can and are disrupting the prevailing forms of neoliberal practices by reworking practices of property, nature and economics in search of more socially just and sustainable futures (See Mackenzie 2012; Hunter 2012). Many examples can be found on the Community Land Scotland website, a charity founded as an umbrella to represent the interests of community land owning groups in 2010.[2] In an urban context, the legacy of Scotland's industrial past means that almost a third of the Scottish population currently lives within 500 meters of an urban derelict site. As research from the Scottish Land Commission[3] has shown, bringing abandoned and unloved urban places back into productive use could help us tackle climate change, improve health and wellbeing, create more resilient communities and rebuild our economy in a way that helps everyone achieve their full potential.

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[1] https://revive.scot/
[2] https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk
[3] https://landcommission.gov.scot/our-work/housing-development/vacant-and-derelict-land

The first wave of community land buy-outs took place in the 1990s at a time which also saw a popular grassroots empowerment movement with the campaign for Scottish devolution and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. As McIntosh (2018) recalls, popular education and the ideas of South American educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) were vital to this push for democratic engagement. New methodologies for consciousness-raising and community engagement aimed to help people understand and analyse the circumstances of their lives, and to review their options for change in accordance with 'what gives life.' In relation to community land, McIntosh (2018) writes,

> "A typical process might involve a group remembering their history, re-visioning their future, and reclaiming what might be needed to bring about the transformation of their situation. All of these techniques involve iterations of action and reflection around power, and around what it takes to get a life worth living."

The final stage in the process of taking collective ownership is the strengthening of local democratic processes. In other words, this is the stage of learning (or re-learning) what it really means to *live in community*. Community empowerment matters in its own right as a matter of human dignity. While common ownership of land and resources does not necessarily mean it will be managed or stewarded well, it is a vital step towards breaking up systems of power and re-engaging people with collective local responsibility. Each story of community ownership is a microcosm of possibility, a story of resilience in the face of seemingly impossible barriers, of transformation and self-determination, opening up channels for others to follow. In the context of degrowth, this process becomes a social, cultural and ecological imperative.

In the new millennium, there have been some major developments when it comes to land reform.[4] The first Land Reform (Scotland) Act[5] was passed in 2003 - a major milestone. A new Scottish Government came to power in 2007, and in 2014 the country experienced another huge grassroots movement with the campaign for Scottish independence. The diversity of this campaign catalysed activists, artists and citizens into a large scale participatory democratic process, opening up new grassroots spaces where land was once again very much a part of the debate. In 2015, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act[6] was passed in Parliament, followed by a second Land Reform (Scotland) Act[7] in 2016, opening up new possibilities for both urban and rural renewal. Despite these positive developments, there are still significant institutional and other barriers to enabling policy to fully contribute to renewal in practice. In a sense, the need for such legislation emphasises a huge gap or missing layer in terms of local

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[4] For a timeline of events, see: https://www.fearann.land/timeline

[5] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2003/2/contents

[6] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2015/6/contents

[7] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2016/18/contents

democracy and civil society in Scotland, partly a consequence of such large local government authority areas.

Decentralisation and Decolonisation

It is important to briefly reflect on the fragile socio-economic situation of the largely rural Highlands and Islands and the *Gàidhealtachd* in relation to contemporary discussions on decolonisation and degrowth. Of course, the genealogies of coloniality are long and entangled in Scotland; any process of decolonisation must reconcile the (ongoing) effects of the historical injustices of the Clearances with the colonial framework of Empire, acknowledge the implicit and direct involvement in transatlantic enslavement at home and abroad, confront the genesis of the Scottish diaspora and acknowledge the inequities based on the ideology of racialisation that persist in our society, social structures and institutions today.

As Ferguson (2020) writes, the twin forces of colonialism and capitalism and their effects are strongly implicated in the socio-economic challenges faced (such as housing, the impacts of tourism etc.) as well as the worrying decline of the minority Gaelic language. In the context of recent discussions and in the light of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement, Ferguson reflects on the commonalities (without drawing false equivalences) with other marginalised communities across the globe:

> "Whilst differing intersecting forms of discrimination distinguish these particular situations, the commonality between these populations is an existence characterised, in many cases, by marginalisation and peripherisation...and now, under the neoliberal project, a subsistence often predicated on state programmes of socioeconomic support, rather than true redistributive and restorative justice in a putatively post-colonial world."

The centralisation of contemporary society, by its very definition, places decentralised areas and issues on the periphery. In recent years, attempts have been made by the Scottish Government to support regional development through increased packages of investment for businesses and enterprises and community schemes of assistance, but very much within a neoliberal framework and following a growth-based agenda.

In a similar way to those BLM activists across the globe demanding enhanced political and social control, Ferguson asks, 'might there be potential for communities of Gaelic heritage to assert similar claims to autonomy (e.g. increased community governance, land and asset ownership) over their own socio-economic, cultural and linguistic domains?' As a largely ethnically homogenous population, she writes, 'the Gaelic community... does not escape criticism vis-a-vis diversity and inclusivity, or lack therefore, despite the historical imbalances wrought by colonialism, and despite their minority status (see Gessesse, 2019)'. At the same time, the experience of the Gaelic community in its heartlands resonates with the struggle for

economic, cultural and political justice for some of the most precarious and marginalised communities in Scotland and across the globe. Similar arguments have been made by campaign group *Misneachd* with their *Plana Radaigeach Airson Na Gàidhlig* / Radical Plan for Gaelic.[8]

Degrowth has the potential to be a connecting point to the myriad struggles and economic crises facing these fragile communities. While not writing explicitly from a degrowth perspective in this case, Rennie (2019) expresses the vital importance of the local ecology of people and place:

> "The Community Land Trusts of the Highlands and Islands are not a panacea for all land-based ills, nor is the concept restricted to the Highlands and Islands. Nor, as the resilience of grassroots democracy begins to take effect, are the development actions of the Trusts necessarily restricted to land-based matters. The importance of the links between development and place, however, is fundamental and self-reinforcing to the principle of the ownership and management of land by the community that lives in that place...
>
> From a wide range of perspectives, whether it is providing a token measure of restorative justice for the clearances, the incubation of new local employment, or simply having a voice in what the land outside your window looks like and is used for, community land trusts are proving to be an effective vehicle. The movement is in its early days, but has had a promising start, and as a level of community democracy or as an "embedded intermediary" – a point of mutual trust by the top-down and bottom-up of governance – it shows great potential. Perhaps, in a circuitous way, the broader appreciation of the values of place, the acknowledgement that humans are a fundamental part of the ecology of a place, and the understanding that development, in its strict sense, must mean the improvement of the whole place."

In our collective efforts to give shape to the imagination of alternatives to the current order of things, there is much inspiration we can find in place-based cultural and ecological practices. In the context of the *Gàidhealtachd* and the imaginary of the commons, we can evoke the Gaelic notion of *dùthchas,* a word that does not easily translate into English. It takes in both a sense of belonging and responsibility to each other and to the 'stewardship' rather than 'ownership' of the land or *dùthaich,* reflecting the idea of the reciprocity of mutual dwelling (MacInnes 2010). *Dùthchas* is also connected to the word *dualchas*, often translated to mean 'heritage,' our cultural inheritance or our collective memory. Together, these words form a matrix in which land and culture are inseparable – a lens or way of being in the world which very much resonates with a commons and degrowth perspective.

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[8] https://www.misneachd.scot/

It is perhaps important to touch on the importance of the Gaelic language in a degrowth context in terms of arguments for environmental and cultural sustainability (something we will revisit in section C2). There can be a tension between Gaelic activists who believe that culture is vital to renewal and regeneration and those who prioritise landscape conservation (and who may even find arguments for language revitalisation alienating or exclusivist). This tension is sensitively discussed in historian James Hunter's book *On The Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands* (2014, 1995). For example, ideas around 'rewilding' have become popular in recent decades, but the use of this language and discourses of 'wildness' can strike a discord with those communities who have experienced the effects of clearance. From a degrowth perspective, rewilding and 'repeople-ing' must go hand in hand; these aims are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, any plans for regeneration and renewal must avoid approaches that perpetuate existing and paternalistic patterns of land ownership.

Hunter (2014) invites us to imagine a way into the future when the Highlands and Islands have been put right, ecologically, socially and culturally – restoring life and community. This doesn't require everyone to learn and speak Gaelic. It does, however, require people to recognise and respect the local culture of this place. In order to do this, we need a culture of deep listening and dialogue.

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C. Ideas: Furrows in the Field

This section looks to the past and to the rich creative, cultural and intellectual wells that we can draw upon to inspire and inform a degrowth discourse in Scotland. Of course, there are many more examples that we could highlight! Alongside this intellectual and cultural heritage, there is a rich radical heritage of grassroots resistance and activism to draw upon in Scotland, from Màiri Mhòr nan Òran (1824 – 1828), songwriter, poet and an icon of the struggle over land rights in Skye, to Mary Barbour (1875 - 1958), Glasgow rent strikes and the Red Clydeside movement, to the anti-Polaris campaign and Peace Movement in the 1960s, Pollok Free State in the 1990s, the campaigns for devolution (1997) and Scottish independence (2014) as well as the growing climate movement. There is much to be learned from what has come before.

C1. Think Global, Act Local: Patrick Geddes, Bioregionalism & the Ecological Imagination

The first of these influences is the thinking of Victorian polymath and Scottish generalist Patrick Geddes (1854 - 1932). Often described as an ecologist, biologist and sociologist, and by some as the 'father of the Green political movement', Geddes is probably best remembered for his pioneering work in planning cities. His ideas are only in the last decade finding their way into wider social consciousness, perhaps because the problems he addressed are more valid and current than ever. Indeed, he is credited with gifting the world the often-used epithet 'Think Global; Act Local.' Almost a century ago, he wrote:

> "Our greatest need today is to see life as whole, to see its many sides in their proper relations; but we must have a practical as well as a philosophical interest in such an integrated view of life" (quoted in Wall 2017).

Geddes created a new way of thinking centred on the flourishing people and places. His vision was to transform the 19th century ideal of progress from an individual 'Race for Wealth' into a 'Social Crusade of Culture,' underpinned by a vision of mutual cooperation as opposed to competition.

Inspired by the French sociologist Frederic Le Play's (1802–1886) triad of '*Lieu, Travail, Famille*' – which Geddes translated to 'Work, Place, Folk' – his approach to regional and town planning was based on the integration of people, their livelihood and the particular environment of the place or region they inhabit. This was based on a detailed survey which established an inventory of a region's hydrology, geology, flora, fauna, climate and natural

topography, as well as its social and economic opportunities and challenges. In many ways, this approach prefigured and pioneered a school of thought now called 'bioregionalism' – the belief that human activity, including environmental and social policies, should be based on ecological or geographical boundaries rather than economic or political boundaries. Along with localisation, bioregionalism shares many values and principles with degrowth thought.

Geddes' concept of 'civics' had a double objective: reclaiming human individual creativity on one hand, and the improvement of the environment, through informed action, on the other. His many regeneration projects were achieved not through sweeping governmental legislation and measures, but by encouraging involvement by local people in local places through beauty, art and life-long education. Such an approach differs radically from today's neoliberal and statist attitudes to regeneration, which often employ a top-down attitude by putting either the state or private property speculators at the heart of developments, regenerating areas but often destroying the communities living there in the process.

The dynamic of Geddes' plan for a 'cultural revival' or 'Scottish renaissance' was about learning from the past to inform the future. His belief was that, as a modern cosmopolitan nation, Scotland could only be creative when it was actively seeking to implement its own vision of a 'commonweel,' with collectivity, rootedness in place and community involvement at its heart. This revival was 'radical' in the true sense of the word. *Radicalis* means 'to form the root.' The key point here is that this process was not seen as a 'break' from history: it was a future reality-vision developed *with*, not *against* the past, always emerging from the local context. This process of reawakening history and making it active in the present is all part of nurturing a reconnecting to the collective right to the land and reclaiming the commons.

C2. Poetry Becomes People: Hamish Henderson, Internationalism, Culture & Conviviality

This idea of cultural cultural revival was also at the heart of the vision of Hamish Henderson (1919 - 2002), alongside ideas of cultural equity, diversity and sustainability. Henderson was a poet, folklorist and folk revivalist, songwriter, translator and activist. Like Geddes, he was very much an internationalist, with strong connections with Europe and beyond. His activism was a fusion of cultural politics and social justice – campaigning with CND and with the Peace movement, against apartheid in South Africa and championing the causes of equality and gay rights.

Henderson is perhaps best known for his involvement with the Folk Revival, which began with the Edinburgh 'People's Festival Ceilidhs' in the early 1950s. He saw folk art as a manifestation of a rebel underground, a subaltern view of history and society as opposed to

the official or establishment view. Bringing together traditional singers and musicians from Scots speaking and Gaelic Scotland, these ceilidhs were a radical challenge to the Rudolph Bing's Edinburgh Festival and the elite 20th century ideals of cultural democracy from which it emerged: the idea that the masses could be civilised by giving them access to culture that was not their own. The 'heelster-gowdie' force of Henderson in upending the establishment through his challenge to dominant orthodoxies – in politics, education, culture and broadcasting – led to many hostile reactions and attempts to sideline him in his own time.

His most famous work, the song 'Freedom Come All Ye' is a song of liberation and international reconciliation. Out of a past riddled with imperial injustices, Henderson conjures a world of global solidarity, ecological harmony, radical love, dignity, humanity and the flourishing of life in all its forms – a vision that resonates very powerfully with a degrowth future:

> Roch the wind in the clear day's dawin
> Blaws the cloods heelster-gowdie ow'r the bay,
> But there's mair nor a roch wind blawin
> Through the great glen o' the warld the day.
> It's a thocht that will gar oor rottans
> – A' they rogues that gang gallus, fresh and gay –
> Tak the road, and seek ither loanins
> For their ill ploys, tae sport and play
>
> Nae mair will the bonnie callants
> Mairch tae war when oor braggarts crousely craw,
> Nor wee weans frae pit-heid and clachan
> Mourn the ships sailin' doon the Broomielaw.
> Broken faimlies in lands we've herriet,
> Will curse Scotland the Brave nae mair, nae mair;
> Black and white, ane til ither mairriet,
> Mak the vile barracks o' their maisters bare.
>
> So come all ye at hame wi' Freedom,
> Never heed whit the hoodies croak for doom.
> In your hoose a' the bairns o' Adam
> Can find breid, barley-bree and painted room.
> When MacLean meets wi's freens in Springburn
> A' the roses and geans will turn tae bloom,
> And a black boy frae yont Nyanga
> Dings the fell gallows o' the burghers doon.

For Henderson, when it came to the folk tradition, it was not so much about the songs themselves – although these were of course important – it was the singing of them that was vital; for in the sharing of the song, it is given new life. He championed the 'lived moment' of the *cèilidh* or gathering, when people gather together in the joy, liveness and conviviality of shared experience. For Henderson, such moments of conviviality embody an ineffable creative power, an organic energy, a life force. They are moments of 'resolve, transformation and insurrection' and the 'proving ground for emotional and political truths' where the impulse and catalyst for resistance and change are to be found. We will pick up on this idea in Section D1, 'Conviviality and the Commons'.

Cultural Equity & Sustainability

As a folklorist, Henderson understood very well the significance of local culture and creativity for nourishing and sustaining communities. The idea that cultural diversity is essential for human survival was perhaps first popularised by folklorist Alan Lomax (1915-2002) in his 'Appeal for Cultural Equity' in 1972, a guiding principle for Henderson's own fieldwork and folklore collecting. At this time, there was a growing concern that local languages and expressive traditions across the globe were being lost as a casualty of the economies of scale, the processes of standardisation, centralised education, powerful entertainment industries and global mass communications. Lomax wrote,

> "The human species not only loses a way of viewing, thinking, and feeling but also a way of adjusting to some zone on the planet which fits it and makes it liveable; not only that, but we throw away a system of interaction, of fantasy and symbolizing which, in the future, the human race may sorely need."

Research has shown that there is a causal link between the damage to cultural and biological diversity. In many cases, damage to cultural and linguistic diversity comes first, followed by a disregard and abandonment of indigenous knowledge. This severance leads to a profound human-ecological disconnect, alienation and loss of meaning, with desperate environmental consequences. As Love (2019) remind us,

> "As we face a potential emergency in biodiversity loss from human activity and human-caused climate change, these complex interactions of language and biodiversity are a reminder that our cultural lives are wrapped up in the natural world too. Just like an animal species, our languages evolved in the context of the environments that surrounded them. When we change those environments, we threaten much more than just the physical living things that thrive there."

Globally, the call for 'culture' is becoming ever more powerful along with the increasing ecological, economic and social challenges to meet the aims of 'sustainability.' The UNESCO

Hangzhou Declaration in 2013[9] puts culture at the very heart of 'sustainable development.' This very much includes approaches to safeguarding and facilitating engagement with what is called 'intangible cultural heritage'. The treaty asserts:

> "Culture is precisely what enables sustainability – as a source of strength, of values and social cohesion, self esteem and participation. Culture is our most powerful force for creativity and renewal."

In the context of degrowth, recovering ways of viewing the world, ways of thinking and feeling become not just a matter of cultural democracy, but an ecological and existential imperative.

It is not just creative cultural expression that fieldworkers like Henderson collected, but cultural heritage in the sense of ways of life, including examples of living sustainably from the land. Working alongside Henderson was anthropologist Eric R. Cregeen (1921 - 1983). Cregeen undertook his fieldwork among people who lived off the land and sea, and whose knowledge, skills and wisdom sustained their lifestyle and their culture. He documented the lives and traditions of crofters, fishermen, shepherds, cattle-dealers, drovers, blacksmiths, horse-dealers, carpenters, tradespeople, weavers, craftspeople, children, healers, whisky-makers, teachers – 'those sections of society which are unlikely to leave behind them any quantity of memoirs, diaries, or correspondence from which history can subsequently be written.' In 1978 he wrote, 'the recordings we make now will be a powerful aid to future generations living in a much-changed society.'

Archives are a repository of this lost wisdom and local knowledge. In Scotland, thanks to the efforts of figures such as Henderson and Cregeen (and many others), we are lucky to have such extensive collections; few other countries in the world possess such an exceptional store of audio field recordings. You can listen to many of these recordings on the Tobar an Dualchais / Kist O Riches online archive website. In the following clip, listen to a discussion describing the practice of sharing seaweed as fertiliser and the thatching the croft houses, a wonderful expression of 'mutual aid' in practice recorded on North Uist in 1973:

http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19182

From a degrowth perspective, advocating for local culture is not about reifying places and forms of non-capitalism as untouched or outside of history as part of some sort of romantic hankering for paradise lost, it is to stand up against the destructive and homogenising forces of capitalist modernity. In many rural and island communities, this knowledge of living sustainably off the land is still there in living memory, wisdom we need to value, learn from

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[9] http://www.lacult.unesco.org/docc/Final_Hangzhou_Declaration__.pdf

and share. At the same time, it is important not to fall into the trap of romanticising such ways of life (the reality today is that, as a consequence largely of economics, for many people, crofting is a hobby for those who can afford it rather than any kind of sustainable way of living).

A recent blog published by the Scottish Land Commission 'Whose Space, Whose Heritage' reflects,

> "The uneven impact of COVID-19 has been stark. It is interesting that our recovery out of COVID-19 increasingly looks as if it will depend on very local knowledge, understanding and respect for who lives there, what their living and social habits are and what will work within that community.
>
> Similarly, if we are to get real about building back a better, healthier, more inclusive society – in which access to outdoor space and nature is more equal, and wellbeing is genuinely pursued as a social goal – we will have to invest location by location, and community by community. We have to put an equal value on accessing space and nature everywhere. And we cannot do that without thinking about how privilege and power over land and public space has influenced the past, and how it will continue to influence the future without a different kind of participation that reflects the diversity of people and their interests."

A re-engagement with the 'local' – in all its multiplicity and contradictions – is part of a radical degrowth agenda: the revitalisation of ecology and democracy, working towards a shared vision of a thriving, equitable and convivial society.

References:

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Further readings in section E.

D. Degrowth in Practice

This final section turns to a reflection on degrowth in practice in a Scottish context. A different kind of world is not just possible; it is a crucial and urgent necessity. But where do we start when it comes to envisaging the shape it should take and working out how to bring it about?

A growth economy demands economies of scale. From a degrowth perspective, locally-owned provision of social and community services based on the idea of the commons and peer-to-peer models feels imminently more human, practical and economically sound. While many alternatives to growth capitalism already exist, they struggle in our current system. As Gallagher & Small (2020) reflect, 'this is not an indictment of the credibility of alternatives, but of an economic system which depends on excess production, consumption and accumulation to survive.' Localised need and localised production, they write, would value the creativity and contribution we can all make in practice, with meaningful work for all, a working life freed from the relentless pursuit of GDP and life lived at a slower pace.

Degrowth thinking proposes a larger vision of the human being than conventional property laws or economics would allow. Such a vision invites people to be more than economic agents but active participants in their own life – in making history themselves, as opposed to just voting or expecting politicians of bureaucrats to solve our problems.

> "If capitalism predicated on endless growth means globalisation filtered through nation states and corporate power, its antithesis is an anti-capitalist economy based on degrowth with increased localisation and decentralised power. If growth-based capitalism means we are defined as one-dimensional consumers, *a degrowth society means we can become multi-dimensional citizens in charge of a viable future*" (Gallagher & Small, 2020)

D1. Conviviality and the Commons

The practice 'commoning' can be understood as the lived expression of conviviality: the 'art of living together' (*con-vivere*). It involves finding those cultural practices – those that exist in present, those that have always been there (and are now only being rediscovered) and those that are being created now, for the future – which *restore life and community*.

"There is no commons without commoning". This means that shared resources by themselves do not constitute a commons; these must be activated by community action and governance in practice. The imaginary of the commons, then, embodies the whole process – the dynamic interaction between a resource, the community that gathers around it, and the protocols for its

stewardship. As outlined in the French Convivialist Manifesto(2014)[10], commoning is a relational dynamic through which people freely collaborate with one another, a way of being that would allow humans to take care of each other and environment 'without denying the legitimacy of conflict, yet by using it as a dynamising and creativity-sparking force.'

Discussion of the concepts of conviviality and convivialism often refer to the works of Ivan Illich (1926–2002), a critic of technology and growth – ideas which he explored in his book *Tools for Conviviality (1973)*. Illich's argument is to restore the primacy of 'being' over 'having' by exposing the flaws in technology and capitalism. The argument of his book *Shadow Work* (1981) is that wage labour created another kind of labour: unpaid activities that make wage labour possible in the first place, or the 'shadow work' of capitalism.

We often use the word 'conviviality' to simply mean the joy of coming together socially – the kind of unconstrained friendly relations and dealings which people can have with one another. As humans, much of what we value in terms of quality of life is still created outside the spaces of economic exchange, through the voluntary association of friends, neighbours and citizens – in the home, the park, the library, local clubs or the village hall cèilidh. Far from being frivolous, however, creating non-commodified spaces outside of economic exchange is vital to a degrowth future. As Bollier and Helflrich (2020) remind us:

> "The commons is not just about small-scale projects for improving everyday life. It is a germinal vision for reimagining our future together and reinventing social organisation, economics, infrastructure, politics and state power itself."

In degrowth economist Latouche's view (2009), in a convivial society, new forms of economic relations are required. What Latouche means by degrowth is not some monolithic alternative to the existing capitalist set-up – and above all not some kind of economy without markets – but rather 'a matrix of alternatives which reopens a space for creativity.' As long as the legitimacy of basic social entities (such as work, social security, democracy) depend on growth, the introduction of degrowth is extremely difficult. Latouche's argument is that degrowth is thus possible only in a 'society of degrowth' which we must create ourselves. Similarly, any movement for localism or localisation is not about looking for one alternative system; it's about seeking out the principles of reconnection and decentralisation to create many systems that renew and strengthen local communities.

We need to find ways of freeing our life, work, making, doing, being from enclosure – figurative, physical, economical, colonial – and ask, what nourishes and sustains life?

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[10]https://www.gcr21.org/fileadmin/website/daten/pdf/Publications/Convivialist_Manifesto_2198-0403-GD-3.pdf

There are countless initiatives here in Scotland seeking alternative ways of living and being that might make up such a society of degrowth; indeed, there are (and have been for decades) many existing projects, organisations and communities living by degrowth principles even if they don't recognise or describe themselves in such terms. We can see this in practice in the form of community land trusts, community gardens and urban growing projects, community woodlands, community energy initiatives, cooperatives of all kinds, fair trade, alternative currencies, not-for-profit community and social enterprises, swap shops and systems of local exchange, solidarity syndicates, repair cafés, tool libraries, food sovereignty and food justice groups, mutual aid groups, community climate and environmental groups, voluntary arts groups, community heritage groups and community campaigns of all kinds. The question is how to cultivate that degrowth potential, opening up opportunities and possibilities for individuals and groups to connect, organise and create lasting change.

D2. Enough! A Scottish Degrowth Network?

Enough! – a collective working towards social, economic and climate justice in Scotland – do see their work in explicitly degrowth terms (See: Enough's Call to Embrace Degrowth Thinking in Scotland; Enough's Open Letter on Economic Recovery - listed in section E Further Readings). They are also committed to the work of decolonisation, recognising that there is much to be done on anti-racism in Scotland and that a decolonised global climate justice is vital. Carrying forth an economic logic that maintains and increases exploitative race and class structures is not an option.

As part of their programme work, Enough! is building a living archive of degrowth case studies across Scotland with projects and organisations which challenge growth mindsets. These projects and practices emphasise sufficiency, redistribution and the idea of 'enough for all.' This living archive will also include projects that focus on decolonisation, or those that actively challenge dominant oppressive political and social narratives that ultimately fuel an economic mindset based on extractivism and unlimited growth. Part of the aim of this is to make visible the 'matrix of alternatives' which Latouche describes.

In addition, Enough! has been seeking to inspire and energise the forming of a Scottish-specific 'network of alternatives', opening up a space for creativity. This will connect and bring together those who are actively interested and committed to shared principles, ideas and practices related to both degrowth and decolonisation. In the context of COVID-19, several virtual meetings have taken place, with participants co-creating a shared and evolving purpose statement (see below). An interesting development that the virtual environment in the context of COVID-19 has created is a shift of perceptions of the centre and the peripheral, with rural and island voices playing a central role in emerging conversations.

A Scottish Degrowth Network exists to:

- **bridge + connect** academics, activists, practitioners, rural communities, city streets and all those who are degrowth-minded so that we can **imagine, rediscover + build** together our vision for a degrowth society in Scotland
- **connect across struggles, share + learn** from each other's experience + develop our collective practices
- **spread, share + promote ideas, demystify language + shift discourse** so that we can bring others with us in building a degrowth future
- **make visible, nurture, connect + amplify** the seeds of a degrowth society that are already here, building our readiness to **collectively respond** to crises with viable alternatives
- intentionally align degrowth discussions with an **understanding of colonialism and climate justice** in Scotland
- **develop together an emerging praxis** which nourishes + sustains, with a focus on **joy, care, equity** + **stewarding a shared commons**

References

Illich, I. (1973) *Tools for Conviviality.*

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E   Degrowth Possibilities in Scotland

E1. A Scottish Degrowth Movement?

(*excerpt from an unpublished essay written by Svenja Meyerricks*)

"In Scotland, the Degrowth movement is in its relative infancy, although in the past year or two, there has been an increasing interest – for example, through the formation of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance[11] which brings the conversation about different markers of economic success to policy makers, at Enough! Scotland[12] who seek to foster a grassroots network of degrowth activists and in some academic circles researching new economic frameworks and practices. While the Scottish Government still advocates the oxymoronic "sustainable economic growth" as a guiding principle for its policies, an increased emphasis on health and wellbeing as economic purposes, even as being on a par with GDP, opens up a window for critical discussions around what that might mean in practice.

However, the discourse, analysis and practical steps would not only need to be embedded within a wide range of sectors and walks of society in order to build a truly inclusive and intersectional degrowth movement in Scotland. As the term 'degrowth' often invokes impressions of a total downscaling of all parts of the economy, in a highly unequal society such as Scotland we need to grapple with difficult questions around lack of access to land and housing alongside other inequities as part of any degrowth strategies. A Scottish degrowth focus must be on equity, led by those who are currently most excluded from reaping the fruits of growth, while at the same time critically acknowledging and reckoning with its colonial legacy of extractivism, whether of people or of resources, as well as being a historically high carbon emitter.

Scotland has a wealth of indigenous traditional knowledge to draw upon and build on in the *Gàidhealtachd.* Landownership and local authority areas that are very large compared to many of their European counterparts pose peculiar challenges. On the other hand, a vibrant land reform movement advocating for asset transfer to communities has highlighted the potential of strengthening the commons in Scotland.

Ideas around degrowth and postgrowth can help shape Scotland's priorities as the country faces a No Deal Brexit the Scottish population did not vote for. The possibility of a new independence referendum is only one of the political maelstroms that require a robust analysis of the kind of economy that is socially just and ecologically possible. The hostile environment surrounding Brexit calls for a critical cultural inquiry into Scotland's own colonial past as part of ongoing efforts to reframe attitudes towards migrants and migration through a lens of historical and global justice. As the degrowth movement

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[11] https://wellbeingeconomy.org/
[12] www.enough.scot

addresses similar issues, engaging with degrowth thinkers and activists presents an opportunity to contribute to and learn from European grassroots movements at a time when nourishing and maintaining continental European connections is particularly precious.

The COP26 summit is to take place in Glasgow in 2021, postponed from 2020 due to the covid-19 pandemic. The gravitational pull of such large international events like these galvanise the energy of climate and social justice movements, temporarily diverting struggles away from long-standing causes. However, this mass concentration of efforts also presents a precious opportunity for communities in hosting nations to reflect on how to effectively encounter and engage with the show in town. This may include honest and in-depth dialogue around the root causes of the climate emergency, and forging new alliances around the need to rethink economic priorities.

As well as theoretical and political conversations, this needs to include engagement with those groups and individuals who already lead by example, developing solutions on the ground to bring about a systemic shift. We need to hear from care and health workers, community organisers, plumbers, local food growers, electricians, accountants, permaculture wizards, medicine workers, storytellers, those who care for children and adults, bicycle-powered gadget builders, free software and open source programmers, teachers, economists, writers, domestic workers, engineers, artists, architects and all kinds of workers about what degrowth in Scotland might look like. Only when the core ideas are co-owned by as wide a range of people as possible and bring in previously under-represented or unheard voices, they might capture the wider cultural imagination."

E2.   Breaking with Growth - Creating an Economy of Life

(excerpt from an essay written by Bronagh Gallagher & Mike Small, to be published in a forthcoming collection 'Scotland After the Virus' (2020) (eds. Gerry Hassan & Simon Barrow)

Scotland sits at a unique and pivotal juncture. The tracks laid while leaving lockdown will chart a course that it will be hard to move away from once set. Given the reality of climate breakdown, the significance of this moment is only magnified.

Nothing happens overnight. As radical as these ideas may seem, it is important to acknowledge that a world beyond growth is a direction of travel, not a defined destination. Getting there will be a process of discovery and adjustment, needing both consistent small choices on the part of each of us to do differently, as well as struggle and sweeping changes. The positive is that this is a future that is *already here* in many small ways. Scotland hums with alternatives. Stretching the length and breadth of this country are initiatives which speak to community energy, community ownership, alternative work models, alternative housing options. The scale of change might seem daunting, maybe even unimaginable, but we already have much we can build from.

We seek to inspire and imagine different yet credible futures and to outline the contours of a future Scotland which is fair, just, sustainable and balanced - a future which makes you want to live there, and, more importantly makes you want to be part of building it.

Too often alternatives and activists are painted as utopian as a way of dismissing ideas, as if trying to imagine the best world possible and then figuring out how to get there isn't what the work of the best governance should be. We have lived a reality shaped by logic of economic growth for 40 years. It has simply not delivered. Imagining a world beyond growth can no longer be dismissed as utopian; it is the most pragmatic response we have to a planet teetering on the edge.

F. Additional Resources & Further Reading (available online):

N.B. These are all optional readings. Please follow your own interests!

Bollier, D & S. Helfrich (2019) *Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons.* New Society Publishers, available online

Convivialist Manifesto: A Declaration of Interdependence, available online

Crichton Smith, I. (1986) 'Real People in a Real Place' in *Towards the Human*, available online

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Enough! - Call from Scotland to Embrace Degrowth Thinking on #GlobalDegrowth Day, available online

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Ferguson, J. (2020) Back From the Edge: Defunding | Decentralisation | Decolonisation | (Re)Distribution, 'The Edge' blog, University of the Highlands and Islands, available online

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Wall, D. C. (2017) Design and Planning for People in Place: Sir Patrick Geddes (1854–1932) and the Emergence of Ecological Planning, Ecological Design, and Bioregionalism, available online

Websites

Commons Transition - Key Concepts
https://primer.commonstransition.org/4-more/5-elements/key-concepts

Community Land Scotland website https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/ Timeline of

Community Land, Fearann / Land website https://www.fearann.land/resources

Evergreen: Patrick Geddes and the Environment in Equilibrium
http://libraryblogs.is.ed.ac.uk/patrickgeddes/

Revive Coalition for Grouse Moor Reform https://revive.scot/

Scottish Land Commission https://landcommission.gov.scot/

Tobar an Dualchais - Kist O Riches http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/

Suggested Books:

Henderson, H. (2004) *Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature.* Edinburgh: Polygon

Hunter, J. (2018, 2010) *The Making of the Crofting Community.* Edinburgh: Birlinn

Hunter, J. (2012) *From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops: Community Ownership of Land in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*. The Islands Book Trust

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