

7th annual workshop

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28 - 29 November 2024

*Democratic planning
and labour alliances
beyond growth*



Thursday 28 November

9:30-10:00 *Introduction to the workshop* (Luigi Pellizzoni, SNS)

10:00-13:00 Session 1 – *Ecological crisis and democratic planning*

Chair: Alice Dal Gobbo (University of Trento)

Matthias Schmelzer (Europa-Universität Flensburg)
Social-ecological planning as collective self-limitation

Olimpia Malatesta (University of Bologna)
Economic rationalities and democratic planning: Knowledge and “incommensurability” in the socialist calculation debate

Commentaries by:
Irina Aguiari (SNS), Maura Benegiamo (University of Pisa)

General discussion

14:30-17:30 Session 2 – *Labour alliances*

Chair: Clelia Li Vigni (SNS)

Viviana Asara (University of Ferrara)
A critical examination of the Just Transition: what coalition politics?

Bue Rübner-Hansen (University of Copenhagen)
What is ecological class composition?

Commentaries by:
Maja Hoffmann (WU Wien), Torsten Geelan (University of Bristol)

General discussion

Friday 29 November

9:30-12:30 Session 3 – *Designs of just transition*

Chair: Guglielmo Meardi (SNS)

Introduction Emanuele Leonardi (University of Bologna)

Speakers:
Simone D'Alessandro (University of Pisa) – Alleanza
Clima Lavoro

Leonard Mazzone (University of Florence) – Ex-GKN
case

Claudia Collodoro (Catholic University of Milan) –
Climate Jobs Campaign (Italy)

Martín Silvestre (LAB trade union of Basque Country-
Euskal Herria) – Mecaner case

A. Katharina Keil (University of Lausanne) – Mahle case

Commentaries by:
Daniela Chironi (SNS)
Angelo Moro (University of Modena-Reggio Emilia)

General discussion

12:30-13:00 *Wrap up and conclusions*

Abstracts

A critical examination of the Just Transition: what coalition politics?

Viviana Asara

Since the advent of new social movements, environmental movements have generally been counterposed to workers' movements as vectors of post-materialistic rather than materialistic claims, respectively, although critical literature has emphasised the intertwining of ecological and social claims/struggles in at least an important subset of environmental movements. Moreover, in the field of industrial production, the narrative of blackmail - either health/the environment or the job - has often prevailed, exerting an influence on workers as well as communities' capacity to react to ecological stress. The debate on the 'Just Transition' (JT) has countered such a narrative, claiming that environmental outcomes should not be reached at the expense of workers' right, while the literature of Environmental Labour Studies has investigated some of the contextual conditions and reasons why trade unions sometimes oppose or delay ecological transitions, and other times support them with a transformative role. This presentation will critically examine the development of the JT concept which in the last two decades has experienced a remarkable expansion, both conceptually and in institutional terms, putting it into dialogue with Social Movement and Environmental Labour Studies. While the participation of workers and affected communities has been identified as a key element in JT processes, participatory processes are predominantly invoked rather than studied, due to a normative bias of the literature; a fate generally encountered also by inter-movement coalitions between workers and environmentalists. The presentation will reflect on these issues by drawing on an in-progress-case study of coal energy transition in Italy with strong 'bottom-up' participation, the Enel coal-fired power plant of Torrealvaldiga Nord (Civitavecchia). It will examine how and why inter-movement interactions have changed in recent years, and how they contributed to different social constructions of the ecological (just) transition.

Abstracts

Economic rationalities and democratic planning: Knowledge and “incommensurability” in the socialist calculation debate

Olimpia Malatesta

The intervention aims at reconstructing the origins of the socialist calculation debate as it developed starting from the 1920s in Austria. The intervention will be divided into three parts. The first one will center around Otto Neurath’s conception of planning and discuss the idea of a calculation in kind, capable of emancipating the economy from price mechanism. By presenting Neurath’s vision of a “natural economy” based on the satisfaction of fundamental needs, it will also assess the importance, in the development of his thought, of war economy and of the politicization of production and distribution it produced. In fact, war economies had disclosed the possibility to calculate the optimal allocation of resources according to a politically defined hierarchy of needs, by liberating the economy from the game of supply and demand. Taking war economies as an example of economies which did not present a common unit of calculation (prices), Neurath argues for a planned economy in which the calculation on allocation is made according to the democratically defined utility of a good or a service. The second part will center around the neoliberal criticism of the possibility of planning. It will discuss Ludwig von Mises’ idea according to which economic processes cannot take place without a common calculation unit, since only the price mechanism can reflect all the necessary information. Furthermore, an economy aimed at substituting myriads of decisions taken by sovereign consumers with politically defined plans produces necessarily a disjunction between demand and supply and results in a despotic management of the economy. Hayek on his part, grounds his arguments even more on the epistemological terrain: calculation in nature expresses an illusion about the limits of human reason. In this sense, socialist planning reveals a “scientist hybris”, an omnipotence of reason, which has no regard for the structural dispersal of knowledge which is always individual and situated. Therefore, the first two parts of the intervention will investigate the nexus between possibilities and limits of knowledge and political planning, that is, the capacity to shape economy and society according to a rational design. The last part of the intervention will assess the utility of Neurath’s idea of incommensurability as a viable tool for the conceptualization of ecological planning. In fact, the latter should possess a “substantial rationality”, that is a vision of objectives underpinned by non-market values. As it will be shown, such a planned economy should be constructed through democratic processes according to the various needs and finalities.

Abstracts

What is ecological class composition?

Bue Rübner Hansen

Over the past 15 years, researchers and activists have increasingly come to see global warming and ecosystem degradation as capitalogenic rather than abstractly anthropogenic. Yet until now, relatively little focus has been put on an essential element in capitalist destruction: labour and work. This talk discusses what we can learn from ontological and historical materialisms when we attempt to theorize the role of labour in the ecosystem crisis. Connecting such abstract discussions to concrete cases of workers' struggles against the toxicity, noxiousness, and madness of work under conditions of capitalist ecocide, this talk develops a strategically and analytically relevant notion of ecological class composition. If successful, this approach will aid existing efforts to bring the analysis of technical, political, and social class composition into the age of socio-ecological struggles.

Abstracts

Social-ecological planning as collective self-limitation

Matthias Schmelzer

In view of the escalating ecological breakdown, rising inequalities and constant economic instabilities and market failures, recent years have seen a renewed interest in theories and practices of democratic planning, as well as a surge in writing and activism around critiques of economic growth and productivism, the need for sufficiency, and postgrowth futures. In analyzing the hitherto neglected degrowth-planning nexus, the keynote will present the case for planning beyond growth. While the hegemony of growth with its focus on maximizing GDP (Gross Domestic Product) has depoliticized economic debates, which came to be seen in the framework of technocratic optimization, degrowth aims at the repolitization of “the economy” and social metabolism. Yet how could institutions for planning beyond growth be conceptualized? How can the setting of limits be aligned with democratic decision-making? What are key policy areas of degrowth oriented planning? And how can a focus on democratic social-ecological planning unravel hegemonic growth misinformation discourses? These are some of the questions addressed in the keynote.

Speakers

Viviana Asara is Associate Professor in Sociology at the Department of Humanities at the University of Ferrara and a ‘research affiliate’ at the Institute for Multi-Level Governance and Development of the Vienna University of Economics and Business, where she was based until 2021. She investigates social-ecological transformation processes with a sociological and political ecology lens. Her work has appeared in many international journals; her books include the Handbook of Critical Environmental Politics (Edward Elgar, 2022) co-edited with L. Pellizzoni and E. Leonardi, and the monograph *Democrazia senza crescita: L’ecologia politica del movimento degli Indignados* (Aracne, 2020).

Claudia Collodoro is a doctoral candidate in Innovation Studies at the Catholic University of Milan. She holds several experiences as a research and teaching assistant. Her interests focus on labour economics, policy evaluation, and industrial relations.

Simone D’Alessandro is Professor at the Department of Economics of the University of Pisa. His main research interests involve distribution of income and wealth, development economics, ecological economics, non-linear dynamics, ecological sustainability and degrowth. In recent years, research has focused on the socio-economic effects of policies to promote the transition towards sustainability.

Bue Rübner Hansen is a researcher, writer, and educator, and a member of the movement school Common Ecologies. He is interested in practices and theories of socio-ecological interest formation and movement strategy, and currently works at the University of Copenhagen, where he is writing a book about batshit jobs - the jobs where workers must participate in the destruction of the conditions of life to make a living.

A. Katharina Keil is a doctoral candidate in the Department of Geography and Sustainability at the University of Lausanne. She works as an assistante diplômée under the supervision of Prof. Julia Steinberger. Her primary interest lies in understanding systemic barriers to socially and ecologically sustainable production and levers to overcoming those. In her PhD research, she explores this topic by way of analyzing the German automobile industry from the perspective of Marxist Political Economy integrating key insights from ecological economics and sustainable work.

Martín Lallana has an academic background in industrial engineering and renewable energies. He is the author of several reports on critical raw materials and on the automotive sector. He currently works for the LAB trade union in the Basque Country (Euskal Herria) in the responsibility of ecological transition and productive transformation.

Emanuele Leonardi is Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Business Law at the University of Bologna, and Affiliated Researcher at the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra, where he was based until 2020. His work is published on several international journals; his books include the Handbook of Critical Environmental Politics (Edward Elgar, 2022) co-edited with L. Pellizzoni and V. Asara, and the forthcoming monograph *Labour Nature Value. André Gorz between Marxism and Degrowth* (Verso, 2025).

Olimpia Malatesta is Research Fellow in History of Political Thought at the Department of the Arts of the University of Bologna. She is currently working on a project (PRIN) entitled Political planning in European liberal democracies from the 1920s to the 2020s. She obtained her PhD in History of Political Thought and in Sociology at the Department of Political and Social Sciences of the University of Bologna in “cotutelle” with the Institute of Sociology of the Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena. Her first book *Ordoliberalism, State and Society: A Political Theory of Social Order* (Routledge) is forthcoming in 2025. She has been a DAAD and an IISF scholar. Furthermore, she collaborates with the IISG (Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici) and with Villa Vigoni (German-Italian Centre for the European Dialogue). She is author of numerous articles and book chapters on ordoliberalism, neoliberalism and the European economic constitution in Italian, English and German.

Leonard Mazzone is Research Assistant in Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Florence. His interests include critical social theory, justice and democracy, and new forms of mutual aid widespread within and outside workplaces.

Matthias Schmelzer is an economic historian and transformation researcher. He is currently substitute Professor for Social-Ecological Transformation at the University of Flensburg. He is author of the award-winning *The Hegemony of Growth: The OECD and the Making of the Growth Paradigm* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), co-edited *“Degrowth in Movement(s): Exploring pathways for transformation”* and is co-author of *“The Future Is Degrowth: A Guide to a World beyond Capitalism”* (Verso, 2022).