

## **Alternatives for Sustainability**

### **Event summary**

**23 March 2023**

The conference *Alternatives for Sustainability*, organised by ENoP member **Društvo Progresiva**, took place on **23 March 2023**. It looked at the efficiency of current instruments in use for achieving sustainability and some cases of good practices: How is degrowth realizable in practice? Will the prosperity indicator finally replace the indicator of economic growth? How to change the opinions of decision-makers and with that the policies of progress, development?

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The facilitator Mija Javornik opened the public conference with a question of how sustainable GDP is as an indicator of growth and general well-being.

The first speaker, Dr Jernej Pikalo, labelled degrowth as a mental challenge. He went on to connect our perception of time, which we decided to be linear, with the rise of capitalism, saying that capitalism can only continue to exist with constant growth, innovation etc. while degrowth, as a concept itself, is the opposite of that. The problem lies with the fact that the current lifestyle most of the human population leads is simply incompatible with nature. It all boils down to the question of human needs. Which of the needs humans have are inherent and which were produced by certain systems? He went on to open the question of global justice and how this, alongside proper democratization, might be the right answer to the problems we are facing. In the end of his opening speech, he mentioned that GDP really isn't a reliable indicator of human wellbeing and that wellbeing shouldn't be a numerical indicator we can measure.

The second speaker, Eva Černe MA, started off more practical and enumerated some cases of individuals taking matters into their own hands and changing their lifestyles. The first case was of a small group of people who decided to spend a year not buying anything new (they had a short list of essential things that they could buy). This case showed that those who managed to last till the end still spent the same amount of money as before, only this time, they bought things which were higher in quality. They also discovered that in order to sustain this lifestyle they needed more time and certain skills. This opens up the question of shorter working hours. The next case was a library of things in a Ljubljana district, where people were able to borrow things they needed occasionally, instead of being forced to buy them only to use them once or twice. The result of this practice was also a connected community, which evolved into other activities, as well. She finished her opening statement with the fact that even though these cases are exemplary, they are still not enough. Individual action is a great way of rising awareness, but it is not enough. The real problem lies in our economy and the system which propagates capitalism. And they way to change that comes from changing the perspective of individuals who then pressures the decision-makers into writing changes into the appropriate legislature.

The last speaker, Andrej Fideršek, is the co-founder of the organization Zero Waste in Žalec. His statement focused more on the existing cases of communities which live in a more connected way from examples in Slovenia, where people share the things they produce amongst each other in a semblance of goods exchange, or examples of peoples in Mexico, who have a completely different relationship with nature than the rest of the 'modern' world. He sees the answer to the current situation in this approach or a version of it.

After all speakers have had a chance to present their views and work, the audience had the chance to comment or pose questions.

The first question was whether this approach of individual action and/or gradual change is enough to achieve something or do we need something that would force change. To this the speakers all responded in a way that while gradual change is a good thing, we might be forced into having to take more instant action, because we are running out of time to change the way we live.

The following questions were more or else all about how to live sustainably without having to give up on some comforts of life which we all enjoy. The prevailing answer here was that we have to find practices which are good for us and to pressure our decision-makers to take more decisive action in terms of company legislature. An outlier was a question on whether or not this was the way of going about it or should we rather focus on innovation and technological development and for example move to Mars. While this question seemed comical it did open up the question of how technological development plays into degrowth and how to take advantage of it.

As a closing thought we can point out this: there lies misconception in how people see degrowth as a regression of all areas of economy. Rather it is the opposite, some areas will lessen, but there will be space, and need, for others to grow.