10
GREECE
Real-existing degrowth and its challenges

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Introduction

'Real-existing degrowth', coined by Kallis et al. (2022), refers to and encapsulates a multifaceted approach to confronting the unsustainable growth paradigm that dominates modern societies. It acknowledges that degrowth isn't a packaged theory but rather an imperfect and evolving reality within everyday practices. This concept embraces both voluntary and involuntary actions taken to resist growth, adapt to its limits, or simply live well without it. In this chapter we follow this idea of real-existing degrowth to refer to imperfect degrowth-oriented organisational models in Greece. These practices range from communities engaged in conflict and activism to communities that voluntarily or involuntarily organise themselves outside capitalist structures. These can be territories, often in the periphery in a state of what Latouche (2004) calls 'a-development' (Kallis et al. 2022, p. 2), or nowtopias (Carlsson 2008; Gearey and Ravenscroft 2019; Demaria et al. 2019), which are forms of collective organisation proposing alternative practices (such as energy communities).

Between crisis and resistance

Aspects of the social structure and contemporary history of Greece provide fertile soil for the degrowth movement to take root. The economic crisis of 2008–2010 turned Greece into a 'modern-day study of political, social, and cultural issues during a prolonged economic recession' (Markantonatou 2021, p. 4), which should not be confused with an ideal degrowth case study. Nonetheless, the sharp reduction in consumption of energy was followed by a sudden rise of solidarity-based social resistance movements, including self-organised collectives and grassroots initiatives also referred to as 'liminal commons' (Varvarousis 2022). As highlighted by Arampatzi (2017, p. 2159), during the initial five years of the crisis, over 300 solidarity economy groups and networks were actively operating within the metropolitan area of Athens. Research by Tsagkari (2017) in Greece observed an:

> increased tendency around niches of social movements that can form an alternative model of growth, based on solidarity, cooperation, and mutual respect. Many of these initiatives form part of the tradition that is rooted in the Greek culture that did not fade completely

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> in modern life. This can offer a comparative advantage towards a potential transition to a degrowth model, as many of the ideas this model embodies are neither new nor strange to Greek society.

Indeed, ideas of degrowth are not new to the Greek context. Cornelius Castoriadis, considered one of the degrowth pioneers, drew upon his Greek heritage, finding inspiration in ancient Greek philosophers, and delved deeply into the Greek context to explore what he termed the 'Greek imaginary'. Castoriadis posits that humans collectively construct norms, laws and institutions, forming a social imaginary that defines societal values. Autonomy, to him, entails the freedom to shape these social significations consciously rather than passively accepting them as products of external influences (Castoriadis 2023). Petridis (2013) draws from Castoriadis' project of autonomy to discuss an alternative path for Greece during the economic crisis, one not centred on growthism. Yet, in the post-memoranda era Greek traditional strategies of social reproduction, such as the pre-crisis finance-led growth model and the 'familistic' social model, have become either unavailable or less effective while economic growth has become a priority (Markantonatou 2021).

New growth opportunities, especially in the tourist sector, have emerged through the mass touristification of Greek destinations, especially islands (Prokopiou et al. 2018; Rossidis et al. 2019). To generate primary surplus, the country has been promoting privatisations, deregulation of social rights, and environmentally harmful and large private investments. At the same time, high levels of energy poverty (Halkos and Kostakis 2023), severe floods and great wildfires (Kitsantonis 2023), and rural abandonment (Salvia et al. 2020) are only some of the pressing issues Greek society has faced in past decades. Neoliberal structural adjustment policies (imposed after the 2008 economic crisis and exacerbated in the COVID-19 pandemic) have significantly impacted connections among individuals, with non-human nature, and spatial dynamics resulting in an ongoing interconnected crisis that has influenced, and continues to influence, nearly every aspect of social and economic existence (Mylonas 2020; Sarımehmet Duman 2022). Thus, despite the superficial economic recovery of Greece, the country is still facing a deep interrelated social-economic and environmental/ecological crisis.

As a response to these crises, often in the absence of state intervention, and amid an increasing disillusionment with established representative democratic institutions, several strong social movements and solidarity structures have persisted in Greece. While most of these movements are not direct extensions of the solidarity movements that arose during the crisis, their emergence, perpetuation and evolution are intricately linked to the solidarity movement of that period. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Greece witnessed the (re)emergence of numerous grassroots solidarity initiatives, such as the establishment of a robust solidarity network supporting community health clinics, the development of independent community radio stations, and the creation of a solidarity fund to assist imprisoned and persecuted activists (EP and TP 2020). These movements arose organically as citizens sought to address gaps in the official pandemic response and counter what they viewed as government propaganda. As noted by 'K.M. and V.K.' members of an Athenian social health clinic (cited in EP and TP 2020, p. 158): 'This pandemic is a turning point. We are ready for tomorrow'. Their observation reflects the broader sentiment among these solidarity movements as they witnessed the Greek people's capacity for rapid mobilisation and mutual aid. 'The movement in Greece has very good reflexes', K.M. and V.K. continued. 'People responded very quickly through various efforts, showing great persistence in resistance, filling us with optimism' (K.M. and V.K. in EP and TP 2020, p. 158). These grassroots initiatives not only provided essential services during the crisis but also demonstrated the potential for community-based responses to social challenges, establishing networks of support that extended beyond the immediate health emergency.

Given the chapter's limit on length, we present only some examples of the tapestry of real-existing degrowth cases found in Greece. These cases, although facing contradictions, offer an alternative vision that challenges conventional growth-oriented paradigms. To do justice to the many different examples and bringing in our personal experience, we chose to focus on three categories. First, we discuss *insurgent* cases rooted in climate justice and environmental movements. Second, we spotlight commoning *nowtopian* projects, such as energy communities in Athens and rural Greece. Last but not least, we discuss *a-developed* territories like the islands of Tilos, Ikaria and Gavdos. Throughout the text, it will become clear that these categories often overlap, with many movements and territories fitting into more than one category.

It is essential to recognise that while these initiatives offer valuable insights and inspiration for the degrowth movement, they do not provide a one-size-fits-all solution or blueprint for real-existing degrowth. Each context, embedded in a singular socio-cultural context, presents its own challenges and opportunities but can offer valuable lessons within the broader context of degrowth theory and practice. All within the Greek territory, they represent microcosms of the tensions between growth-oriented policies and the ideas of degrowth.

Degrowth and the contemporary climate and ecological movements in Greece

Insurgent territories emerge as a response to environmental violence, neo-extractivism, resource appropriation, land grabbing and commodification. Often insurgent movements and territories centre the environment and identify as part of the broader and global environmental movement active in areas of (environmental) conflict. According to Müller (2020, p. 119):

> Climate justice is not so much a state of affairs – e.g. the fair distribution of the costs of a potential solution to the climate crisis – but more a process, namely the process of struggling against the social structures which cause climate injustice. If we heed this broad definition, we can even say that many of the struggles for climate justice are not necessarily being fought under the banner of climate justice, but are represented as struggles for land, water, and other basic needs and human rights.

Even though we believe that the term 'climate and ecological justice movement' is more appropriate, since the word 'environment' creates a distance between humans and nature, which goes to the core of the crisis we are facing, we consciously use the term 'environmental movement' here, since this is how it's described in Greece.

In order to understand the current state of the environmental movement in Greece, and its role as an insurgent real-existing degrowth example, we need to look back at the financial crisis of 2008, and the austerity measures and privatisations that followed. The financial crisis resulted in a detrimental loss in Greece's gross domestic product (GDP), which is not an example of 'degrowth' – as some opponents of degrowth claim, making a flawed correlation to discredit degrowth. The financial crisis and the austerity measures enforced in Greece were a violent and sustained top-down impoverishment of the Greek population as a result of tremendously unpopular policies. The European Union (EU) and International Monetary Fund adjustment programmes had a significant impact on middle- and lower-income classes, increasing precariousness and unemployment, and deepened inequality (Forster et al. 2019), while also creating an environment of fear and insecurity (Davey 2015). At the same time, they had severe ecological impacts, increasing the country's vulnerability to climate change (Botetzagias et al. 2018). These policies don't refer to degrowth,

which is a truly democratic process where citizens collectively decide to position social justice at the core of their policymaking, while transitioning to an economy that respects the ecological boundaries and is not solely focused on GDP growth.

Ruling parties often employ the climate crisis as a convenient excuse during climate disasters, while corporations leverage it for greenwashing and financial gain, exacerbating distrust among citizens (van Versendaal 2023). The climate justice movement is organised and loud in Europe but less prevalent in Greece (Gkiouzepas and Botetzagias 2018). Greek environmental groups often critique growth and green-growth strategies usually without explicitly mentioning the climate crisis (Kafetzis 2023), or aligning with the climate justice, or degrowth principles. Greek environmental movements are primarily rooted in leftist or anarchist ideologies (Keith and Tsakatika 2023). Despite a recent increased interest, many collectives struggle to effectively communicate the climate crisis within its socioeconomic framework due to systemic failures and government exploitation (Kafetzis 2023).

Opposition to industrial wind farms

The most potent force in environmental advocacy today lies in opposition to industrial wind farms, where a robust network of organising has yielded substantial victories, mostly through the judicial system (Komninou et al. 2023). Big projects have been cancelled by the Council of State, Greece's highest administrative court. The movement of opposition to wind farms has several different views, from climate crisis denialism and the NIMBY ('not in my backyard') reaction/movement to anticapitalist and strong degrowth and climate justice voices. The majority focus on biodiversity loss and land use change as a consequence of industrial wind farms but rarely mention the climate crisis, not necessarily because they don't acknowledge climate change.

Greece is a place of an intriguing contradiction demonstrating the undesirable outcome produced when a central authority claims to implement an environmental policy but does not fuse it with a complementary social policy. Alternative energy sources like wind and solar are usually considered more compatible than energy systems based on coal, oil and nuclear power in a democratic egalitarian society (Winner 1980; Becker and Naumann 2017). People active in social movements are natural proponents and allies in the creation of a more egalitarian and democratic society and are often in movements against alternative energy sources. These technologies have been implemented in distorted ways in Greece – in a top-down and destructive manner, often in Natura 2000 protected areas, weaponising the climate crisis, and without benefits for – or prior, free, and informed consent by – local communities (Zafeiropoulos 2024). A different model, based on the vision of degrowth and self-sufficiency, could have different results and responses by the public. Books written by Giorgios Kolempas (*Γιώργος Κολέμπας*) and Giannis Mpillas (*Γιάννης Μπίλλας)* are popular within the environmental movement, Mpillas and Kolempas (2013, 2019) expanding on subjects such as degrowth, the commons, self-sufficiency, communalism and direct democracy.

Insurgent territories and radical geographies

The environmental movement has a strong presence in other realms as well (see Koulouris (2024) for details). Currently, in Greece's two largest cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, there are assemblies organising around public spaces and resisting gentrification. Oil and gas exploitation is becoming a bigger struggle, since many offshore and onshore blocks have been leased and the extraction phase could start soon in Epirus and Crete (Ibrahim 2019). A network known as

'Hellenic Trench SOS' (Ελληνική *Τάφρος SOS*) has emerged to combat proposed fossil fuel extraction blocks in the Hellenic (Greek) trench. This trench harbours the deepest point in the Mediterranean Sea, crucial for the reproduction of wildlife within its ecosystem.

A monumental moment for the contemporary (post-2008) environmental movement has been the fight against gold and copper mining by Eldorado Gold, a Canadian mining company, in Skouries, Chalkidiki (Blionis 2015). The first permit granted in 2011 led to clashes with riot police in the years that followed. This local organising effort garnered national and international attention (visited by Naomi Klein in 2013) and solidarity from various grassroots movements, transcending environmental concerns to confront capitalist interests. Although the Skouries movement has been unsuccessful in stopping the mining until now (writing in 2024), it remains an important moment that mobilised thousands of people who met with violent repression unseen before in environmental struggles (Hofkirchner et al. 2015).

Degrowth emerged as a central concept embraced by numerous participants in the Skouries conflict, especially by the Epitropi Agona Megalis Panagias assembly (*Επιτροπή Αγώνα Μεγάλης Παναγίας*) as it encapsulated the shared idea of challenging the prevailing paradigm of ceaseless economic expansion and fighting against capitalist interests that drive natural resource exploitation and environmental injustice (Kallis 2012). Another noteworthy endeavour, celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2023, is the Vio.Me Cooperative (*Σ.Ε. BIO.ME*), a self-managed factory in Thessaloniki that produces environmentally friendly cleaning products. The initiative was started by workers after the owners had failed to pay salaries, the case for many workers in the post-2008 financial crisis.

Another milestone for the Greek environmental justice movement was in 2020, when the so-called Modernization of the Environmental Law bill was passed. At that moment, more than 150 collectives mobilised all over Greece for months, with more than 5,000 people protesting on Syntagma Square on World Environment Day. This turnout represented an unprecedented opposition to environmental legislation (Bechlivanis 2020). During that period Agrypnoi Polites (*Άγρυπνοι Πολίτες*) was formed as an open assembly that congregated in front of the parliament every night until dawn for 62 consecutive days. Climate justice and degrowth were central in their messaging. At that time Support Art Workers, an arts professionals movement demanding better pay and equal treatment from the state, decided to form a new group, Support Earth, to protest the environment law. This was an important sign of more intersectional approaches appearing in environmental struggles in Greece. By opposing laws that prioritise economic growth over environmental protection, these movements advocate for a shift away from the dominant paradigm of endless expansion and symbolise a commitment to continuous engagement and resistance against policies endangering ecological balance.

In 2023, the massive wildfire in Evros and floods in Thessaly – one of the most significant rainfall-induced floods in Europe since records began – played a pivotal role in increasing public interest in climate crisis impacts. Wildfires are easily attributed to negligence, power line failures, or more nefarious causes like arson, but rainfall amounting to two years' worth of rain in just two days is difficult not to attribute to climate change. Simultaneously, the environmental movement is striving to link these disasters to social justice issues and the destructive agenda driven by growth that benefits only a few (Kafetzis 2023).

Recent efforts to prioritise climate justice (*κλιματική δικαιοσύνη*) and degrowth (*αποανάπτυξη*) are exemplified by initiatives such as the annual Climate Justice Camp (*Καμπ Κλιματικής Δικαιοσύνης*), established in 2022, and planned to be held in a different location in Greece each year. In 2024, an informal group emerged from a series of educational activities organised by the non-government organisation (NGO) Inter Alia, which received support from the Research &

Degrowth lab (Barcelona) to enhance their learning and organising capacity. Consequently, Let's Talk About Degrowth Greece plans to arrange actions and dialogues with different stakeholders on degrowth as well as initiating a degrowth library.

Other examples of collectives that talk explicitly about degrowth and embrace degrowth ideas are Climataria (*Κλιματαριά*), an intersectional activist assembly for climate and social justice launched in Athens in 2023; Apo Koinou (*Από Κοινού*), a collective and network in Trikala that focuses on the commons, mutual aid, self-sufficiency and direct democracy; Stagiates (*Σταγιάτες*), a small village in Volos with strong local organising against water privatisation that has held a quarterly national assembly for degrowth for three years; Aftenergia (*Αυτενέργεια*), a self-organised collective that focuses on social ecology and autonomy; Save Gavdos (*Πρωτοβουλία Παραθεριστ(ρι)ών Γαύδου*), an assembly that started in 2021 against water privatisation, destruction of hand-made shelters, prohibition of nudism, oil drilling, and growth-oriented touristification of the island of Gavdos.

The case of Epirus

The region of Epirus in Western Greece deserves a special mention due to the many promising initiatives located there that explicitly or indirectly espouse degrowth arguments. This region is at the forefront of ecological struggles in Greece as the location of all the approved necessary permits for oil and gas extraction. The only existing fossil fuel extraction site is Prinos, which has been exploited since 1974. Activists are worried that if the exploitation plans for Epirus are realised, then many onshore and offshore blocks currently leased in regions like Crete and the Ionian Sea will follow. Furthermore, many industrial wind and solar energy projects are taking place in Epirus.

Significant activists include the P2P Lab, an interdisciplinary research collective focused on the commons, launching various projects, such as Tzoumakers (*Τζουμέικερς*), an open lab for communities to cooperatively design and manufacture tools for small-scale agricultural production; Koino Kalo (*Κοινό Κ.Αλ.Ο*), a network of Social and Solidarity Economy organisations consisting of 16 projects, such as The High Mountains (*Τα ψηλά βουνά)*, which promotes decentralisation and repopulation of mountainous regions; Epirus Against Oil & Gas (*Ήπειρος Κατά Των Εξορύξεων)* and Save Epirus (*Σώστε Την Ήπειρο)*, which are movements fighting against the imminent threat of fossil fuel exploitation; the Open Assembly In Ioannina Against Energy Exploitation (*Ανοιχτή Συνέλευση στα Γιάννενα ενάντια στην Ενεργειακή Λεηλασία)*, a grassroots assembly fighting against a variety of energy projects in the region; Chironomia Antiexousiastiki Kinisi (*Χειρονομία Αντιεξουσιαστική Κίνηση*), an anti-authoritarian anarchist collective in Ioannina.

All these cases in Greece's contemporary environmental movement demonstrate the fertile ground, especially within degrowth and climate justice movements, for a strong degrowth vision with an intersectional approach to act as connective tissue among the movements.

Greek energy communities as nowtopias

Greece offers an interesting territory to study different forms and organisations of real-existing degrowth. On one hand, the country's topography comprises numerous isolated islands and mountainous villages, many of which confront significant levels of isolation and have been marginalised within the prevailing development paradigm. Additionally, Greece's advantageous wind and sun conditions present a promising opportunity for the expansion of renewable energy sources.

The abundance of sunlight and consistent wind patterns across the country's landscape offer a fertile ground for the development and utilisation of solar and wind power technologies (Panagopoulou 2023). However, the growth of renewable energy projects often raises concerns regarding extractivism, as local ecosystems and communities may be exploited for resources (Voskoboynik and Andreucci 2022). Land grabbing can arise as developers seek prime locations for renewable installations, leading to displacement of local populations and loss of agricultural land (Scheidel et al. 2023). While the emergence of renewable energy technologies is a positive development for minimising carbon emissions, they have yet to significantly replace fossil fuel dependency and have often been added to an already fossil-dominated energy mix (York and Bell 2019). Degrowth solutions to the challenges of renewable energy expansion and fossil fuel dependency include prioritising energy sufficiency, promoting community-led and localised energy initiatives, integrating social justice into energy transitions, limiting extractive practices, reducing energy demand and transforming or abolishing energy-intensive sectors.

Energy communities represent a promising model for navigating the complex challenges of renewable energy transition. While acknowledging the material limitations and extractive processes behind renewable technologies, these grassroots initiatives demonstrate how local, democratically managed energy systems can help reduce overall consumption while ensuring fair distribution. Unlike large-scale corporate renewable projects that often perpetuate extractivism and distant resource exploitation, energy communities typically operate at a scale that matches local capacities. Rather than simply substituting renewable technologies for fossil fuels while maintaining current consumption patterns, in line with degrowth, energy communities argue for reducing overall energy demand, redesigning cities for lower consumption, shortening supply chains, and prioritising essential needs over endless economic expansion (Wahlund and Palm 2022; Vrettos et al. 2024).

The case for energy communities

From the first cooperatively owned electricity grids in Germany, in the early 20th century, community energy marks a long history in Europe. REScoop.eu, the European Federation of Citizen Energy Cooperatives, counts more than 2,500 members, representing over 2 million EU citizens (see Huybrechts and Haugh 2018). Following years of persistent activist pressure, the European Commission with its landmark 2018 Clean Energy for all Europeans Package of Directives, officially recognised the right of citizens to co-create local renewable energy projects. In fact, 'energy communities' were introduced as legal entities that prioritise social and environmental goals, and not private profit. Buoyed by official legislative recognition and the energy crisis of 2022–2023, the community energy movement witnessed exponential growth in the five years to 2024. In Belgium 5 per cent of all renewable energy capacity stems from cooperatives, which recently won the right to participate in the first offshore wind tenders to take place in the country in 2025 (REScoop 2023). In Denmark, 75 per cent of all district heating projects are owned by cooperatives. Across the bloc, by 2050, one in two citizens could be producing their own energy (Kampman 2016).

Highlighted in the doughnut vision of REScoop (2021), energy communities are a natural fit for a post-growth economy. They strive to reduce their members' resources and energy. Studies show that membership in an energy community can lead to energy demand reduction, through activities like deep housing renovations, or awareness campaigns (Barnes et al. 2022). While this does not align consumption patterns with those suggested by science as necessary to stay on track with the 1.5°C target, it creates a springboard upon which energy communities can push for deeper sufficiency policies.

Beyond their material impact, energy communities offer intangible social and cultural effects. They usually operate under a 'one member equals one vote' principle, emphasising direct democratic participation, while centring diverse and structurally underrepresented voices (Vrettos 2021). These communities typically prioritise renewable, small-scale energy sources, energy efficiency, collective ownership and democratic decision-making processes (Vrettos 2021). These nowtopias can be found between the rock of proposed oil and gas drilling, and the hard place of large-scale private wind projects. Alternative energy sources like wind and solar, are usually considered to be more compatible with a democratic, egalitarian society than energy systems based on coal, oil and nuclear power (Winner 1980).

The northern Epirus region of Greece is a telling example of the inherent contradictions in the country's energy transition. Positioned in an area faced with the cruel (and false) dichotomies of growth, CommonEn energy community in Ioannina offers a third way – a pluralistic, democratic, renewable energy future. By 2024 the community had developed two 100 kWp solar parks for collective self-consumption and was developing the country's first *community-led agri-voltaic* project. It was collaborating with other actors within the local social economy, co-organising political events centred around the commons, post-growth, and participatory policymaking (Katsanouli 2024). These events include convivial workshops to co-design low-tech solutions like a small wooden wind turbine, and strategy meetings to discuss how to enhance the commons-based economy in the broader region, including in sectors such as agriculture.

In the metropolis of Athens, a net importer of energy, land and materials where almost half of the country's population lives, citizens have founded various energy communities to promote localised, wind and solar energy production. Amongst them, Hyperion, Collective Energy, and Solarity stand out. All three communities have developed collective solar parks for self-consumption, guided by principles of sufficiency, and have dedicated a portion of their total energy production for free to social NGOs, and energy-vulnerable households (Kalaitzi 2024; Katsanouli 2024).

Aligning energy communities with degrowth: from practice to purpose

Buoyed by the energy crisis, there has been an exponential increase in interest for energy communities, and other self-consumption solutions in Greece over the past two years. At the same time, energy communities are breaking ground with cutting-edge, large-scale projects (including agrivoltaics, district heating and offshore wind), cementing their footing as equals in the energy market (Schwanitz et al. 2023). Clearly, there are significant opportunities for the decommodification and democratisation of the energy market, a hitherto oligopolist system of extreme profiteering. At the same time, many Greek energy communities are examples of real-existing degrowth.

Nonetheless, there's crucial ongoing work to make community energy groups more inclusive and degrowth oriented. A key element still missing from the degrowth transformation discourse around energy communities is the explicit articulation of a degrowth vision. While the practices of Greek energy communities strongly align with many degrowth principles, they are not often guided by an overarching, cohesive degrowth vision (Vrettos et al. 2024). Lack of intentionality potentially paves the way for significant contradictions and rebound effects. What if members of energy communities used the savings incurred from self-consumption projects to invest in buying new cars, or trans-Atlantic flights? Or, if a large private electricity supplier offered them a 'green guarantee' contract, would they bother joining an energy cooperative? A broader vision must encompass conscious elements of sufficiency to ensure absolute and deep demand reduction and, push for solidarity with the Global South, emphasising that sufficiency principles in the Global North are needed to eliminate extractivist, neo-colonial practices associated with renewables supply chains

(Vrettos et al. 2024). With over 100 MW of installed collective self-consumption projects, hundreds more in the Greek energy communities are making genuine strides in shifting the renewable energy transition beyond profit. Weaving this tremendous potential into a solid, explicitly articulated, degrowth vision could address some of the movement's inherent contradictions.

Real-existing degrowth on Greek islands

The term 'island' typically refers to land surrounded by water, but its definition can vary. Islands might emerge from tides or be surrounded by peatlands. Metaphorically, islands symbolise escapism, experimentation and remoteness. Many of the insular areas face several challenges, mostly related to limited resources, high vulnerability to climate crisis, and frequent hazards (Aguiar et al. 2018). In search for immediate economic growth, perceived needs to catch up with economic developments of more affluent areas can have important environmental, social and economic costs. However, as Tsagkari et al. (2021) argue, this is not the only path. To respond to contemporary challenges, islands can revitalise their economies without 'succumbing to growthism'. Islands, whether physical or symbolic, can offer glimpses into alternative narratives of simplicity, prosperity and community resilience, challenging conventional notions of development and progress.

In recent studies, attention has turned to systems operating on islands like Eigg in Scotland (Caramizaru and Uihlein 2020) and the management of common resources such as fish quotas in the Shetland Islands (Cunningham and Bostock 2005). By virtue of their geographical boundaries and limited local resources, islands often maintain a more direct and conscious relationship with their material and ecological limits, making their inhabitants inherently more aware of resource constraints and interdependencies (Burgos Martinez 2024). While many proponents of degrowth acknowledge the necessity of developing island regions, they reject uncritical modernisation based on conventional models. Essential infrastructure like water supplies, reliable electricity, shops, schools, healthcare, public transport and digital advancements are recognised as crucial for ensuring quality of life. Nurturing commons through local associations, cooperatives and networks to manage these services fosters local engagement and participatory approaches. The synergy between commoning and degrowth can pave the way for the emergence of new socio-political systems that prioritise equity and participation while resisting enclosure and preserving communal spaces (Jakob and Edenhofer 2014; Lockyer 2017).

Greek islands boast a unique blend of geographical, cultural and socio-economic particularities that make them intriguing subjects for degrowth studies. Geographically dispersed across the Aegean and Ionian Seas, each has its own distinct landscape, climate and natural resources. Their insular nature presents challenges such as limited land, water scarcity and vulnerability to environmental hazards like wildfires and sea-level rise. However, their very insularity fosters a strong sense of community and interconnectedness among islanders, often characterised by tight-knit social networks and collective resilience in the face of adversity. Culturally, Greek islands are rich tapestries woven with centuries of history, tradition and folklore. Each island has its own unique cultural heritage, shaped by influences from ancient civilisations, Byzantine and Ottoman rule, as well as more recent migrations and interactions with mainland Greece and other Mediterranean cultures.

Traditional practices such as agriculture, fishing and artisanal crafts are deeply ingrained in island life, contributing to a distinct way of living that *values* simplicity, self-sufficiency and conviviality (Theodossopoulos 2003). Examples abound of adoption of local currencies, support for small family farms, promotion of cooperatives and cultivation of local networks encompassing

consumers, farmers and markets – a model often referred to as 'relocalisation' (Tsagkari et al. 2021). Additionally, rekindling old customs, such as the Greek tradition of '*charáki*' involving communal sharing of cheese and milk among shepherds (Lekakis and Dragouni 2020) and solidarity networks (*Ενωση Φορέων ΚΑΛΟ*) (Kalaitzi 2024), and the revival of convivial economic activities and women's cooperatives in Lesvos (Karides 2016) and Karpathos (Iliadou 2021) or the local energy projects of Tilos (Tsagkari et al. 2021) and Serifos (Katsaprakakis et al. 2022).

The examples of Gavdos, Tilos and Ikaria

Kallis et al. (2022) discuss the Greek islands of Ikaria and Gavdos as examples of territories that have not followed the Western development path. They combine ideas of Southern thought (Cassano 2012), islandness, and real-existing degrowth to explore how the geographical, historical and cultural factors of these islands have shaped an ethos and praxis of degrowth. Their research explores how values of Southern thought, which prioritise slowness, moderation and conviviality, are interconnected with the condition of islandness. They discuss how the specific geography, historical contingency and processes of mythmaking have re-valued what might be seen just as 'undeveloped' places but rather create space for real-existing degrowth. Kallis et al. (2022) emphasise the role of local folk thought and interactions with outsiders, and highlight the resistance to conventional development and the emergence of alternative ways of living on these islands, despite ongoing processes of tourism and gentrification. Cultural practices and values contribute to a diversity of modes of existence, fostering alternative cultures characterised by degrowth, especially in the context of geographical margins. Their findings also discuss the challenges associated with the re-valorisation of territories that foster real-existing degrowth and promote alternative economic and social organising away from capitalist and productivist development.

Ikaria

Ikaria, a small Greek island in the Aegean Sea with a population of about 8,000 people, has gained special attention in recent years. The island belongs to the 'Blue Zones' – where people live longer than average. Previous studies have attributed the longevity of the Ikarians to their lifestyle, food and social arrangements (Chrysohoou et al. 2011; Legrand et al. 2021). For instance, many residents have daily interactions within their communities, and take long walks and naps, while their diet is Mediterranean, consisting primarily of homegrown vegetables, legumes, fish and herbal teas. Adherence to the Mediterranean diet combined with the consumption of locally produced products is one of the factors associated with the longevity of the population (Chrysohoou et al. 2011). In 2009, Panagiotakos et al. (2011, p. 1) conducted a study encompassing over 1,400 Ikarians aged 80 years and above to conclude that a combination of environmental factors, behavioural patterns and clinical characteristics might collectively contribute to an extended lifespan. 'Panigiria' are traditional festivals that celebrate the feast day of a saint or a religious event. They are deeply ingrained in the cultural fabric of Ikaria and represent multifaceted celebrations that amalgamate religious fervour, communal bonding and the preservation of traditional practices.

The research of López Barreiro (2024) tried to shed more light on social changes Ikaria faces today. Through a metabolic analysis, the author provides an exploration of sustainable lifestyles and the embrace of degrowth-relevant activities and principles. This research concludes that, although the island is highly dependent on the mainland, there is a strong connection with local production and that land defines the identity and lifestyle of the population. Imagining life in a

degrowth society based on values of autonomy, sufficiency and care, Rae Rhodes (2024, p. 27) found a strong presence of these values in Ikaria:

> The Ikarian approach is more laid-back, it's specific to a person's needs, and therefore results in less stress, more mindfulness, and perhaps more self-awareness and wellbeing. Ikarians seem to be in tune with their socio-ecological environments, more resilient and adaptable to its ups and downs.

Tilos

Another instance of insular real-existing degrowth is just about 52 nautical miles southwest of Ikaria – the quaint island of Tilos. Located in the Aegean Sea, this island of 65.52 km^2 is home to around 750 people (Municipality of Tilos 2024). The island's history dates to ancient times, with Neolithic evidence of human settlement. In past years the island has faced several challenges – the economic downturn, leading to declining population numbers and limited employment opportunities, particularly for the island's youth, and, like many small islands, environmental pressures, such as waste management and sustainable resource utilisation.

Tilos is known for its commitment to sustainability and conservation. The island's protected areas, including the Tilos Park (a Natura 2000 site), showcase its rich biodiversity and serve as sanctuaries for endangered species. Additionally, Tilos promotes local production through cooperatives such as the small cheese cooperative Irina. These efforts strengthen the island's economy while reducing reliance on imports. Tilos thrives on strong community bonds and a gift economy, where residents share resources and support one another (Tsagkari et al. 2022). Moreover, the island has shown solidarity with refugees, offering shelter and assistance despite its limited resources. Tilos exemplifies real-world degrowth principles through its inclusive community ethos (Tsagkari 2023).

In 2017, it became the first Mediterranean island to be powered entirely by renewable energy sources, testament to its dedication to preserving its natural heritage (Notton et al. 2017). This commitment to clean energy was part of the broader sustainability plan of the island that includes many practices that embrace degrowth ideas. Tsagkari et al. (2021) discuss the importance of promoting energy democracy, energy self-sufficiency, localised production and revitalisation of the local economy in the specific case of Tilos. They explore the complex relationship between degrowth, islands, and local energy to conclude that local energy projects can contribute to new social arrangements beyond economic growth and towards a degrowth path, of which Tilos is exemplary. It is the first island worldwide to earn the status of a Zero-Waste Island. Within a year of implementing door-to-door separate collection and organics management, Tilos achieved a groundbreaking 100 per cent diversion of residual waste from landfills, with recovery rates nearing 90 per cent, the transformation of its old landfill into a Centre for Circular Innovation, ingeniously processing waste into fertilizer, upcycled materials and waste-to-energy conversion (Mehta 2023).

Gavdos

Gavdos, a remote island in the Mediterranean at the southernmost border of Greece with a population of only 172 residents (Gavdos Island 2024), embodies the principles of degrowth through its small population, limited economic development and minimal infrastructure. With fewer than a hundred permanent residents, the island relies mainly on traditional activities like fishing, farming

and sustainable tourism, avoiding large-scale industrialisation. Although it relies heavily on tourism, Gavdos attracts those seeking alternative lifestyles. Andriotis refers to the 'antinomian' travel counterculture of Gavdos to describe how the island's appeal extends beyond traditional tourism. Varvarousis (2014), in his fieldwork in Gavdos, observes that the local community engages in liminal self-expression to forge social connections and to maintain its cohesion. These alternative social spaces arise from both individual and collective actions, primarily characterised by reciprocal giving and communal sharing (Kallis et al. 2022; Varvarousis 2014). For Varvarousis (2023), 'Gavdos's peculiarity emphasises the pluriverse of the Aegean archipelago, one that must be protected and amplified in every possible way'.

Emphasising local economies through sustainable agriculture, fisheries and renewable energy endeavours can lessen dependence on external resources and bolster economic resilience. Additionally, fostering community empowerment and collaboration, both within and beyond the islands, can facilitate alignment of common degrowth visions and strategies. Despite the aspiration that islands like Tilos, Ikaria and Gavdos offer, helping us to envision how degrowth might look in practice, they are not perfect. The islands are still highly dependent on the mainland and suffer from touristification, out-migration, lack of infrastructure and environmental degradation. For instance, Gavdos is resisting the prohibition of nudism on the island – a symbol of freedom (Ioannou 2023) – and Ikaria is standing against land grabbing for wind parks.

Conclusion

All the movements discussed in the chapter have potential to serve as core democratic, bottom-up and self-organised entities prefiguring degrowth cultures and ways of living. Through their daily acts of resistance, they establish connections with the tangible realities of existing degrowth ideas. Collectives advocating for degrowth must be mindful of framing because most of the population endured significant hardship during the financial crisis and they perceive growth as necessary for recovery. Most in Greece, as in other countries in the European South and around the Mediterranean Sea, have strong ties with their local community and families. Most Athenians have roots in villages where they spent memorable times during vacations close to their relatives. These connections with an (often) simpler and slower lifestyle can offer valuable images and experiences to promote degrowth principles and policies. Combined with widespread distrust towards the central government, there is a strong potential for community building away from big cities where people can live in symbiosis with nature. Even where people don't explicitly mention degrowth, it seems like they implicitly support a degrowth vision and would be ready to believe in and push for it.

Such connections offer a unique opportunity to engage individuals in conversations about degrowth principles and policies. By tapping into the sentimentality and cultural heritage associated with rural and island living, advocates can effectively communicate the benefits of sustainable practices and mindful consumption. Highlighting the resilience and resourcefulness of village communities that have long practised self-sufficiency and communal living can serve as inspiration for transitioning towards a more sustainable future.

Moreover, real-existing degrowth initiatives in Greece provide tangible and inspiring examples of how principles can be put into action. Energy communities, where residents come together to generate renewable energy and promote energy autonomy, showcase the power of collective action and decentralised governance. A-developed islands, which have embraced sustainable practices out of necessity, demonstrate the potential for small-scale, community-driven solutions to environmental challenges.

The environmental movement in Greece serves as a testament to the power of grassroots activism in advocating for systemic change. By linking environmental conservation with social justice and economic equity, activists have been able to mobilise diverse coalitions and challenge the status quo. Countering prevailing negative and defeatist attitudes, that stem from disillusionment with capitalism and austerity-era disappointments, a degrowth vision is a promising solution, fostering a belief in a brighter future.

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