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ROLES OF UTOPIAN THOUGHT IN A DEGROWTH TRANSFORMATION

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It is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism is the favourite slogan of capitalist realists (Fisher 2009), and it offers us no solace in times when six out of nine planetary boundaries are crossed (Richardson et al. 2023), and inequality rises at incredible rates (Hickel 2018). It suggests to us that 'there is no alternative' and only those playing well the current rules of the game are fit enough to survive. Degrowth comes up against this highly cynical, utilitarian but currently dominant logic. No wonder, 'decolonise the imaginary', the slogan attributed to Serge Latouche (2009, Chapter 24, this volume) has become the motto of degrowth.

Any degrowth scholar or activist must be painfully familiar with the feeling when the whole concept of degrowth – with all the degrowth practice, literature, research and social innovation of the last decades – is dismissed with one word, 'utopia'. As if it was a mere intellectual amusement to think of ways to rid our societies from its massive addiction to growth in order to put a stop to ecological degradation and, incidentally, to save ourselves as well as other species from extinction. To many, the dystopian thoughts of the apocalyptic Mad Max worlds where humans turn against each other after social and ecological collapse seems more credible than any quest to imagine a world where people live convivially and in solidarity with each other and other non-human beings. In this chapter, I do not just dismiss the notion that being utopian would be a futile exercise but argue that utopian thought can be the very foundation of our collective understanding and action in a world often described as complex and ambiguous.

Thomas More ([1516] 2012) toyed with the Greek words 'outopia' and 'eutopia' when describing the society of his own imaginary as Utopia. While the first one refers to no-place, the second refers to a good-place (Vieira 2010; Fernando et al. 2018). This ambiguity still impacts the way people dismiss or embrace utopian concepts such as degrowth. Whether in our everyday speech we believe utopia is 'an impractical scheme for social development' (*Merriam-Webster* undated) or 'a perfect society in which people work well with each other and are happy' or in British *Cambridge Dictionary* (undated), in this chapter we move beyond the conundrum surrounding the definition of utopia (Vieira 2010) and work with the understanding that utopia is a normative vision of society: not what we think the world could be but what we imagine it should be in an ideal scenario. Utopias can serve three distinct functions: first, they can motivate people to engage in activities that drive societies closer to what they deem ideal; second, they serve as a benchmark for the ideal and enable people to assess current realities accordingly, giving them a critical stance

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towards existing structures; and, third, they can provide a safe mental space to retreat to from reality and compensate for the bleak social reality people face, leading to some forms of escapism (Levitas 1990). Or they might just simply build up our social realities. Before we have a look at that last possibility, let us discuss the role of utopias on the individual level.

Humans as essentially utopian beings

In many debates that I have had, differences of opinions often boiled down to one fundamental difference – how we perceived human beings. Those who believed humans were inherently bad often argued that we cannot in any way achieve a society better than the current one as capitalism built itself on exploiting the worst in us and this is why it will flourish forever. And even if it will not flourish forever, what we create after this will soon be just as bad as none of our social systems have been better and none will ever be better. In other words, we get what we deserve. On the other end of the spectrum, I stood with my unexplained faith in humans, arguing that our inner core is essentially benevolent and our debates around philosophy, morality, spirituality and psychology are all signs of this essence. In my undeniably anthropocentric worldview, I shared the Aristotelian sentiment that with each decision we make, we strive to be more virtuous whatever virtue might mean to each one of us. Hence, I found much solace in the words of the Italian philosopher, Cosimo Quarta (1996, p. 160):

> What makes human life worthy of being lived is above all this task of self-construction of a person, a task which demands a lifetime's commitment and effort, precisely because humanity insofar as its nature is finite and is subject to collapse and ruin but is also able each time to raise itself up again and set out once more – even with enthusiasm – on its long and arduous journey of self-realisation. Now, this impulse to reach out towards what ought to be, this tendency of self-transcendence, this deep aspiration to become what is Not Yet, makes of humanity a being that is essentially projective, that is utopian. In other words, the utopian is the characteristic that has indelibly marked humanity.

While this may sound like a highly individualistic train of thought, I believe exactly this aspiration 'to become what is Not Yet' drives so many people around the globe to collectively fight for a better world. And I presume that most degrowthers share my belief that humans are not fundamentally malevolent. Why else would we strive to stop ourselves heading towards extinction?

Some time ago I participated in a Degrowth Political School where activists expressed their upmost respect towards the mass movement Les Soulèvements de la Terre (the Earth Uprising collective). This collective was established by former members of the *zone à défendre* (ZAD – a militant occupation, deferred development zone) who had kept up their struggle at Notre-Dame-Des-Landes (France) to obstruct an international airport from being built on 4,000 acres of wetland. Finally, after 40 years of struggle, the airport project was finally abandoned in 2018, labelled by the French government as 'a territory lost to the republic'. The activists I met told us how much inspiration they gained from this movement. But where did the activists in the ZAD get their inspiration from to keep going against the odds for decades? The book *We Are 'Nature' Defending Itself: Entangling Art, Activism and Autonomous Zones* by Isabelle Fremeaux and Jay Jordan (2021) pays tribute to the incredible transformative imaginaries of the people involved in this movement – rooted in a wide array of political, theoretical, spiritual and artistic traditions.

Psychology suggests that our actions are often influenced by images of our possible selves (Markus and Nurius 1986), the person we can imagine becoming or would want to completely

avoid becoming. We pursue completely different paths if our mental image of ourselves tells us that we can become filthy rich through being a Wall Street yuppie or we find it appealing to live in a commune and devote our time to gardening and spiritual growth. One motivates us to have a finance degree and learn all tricks of the trade at stock markets, wear designer clothes and finally move to New York, while the other motivates us to find a community where we belong and learn about gardening as well as spiritual traditions. Possible selves also stop us doing things. If we do not want to resemble to our parents, we do all we can to avoid similar traits or actions. We may never end up in New York. Instead of the commune we may end up living alone in a high rise building that does not even have a balcony where we can garden. Despite doing everything we can to act like our parents, we end up pretty similar to them. However, it is our actions along the way that would have been very different, had we not had images of these possible alternative selves.

Human beings are capable of seeing what is not yet there. We plant seeds into the ground in the Autumn and even if we cannot see anything now, still know that next Spring there will be green plants and also bread on the table. Modern psychology deals more and more with the abilities of such foresight and prospecting, and with how they play a crucial role in the way we evaluate the effects and consequences of the decisions that we make in the present. Foresight (Seligman et al. 2013) is the estimation of what will happen in the future or what should happen in the future, and research shows that it is a significant part of our everyday thinking. Foresight is the ability to create and evaluate different future scenarios, which includes being able to consider our own future emotions as well as our environments' potential alternatives. These are the abilities that allow us to save for our retirement years, put away savings for the winter, or develop long-term sustainability strategies (Bulley and Suddendorf 2016). Imagining what should be in our future ideally, we opt for action instead of just going with the flow, which normally simply upholds the status quo. Experimental research (Burden et al. 2018) also shows that focusing on the psychological process, engaging with utopian thinking – rather than the content of utopias – indeed leads to people being more motivated to both criticise current societies and participate in activities that might lead to changes.

Where utopian beings meet: social imaginaries

If we accept Quarta's argument that we are essentially utopistic, there must be ways for our individual utopias to meet and make up the social realm by interacting with each other. Castoriadis (1997) suggests that everything that happens in a society is the result of an interplay between different social imaginaries. Even if the dominant paradigms make us believe that institutions are mere entities of function, in reality they are built on imaginaries and their operations result in reinforcing and limiting prevailing imaginaries that in return manifest themselves in institutions. 'Every thought, whatever it may be and whatever may be its 'object', is but a mode and a form of social-historical doing', writes Castoriadis (1997, p. 3).

Each of us having a mental image of what might be, should be or could be before we do something happens on a collective level as well. Even if our actions are surrounded by the unknown and the unpredictable, not knowing how things would turn out hardly ever stops us choosing a profession, wanting to have a child or travelling to faraway lands. Why should it when it comes to collective decisions? And why should it be different when it comes to expressing our desires as to what direction we wish for society to evolve? Just because we may never live the day when it becomes our common reality, working towards it is the only way 'I am in a position to partially realise this desire' (Castoriadis1997, p. 93).

A social imaginary may propose a 'maximum programme' (Castoriadis 1997, p. 86) to respond to a problem of the social totality. Any social change (such as changing the ownership of production) would necessarily lead to changes in the other spheres (such as in education, organisational forms and so on). However, we cannot expect everything to happen in parallel at the same time, affecting all individuals in the same way. These are dynamic processes where imaginaries shape and reshape institutions, and institutions shape and reshape individual and collective imaginaries. It also means that, if in one sphere, something seems possible, another sphere can render it impossible and vice versa, something that seems improbable today may seem perfectly likely or natural tomorrow. This implies that, by nature, no utopias can ever be realised in their wholeness. But that is not the point of utopias. Just by being conscious of our social imaginaries and their interplay with institutions enables us to find constantly evolving answers to our collective problems. As Castoriadis (1997, p. 90) says:

> Revolutionary praxis is, therefore, not required to produce the complete and detailed model of the society it intends to establish; nor does it have to "demonstrate" and provide an absolute guarantee that this society could solve all the problems that might ever arise. It is enough that it shows that there is nothing inconsistent in what it proposes and that, as far as can be seen, its realization would greatly increase society's capacity to face up to its own problems.

Only when we accept that society consists of autonomous individuals who can freely express, reflect on and share their social imaginaries – not of infantilised adults who receive their fair share of predigested visions of what social life can and must be – can we start building a more sustainable and just society.

Such imaginaries are often supported by literature or art that enables us to have a peep into what is not yet there and what it could look like. The novel by Ursula le Guin *The Dispossessed* (1974) is about a utopian society built consciously on Annares – the moon of capitalist Urras – that manages to find well-being on a barren planet. At the same time, the lavish life based on possession on lush Urras makes the people devoid of a truly satisfying life. Through the thoughts of its main character, the Annaresti physicist Shevek, who travels between both worlds, the novel manages to make us realise how what we feel or are made to feel about our current social system is by no means the only way to feel. There are a myriad of other sources of a good life that are independent of material wealth. Such thought experiments offered to us as science fiction enable us to move away from unquestioned cornerstones of our current system and make us weigh the benefits and hardships of potential alternative worlds. Le Guin does not depict a perfect utopian society but forces us to pick the guiding values we would pursue without idealising them. Giorgos Kallis and Hug March (2014) wonderfully link this book's relevance to degrowth through grasping the socially constructed nature of scarcity, understanding how to build a future based on comprehending the past, and in addressing the roles that conflict plays in such transitions.

In my own research I have also experienced how art can play a significant part in making normative visions vivid. 'Backcasting' is a methodology that uses normative scenarios in the future as a starting point and works its way back from that future, looking at interventions that increase the chances of systems moving towards a desired direction (Robinson et al. 2011). Backcasting on the future of responsible and sustainable business was turned into a theatrical action game played on numerous occasions successfully, bringing the ideas of a beyond-profit business world closer to people (Köves et al. 2019). In another example, a backcasting project was run at a marketing media agency, where participants envisioned how their industry could be turned upside down to contribute to a better world rather than upholding the current status quo (Köves and Király 2021).

A science fiction writer was asked to turn their vision into a novel to make it easier for people to grasp the possibility of such a world (Szélesi 2018). Even if the utopia described in that novel is more likely to uphold current narratives – and with its techno-optimistic concepts can hardly be characterised as deeply subversive, as Kallis and March (2015) use the term – it can influence the dominant value choices of industry. Deborah Lambert (2020) compares different initiatives in Brussels that aim to induce change in the way we produce our food. She shows how, even with the same benevolent aim to make food production more sustainable, some social imaginaries still serve the status quo, while others work towards radical systemic change with imaginaries that fall into the realm of subversive utopias.

During my debates on degrowth, people often claim that constructing any utopia is a useless pastime as we cannot overcome certain facts and realities. The most common arguments are that humans are selfish; competition is the only way to develop; and innovation is the product of greed. Such arguments not only infer some kind of predetermined human nature but also take past history as something free of narratives and imaginaries. *The Dawn of Everything* (Graeber and Wengrow 2021) shows us how our current understanding of human history has been shaped by dominant narratives and social imaginaries, most of which have been with us only since the enlightenment and such historical 'facts' are merely pick-and-mix representations of what might have been. All this to support the case that massive inequalities, wars and autocratic leadership are historically proven attributes of human social existence. In reality we have no knowledge of how humans had lived for hundreds of thousands of years in prehistoric times and many indigenous traditions have vastly different understandings of how humans are capable of organising themselves. While dominant historical narratives suggest that egalitarian social organisations are only possible in small 'uncivilised' tribes, archaeological findings suggest that many communities, and the earliest cities, were free of hierarchies and inequalities (Graeber and Wengrow 2021). Hence, social imaginaries not only shape our understanding of the future but also our understanding of the past.

Alternative visions of potential societal modus operandi come from various movements all over the world with a similar aim to transcend the dominant system in order to live in harmony with nature and each other (David Barkin, Chapter 12, this volume). Their approaches provide not only distinct narratives but also concrete practical initiatives; radical praxis serves as a constant inspiration for the degrowth pluriverse (Demaria et al. 2023). The many distinctive understandings of how personal, social and economic life could be different do not have to follow dominant Western way of seeing the world around us. As an example, the *eco-swaraj* of India showcase how individuals and communities can practice collective decision-making in transformative ways and how these collectives can redefine well-being in many different segments of life. Radical Ecological Democracy is a recent conceptual framework based on notions of *eco-swaraj* as five interlocking spheres (Kothari 2024): ecological wisdom and resilience; social well-being and justice; direct or radical political democracy; economic democracy; and, finally, cultural and knowledge plurality.

Utopias for navigating complexity

Whether we assess that deliberating, conceptualising and refining a meaningful, ideal social state that may never come into existence is a necessity, or a senseless exercise, may also represent a clash of worldviews.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to argue whether or not capitalism and enlightenment came hand in hand – for 'con' arguments, see Wood (1997); for 'pro' arguments Dupre (2008) – they almost certainly twinned each other and emerged in parallel. Enlightenment brought with it the proposition that everything in our universe is made up of parts that are mechanistically

linked together and, through understanding the parts and the laws behind the cause-and-effect processes that bind them together, we have no problem describing our world. We started treating the cosmos, nature, the human body and our societies as machines that we can – like engineers – dismantle, examine their parts, rationally and objectively establish the laws behind their behaviours. And, once we have all that knowledge, control and influence, they will operate the way we want. This also meant that, if the individual parts function well and interact with each other through the laws that describe their behaviour, the machine works appropriately.

These thoughts were mirrored by economic rationale as well. If the parts – individuals pursuing their own utility-maximisation strategies – work well enough, linked to each other through the simplified laws of the market like supply and demand – then the economic machinery will do its task and will benefit us all. The baker will want to earn as much money as possible and, hence, it logically follows that s/he will not bake bad bread as people will not buy it but rather turn to the baker who does bake good bread. Therefore, as long as there are no barriers for new bakers to enter the market and people are free to move from one baker to the next, they will eat good (and cheap) bread. Hence, everyone is happy, and the system works adequately.

As degrowth is based on a critique and, finally, a complete dismissal of this notion, I do not need to detail why this logic leads to a downright disregard for nature. For the sake of our current argument, it is enough to establish that the natural environment has been treated as separate from, and subservient to, the economy. Transcending our current economic operations also means that we need to transcend the worldview behind it. Just as many aspects of physics and biology are now understood through a systems rather than mechanistic worldview (Capra and Luisi 2014), it is desirable that economists similarly resolve to adopt a systems perspective.

While many degrowthers base their understanding of the economy as embedded – based on the thoughts of Polanyi (2001 [1944]) – this embeddedness is not merely a linear appreciation of large, larger, largest. This is not the embeddedness of the Matryoshka type but rather an entanglement of the economic, social and ecological. It is obvious that without a healthy natural environment, human societies cease to exist, while without human societies ecological systems would certainly change but not perish. Like the 'hierarchy of systems' (Rousseau 2017), where the whole is much more than the sum of its parts taken altogether, properties can arise that otherwise would not exist. Accepting the immense complexity stemming from the entanglement of these systems suggests that we must acknowledge that any event in one domain will impact another one in sometimes unpredictable ways.

In a systems view, understanding how networks work is key. A complex system works properly if not only the individual nodes function well but also the relationships between them are appropriate. In a network, there is no separation; no divisions as all parts are connected to each other directly or indirectly. What happens to one node affects the others around it and eventually the whole and, through affecting the whole, influences revert back to the original node. The more complex the system, the more important it is for its resilience that subsystems have diverse tasks and diverse properties since, if there is a problem in any part of the network, then other parts can help out, and the whole does not collapse.

In a network, the focus is, thus, on relationships. Nodes are not independent from each other, as they constantly interact. If we think in terms of a network of people, the individuals in the network do not have complete freedom, since they depend on how the people around them and in the entire system behave. However, they have autonomy, they can self-organise and determine their own behaviour, but they do not have the freedom to become independent from the system. Neither their own behaviour nor the behaviour of the system as a whole is deterministic. It is not possible to say in advance what kind of interactions and, thus, what dynamic changes will emerge within the

system, given the behaviours and decisions at any given moment. We need to accept that we only have an approximate knowledge of all this. In complex systems, so many impulses coming from actors interact in parallel and strengthen or cancel each other out, that the end result is unpredictable and highly uncertain.

Degrowthers know this all too well. Incredibly complex systems connect human and non-human beings, our economic systems, our ecological systems, our technologies, our communities – these affect and react with each other in ways that we still only have an approximate knowledge of. Our global economic system, already operating as a complex network on its own, affects and is being affected by our natural environment. Climate change threatens to reach a point where dynamic, non-linear processes push our climate systems into a new equilibrium point that could destroy our social networks, which are in close symbiosis with natural ones (Rockström et al. 2009). In the meantime, we lose the mental handholds on which we were able to build. After all, you can fix a machine. You can intervene in a linear cause-and-effect process by understanding exactly what happens after your intervention. But now we no longer feel this certainty.

We are facing terribly fast and unpredictable changes filled with uncertainties and see multiples of possibilities while having access to only one of the myriads of 'truths', namely the one surrounding our node. This kind of ambiguity is key when we link systems thinking to utopian thought. We put a machine on the table and dismantle it. We see how it all works, find out the problem, repair the broken parts, and reassemble it. We monitor, control, and manage the process from the outside. If, on the other hand, we are one of the nodes within a complicated system, we cannot see the whole from the outside. We see the nodes around us. We can feel the impulses of the system around us. We can learn how we function quite well in it. But by default, we can only see it from a limited perspective. Another node will see it from another perspective, and these realities will compete leading to ambiguity. Like the six blind men of Indostan in the widely cited poem by John Godfrey Saxe (1816–1887), each with a firm opinion and, even if based on partial information, somewhat correct yet 'all were in the wrong!'

The significance of utopian thought comes into the picture in a degrowth transformation once we understand the limits of comprehending the impacts of our actions. If we accept – as degrowth does – that we are all part of complex systems, we either give up on the idea of systemic change initiated from within or seek a potentially key mediating variable. We can be reflective of the systems' existing properties with our limited knowledge and act within our limited scope, but we need many similar impulses from different parts of the system to increase the chance of a new system property emerging. If many nodes start sending similar impulses through their autonomous actions, beyond cause-and-effect processes, they increase the chance of required change. This is what we often refer to as critical mass (Ball 2004). However, all this requires a common narrative. The common narrative is the mediating variable. This foresight capacity enables us to act in unison globally following common narratives.

Going back to our complex systems, for each node to send similar impulses, there needs to be a shared vision of what new traits each would want to see in the system or what old properties they would want to cancel out. This vision can determine the direction not only of individual action (as a node) but also of collective action (of a number of nodes). Although the impulses cannot guarantee the reaction of the complex system as a whole (as it depends on the interactions with other nodes and impulses), it can increase the probability of changing properties.

The notion of purposive finality of Von Bertalanffy (1955), one of the greatest minds of systems theory, should be important to degrowth thinkers. Purposive finality means that, while an actor in a complex system may have a vision of where the nonlinear and dynamic system should evolve towards, solutions and pathways need to be diverse, and unexpected consequences anticipated

(Van Assche et al. 2019). According to Von Bertalanffy (1955), what we deem as a potential route of evolution of the socio-economic sphere is strongly limited by our understanding of what may, or may not, be possible in the same system both internally and externally. Hence, in this manner, utopian thought can be considered a purposive finality – opening up our ways of understanding our possibilities, where reaching the outcome is by no means ensured, but possibilities themselves enable a harmonising of actions of the different nodes in the system, creating a von Bertalanffy (1955) 'unity in action'.

Hedrén and Linnér (2009) argue that in order to be able to move towards sustainability, our understanding of the world must transcend three presumptions that are strongly held beliefs in modernity. First, we must transcend national boundaries that they call 'fixed territoriality'. Second, we need to rid ourselves of the ideals of 'fixed truths' or scientification that imply that, in science, we must be able to find one right answer to the one objective reality. And third, we should not expect 'fixed final goals for politics' as we have to accept that no roadmaps or blueprints exist for structural changes. And, to overcome all this, we need widely debated normative visions and contested utopias.

Yesterday's utopia is today's reality

When the degrowth motto originating from Serge Latouche calls us to decolonise our imaginaries, we need to build on Castoriadis' plea to create and act on new narratives in order to find adequate answers to today's social ills and not buy into the social imaginary built on the economism of growth and consumption (Asara et al. 2015).

Whatever we take for granted today as a leading narrative of our social realm once constituted a utopia and some of still does even if not deemed utopian. The promise that we can achieve social justice and environmental protection while maintaining economic growth is utopian (Harlow et al. 2013). Some thoughts – classified in the past as utopias – have since become the cornerstones of the capitalist narrative to tackle climate change with absolutely no attached labels of being utopian (Hjerpe and Linnér 2009). The consumer society's promise to supply a never-ending abundance of material wealth thus leading us all to happiness bases itself on value choices that we no longer question. But it is a utopia. Hence, it is not having utopias that we should contest but rather we should question and deliberate on the values behind them, and take utopia for what it is – a way to criticise current forms of social organising and debate the values we wish to build into our societies through constructing visions (Friedmann 2000).

Wright (2012) suggests that we should create tangible utopian models that offer alternatives to our current societal structures and practices. These, what he calls, 'real utopias' are essentially social experiments designed to address the shortcomings of our existing reality while considering their limitations and potential unintended outcomes. Many scholars well-known to degrowthers also use normative scenarios, real utopias, to outline the world that transcends our current economic paradigms. Robert Costanza, in *Addicted to Growth* (2023), argues that the only societal therapy that can lead us out of our sick addiction to economic growth is the capability to envision alternatives. *Future for All: A Vision for 2048* by degrowth scholars Kuhnhenn et al. (2024) presents concrete ways of living in a degrowth future based on the visioning processes of 200 people. Paul Raskin et al. (2002) also used a wide range of scenarios – or 'dreams', as he sometimes calls them – to propagate the 'great transition' to a more sustainable modus operandi.

In our experience – having used backcasting in many different research projects covering diverse topics – normative envisioning itself invokes a feeling of responsibility for future generations. When imagining the coexistence of humans and artificial intelligence (AI), many AI

experts – without prior considerations for such perspectives – chose to envisage a decentralised, democratised technology that serves both nature and humans in a sustainable and just future (Köves et al. 2024). During the aforementioned backcasting project at the marketing media agency, even without framing the topic around sustainability and social justice, participants came up with a vision revolving around these themes, and had to face their own cognitive dissonances between what they would want to see in the world and what they contribute towards in their everyday jobs (Köves and Király 2021).

We often perceive the future to be a direct continuation of the past and the present, and we build our future thinking based on the extrapolation of the present into the future. However, our complex world also means that unexpected occurrences can derail the trends and tendencies of the present, and black swan events (Taleb 2001) radically change pathways in a unforeseen ways. Their foreseeability is impossible either because they are brought about by previously unknown properties in the system or because their occurrence results from a series of low-probability events whose effects on each other seemed unpredictable in light of our previous knowledge. Therefore, due to these uncertainties and dynamic influences, we should not see the future as a linear continuation of the past.

Understanding the interrelatedness of complex socio-economic and ecological systems influences the behaviour of both those who are concerned about humanity being affected negatively by environmental degradation, and those who are concerned about nature being negatively affected by humanity and treat our moral obligation to protect it in its own right and not just as an ecosystems service provider to humans. This kind of systems thinking has been proven to induce not just much more concern for distinct viewpoints, tolerance for various perspectives and much more mental flexibility to adapt to new solutions, but also the tendency to consider limits to growth over sheer meritocratic performance (Frank 2006). Evidence also suggests that those with stronger systems thinking as a cognitive paradigm engage more in pro-environmental behaviour (Davis and Stroink 2016).

However, seeing the world as a complex, interrelated system also means that we accept that history does not unfold itself as a predictable roadmap. We cannot have a degrowth recipe for all or the perfect degrowth blueprint for policymakers. What we can and must have is the inspiration to send just the right individual and collective impulses to enhance our chances of seeing new characteristics in our systems. And, for this, we need utopia. As Quarta (1996, p. 164) writes, 'this is why we should regard the dissolution of the utopian tension as the sound of an alarm bell for humanity'. Luckily, degrowthers know this all too well.

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