Let’s Talk: Debt Meets Degrowth
Workshop for Researchers and Activists
Ljubljana, June 5, 2019
Economic growth and rising consumption was celebrated by capitalism as the system’s great achievement. Its key result was to make rising levels of consumption the measure of success. That provided a new profit opportunity for financial institutions: lending to consumers to enable rising consumption. Without the illusion of wealth generated by easy access to credit cards, mortgages, consumer credit and car loans, there would be little left of the middle class. A similar illusion of wealth appears at the global scale. The richest economies in the world actually produce very little. Consumption largely relies on the provision of international credit and the continuous inflow of cheap commodities from the Global South.

Instead of ending poverty and wars, and instead of addressing the multifaceted crises facing humanity at their root causes, the state is content just to manage them. And not just through surveillance and by policing protests, but also through debt via our indebtedness. The threat of violence — enacted through home repossessions, wage decreases or austerity — is needed to maintain the creditor-debtor relation.

The legacy of the financial crisis is reflected in people’s rejection and distrust, not only in the financial industry, but also in its regulators. If people cannot understand the benefits of a reformed financial system and the importance of personal engagement or the engagement of civil society organizations in implementing improvements, they are that much less likely to participate in these processes. However, it is important to see through political decisions and socio-economic structures that have led to such vast increases in indebtedness. Politicization of technocratic decisions that are taken under the mask of economic necessity is an important step towards breaking out of the rule of finance and liberating ourselves from that violence.

The new era may mean the expiry of political polarization between the global and local, left and right. It might bring values and principles different from those we inherited from the French revolution, and it might be time to re-examine them. The new era definitely requires a new conceptual framework to advocate for a different society.

Ajda Pistotnik, EnaBanda
Programme and Its Aims

9.45 AM
Arrival and Registration

10.00 AM
Welcome and Orientation regarding People and Objectives

10.15 AM – 11.30 AM
Food for Thought: Interventions from Discussants:
Márton Czirfusz, Mladen Domazet, Tilman Hartley, Oxana Lopatina, Predrag Momčilović,
Eugénia Maria de Carvalho Fernandes Pires, Christina Plank and Ana Podvršič.

11.30 AM – 12.15 AM
Coffee Break

12.15 AM – 13.00 PM
Making Sense: Discussions in Working Groups
(II)Legitimate Debt (Antun Katalenić),
Housing (Klemen Ploštajner) and
New Politics (Lana Zdravković).

13.00 PM – 13.30 PM
Sharing the Results of Discussions

13.30 PM – 14.00 PM
Reflecting Together
The idea of the Workshop *Let’s Talk: Debt Meets Degrowth* is to bring closer two interlinked international communities, one working on debt and the other on degrowth, that have a common policy agenda, but did not have much opportunity to advance their common strategic debates. Many conferences and debates on debt or degrowth have taken place but still the two communities are lacking communication and collaboration.

Therefore, to build on this momentum and bringing cooperation to a new, stronger and more creative level, we invited actors from the debt and degrowth movement to come together and talk, share their understanding of the current transformation within the current affairs, exchange their experiences of political and social organizing and, most importantly, discuss possibilities for collaboration.
Márton Czirfusz is a founding member of the Periféria Policy and Research Center based in Budapest, Hungary. With a disciplinary background in geography, he has more than ten years’ experience in basic and applied research in the field of urban and regional development in Hungary. Within Periféria, he and his colleagues have worked on issues of housing-related debt and socio-spatial inequalities of housing in Hungary. He was co-editor and co-author of the Annual report on housing poverty in Hungary 2018, one of the thematic foci of which is household indebtedness.

Dr. Mladen Domazet is a philosopher-physicist and Research Director at the Institute for Political Ecology in Zagreb, Croatia. He was a member of the Organizing Team of 2016 International Degrowth Conference in Budapest. His research focuses on degrowth-compatible common senses and social attitudes among contemporary populations, with special focus on the European semiperiphery and modernity’s cultural instruments that contributed to the hegemony of economic growth.
Workshop’s Guest Speakers

**Tilman Hartley**  
Barcelona, Spain

Dr. Tilman Hartley is currently a visiting researcher at the Institute for Environmental Science and Technology (ICTA) at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. A political scientist by training, he researches debt in non-growing economies with the aim of finding out what kind of financial institutions might be compatible with a more environmentally and socially sustainable economy (or at least one in which neither resource use nor poverty relentlessly increases). He builds simple formal models and examine cases from throughout history and across the world, using theories from ecological, institutional, and political economics.

**Oxana Lopatina**  
London, UK

Oxana Lopatina is a researcher in the field of political ecology and ecological economics and a degrowth activist. In 2018, as part of a research fellowship with the Institute for Political Ecology, Croatia, she studied the role of debt accumulation in driving changes in material and energy throughput in the countries of Eastern Europe. Besides the debt-growth nexus, she is also interested in the impact of debt on inequality and autonomy, with a broader interest in the scarcity-abundance dichotomy. Also, she is a member of the international degrowth movement and is currently coordinating the preparation of an introduction to degrowth for policy makers. In addition, she is a Programme Officer with the International Center on Small Hydro Power and does policy analysis for a UN publication on the status of small hydropower in the world. Finally, she is also working with the NGO Swarm Dynamics on a system change course for artists in Brighton, UK.
Predrag Momčilović is a political activist, researcher and journalist from Belgrade, Serbia. He is a PhD Candidate at Faculty of Geography, Belgrade University and a member of the Platform for Theory and Practice of Commons based in Belgrade. He is one of the pioneers of the degrowth movement in Serbia, where he published several articles about degrowth. His areas of interest are political ecology, degrowth, future of work, agriculture and food production.

Eugénia Maria de Carvalho Fernandes Pires is a researcher at Co-LABOR, the Portuguese Collaborative Laboratory for Work, Employment and Social Protection based in Lisbon. With a degree in Economics, she has specialised in public debt, finance and development, with an MSc in Finance and Development at SOAS (UK). Her recent project is focused on the impacts of digital technology upon labour and employment, labour process and value-chains. At the same time, she is a fully engaged activist addressing the impact of financialization and debt-related issues, in particular the urgent need for citizens’ debt audits and sovereign debt restructuring mechanisms led by the debtor, advocating the importance of respecting democracy and human-rights, while co-sharing the responsibility between the sovereign and official and non-official creditors.
**Workshop’s Guest Speakers**

**Christina Plank**
Vienna, Austria

Dr. Christina Plank currently works as a post-doc researcher at the Institute of Social Ecology at the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria. Her research focuses on political ecology, critical state theory and inter- and transdisciplinary research. Empirically, she has worked on agriculture and food politics at the intersection with energy, climate and biodiversity issues. Her regional interest is Central and Eastern Europe. Her goal is to conceptualize “quiet degrowth” for the region.

**Ana Podvršič**
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Dr. Ana Podvršič holds a PhD in sociology and economy from the University of Ljubljana and the University of Paris-13 Villetaneuse, respectively. She is currently an associate researcher of the Centre d’Economie Paris Nord at the University of Paris-13 Villetaneuse. Her research interests are especially post-socialist transition in Slovenia and Central and Eastern Europe, European integration and critical international political economy. Her most recent contribution to debt issues is the article on “New European Banking Governance and Crisis of Democracy: Insights from a post-socialist periphery – the case of Slovenia”, co-written with Dóra Piroska (Corvinus University of Budapest) for the New Political Economy, and she is currently working on an article with Joachim Becker (Vienna University of Economics and Business) titled “Transformation of dependency: financialization and industrialization on the Eurozone periphery”. She has also participated in the preparation of the ReCommons Europe “Manifesto for the new popular internationalism in Europe”.

Antun Katalenić is author and editor at Radio Student in Ljubljana, one of the oldest and biggest independent radio stations in Europe. He is a journalist with a bachelor’s degree in geography and pedagogy from the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana. His fields of expertise include, but are not limited to politics and society in South-Eastern Europe, minorities, decolonisation, politics, sports and separatism. He is a co-author of the bi-monthly Croatian minority radio broadcast.

Klemen Ploštajner is a junior researcher at the Department of Sociology at Ljubljana’s Faculty of Social Sciences, where he is researching political economy of cities, neoliberal reorganization of urban spaces and housing politics. He has written articles about related topics and has edited a special edition of Journal for the Critique of Science that was dedicated to housing politics. Klemen is also involved in local urban social movements (founding member of the housing cooperative Zadrušek) and regularly appears in media to shed critical light on spatial and housing issues.
Dr. Lana Zdravković (PhD in Philosophy with the thesis “Politics of emancipation: thought-practice of the militant subject”, 2013) is a researcher, publicist, political activist and artist. Fields of her research interest include political engagement, radical equality, emancipatory praxes, thought-practice of the militant subject. She works as a researcher at the Peace Institute, Institute for Contemporary Social and Political Studies. She occasionally publishes and collaborates within Slovene media: Dialogi – Magazine for Culture and Society, ČKZ – Journal for the Criticism of Science and New Anthropology, Borec – Journal for History, Anthropology and Literatures, Delo, Dnevnik, Večer, Mladina, Tribuna, Radio Student Ljubljana, Radio Student Maribor, and the Media Watch journal, where she is also a member of the editorial board. She is a performer and co-founder of KITCH – Institute of Art Production and Research. Her artistic interest extends to neoliberalization and economization of art, political performance, pornography and art, kitsch and trash art.
Workshop’s Organisers

Ajda Pistotnik
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Ajda Pistotnik is a researcher and project manager at EnaBanda. She has a degree in political science and a MSc on human right to water and business at the University of Ljubljana. She took part at the initiative TroikaWatch and wrote a case study on the Impact of international finance on key policies of Slovenia. Since 2016, she has been taking part in the coalition working on the monitoring of public finance and has published a report Slovenian Public Debt and an analysis on household indebtedness. On the degrowth side, she edited the special edition on degrowth for the Journal for the Critique of Science (ČKZ) in 2018. Moreover, she is an author of a forward to the book Degrowth: a Vocabulary for the New Era in Slovene. She was also a member of the Organizing Team of 2016 International Degrowth Conference in Budapest.

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Petra Čičić
Ljubljana, Slovenia

Petra Čičić is a project coordinator at EnaBanda. She has a degree in a social anthropology at the University of Primorska. She is also a cultural producer, co-founder of the Cultural Association Grable, interested mostly in literature and storytelling. As a youth worker she is especially interested in working on inclusion of deprivileged groups. As an activist she has been involved in different movements within autonomous urban spaces such as Invisible Workers of the World, the Occupy Movement 15o and Anti-Racist Front Without Borders.

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