“Degrowth, youth and utopia

Understanding the roots of distress in order to take ownership of our future Health

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www.decrescitafelice.it
1. Youth distress in Western society
II. The origins of distress
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IV. How to explain degrowth to youth
Jean-Louis Aillon

LA DECRESCITA, I GIOVANI E L'Utopia
Comprendere le origini del disagio per riappropriarci del nostro futuro
Prefazione di Maurizio Pallante

Edizioni per la decrescita felice

Circolo della Decrescita Felice di Torino

www.decrescitafelice.it
1. Youth distress in Western society
Youth distress

- **Suicides**: x 3 between 1950 and 1990 in U.S.A., Canada, Spain,...
- **Major Depressive Disorder**: 6.6% U.S.A. (Ryan 1992)
- **Alcohol and drug consumption**
  - Eg. Cocaine heavy consumption: +30% (2001-14)
- **Psychotropic drug (sedative/tranquilliser)**: 14% of European teenagers
  - 8% prescription
  - 6% without prescription

**Developmental crisis**
- **Magnitude**
- **Expression**
- **Prolongation**

[The 2011 ESPAD Report](http://www.decrescitafelice.it) Substance Use Among Students in 36 European Countries

[Cutler 2001](http://www.decrescitafelice.it)
A different distress

Emptyness, boredom,
Lack of meaning/direction
Future?

Work alcoholism
money/consumption worries
lack of time for relationships

www.decrescitafelice.it
1. The origins of distress
Future: from the promise to the threat

Distress: no psychological origin→ widespread sense of sadness, a feeling of general insecurity and precariousness that characterizes the whole contemporary society.

An extraordinary crisis: individual crisis, the consequence, experienced by the individual, of the crisis of our society.

the imaginary of future has changed

promise → threat.
Nihilism: a disturbing guest

• Young people malaise – not for usual existential crises
  ↓
  a disturbing guest: nihilism

• Sad passions: not suffering or crying, but impotence, disintegration and lack of meaning.

• Cultural Crisis of the foundations of our civilization, of absolute values (god, the truth, the good).

• Optimistic view has collapsed. God and his heirs (science, socialism and utopia) are really dead
Past removal

No future (threat)

Values

without guidance

Eternal present

Emptiness

“all is possible/no limits”

+++ freedom

Hedonism

Consumption

Parents, teachers

Identity?

Market

+++

limits

boredom, indifference, frustration, apathy

“narcissistic libido”

“Object libido” (eudaimonia)

1 must be the best!
1 must be happy!

Frustration

inferiority
III. Degrowth as a part of the solution
1. recognize youth sufferance and legitimize it
   (understandable reaction to the huge cultural and economic crisis)

2. Crises: not inescapable -> consequence of unlimited growth

   Causes of unsustainability

   Youth distress

   \[\Downarrow\]

   Theory

   Re-gain ownership of future meaning

   Utopian instinct

   Change

3. To watch Nihilism straight in its eyes -> opportunity

   (Heidegger 1987)
IV. How to explain degrowth to youth
Different problems/different solutions

≠ language
≠ ways to explain degrowth
≠ solutions

+ practice!
Utopia lies at the horizon. When I draw nearer by two steps, it retreats two steps. If I proceed ten steps forward, it swiftly slips ten steps ahead. No matter how far I go, I can never reach it.

What, then, is the purpose of utopia? It is to cause us to advance.”

Eduardo Hughes Galeano
Youth and Utopia: a biological necessity

- Utopia instinct as a fundamental driver for human cultural evolution.
  e.g. ants

- Repression in growth society

- Climate change: threat

- Antibody for human survival