

# DEGROWTH CONFERENCE BUDAPEST 2016

30.08 – 02.09 2016

Conference Report

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## I. INTRODUCTION

After Paris in 2008, Barcelona in 2010, Venice in 2012 and Leipzig in 2014, a dedicated conference of the Americas in Montreal 2012, the 5th International Conference on Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity was held in Budapest (30th August – 3rd Sept 2016). The conference deliberately reflected on its post-socialist and current “semiperipheral” environment. Starting from specific social, economic and political challenges faced by the societies in this region, the conference provided for fruitful and interesting meetings and discussions in reflecting worldwide degrowth experience and perceptions in this specific regional and historic context.

Degrowth research and practice converged in this conference within a setting of a crisis destabilised society, but also a thriving Central European metropolis rich in examples of self-sufficiency, international solidarity and conviviality in the face of adversity. As such, the conference was more than an aetherial exchange of world-models, in overlap with free-style and open-access Degrowth Week, it acted as an alliance incubator and political generator of the commons sense required by the emergent transformative political and economic order. As an international meeting, learning and exchange event, this conference did not come up with a unified message to be addressed to the world, acknowledging that such messages exist in popular and academic publications and the Declarations from the previous Conferences.

This conference, crucially, provided a space for many of the existing degrowth messages to be openly questioned again, from new perspectives and by new people; new thinkers and players, re-reading and re-interpreting the previous narratives.

The conference output remains openly accessible in recordings, presentations, articles and research abstracts available online:

<http://budapest.degrowth.org>

The convergences established between the participants become their own platforms for cooperation, solidified through the collective spirits invoked in social events and jam-sessions of the Degrowth Week, until they are presented and questioned at the next International Degrowth Conference.

## Why Budapest?

The Budapest conference was, in a way, degrowth coming back home. It was located at the heart of a semi-peripheral European region, which used to be a home to many degrowth thinkers, like Karl Polanyi, Ivan Illich, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen and André Gorz. The conference included special focus on the significance of some of their work to understand the present day transformations, for example in Gareth Dale's lectures on Karl Polanyi. The theme of the conference, Walking the Meaningful Great Transformations, was an invitation for a mindful multi-perspective examination of the social and political transformations required to undo the life-threatening consequences of the market society, a practice in predictive and strategic substantivism (in reference to Polanyi).

Presently, the post-socialist region faces specific social, economic, environmental and political challenges, often under-researched in degrowth thinking. In the run up to the conference, preparatory events were organised throughout the region in order to kick-off the degrowth debate specific to the region itself, as a preparation for participation of new actors in the International Conference proceedings. Budapest, Zagreb, Ljubljana, were just some of the locations explicitly connecting lectures, concerts and summer schools to the September International Conference event. These were re-readings of the degrowth canon in contexts where the complete disintegration of societies has not been completed and their pressure on environment is still lesser than that of more developed countries.

In Budapest in particular, degrowth expressed itself through a very impressive network of local initiatives, in particular around alternative "ruin bars". These social spaces are connected to collectives and movements and play a very decentralized and self managed role in the cultural life of Budapest: from political discussion to establishment of community gardens, from direct market activities to practical workshops. The degrowth conference, and Degrowth Week in particular, plugged into this network to connect, support and extend the reach of the alternatives represented, and allow them to take their place in the global intellectual and academic environment around degrowth narratives.

Hungary has been in the focus of media and European politics in the last years. After being the model and the "most advanced" post-socialist country in the 1990s, in the perspective of a transition toward market-economy, Hungary faces a deep social, economic and moral crisis today. In a logic of dialogue and deeper understanding of processes, Hungarian political, cultural, social and economic recent past and the present position offer a very reflective and fruitful ground to challenge degrowth. An open debate "Degrowth in Parliaments", realised in cooperation with the Green European Foundation, was but one of the explicit learning points during the Conference. In the opposite direction, an International Conference of such composition, size and visibility was also a platform for the Hungarian emancipatory movements to find paths to go above emotional political and cultural divisions and/or blockades.

## Specific aims of the Budapest local organisation committee (LOC)

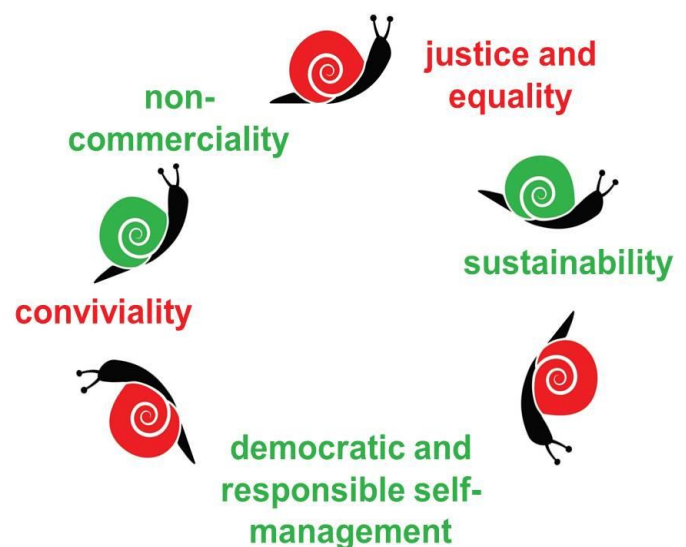
The main goals of the Budapest Degrowth Conference and Week was on one hand to broaden the questioning of the limits to growth in understanding the challenges faced by a broad spectrum of contemporary communities, and on the other hand to implement dialogue about solutions on different levels of research and practice.

As the number of events on explicitly related to degrowth is growing in Europe and globally, the goal of this conference was to develop a clear identity and philosophy for the International Conference as a regular and recognizable event, where scholars, civil society practitioners and alternative producers come together to inform each other regarding their degrowth-related activities, experience and new knowledge. Perhaps even more importantly, it was to be a convivial networking event, an example of how useful work can be seamlessly combined with enjoyment of life within available means.

## Principles of organization

The organization team has worked diligently to shape the conference program guided by Degrowth principles, while striving to ensure that proceedings represent a meaningful example of “Degrowth in Practice”. The planning and implementation of conference programs and activities were a collective representation of an environmentally and socially conscious, convivial exchange of intellectual positions, human capacities and respectful cooperation.

In particular, and in line with the advice from preceding International Degrowth Conferences, events of the 5th International Degrowth Conference and Budapest Degrowth Week were implemented in cooperation with local food and beverage producers, with non-violent communication practices, transparency and direct democracy, involvement of a wide diversity



See more about the organisation principles:  
[http://budapest.degrowth.org/?page\\_id=407](http://budapest.degrowth.org/?page_id=407)

of partners, organizers and participants, and alliances with different actors through shared values. In some instances cooperation was a means of spreading and specifying the degrowth-compatible understanding of practical solutions, despite initial contractual limitations.

The 2016 Budapest Degrowth Conference and Degrowth Week were used as an opportunity to bring together roughly one thousand scholars, practitioners, local citizens and volunteers in a manner which allows this critical mass of enthusiasts to leave a net positive benefit within the local community. Some hard decisions were adopted on the limiting of the overall size of the conference, to allow it to stay a meaningful event for most participants, and to provide it with accessible connections to the fluently structured, local or ad-hoc events of the more convivial Degrowth Week. These decisions had consequences in the self-financing of the majority of Conference and Week features, but also in the selection of the content for the conference. Whilst the selection of the presentations for the conference adhered to requirements of academically rigorous anonymous expert and peer review, full transparency was enacted in the final programme construction by the LOC.



## II. THE CONFERENCE

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*About 600 researchers, students, practitioners and activists from across the world gathered in Budapest as co-financing registered Conference participants to discuss latest conceptual and empirical contributions to degrowth, broadly understood as a response to ecological, social and political unsustainability of the contemporary society. The Conference, implemented primarily through thematic presentations and plenary discussions took place from August 30 to September 3 at Budapest Corvinus University.*

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**T**he Conference built on the continuity of previous International Degrowth Conferences, to demonstrate the latest research in the field of degrowth, as well as instantiate cooperation of various actors in the development of scientific and political proposals and experimentations relating to degrowth-inspired socio-ecological transformation. This cooperation is an important extension of academic research, and the conference provided a forum for a reciprocal dialogue between expanding new knowledge and social and ecological practices that rely on it. In order to strengthen the depth and durability of this dialogue, the Conference limited the number of participants to a manageable size, both in terms of accepted presentations and access to participation. Whilst this undoubtedly created some frustration within the burgeoning European degrowth networks, it caused no serious hindrance to cooperation of various actors and stymied the growth-crisis of the degrowth thinking in practice.



The presentations for the conference were selected from over 500 applications for papers and special sessions by an international team of degrowth researchers (see Scientific Committee [here](#)) collaborating through a specifically adapted online platform, including novel peer-to-peer evaluation of some submissions. The selection strongly rewarded coherence of the submissions, especially in the case of special sessions which combined several contributors from different sectors or academic disciplines. A special format, Research in Action, encouraged sessions where research discourse frames particular practices related to degrowth but not necessarily themselves academically articulated. This served as a structural encouragement for the dialogue between new findings and narratives, and the social and ecological practices reliant on them. The conference proceedings were delivered through about 40 topical panels (special sessions) and just under 200 other individual research presentations; throughout two daily 90min timeslots for three working days of the conference.





## Key themes

Based on the set of key open challenges for degrowth recouped at the closing plenary of the preceding, Leipzig, International Degrowth Conference, the Budapest conference was organized around several key themes, grouped into thematic days of **CHALLENGES**, **STRATEGIES** and **ALLIANCES**.

| DAY 1 : CHALLENGES  | DAY 2: STRATEGIES  | DAY 3: ALLIANCES   |
|---|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The un-common sense</li> <li>• Historical socialism and post-socialism in Eastern Europe:</li> <li>• Exit from growth <math>\neq</math> exit from capitalism?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environmentally sound economies</li> <li>• This is the 22nd century</li> <li>• Global village</li> <li>• The wrong way round</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New forms of democracy and new institutions</li> <li>• Degrowth and other social movements</li> <li>• Building on solidarity</li> <li>• Empowering communities</li> </ul> |

As degrowth is not a topic within a single academic discipline, or a fixed set of academic disciplines, the Conference intended to avoid the separation into standard disciplines which the researchers (mostly) come from. The cross-cutting themes were designed to fully break away with the disciplinary enclosures and conceptual comfort-zones of the seasoned practitioners, established academics and finishing graduates, by removing reference to easily recognisable disciplinary terminology. In submitting a proposal for the conference each participant had to choose a theme (and set of auxiliary determinants, clumsily called 'subcategories') best suited to the topics and findings they intended to present at the conference. This self-selection of content categories at times lead to a broad variety of approaches and findings presented within the same conference sessions, but also to surprising synergies of different research outputs.

The twelve cross-cutting themes ranged from visionary conceptual innovations to solidarity with other global movements. The themes of the first working day focused primarily on analytical deconstruction of the sustainability and equality challenges, both universal and regionally and historically specific. It also encouraged deliberate cross-disciplinary thinking, even when presenting the well-known or thoroughly researched topics. The themes of the second day presented the possible strategies for addressing the challenges, from economics that is inclusive of inequalities in access to resources and sufferance of impacts, through international structural connections of struggles, a long-term temporal perspective on current bottlenecks, to visions of social metabolism respective of ecological constraints.

On the third and final thematic day the focus was on the possible alliances between degrowth-inspired movements and other intellectual and social efforts aimed at ecological sustainability and social justice. Objects of interest from individual communities to global movements or schools of thought were included. The plenary keynote lectures and evening panels overlapped with the days' themes, highlighting alliances or known and inspiring strategies through detailed 90min lectures and discussions. More information about the key themes is available [here](#).

## Program and formats

The full program of the conference is available [here](#), while this is the general overview of the structure of the program:

| Tuesday, 30 August<br>WELCOME  | Wednesday, 31 August<br>CHALLENGES | Thursday, 1 September<br>STRATEGIES | Friday, 2 September<br>ALLIANCES   | Saturday, 3 September<br>CLOSING  |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
|  | 9:30 – 11:00<br>Morning plenary    | 9:30 – 11:00<br>Morning plenary     | 9:30 – 11:00<br>Morning plenary    |   |
|  | 11:00 – 11:30<br>Coffee break      | 11:00 – 11:30<br>Coffee break       | 11:00 – 11:30<br>Coffee break      | 10:00 – 12:30<br>Closing plenary: Polanyi, historical lessons, future challenges, semiperiphery |
|  | 11:30 – 13:00<br>Parallel sessions | 11:30 – 13:00<br>Parallel sessions  | 11:30 – 13:00<br>Parallel sessions | 12:30 – 14:00<br>Closing festival: Degrowth parade  |
|  | 13:00 – 14:30<br>Lunch break       | 13:00 – 14:30<br>Lunch break        | 13:00 – 14:30<br>Lunch break       | 14:00 – 17:00<br>Closing festival: Kazinczy street festival                                     |
|  | 14:30 – 16:00<br>Parallel sessions | 14:30 – 16:00<br>Parallel sessions  | 14:30 – 16:00<br>Parallel sessions |   |
| 16:00 – 18:00<br>Opening plenary:<br><i>Connecting the dots of degrowth</i>                    | 16:30 – 18:30<br>Degrowth week     | 16:30 – 18:30<br>Degrowth week      | 16:30 – 18:30<br>Degrowth week     | 17:00 – 20:00<br>Closing festival: Jam session  |
| 18:30 – 20:00<br>Opening panel of the conference:<br><i>Degrowth in semi-periphery context</i> | 19:00 – 20:30<br>Evening plenary   | 19:00 – 20:30<br>Evening plenary    | 19:00 – 20:30<br>Evening plenary   |   |
| 20:00<br>Opening cocktail for registered<br>conference participants and guests                 | 20:30<br>Conviviality              | 20:30<br>Conviviality               | 20:30<br>Conviviality              | 20:00<br>Closing festival: Final party  |

The Conference worked towards combining research and practice on a daily basis, and through a variety of meaningful formats of work. The opening and concluding days presented mostly invited presentations and in-situ organised content, inviting experienced speakers to make connections to previous and following international conferences. The three central days of the conference each started with a morning keynote presentation from a renowned speaker to contextualise the selected themes for the day, and open the key points for discussions to be unfolding throughout the events of the day. The plenary was followed by two sets of parallel sessions, delivering individual papers and pre-organised 'special sessions' (academic and research-in-action) grouped under the themes of the particular day. After these parallel sessions, based primarily on research presentations and open only to registered participants of the conference, the events of the Degrowth Week (see 3. Degrowth Week, below) filled a slot of three hours on each of the working days of the Conference.

No academic sessions overlapped with these events and registered participants (primarily fee-paying researchers) were encouraged to take part in these events together with interested public and ad-hoc participants. The events of the Degrowth Week, mostly open to all interested audiences, provided a space for a dialogue, deliberation, convergence, networking, practice, art and leisure in line with many facets of lived degrowth. This structured, yet open and flexible, offered a wide variety of formats, which can be categorized into the following main groups: book presentations; panel discussions and/or participatory discussions; workshops; visit tours; concerts, films, parties, exhibition, plays and performances. These were combined with the open access evening keynote plenaries and subsequent evening events, some of which featured the simultaneous translation in Hungarian.

These events and sessions were open to the wider public, local and international, and took place across Budapest. The closing event on the final day of the Conference took a form of a festival, whereby a Degrowth parade, Street festival, Jam Session and final party were organised. More information about the different formats can be found [here](#).

## The partnership

### Regional organisation

One specific feature of the Budapest conference is that it was based on regional organisation. The Institute for Political Ecology from Croatia and Focus Association for Sustainable Development and Ena Banda from Slovenia have supported the organisation from the respective countries, while in Budapest the main organisations supporting the Conference and Degrowth Week were Cargonomia, GreenDependent Institute and Association and The Open Gardens Foundation. The organisers were also supported by R&D (Spain) and international support group for degrowth conferences. Of course, many more organisations and people took part in the adventure and here is a list of the partners for the [Conference](#) and [Degrowth Week](#). By being organised in cooperation with many different actors, the conference opened an opportunity to initiate discussions, projects and synergies around degrowth as well as triggered cooperation with civil society, associations and political movements in these countries.

## Re-localization

Recently the degrowth movement was named the fastest growing movement in the world. Although there is, admittedly, a certain irony in having a growing movement for degrowth, this trend is inspiring. Yet, the conference did not strive to represent the global advance of the movement and its popularity. The conference strived to re-localize the happening and bring the conference to different cities around the world with the combination of participatory IT tools and events in the real world. It provided a nexus for parallel similar events in different locations around the world through collecting websites, contacts, and repository of outcomes (videos, publications, artwork). Over 20 events happened in different locations, bringing the conference to audiences worldwide.

### III. DEGROWTH WEEK

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*For the first time, in parallel to the 5th edition of the International Degrowth Conference in Budapest, an open festival welcomed discussions, public panels, artistic performances and exhibitions, practical workshops and convivial events all over the city. The Budapest Degrowth Week introduced Degrowth to Budapest and its inhabitants.*

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#### Program and elements

A call for programmes and activities was launched in the spring and divided into different categories: panel discussion, participatory discussion, book presentation, movie screening, workshop, concerts, exhibition, artistic performance, tour and stand. More than one hundred activities were selected and organized all around the city.

The diversity of the programmes included a street festival, a parade, some flash mobs, a literature contest connecting a more classical academic production with degrowth, as well as concerts showcasing local bands. The range of workshops and discussions consisted, among other themes, in the role of environmental grassroots organisations, low-tech practices, feminism(s) and degrowth, or political strategies such as the panel discussion “Degrowth in Parliaments” or the sociocracy participatory workshop.

You can see the full programme list [here](#).





## The participants

All the events of the Degrowth Week were public and free. This open platform for Degrowth dialogue, practice, networking and expression offered the opportunity to build bridges between scholars attending the Conference, civil society and practitioners. Some of the participants who prepared these events were key actors in research, while others usually invest energy in local initiatives and alternatives. Also, we opened cooperation with local initiatives and civil society in order to connect diverse local actors, not necessarily directly connected to degrowth, and international degrowth networks.

Therefore, the Degrowth Week gave the great opportunity to gather an important number of international participants of the degrowth conference with local inhabitants acting in the alternative cultural life of Budapest, during discussion events and night parties in our partner's venues. It embodied a unique meeting between diverse actors, approaches and practices of the transition projected by Degrowth, and aimed to create synergies across different movements, cultures, customs of conviviality.

## The partnership

In cooperation with the partners Degrowth Week proceedings gave everyone the opportunity to participate daily from 16h in degrowth-related activities. Each evening in partner venues, the plenaries held in Corvinus University were live streamed, with the possibility to have dinner before enjoying a convivial evening and concerts. Our main partners were Aurora, Golya, Müszi and Szimpla, community houses acting for a renewal of the cultural and political life in Budapest. We also had partnerships with the Polish Institute art gallery which hosted a photo exhibition on climate change and the press conference to announce the Degrowth Week, and with the community bank Magnet.

The week ended up with a partnership with all the bars of Kazinczy street where a car free festival was organized with a diversity of activities, local food and concerts, as well as stands of organizations defending the right of the refugees.



## IV. MAIN CONCLUSIONS OF THE CONFERENCE

Conferences of this type have not, since the expansion and diversification of the research streams and social movements related to degrowth, produced unified final declarations summarising the conclusions of the debates of from the conference. This Conference in particular refrained from such a convergence given its thematic and organisational deconstruction of entrenched narratives and their practical enactment. It is by now clear that there is a momentum of degrowth research, practical experiments and conceptual developments to provide a continuity of conference gatherings in one form or another. In such a variety of intellectual and experiential development forcing a solidified universal declaration statement might have been hierarchically constraining, or what is worse, practically irrelevant.

That is not to say that there is no new knowledge, new perspectives and new alliances arising out of this conference gathering. Whilst these are not presented in a limited word-count declaration, they are evident from the presentations and contributions of the final plenary session of 5<sup>th</sup> International Degrowth Conference, a recording of which is available [here](#).

Nonetheless, we can enumerate common threads here distilled from the content of the conference proceedings, daily summaries provided by ‘conference observers’ and the overview of content collected by members of the organising team. One of them is an attempt to use the very organisation and delivery of an International Degrowth Conference to present degrowth in practice from the perspective of the organising committee and for the benefit of a varied community based on varied, not always fully compatible, intellectual foundations. In that respect it is crucial for the organisers to take no more than a role of temporary stewards of a gathering of the global international community, and that was reflected in the statements by the Budapest conference organisers. This was one of the interpretations of a degrowth way of implementing a degrowth conference, and it stands up to scrutiny and reflection of the community, to be attempted again and improved (“fail again, but fail better!”) at the next Conference. A call for degrowth perspective on the increasing, and due to crises of the contemporary socio-economic practices incessant, migration of peoples is a strong message from the 2016 Conference community to future international gatherings.

A long open question has been approached again during this Conference, one of how global and local combine in degrowth thought. Should there be a universal degrowth narrative, equally applicable to Indian villages and New York urban food producers – how useful and deep can such a narrative be? This was closely connected to the question of degrowth’s own imposition onto existing sister narratives and practices around the world, people of which have never read of degrowth nor seen a self-declared degrowther. Whilst a near unanimity exists in refusal to impose degrowth declarations onto sister movements and practices, it remains an open issue how to fruitfully connect different regional and cultural practices and narratives into a stronger global call for change. An alliance of alliances has been called for, instead of forceful imposition of ‘degrowth ideology’. A related question, but in a category of time, is the community’s question of whether calls for broader action should be put out now, or whether



more research is required to more clearly define the outlines of the widely acceptable degrowth world.

Speaking of change, another hotly debated issue has been one of who should initiate change: institutions or individuals. Concepts of community and conviviality provided some guidance in this, with a lot of warning that action for change requires overcoming of fear: institutional, as well as individual. Loud warnings about the power of opposing actors have also been shared. Decolonisation of the imaginary has been called for as the close kin of overcoming of fear, and concepts both of education and feminism appeared in this thread. The former as the well-established social technology with a far reach and potential to emancipate, liberate from fear and, if properly decolonised, prevent harmful colonisation of popular imaginaries. The latter, is an example of an established emancipatory struggle that is looking to connect with degrowth, and to merge the useful instruments en route to the shared goal; an older and wiser sister to the freshly self-conscious degrowth movement, perhaps. But outside the academic world of metaphor, this thread also calls for creation of valid and basic degrowth narratives that can be used as entry points in a broad social conversation with unlikely audiences. A 'degrowth for my granny' has been 'commissioned' from the academic and practitioner community gathered in the final plenary.

Finally, structural qualms originating in the academia presented a repeated topic of debate. Whether degrowth should produce quantified expectations of change in material throughput and its distribution, or whether it should firmly refrain from quantification due to its reductionist shortcomings. A closely related topic is also a question of what the methods of degrowth-science should be; where from the register of the current scientific practices can degrowth draw whilst avoiding being saddled with the hidden reductionisms. Within academia it is also important to identify the obstacles to degrowth thinking stemming from the disciplinary boundaries and structures of the contemporary (primarily European) research and higher education practices. Some attempted answers to these issues build on the existing thinking in transformation of social metabolism (cf. elephant and snail) and post-normal science, whilst new vistas have opened from the semiperipheral hosting of the young degrowth research, as well as from accumulation of knowledge and experience from repeated questioning of these issues.

The 2016 International Degrowth Conference did not come up with a unified message to be addressed to the world, whilst it acknowledges that such messages exist both in increasing publication output and in the Declarations from the previous Conferences. This Conference was a platform for many of these messages to be openly questioned again, because of the new perspectives and new people appearing since the first Declaration, new thinkers and players, re-reading and re-interpreting the previous narratives. The broad conference output in recordings, presentations and brief research descriptions remains an open-access library for the community to keep referring back to (<http://budapest.degrowth.org/>), whilst the convergences established between the participants become their own platforms for cooperation until they are presented and questioned at the next International Degrowth Conference, to increase the knowledge, understanding and alliance-building a further inch.=

## V. OUTREACH REPORT

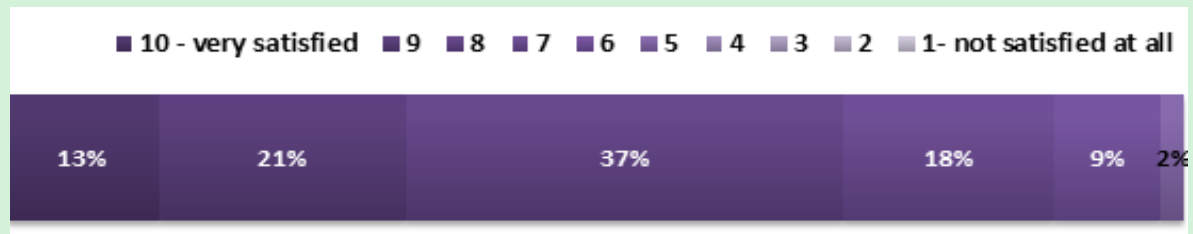
At the beginning of the conference organisation, the organisers set the aims of the outreach activities as follows. On the one hand to use the event of the Conference to get as many people familiar with the main concepts and messages of Degrowth as possible all over the world but with a special focus to the region and in particular Hungary; and on the other to enable those people who are sympathetic or committed to Degrowth to find new information, new connections and share their opinions and experiences related to Degrowth. Hence, the outreach activities mainly covered providing information on the website and Facebook account and generating media attention. The latter was done by organising three media events: one introducing the concept of Degrowth, done in Corvinus University in February 2016 (20 journalists participated), the second showing practical initiatives that reflect Degrowth values in Cargonomia in June 2016 (a dozen of journalist wrote about it or joined the event), and the last on the degrowth week activities organized in the Polish Institute Art Gallery in end of August (more than 20 journalists joined). Before, during and after the conference around 120-150 media appearances were generated all across the political spectrum including the key tv and radio channels and the most important online journals. This media coverage has been mainly in Hungary and the activities reached their aims of initiating public interest and find journalists who are aware of the existence of such a movement. However, the outreach activities were less successful in generating international media attention (in particular no Anglo-saxon nor French main media covered the event). There have been only about a two dozen foreign media coverings that we know of (German, Italian, Spanish, Indian, e.g.). With regard to the second aim in keeping interested parties informed, the FB accounts are up and running and the different pages have a few thousand followers. However, the Budapest Degrowth Week has over 84 thousand people talking about it. According to the participants, the communication before and during the conference were good (around 4 out of 5 in average).

You find here a selection of articles, interviews and reportages about the conference [here](#).

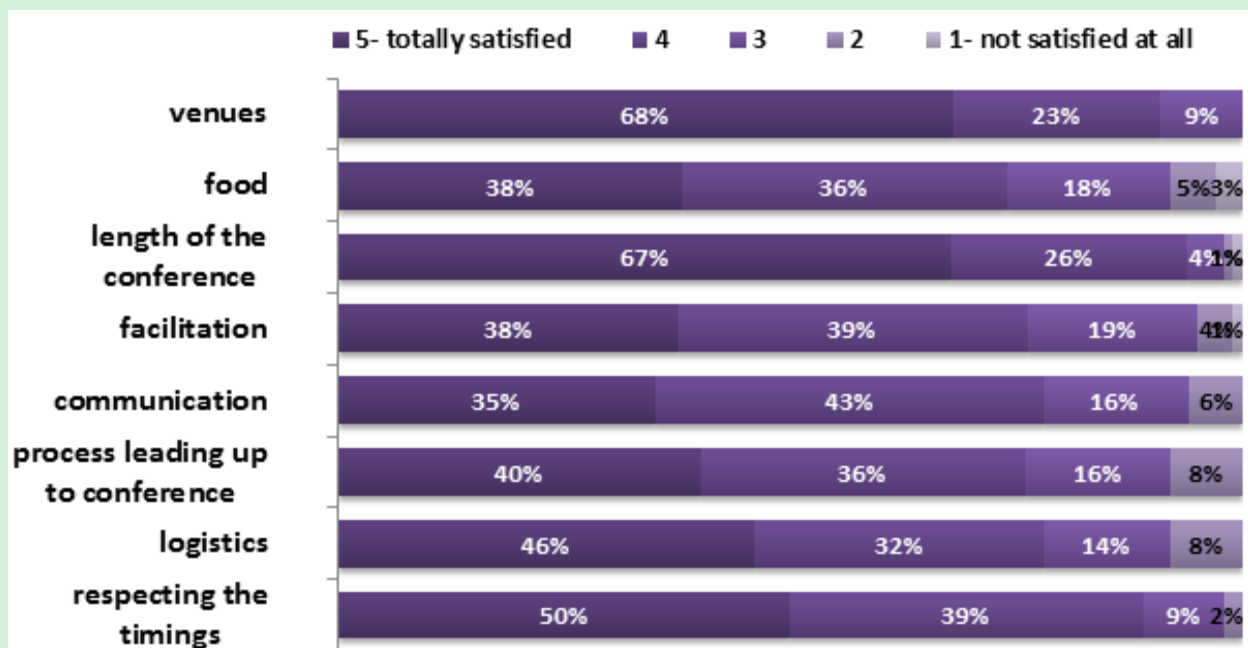
Also and to conclude, the communication strategy, based on dialogue and more open key questions than ideological answers was very effective to go above the political divisions in Hungary. In this challenging context, we could observe that there is a raising interest for new narrative, and debates about well-being, sustainability or more meaningful lives. The quality (long, in-depth), and not only the number, of the articles and interviews and of the comments should also be underlined.

## VI. EVALUATION SURVEY

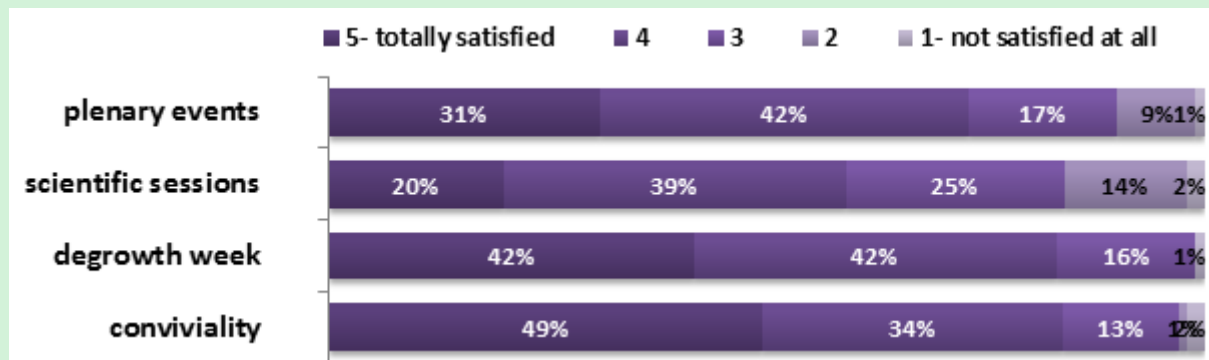
After the conference a quantitative online evaluation survey was done on self-selected sample of 87 event participants. Generally, the participants were satisfied with the conference and Degrowth Week, average of 8 out of 10 on the satisfaction scale:



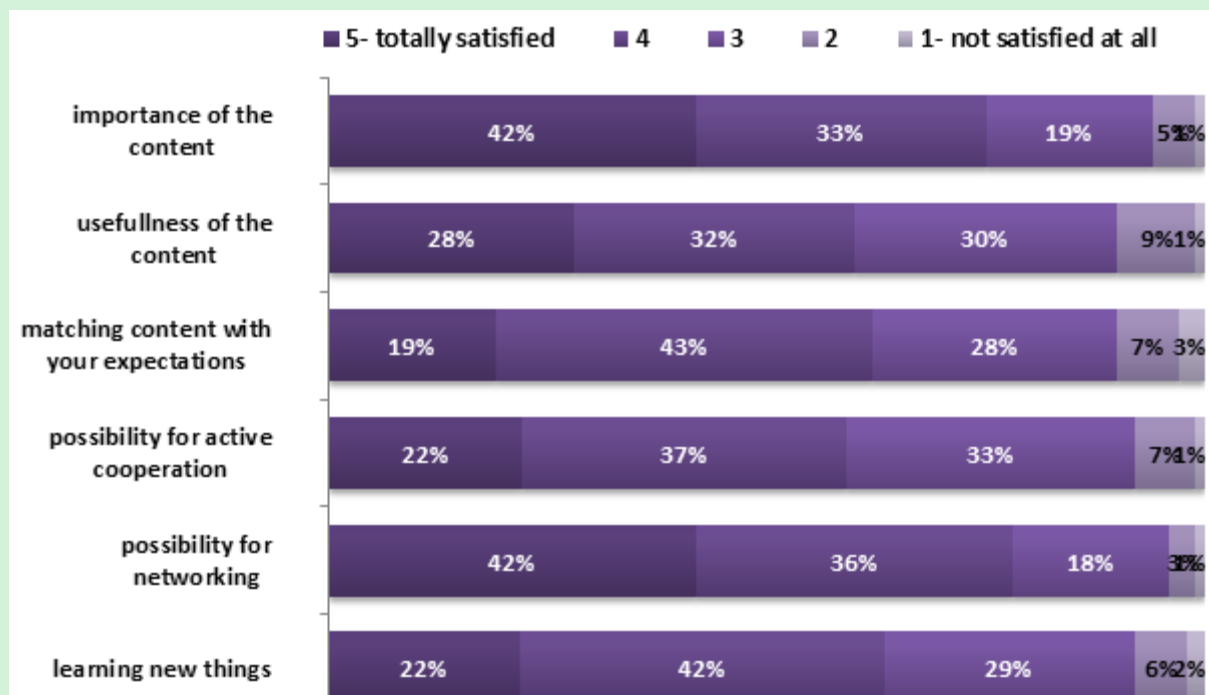
From the organisational perspective, the participants were mostly satisfied:



Among the different formats, the participants liked conviviality events (concerts, parties) best. The weak satisfaction with scientific sessions and plenary events stems from two main reasons: the format (too scientific, rigid, non-participative etc.) and the lack of quality and new content (poor scientific quality, no new information, lack of progress of degrowth research...).



As to the level of satisfaction with usefulness of the content, it is generally lower than the satisfaction with other aspects. This is due to several reasons. The participants expected new information and applicable solutions, but were dissatisfied with the progress from Leipzig and ability to provide practical answers. The participants also expected more active engagement, which was perceived not to be there. For some participants the content was not too useful because they do not work on the issue of degrowth.



To sum up, we have learned (see more under Lessons learned) we cannot make all the participants happy all the time, but we did manage to make the participants quite happy, which is reflected in the upper evaluation, but also in this word cloud of impressions from the conference:



## VII. FINANCIAL AND NON-FINANCIAL PICTURE

|   | Total in EUR | Form of input |
|---|--------------|---------------|
| Human resources                                       |              |               |
| Salaries paid by the budget                           | 17300        | financial     |
| Volunteering or salaries paid through partner budget* | 84230        | in-kind       |
| Travel and accommodation                              |              |               |
| coordination meetings**                               | 13000        | financial     |
| travel and accommodation of global South participants | 5000         | in-kind       |
| keynotes travel + accommodation                       | 14600        | financial     |
| Services  |              |               |
| IT support (platform)                                 | 5000         | financial     |
| interpreters and interpretation equipment             | 5000         | in-kind       |
| live streaming  | 3000         | financial     |
| rent Corvinus University Budapest                     | 11000        | financial     |
| rent other (public areas)                             | 1500         | financial     |
| rent other (public areas)                             | 7500         | in-kind       |
| cost of events (parties, cultural events)             | 5000         | financial     |
| Artists   | 2000         | financial     |
| promotion (logo, website, photos, video)              | 1000         | financial     |
| communication   | 2300         | financial     |



|   |                |                   |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| design  | 1050           | financial         |
| Food and materials                                  |                |                   |
| food, coffee breaks, cocktail reception             | 26747          | financial         |
| food and goodies for meetings (GD)                  | 150            | in-kind           |
| printing  | 2350           | financial         |
| T-shirts  | 1000           | financial         |
| computers   | 500            | financial         |
| Administrative costs                                |                |                   |
| office costs per month                              | 2640           | financial         |
| office costs per month                              | 2640           | in-kind           |
| communication, telefon (per month)                  | 600            | financial         |
| communication, telefon (per month)                  | 600            | in-kind           |
| Support Group Meeting Budapest after the conference | 1500           | financial         |
| Reserve for next conference                         | 7000           | financial         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>227.207</b> | 122.087 financial |
|   |                | 105.120 in-kind   |

\* We made an estimation of the whole time spent by the direct organizers and volunteers in person month (a part of it has been financed by partner organisation budget). It doesn't include the other partners or parallel event organisation.

\*\* Include the transport, food and accommodation

| Income of the conference                                       |        |
|--|--------|
| Source   | amount |
| Financial contributions  |        |
| Participant's fees   | 89000  |
| Heinrich Böll Stiftung grant                                   | 19000  |
| Brot für die Welt grant  | 5000   |
| Leipzig reserve donation                                       | 7000   |
| Selling of T-shirts, books, donations during the conference... | 1587   |
| French Degrowth Movement donation                              | 500    |
| Total income   | 122087 |
| In-kind contributions (work, venue, equipment)                 | 105120 |
| Total income   | 227207 |

## VIII. ORGANISATION OF WORK

As mentioned above, this conference was organised regionally, which had an impact on the way work was organised. The team was lead by two coordinators, one from Budapest and one from Ljubljana. It was structured into 5 sub-teams: coordination, scientific, financial, conviviality, outreach. The scientific, financial, conviviality and outreach teams each had one coordinator, who was a member of the coordination team and in charge of communicating with the coordinators.

The coordination was in charge of directing all processes and teams, ensuring communication and meetings, monitoring, planning, networking, administration, development of overall programme. The coordination team had skype calls on at least a monthly basis (in the last months before the conference the calls were more often) and meetings roughly every two months in Budapest.

The science team was in charge of development of the content framework of the conference (key themes, sub-topics), organising the calls for sessions and papers, development and coordination of the review process, contributing to programme development, keynote speaker coordination, reporting to the coordination team. The team had mainly e-platform discussions, while the coordinator took part in the skype calls and meetings with the coordination team.

The conviviality team started off as the logistics and events team, but soon turned also into Degrowth Week team. It was in charge of organising the logistical aspects of the events (venues, accommodation, food, transport...), but it also did the programming of the Degrowth Week events and conviviality happenings. As the team was mostly based in Budapest, it had regular monthly meetings. Closer to the conference it was meeting almost on a daily basis. The coordinator took part in communication with the coordination team.

The finance team was the least populated (and popular) team. It was in charge of budgeting for the conference and fundraising. It was also partially in charge of managing the conference fee payments. It communicated mainly over e-mail and phone, the only meetings that took place were in parallel to the coordination team meetings.

The outreach team was in charge of developing the dissemination and public relations strategy, implementing promotion activities, dealing with the visual identity, preparing promotion materials, preparing and implementing media work, managing the different forms of communication (website, newsletter, social media, interviews). It had two members who acted as press officers / spokespersons and in the run up and during the conference was supported by a team of expert communicators. The team had roughly bi-monthly meetings in Budapest, for the rest the communication was online or during the coordination team meetings.

More information about the team members is available [here](#).

## IX. KEY LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

### Organisational

From the organisational aspect, there are several key lessons that need to be highlighted.

As we tried to follow some principles, such as organic organisation, reciprocity economy and DiY, diversity of actors and networks, the organisation of the events was unique when compared to standard conference organisation procedures. For the organic approach to organising, we learned that it works well to some extent, but in some point more traditional (structured, top down) approaches need to be used as well to ensure results. The reciprocity economy or DiY approaches worked well.

In terms of communication, the work was well organised when it came to communication with Hungarian publics and media. We had a much smaller impact on other medias. Even if the conference text presentation was translated into 20 languages and spread around in several countries with the support of national Degrowth groups: France (5 press release were sent and publish on several websites, invitations were sent to selected medias and journalists), Germany, Italy e.g.) or with the help of Research & Degrowth in different anglo-saxon networks, we could observe that it was very difficult to motivate non Hungarian medias to cover the conference. In the future, with the help of the support group and international degrowth networks, we should anticipate more effective communication campaigns.

We faced challenges with financial issues as the final budget could only be known only two months before the conference when the registrations fees were paid. So some decisions about it could only have been taken after the conference (like compensation for volunteer work) where it would have been better to do it in the beginning.

At the conference itself we missed a mechanism to react to or deal with emergencies, as well as an efficient information sharing system, in particular considering that we also had event all around the city. The ability to react to, unexpected, on site challenged would have been ameliorated with a better chain of communication through the core group of team members. It should have been better thought of a system for making fast decisions and following what's going on. But all fast decisions were reached in the end, and to no great upset for the participants.

It is very challenging to organise an observation team while organizing the conference itself. So such a team was not organised well as there was no personal approach towards the team, but just mass mailing of instructions and anonymous filling in of forms. It would have worked better if the team was smaller and more connected (through meetings) or if it was organized with the help of international Degrowth networks and/or support group through a parallel project, maybe with fundings.

The IT tools lesson is that there is a danger associated with relying exclusively on IT tools, without possible back-up plans, whilst the internationally distributed cooperation is greatly

enhanced by the availability of a tailor-made IT tool. IT tools certainly offer support, but they can also take a lot of effort in developing and maintaining, requiring a dedicated team member for continuous development, and a continuous assistance to community of users. It is too challenging to parallelly implement new open source IT tools and organize such a big event. Such an implementation should be organized with funding by another team.

An important lesson learned can be explained by paraphrasing Bob Marley: you can't please all the people all the time. Try as we might, there were some people who hated use of airco and some people who loved it, then those who thought there was not enough food and those who saw piles of food being wasted, etc.

In spite of some organisational glitches, it should not be forgotten that this event was done without a professional/institutional background, but rather based on personal commitment to the cause and in most cases volunteer work. Moreover, we decided to follow as much as possible degrowth principles (DiY, self-organization, diversity of events, activities and actors, etc.).

We learned that we need to go further and deeper in the decentralization process of the conference, to open our doors, share tools and tips with others willing to relocalize. A Degrowth Conference must not be an end but a mean, an opportunity for Degrowth communities to do things as they are, with respect of their identities and cultural roots.

## Team

The key challenge that was faced team-wise is that it was demanding to build such event within a team sitting across three different countries and also a very large diversity of people. This made different aspects - communication, decision-making, symmetrical information, team support - more complicated to manage. We faced different team dynamics between the team members that were based in Budapest and could meet every day and the others that were based elsewhere and could only meet once every two months.

The organization team was a newly formed group, which means we did not have shared norms, ways of working or even understanding of tasks. There were differences in experience, field and ways of work, perceptions and expectations. We should have spent more time on developing our group, especially for achieving better functionality of self-organization and organic ways of working. Occasionally we failed to function as a team, reverting to individual specialities and departments, due to difficult communication between the geographical teams.

There were challenges with the decision making processes (participative decision making was not always possible to organise), full transparency within the group (due to different modes of communication), over-exploitation of the conscientious people on the team, asymmetrical information and power between members of the team etc. These challenges must be properly addressed and re-negotiated throughout the organization process.

More effort should have been invested in clearly dividing the responsibilities and tasks, as well as trying to estimate the amount of work to be done. In practice everyone had to work on almost everything, but better planning perhaps could have helped to structure the work better. It is important to stress here, that the environment external to the team was shifting to a large degree in expectations.

Some of the hardship we faced reflect exactly the problems degrowth is addressing: e.g. Where does volunteer work end and paid work begin? How far can personal commitment substitute current mainstream economic realities? How does participatory decision-making work and when do we have to follow top-down (even authoritative) approaches in teamwork?

Regardless of the occasional frictions, there was a good atmosphere in group. In spite of the many differences and difficulties with breaking out of the 'boxes' of our fields, sectors, ways, cultures or languages, we've made it!

## Relationship to the international community

As already emphasized above, the Budapest team has been ambitious in trying to walk the talk of degrowth by embracing organic ways of organisation, DiY, supporting open-source IT tools, practicing reciprocity economy etc. It has also been ambitious in shaping the formats of the conference, creating the new initiative, Degrowth Week, in trying to satisfy all the participants in their diversity, in finding a right balance between well-known important figures and unknown regional researchers or in balancing on the thin line between being open to everyone and overreaching your own capacities. These efforts were initially questioned by the international community and it took a lot of explaining to justify our ways of doing the conference. However, lesson learned is that the communication with the international community should have been more intense from both sides – on clarifying the expectations, asking and receiving information about the conference, building trust. It would have been beneficial to have had more inputs in terms of what the international community expects from the conferences as this would help the organisers tailor the event more towards the needs of the community. In spite of the said challenges, the building of alliances with the international degrowth community, as well as other movements, was very good. One of the factors for good outreach to the international community was the translation of the general introduction to the conference into 20 languages.

Four members of the Budapest Degrowth Conference organisation team have joined the Support Group in order to bring their experience and make the cooperation with the future conference teams even more effective and fruitful.

All in all, It has been a major learning experience for the organisers, but hopefully also for the community. Our collective journey resulted in a very pleasant and convivial week in Budapest and we hope the good memories will stay with us.



## X. CONCLUSION

Event management, in particular for organising an international gathering with hundreds of participants, is always following difficult, stressful and sometime chaotic pathways. We decided to organize the fifth International Degrowth Conference, but at the same time we also decided to challenge ourselves in representing as much as possible Degrowth principles. Also, we wanted to be as open as possible and present Degrowth in a new context by offering a diversity of activities. So we decided to have a regional team with team members in Budapest and also all around the region. We also decided to work with a diversity of people with different levels of knowledge and experience with Degrowth, different working habits and skill sets, standards and expectations, from academics to practitioners, from activists to artists. Somehow, we believe that this two year journey has been very fruitful as a team for all of us. We also hope, that we manage to offer to the participants a nice time of conviviality in Budapest and that they would hold onto fond memories. Also, we hope that Budapest constructed one more meaningful step towards more environmental and social justice following the dynamics initiated in Paris in 2008 and followed by Barcelona, Montreal, Venice, and Leipzig. We are now waiting for the next steps and are happy to share our experience with our successors in wishing them bon courage.



WALKING THE MEANINGFUL  
GREAT TRANSFORMATIONS?

