

**Submission for an academic session by:** Prof. Dr. Esra Erdem, Alice Salomon University Berlin

**Theme:** This is the 22nd Century

**Subcategory:** Social limits of growth, well-being and good life

**Title of the session:** Rethinking Degrowth with Diverse Economies (Panel 1): Narratives and visions of actually-existing degrowth praxis

**Session abstract:**

As there seems to be no alternative to the capitalist status-quo, the task of overcoming capitalism through degrowth appears daunting. This implicates that degrowth concepts become confined to either pre-capitalist cultures or a future society. How, then, might we escape this stultifying fallacy and transform degrowth concepts like cooperation and the good-life into practical interventions against capitalocentric discourses on the economy? This two-part session brings together researchers affiliated with the international Community Economies Research Network (CERN) to start a dialogue around a novel degrowth narrative detailed and critically appraised respectively through our two panels.

In this first panel we find inspiration in the work of feminist economic geographers Gibson-Graham on economic difference to uncover the manifold ways in which degrowth-related ideals can inform emergent – yet consistent – narratives and affirmative practices of community economies. Through case-studies of non-market exchange practices in Switzerland, Denmark, Germany and Argentina, the contributors exemplify different ways of thinking and doing that disrupt the capitalocentric logic. They present actually-existing alternative economic practices that draw on visions of empowerment and the good-life (*buen vivir*), conviviality, the decommodification of our needs and of (subjective) well-being, as well as heterodox understandings of the interconnections between environmental, social and economic justice.

**Related session in Theme 5:** Rethinking Degrowth with Diverse Economies (Panel 2): (Im)potentialities of actually-existing degrowth infrastructures and practices

### **Individual contributions:**

**(I)**

**Name:** Prof. Dr. Esra Erdem

**Affiliation:** Alice Salomon University Berlin; Community Economies Research Network (CERN)

**Title of presentation:** Gift Economies and The Politics of Decommodification in Urban Space

**Abstract:**

Based on a comparative analysis of gift economies in Berlin, the paper explores myriad ways in which gift economies (both material and immaterial) disrupt the logic inherent to the capitalist production and circulation of values. It draws on the diverse economy model of J. K. Gibson-Graham to theorize the rich variety of practices, sites, subjects and communities of decommodification characterizing such nonmarket transactions.

The findings show that gift economies can differ significantly in terms of their understanding of the interconnections between environmental, social and economic justice concerns in urban space. Consequently, a critical engagement with the politics of decommodification and imaginaries of urbanity articulated by gift economies remains crucial for scholars committed to degrowth and postcapitalism.

**(II)**

**Name:** Ana Inés Heras, Ph.D.

**Affiliation:** UNSAM and Instituto por la Inclusión Social y el Desarrollo Humano, CONICET Argentina; Community Economies Research Network (CERN)

**Title of presentation:** "Para tod@s todo": Learning in Community Networks of Exchange in Buenos Aires and Rosario, Argentina

**Abstract:**

This presentation will focus on analyzing two Community Exchange Networks in Buenos Aires and Rosario, Argentina, in which participants interact to construct a geography of partnership and mutual exchange. The analysis shows that renewable exchange is a consistent way of putting into practice mutual partnership, focusing on using and/or re-using what is already available as resources (i.e., space, recycled material, knowledge, volunteered time, emotional support, etc.). In the Buenos Aires experience, the network starts out of the initiative of a Cooperadora Escolar (a family coop organization at an elementary public school) where families gather to create a "cultural community network". The school, some community organizations, a cooperative bank, artists, musicians, and small family-owned business are the network participants. Their motto is "para tod@s, todo" (everything belongs to everybody), and the orientation seeks to put to use spaces and resources that otherwise remain un-used or are underutilized. In the Rosario experience the network comes out of the need of several cooperatives of workers to reflect and learn about what is specific in their way of doing work, cooperatively, which they identify as a way of living. They seek to educate themselves in issues they identify as culturally specific (i.e., non exploitative, humanly sustainable and non

alienative ways of reproducing life). In their work together they also extend their possibilities of exchange, by way of sharing space, time and knowledge about their cooperative organization, and by supporting a way of doing work as culturally specific to cooperation and mutuality.

### **(III)**

**Name:** Lise Skou

**Affiliation:** Community Economies Research Network (CERN)

**Title of presentation:** Exchange Library: A Performative Strategy to Transform the Economy

**Abstract :**

Based upon my artistic research project Exchange Library my contribution will explore what kind of new narratives – established through artistic initiatives and modes of expression such as performativity, relational art and interventions - can contribute to resistance against the capitalist hegemony. I raise the question of using artistic takes on future non-capitalist creative economies and communities as a strategy for change.

Exchange Library is a space to test out, to model and to perform different economic experiments and forms of exchange. The trade tests performed are spaces of process and public engagement. They are experiments and group works. They are a creative supplement that builds upon local structures as a method to test out and discuss imagined economic scenarios. They can be regarded as creative fictitious constructions that prompt a more visionary conversation in the local community. The space is open to the general public, acting as a kind of “squat” that intervenes in the established structures of production, trade and distribution within the city of Aarhus in Denmark where my project is located.

### **(IV)**

**Name:** Bianca Elzenbaumer and Fabio Franz (Brave New Alps)

**Affiliation:** Leeds College of Art and Sheffield School of Architecture; Community Economies Research Network (CERN)

**Title of presentation:** Circolo del Suolo – The Soil Club: Exploring (More-Than-Human) Community Economies

**Abstract:**

The Circolo del Suolo – The Soil Club is part of the practice-based community economies research project COMUNfARE based in the Italian Alps. To date, the club consists in a series of roundtable discussions, site visits and a periodically published co-research zine. These activities engage people in the Vallagarina valley in explorations of community economies and the commons, both of which in our practical approach are closely connected to a movement of degrowth.

Overall, the research takes as a starting point our need and desire to build ways of relating, producing and exchanging that foster progressive eco-social change. It moves within the theoretical frameworks of (more-than-human) community economies, feminist notions of the commons and matters of care, while continuously creating relays with practice via methods of participatory design research, critical pedagogy and DIY modes of making. The club's pedagogical activities unfold with three main aims: a) to weave a strong (trans)local network between people interested in fostering such change; b) to build up a shared framework for disruptive ways of thinking and doing in the capitalocene; c) to unravel the connections between everyday activities and geopolitical tendencies.

Currently, the club is nomadically moving through the valley. We are, however, also working towards the establishment of a space that can act as an incubator for community economies and practices of commoning in order to give spatial and temporal continuity to the club's activities. In our contribution we will thus elaborate on how the club has unfolded so far and what we envisage its next developments to be.