

Call for contributions:

The bioeconomy as a blueprint for the postfossil society?
Contours of the social after coal and oil.

A set of sessions at the 7th International Degrowth and 16th ISEE Joint Conference:
Building Alternative Livelihoods in times of ecological and political crisis
Manchester 1 to 5 September 2020

The dominant narrative of the ongoing debates on the bioeconomy paints the picture of a future economy based on renewable energies and biological resources that will both deliver 'green' economic growth and enable modern societies to phase out fossil fuels and build a sustainable future. But are these promises of a 'bio-based', renewed cycle of accumulation and growth warranted?

While fossil-fuelled economies run on a constantly accelerating linear throughput of extracted fossil resources, bio-based economies rely on materials whose availability is subject to biophysical limits and cyclical regenerative processes that cannot be expanded and accelerated at will. On one side, it is highly uncertain whether the accumulation of ever-increasing amounts of energy and goods can continue in an economy based on renewable resources. On the other side, any break with the logics of accumulation, extraction and expansion is likely to entail new distributional conflicts, but it may also be a starting point for a fundamental transformation of modern societies: The social organization of work and care activities, consumption patterns and people's mindsets might change, or it might become clear that they *need* to change. In a similar vein, political actors and strategies often claim that the bioeconomy will bring far-reaching change – the EU's bioeconomy strategy anticipates 'rapid, concerted and sustained changes in lifestyle and resource use that cut across all levels of society and the economy'. At the same time, the concrete actions of key players in politics, science and industry seem to assume that the bioeconomy will allow them to continue with business as usual and avoid a turn away from the growth paradigm.

In four different sessions we want to explore and analyse the opportunities and risks of an expanding bioeconomy from a degrowth perspective and ask what we can learn from past transformation experiences: How do attitudes, common imaginations and everyday practises change in the course of a transition to a circular bio-based economy? Is the growth of bio-based economies associated with mentalities and social structures that are more in line with natural processes - such as the change from agrarian to industrialized societies gave rise to 'fossil mentalities and infrastructures'? How does the transformation towards a bioeconomy modify existing social inequalities?

The transformation towards a bio-based economy offers opportunities for building alternative livelihoods. But there are also serious concerns about social and ecological justice in large scale bioeconomies: land conflicts, agroindustrial monocultures and the further utilization of nature in terms of cost-benefit-analyses are apparent problems. Political conflicts around the (re-)distribution of limited resources are likely to intensify. In this set of sessions, we aim to identify and analyse these tensions and conflicts, but also focus on possible solutions and ways to put forward the radical transformation that we need.

Possible contributions include but are not limited to academic papers, lightning talks, short films, posters, audio/video testimonies and other forms of input on the questions raised above and on other topics such as:

Session 1: Work, mentalities and social structures in the transformation towards a bio-based economy

- work and working conditions in the bioeconomy
- fossil and post-fossil values and mentalities
- persistence or new inequalities and differentiations in a postfossil social structure

Session 2: The Role of the Bioeconomy within the Renewable Energy Transition

- experiences from local bioenergy projects
- the potential of energy from biological resources within the renewable energy transition
- conflicts around bioenergy
- bioenergy as a strategy of subsistence, sufficiency and efficiency

Session 3: The growth paradigm in the bioeconomy

- growth, green growth, degrowth and postgrowth and the bioeconomy
- biophysical patterns and flows of energy and matter in the bioeconomy
- lessons from history: can a postfossil bioeconomy transform capitalist social relations?

Session 4: The bioeconomy and rural social inequalities

- land conflicts around the bioeconomy
- transformation of agricultural production
- labour relations in rural areas, land access
- overexploitation of the soil, monocultural production, intensification

We invite you to send us your abstracts of no more than 250 words until March 6, 2020 to:
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