

LEV!COVINY

NEWSLETTER OF THE LEVICE PARTY · SPECIAL ECOSOCIALIST ISSUE · SUMMER 2026



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Editor's Note

Dear readers,

This special English edition of Levicoviny, the newsletter of the Czech party Levice (the Left), focuses on a single subject in depth: democratic degrowth ecosocialism. This is a deliberate choice. The polycrisis affecting both the world and the Czech Republic today shows that the left needs a positive vision, not just criticism of what is wrong.

The issue opens with Antonín Hořčica's essay on the ideological crisis of the Czech left and the case for ecosocialism (p. 2), followed by Zdeněk Beil on the polycrisis and equitable transformation (p. 6) and Patrik Vágner on humans as part of nature (p. 6). Hořčica returns with a map of five left-wing approaches to ecology (p. 7) and, together with Jakub Višňák, a political compass (p. 10). An interview with Kohei Saito on degrowth, Marx and the future of the left follows (p. 14). Petra Valeš Jelínková writes on climate justice and just transition (p. 17), and Hana Polanská-Turečková on ecosocialism in culture and art (p. 19). The issue closes with reports from the international ecosocialist scene (p. 21), a summary of the Levice–Budoucnost debate (p. 23), and an ecosocialist library and overview of organisations (p. 23–24).

This international edition has been adapted from the original Czech version: some passages too specific to Czech politics have been cut, others explained along the way. We hope it helps build understanding across borders, and that readers on the left everywhere will find something here that speaks to their own vision for the future.

Editorial Board of Levicoviny

10 August 2026

LEV!COVINY – newsletter of the Levice party | Publisher: Levice, Žirovnická 3133/6, Praha 10 – Záběhlce, 106 00 | Editorial Board of Levicoviny | Print and digital edition | Contact: info@jsmelevice.cz , RRLevicoviny@protonmail.com

Without Content, the Left Is Nothing: Ecosocialism as the Way

ANTONÍN HOŘČICA

An edited version of this article was published in Deník Referendum, a Czech left-wing online magazine. This is the full author's version, including passages the editors omitted, adapted for an international audience. The Czech left is grappling with an identity crisis. But the Czech left is not unique. Fragmentation, ideological confusion, alliances with nationalists, and the inability to offer a convincing alternative: this is the story of the European left in miniature. This article argues that the way forward lies neither in nostalgia nor in tactical alliances with the right and nationalists, but in building a left based on three pillars: grassroots democracy, ecosocialism and consistent internationalism. At a time of deepening social inequalities, the climate crisis and the restructuring of European security architecture, the left should have something to say. And yet, in the Czech political landscape, it is almost as if it did not exist. The congress of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), the country's unreformed communist party, at the end of May 2026 illustrated this eloquently: new leadership, but the same course, no real renewal of its programme. Jiří Dolejš, a veteran MP and former party insider now expelled from its ranks, aptly described it as a funeral while still alive. The problem, however, is not limited to a single congress. It is deeper and systemic.

Conceptual chaos on the left

In recent weeks, a debate has erupted on social media over who actually represents the Czech left. The picture that emerges is, to say the least, contradictory.

The Greens are regarded as the only genuinely left-

wing parliamentary party, even though their seats came through preferential votes on the Pirates' list, a party which some commentators also count as left-wing, despite its participation in the previous neoliberal government led by then prime minister Petr Fiala.

The New Social Democracy is an emerging party



Photo: Levice

project launched in 2026 by former prime minister Vladimír Špidla and other breakaway members of the country's established Social Democratic Party (SOCDEM), who split over SOCDEM's flirtation with the Stačilo! (literally "Enough!") bloc and the Communist Party. It is held up by some as the hope of the left, even though it has yet to indicate which direction it wishes to take or whom it intends to work with. So far, it seems more focused on a return to past successes and on building its own organisation than on engaging in open dialogue with other parts of the left. The KSČM claims a monopoly on the radical left and declares an interest in unification, albeit selectively: with Stačilo! (the nationalist-populist movement under whose banner the KSČM, SOCDEM, and other nationalist-populist and even far-right forces ran an undeclared coalition in the last election), with SOCDEM, or possibly with the ČSSD (a separate, unrelated party that has simply appropriated the old social democratic acronym), in short, with whoever comes forward. This is a bid to crown itself as the leading force of "the left" in the spirit of the 'horseshoe theory', where the extremes meet across the left-right divide. Part of the debate, however, questions the left-right divide as such. Progressive movements such as Volt (a pan-European movement whose Czech branch is largely made up of former Pirates) or Kruh (another grouping of Pirate defectors formed after the party joined Fiala's government) prefer not to call themselves left-wing. Budoucnost ("Future"), a small movement founded in 2020, adopts a similarly cautious approach, even though it is programmatically close to

Levice ("the Left") and is even pursuing a form of merger with it. Meanwhile, the Levice party, a small radical-left party with a long history (founded in 1993, it operated for over two decades as the Party of Democratic Socialism before adopting its current name in 2020), which explicitly identifies with the radical left in its very name and was the only avowedly left-wing party to run independently in the last election, albeit unsuccessfully, is dismissed in some commentaries as trotskysts or an offshoot of the communists.

This state of affairs is no accident, nor is it just a matter of confusion. It is the result of decades during which left-wing identity in the Czech Republic has been distorted, either by the stigma of the former regime or by a desperate attempt to distance itself from it at any cost. Until the left answers the question of what it actually wants and for whom it exists, the situation will not change.

Stačilo! as a dead end for the Czech left

At the turn of 2024 and 2025, the French model became the mantra of the Czech left. NUPES and, later, the New Popular Front showed that a coalition ranging from the Socialists through the Greens to the radical left could overcome internal differences and succeed. In the Czech context, this idea quickly took hold. Yet what actually emerged from it was the 'Stačilo!' project: an alliance of the so-called conservative left, centred on the KSČM and SOCDEM, with nationalist and right-wing groups such as the ČSNS (a small party that, despite carrying the name of a once-prominent interwar party, today pursues an entirely different politics), SD-SN (a small conservative grouping) and the Moravians (a regionalist party seeking Moravian autonomy). In other words, its exact opposite.

This project aimed to appeal to a broader left-wing electorate. It ended in a fiasco, and it is worth explaining why. Adopting the far-right's talking points – whether it be scaremongering about 'green madness' or sovereignty-focused slogans – is not a clever tactic, but an ideological capitulation. Anyone who adopts the language of their opponent also accepts their perspective and value system. Such a policy will not win over voters seeking a genuine alternative. Moreover, Stačilo! ignored what is crucial for the 21st-century left: a socially just ecological transition. A left that overlooks this has no answer to one of the most fundamental challenges of our time.

However, no lesson has been learned from this experience. Each subject remains absorbed with their own survival, and no common platform has emerged. The declared alliance between Levice and Budoucnost remains an exception, though for the time being it is more of an intention than a functioning real political force. Left-wing voters, meanwhile, are drifting elsewhere, not because they have undergone an ideological conversion, but because a fragmented left speaking no common language has nothing to offer them.

What sort of left? And for whom?

Part of the problem is that the linear left-right axis, the familiar axis of any political compass, no longer explains much today, and even adding the democracy versus authoritarianism axis is not enough. Other questions are also relevant: is economic growth or human development the main objective for a given subject? And does it want to preserve the current system, or change it fundamentally? And how?

From this perspective, things become clearer. Fossil capitalism combines economic growth with the preservation of the system. Green capitalism seeks partial changes but retains the growth imperative. The KSČM and Stačilo! talk of change, but on closer inspection this does not hold up. On the economic growth versus human development axis, they stand on the side of growth: they reject ecological transformation and defend the fossil fuel industry and traditional manufacturing, the car industry above all, on productivist grounds, that is, the belief that expanding output is itself the measure of progress. On the axis of preserving the system versus changing it, they occupy a middle ground. The rhetoric of change is there, but ultimately it points towards a return to the Soviet-style socialism that once existed in the Eastern Bloc, which was in reality a form of party-state capitalism. On the democracy versus authoritarianism axis, the KSČM's claim to a leading role speaks for itself. Calling them a 'bad left' misses the point. They are something else entirely: conservative nationalism masked in socialist rhetoric. The other parties mentioned in the introduction could be assessed using the same set of axes.

In this light, the KSČM's claim to be the sole radical left-wing force and to unite it under its own leadership speaks for itself. Is this not, to some extent, a reminiscence of the 'good old days of the party's leading role'? This, of course, is not the path to the left of the 21st century, but a return to a model that has historically failed. A left that identifies with democracy must reject this path, including any nostalgia for the dictatorship of the proletariat in whatever form it may take.

It should likewise reject the symbols associated with that nostalgia. The hammer and sickle represent not only the struggle for a just society, but also dictatorship, people imprisoned and executed, and lives destroyed. Let us leave what these symbols truly meant to the historians. The 21st-century left needs different ones.

The left for the 21st century

There is, however, a tradition, and the contemporary left should build on it. The Prague Spring of 1968 offered three impulses that remain alive to this day: economic democracy from below in the form of workers' councils as a counterweight to the party monopoly; proof that socialism and democracy are

compatible; and, finally, the very fact that this tradition was not overcome from within, but halted from without. It therefore remains available to us. We can embrace it and supplement it with what 1968 could not have foreseen: a socially just ecological transition and consistent internationalism without selective solidarity.

It is this tradition that gives rise to the kind of left the present moment needs. It rests on three pillars: grassroots democracy instead of top-down paternalism, ecosocialism instead of fossil-fuel-based productivism, and consistent internationalism instead of selective solidarity.

The first pillar is grassroots democracy, both political and economic. One cannot strive for emancipation while relying on a powerful state apparatus and party paternalism steeped in nostalgia for the party's leading role. The radical democratic left, by contrast, seeks to transfer power to the people. In the economy, this means workers' self-management, cooperative ownership and participation in decision-making both in the workplace and in the community, rather than redistribution controlled by the party apparatus or the state. In politics, it means deepening democracy beyond representative institutions, towards direct citizen participation in decision-making. It is precisely in this sense that the impulses of the Prague Spring are still alive: democracy as a prerequisite for genuine emancipation, both political and economic.

The second pillar is ecosocialism. Scaring people with 'green madness' and defending the fossil fuel industry are not left-wing politics, but a defence of the interests of those who profit from the fossil fuel economy. Democratic ecosocialism starts from the opposite premise. The climate crisis has not only an ecological dimension, but also power and social dimensions. Its impacts do not affect everyone equally: the working class and the poor, who have the least means to defend themselves, suffer the most, while those who benefit from the fossil economy bear the least of the costs. A just transition in energy, housing and transport must respect the planet's limits and protect nature as a space for life, while remaining socially just. In this sense, social and environmental justice are inextricably linked. At the same time, it is necessary to reject economic growth as the sole model of prosperity and shift the emphasis towards human development. [Therefore, such ecosocialism must be post-growth](#), that is, rejecting economic growth as the primary objective, as the Japanese degrowth theorist Kohei Saito told me in an interview published in Alarm magazine.

The third pillar is consistent internationalism. As Slavoj Žižek points out, Russian aggression against Ukraine, Israel's genocidal policy towards the Palestinians, and the war waged by the US and Israel against Iran are manifestations of the same imperialism that denies the very existence of nations and their right to self-determination. From a left-wing

perspective, one cannot apply different standards to imperialism based on geopolitical affiliation. Solidarity with those under attack does not preclude criticism of the governments of the countries under attack: supporting Ukraine does not mean uncritically accepting Zelensky's neoliberal government and nationalist excesses, just as solidarity with the Palestinian people does not mean accepting Hamas, and condemning US and Israeli aggression in Iran does not mean supporting the theocratic dictatorship there. A left that applies double standards depending on who the aggressor is, is not internationalist. It is selective. And selective solidarity is not solidarity.

Similarly, the left cannot simply resign itself to Europe's security reality and merely call for withdrawal from NATO. A consistent response lies elsewhere: in strengthening international law and collective security underpinned by the UN, rather than in the isolation of individual states. Nor can it reject the European project as such. The European Union cannot be idealised, but despite its limitations it remains the only existing framework for supranational coordination capable of guaranteeing social and environmental standards and preserving its emancipatory dimension. At a time when this framework is under threat from Trump, Putin and the sovereigntist forces aligned with them across Europe, rhetoric that rejects

the EU as a 'Brussels diktat' objectively becomes their ally.

These principles are not abstract. They are reflected in concrete practice: in trade unions, climate initiatives, social movements and in the defence of the rights of people working in precarious conditions. A left that can link the social question with the environmental and democratic dimension still has much to offer.

What next?

The radical left is not built on nostalgia or the monopolisation of concepts, but on substance. The question is not how to deal with the legacy of the past, but which legacy to choose. The authoritarian legacy of the 'leading role of the party' and the dictatorship of the proletariat belongs to historians. The emancipatory tradition of 1968, on the other hand, is still very much alive.

The question is whether the Czech left can determine what it wants to be, and whether it will have the courage to act accordingly. So far, individual subjects have been more concerned with their own survival than with finding common ground. Change requires left-wing subjects to start genuinely coming together, engaging in dialogue and seeking common socialist solutions.



Photo: Levice

The polycrisis and an equitable transformation

ZDENĚK BEIL

The polycrisis facing the world today (climate, social and democratic) has a common root: the concentration of economic power, which subjugates both politics and public opinion. This text describes the mechanisms of the current polycrisis: how the concentration of economic power leads to energy poverty, media influence and the deepening of social inequalities, and how such an environment plays into the hands of populism. It also examines the interconnection between the climate and social crises and offers a critical assessment of the European Green Deal.



Photo: Jonny White, Wikimedia Commons

Polycrisis

The polycrisis, exacerbated by climate change, manifests in many forms that simultaneously distort democratic processes. A small proportion of the world's population concentrates a significant share of global wealth and uses it to advance its own interests. Through influence over the executive, legislative and judicial branches, these elites create conditions leading, amongst other things, to energy poverty.

Control over the privatised energy sector enables profit maximisation, often through investment in fossil fuels and casting doubt on climate change. Economic power also facilitates media influence, manipulation of public opinion, pressure on legislation, the drawing on public resources, and deepening social inequalities.

Inadequate education, passivity and targeted manipulation create conditions conducive to populism, which can strengthen nationalist and authoritarian tendencies.

Ecosocialism emphasises the link between social justice and environmental sustainability. It seeks to limit private capital's dominance over the means of production, ensure fairer redistribution of resources, and protect the natural environment. Debates about its feasibility focus on the political viability of large-

scale systemic change, the risk of excessive bureaucratisation, and balancing effective environmental policy with democratic control.

Contemporary left-wing approaches envisage individual enterprise, particularly co-operatives, state ownership of strategic infrastructure, and planning free from particular interests or power-driven dirigisme, making use of impartial AI.

Climate and social transformation

The deepening climate crisis is closely linked to growing social inequalities — not separate problems, but different manifestations of a deeper disruption in humanity's relationship with nature and with other people. Nature is often reduced to a resource for exploitation, and this is reaching its limits.

Sustainable change cannot be purely economic or political; it requires a transformation of values and thinking. Human beings are part of nature, not external users of it. Ecological responsibility and social justice must therefore be reflected not only in policies, but in everyday life.

A critical view of the EU Green Deal

The European Green Deal is the EU's strategy for achieving climate neutrality by 2050, including a 55% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. It covers a wide range of areas, from energy to the economy and living standards.

Critics point out that EU policies reflect the interests of powerful economic actors, weakening democratic principles and prioritising profit over the public interest. Differences between member states can deepen inequalities and lead to uneven development within the EU.

Nationalist and populist tendencies are also growing in parts of Europe, further threatening democratic institutions.

Humans as part of nature

PATRIK VÁGNER

As we experience a worsening climate crisis alongside growing social inequalities, it becomes increasingly clear that these problems are closely connected. They are not two separate crises, but different manifestations of a single deeper problem, the alienation of human beings from nature and from each other. Modern civilisation has cast humans as masters of the world. Nature has become a mere resource to be used and extracted. Yet

this way of thinking is not inevitable. It emerged in a specific historical and economic context, and today it is reaching its limits. The consequences are visible in climate change, biodiversity loss and pressure on natural resources.

The American poet and thinker Gary Snyder offers a counter to this view. In his work and life, he shows that humans are not masters of nature but part of it. He draws inspiration from Buddhism and indigenous traditions, which understood nature not as property but as the basis of life, grounded in respect, balance and responsibility rather than dominance. Such an approach can inspire today's societies in their search for a more sustainable way of living.

A similar critique of alienation appears in Marx, who argued that capitalism separates people from their labour, from others and from themselves. Today we can see that this alienation extends to our relationship with nature. People are increasingly distanced from the processes that sustain their own existence, losing awareness of mutual interdependence.

Snyder suggests that change cannot be purely economic or political. It must also be a change in thinking, in how we understand our place in the world and how we act within it. New technologies and laws are not enough if our values and everyday behaviour

remain unchanged.

Perhaps this is where ecology and social justice meet, not only in programmes and theories, but in ways of living. In the understanding that we are not separate from the world around us. The crises we face today are not only a threat but an opportunity: to stop seeing ourselves as masters of the world and begin to understand it as a space of which we are part, and for whose future we share responsibility.



Photo: Pexels

The left's approaches to ecology: towards democratic degrowth ecosocialism

ANTONÍN HOŘČICA

The polycrisis that Zdeněk Beil describes elsewhere in this issue is no mere coincidence. The climate crisis, growing inequality, economic instability and questions of war and security all share a common root in the logic of capitalism. The left thus faces an urgent question: how to respond to economic growth if it seeks a genuine, not merely cosmetic, answer to ecological breakdown? Left-wing currents, however, answer this question in divergent ways. This divergence stems primarily from differing positions on two key questions: how a given current relates to economic growth, and what vision of systemic change, if any, it holds. While some currents regard growth as a necessary tool for meeting human needs, others see it as the primary cause of ecological destruction to be overcome. These currents also differ in the depth of structural economic and ownership transformation they demand, and in how far they are content with regulation and reform within the existing system. Within the left, five basic approaches to ecology and growth can be identified.

The productivist approach

This approach retains growth as the primary objective but places it within a socialist framework where it serves to meet material needs. Historically, it is associated above all with twentieth-century actually existing socialism, which adopted the growth paradigm as a self-evident precondition for prosperity and focused exclusively on the fair redistribution of wealth. Its premise is that socialism requires the maximum development of productive forces to overcome scarcity, while environmental problems are treated as marginal and expected to be resolved by technological progress within a planned economy. The logic of productive expansion goes unchallenged; only the subject to whom the returns belong changes. Actually existing socialism thus reproduced the same clash

between unlimited expansion and planetary limits as capitalism, driven not by market pressure but by centralised demands for quantitative output. The result was a series of environmental disasters linked to the prioritisation of heavy industry and fossil fuel extraction: acid rain and deforestation across the Eastern Bloc, the drying of the Aral Sea, and the Chernobyl disaster. Economic growth is ecologically unsustainable regardless of whether it occurs within a capitalist or socialist framework. Today this approach has largely been replaced in left-wing thinking either by efforts to reform towards green capitalism, or by the defence of traditional industry disguised as protection of the national environment.

Reformed green capitalism

This approach holds that the climate crisis can be addressed within the existing market framework through regulation, technological innovation and re-directed investment, without challenging the logic of growth itself.

Historically it is associated with parts of social democracy, the Greens and the liberal left, who believe capitalism can be "greened" through gradual reform from within. The clearest example is the European Green Deal, which the European Commission explicitly presents as a new growth strategy. Its ambition is to combine climate neutrality with continued economic growth through so-called decoupling, separating GDP growth from resource consumption and emissions. The data, however, do not support this: no empirical evidence exists for absolute, permanent and global decoupling of growth from environmental impact, and numerous analyses consider it unlikely in the future. This is not merely a technical question but a fundamental dilemma: whether it is possible to maintain or increase material wealth while significantly relieving pressure on the planet.

The failure of green capitalism is therefore not only factual but political. In its technocratic, purely market-driven form, participation is absent: transformation is simply planned and implemented from above. The left-liberal variant has a different problem. It seeks to combine ecology with social justice, but remains within the same growth framework. It does not address who owns the means of production, who is genuinely responsible for the climate

crisis, or who actually decides on the transformation. Both variants play into the hands of critics who portray climate policy as a project of distant elites, whether cynical bureaucrats or well-intentioned but toothless reformers.



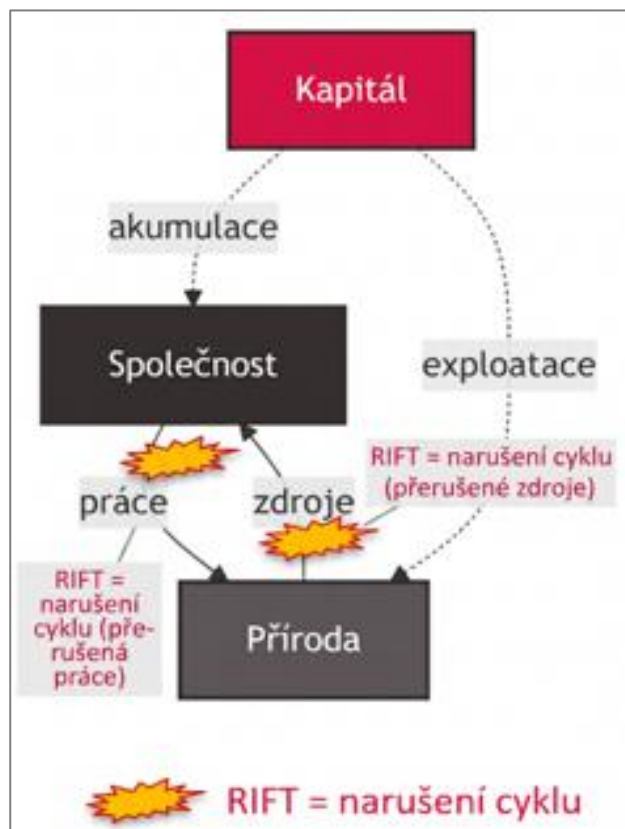
Source: Mohmann / Wikimedia Commons

The degrowth approach

This current radically challenges the growth imperative as the primary cause of ecological degradation, and instead of technocratic "greening" of the existing system, advocates deliberate stagnation or a democratically managed reduction of material production. Its proponents argue that perpetual growth in a system of finite material resources will inevitably hit physical limits, making "green growth" an essentially unrealisable project. Jason Hickel and Giorgos Kallis attempt to link degrowth with ecosocialism, arguing that capitalism requires constant expansion that devastates the living world, and that the only solution is deceleration and the restoration of balance. They seek to develop this into a political programme rather than merely an economic theory. Degrowth does not mean equal belt-tightening for all: reduction should occur primarily where consumption is highest, in wealthy countries and among wealthy people, not among those already living on the edge of a dignified life. Nor is it purely a technical question of consumption: reducing output without addressing who controls production and who owns what can deepen inequality rather than reduce it. One result of this thinking is that human development can be built without GDP growth. In the Czech context, this thinking is developed by academics at Masaryk University and the Re-set platform, whose *New Deal* (2020) proposes a concrete socio-ecological transformation programme.

Marxist ecosocialism

This current draws on thinkers such as Michael Löwy and John Bellamy Foster, redefining Marxism as a theory inseparable from ecological critique. Foster developed Marx's concept of the "metabolic rift": the



Source: author

capitalist mode of production creates an irreparable rupture in the relationship between society and nature, with the exploitation of labour and the exploitation of the soil as two sides of the same coin. Löwy builds on this tradition as a return to the Marxist conception of social justice, radically expanded to include an ecological dimension. Central to this current is the conviction that the logic of endless capital accumulation is in direct contradiction with the physical limits of the planet. In the Czech context, philosopher Michael Hauser argues that it was not humanity in general but capitalism specifically that disrupted the planet's natural systems, and seeks solutions in the expropriation and democratic control of the economy rather than primarily in the question of growth. He develops the link between class and ecology further in the concept of proletarian ecology.

The nationalist-productivist dead end

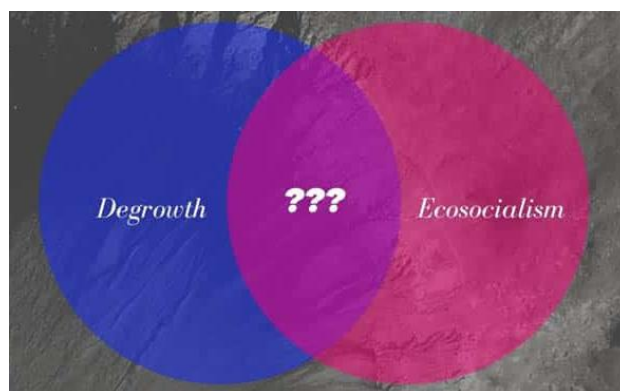
This current is in some sense the heir of productivism: the same defence of traditional industry, stripped of its original internationalism and replaced by nationalism. Found across Europe in various forms, in the Czech context it is most visibly represented by the Stačilo! (literally "Enough!") coalition, a nationalist-left bloc that brought together the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), the Social Democrats (SOCDEM) and several smaller nationalist and right-wing groups to run in the 2024 European Parliament elections. This approach is more a defensive reaction to climate policy than a worked-out political alternative. It rests on verbal defence of national sovereignty and traditional industry without offering concrete systemic transformation. Rhetoric such as "our coal, our cars, our countryside" is closely linked to the rejection of climate policies denounced as "green madness." It is a conservative-nationalist position in left-wing packaging that effectively blocks climate transformation in the name of protecting "ordinary people" from an allegedly foreign ideology.

In the Czech context, Stačilo! ran against the Green Deal as an instrument of economic decline. This strategy represents precisely the "defence of traditional industry disguised as protection of the national environment" discussed in relation to the productivist approach. Adopting nationalist talking points does not bring the left closer to voters; on the contrary, it legitimises frames set by the far right and accepts its simplified diagnosis that the main problems are "migrants" or "Brussels," rather than offering a critical analysis of the structural causes rooted in global capitalism.

These five approaches clash on two key questions: what to do about economic growth, and how far it is necessary to transform ownership and power structures. Productivism addresses only ownership, treating planetary limits as a technical problem to be solved by technological progress within a planned economy. Its contemporary offshoot, the nationalist-

productivist current, loses even this: it retains the defence of traditional industry but replaces expropriation and internationalism with nationalism, ultimately offering no answer to the question of growth at all, merely wrapping it in the defence of "our" certainties. Reformed green capitalism represents the opposite extreme: it promises a more social and ecological system through decoupling production from resource consumption, but ignores questions of ownership and systemic change entirely. The degrowth movement focuses primarily on growth and consumption, but often neglects institutional questions of power and ownership; the exception is its ecosocialist branch, which programmatically links these dimensions. Marxist ecosocialism addresses both questions systematically, yet often lacks concrete answers to how climate change should be tackled in practice.

Saito's synthesis



Source: Climate & Capitalism

The genuine alternative to the preceding approaches is degrowth ecosocialism, linking the Marxist and degrowth traditions. This synthesis was developed by the Japanese theorist Kohei Saito in *Marx in the Anthropocene* (2022), building on his earlier work on Marx's ecosocialism, in which he examined Marx's notebooks and showed that the later Marx revised the productivist reading of his own theory. The result is a vision of degrowth communism based on sufficiency, care and the democratic management of common resources, with an explicit rejection of Soviet-style centralism. Saito thus bridges Marxist ecosocialism (Löwy, Foster, Angus) and the degrowth movement (Hickel, Kallis).

Democratic degrowth ecosocialism

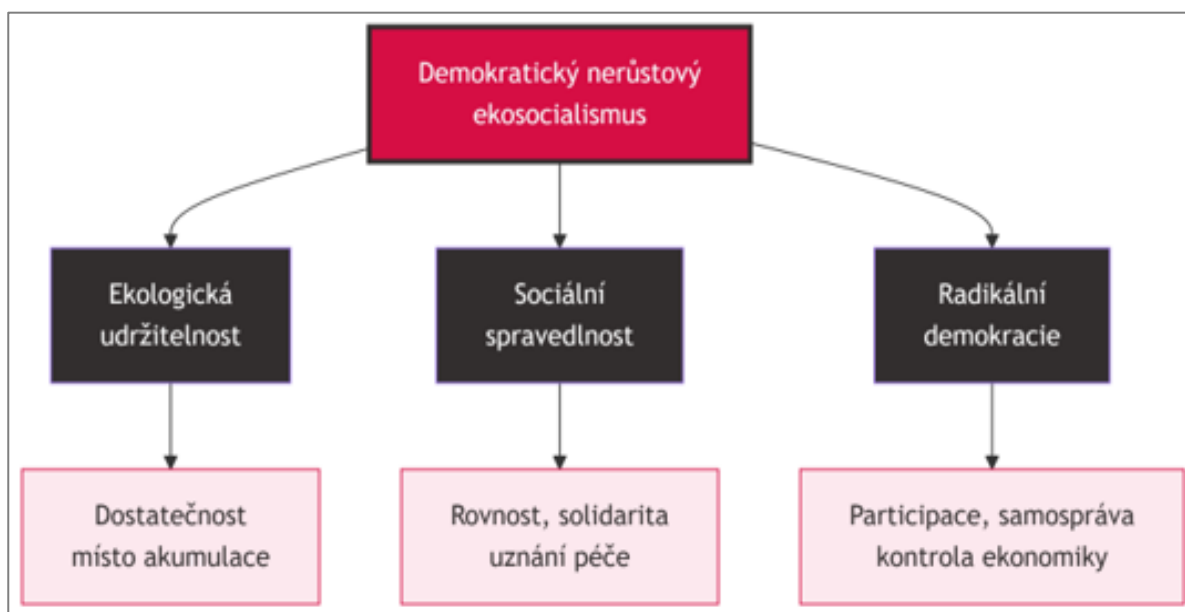
The genuinely left-wing response to current global and local challenges is the framework of democratic degrowth ecosocialism proposed here: a synthesis that adds an explicit emphasis on radical democracy and concrete institutional form to Saito's linking of Marx and degrowth. It also draws on the democratic socialism of 1968. The reform communists of the Prague Spring attempted to transcend the dogma of the single correct party line and offer a democratic version of socialism, socialism with a human face. Yet

they could not free the question of material distribution from the productivist framework. They sought to democratise power and decision-making structures without questioning unlimited material production as the basis for just redistribution.

The proposed framework rests on three pillars: ecological sustainability (sufficiency over accumulation), social justice (equality, solidarity, recognition of care work) and radical democracy (participation, self-management, democratic control of the economy). Without ecology, collapse threatens. Without social justice, the costs of transformation will fall on those least responsible for the crisis. Without democracy, authoritarianism threatens. The risks are twofold: a return to the centralisation that burdened twentieth-

century socialism, and a new technocratism that would impose transformation from above, without the participation of those affected. The word "degrowth" in the name clarifies that this is not every ecosocialism, since not every ecosocialism rejects growth. "Democratic" clarifies that this is not every degrowth, since not every degrowth is emancipatory: it can sometimes amount to demanding austerity from those who did not cause the climate crisis. Nor is every productivism authoritarian, as the legacy of the Prague Spring itself shows.

This combination of ecological responsibility, social justice and radical democracy is the most compelling direction for the left of the 21st century.



Source: Author

Political compass of ecosocialist approaches

ANTONÍN HOŘČICA, JAKUB VIŠŇÁK

To map where specific political parties and movements stand in relation to democratic degrowth ecosocialism, we developed a simple two-axis model. Each subject is positioned according to two questions: how it relates to economic growth, and how deep a systemic change of the economy it advocates.

The diagram makes no claim to ideological neutrality. It measures distance from a specific normative ideal, democratic degrowth ecosocialism as developed by Kohei Saito, not a general "objective" political science scale. We state this openly so that readers know precisely what the numbers mean.

Growth vs. human development

The X axis measures how far a given political subject moves away from economic growth as a goal and towards qualitatively understood development: recognition of planetary limits, sufficiency over maximisation of production and consumption, recognition of care work, and critique of the Green Deal as an

expression of green capitalism.

The level of systemic change

The Y axis measures how deeply a given political subject engages with the ownership and power structures of the economy: from challenging private ownership through democratic control of strategic sectors and technologies, to demanding that the costs of transformation be borne primarily by those most responsible for the crisis.

The questions used for both axes are listed in the table below; the calculation method is described in the following section.

Questions used to classify political subjects

Axis X – relationship to growth and development

- X1** Rejects GDP as the primary measure of prosperity and proposes alternative quality-of-life indicators
- X2** Recognises ecological and planetary limits as a binding framework for economic policy
- X3** Challenges the concept of decoupling growth from resource consumption and defines economic goals in terms of actual human needs
- X4** Advocates a sufficiency economy in which the goal is meeting human needs — health, education, energy and food security — through unconditional basic services or a basic income
- X5** Places care work on a par with paid employment and advocates its full social and financial recognition
- X6** Understands technological progress (AI, automation, robotisation) as a means of improving quality of life, not expanding production and consumption for profit
- X7** Advocates that productivity gains lead to reduced working hours with maintained income
- X8** Critiques the European Green Deal as an expression of green capitalism, insufficient for addressing the climate crisis because growth remains the measure of success rather than the fulfilment of human needs
- X9** Rejects growth at the expense of human development and programmatically advocates an alternative post-growth or degrowth economic transformation
- X10** Defines prosperity as the fulfilment of human needs and development of capabilities, not the expansion of production for profit

Axis Y – level of systemic change

- Y1** Challenges private ownership of the means of production and proposes concrete alternatives in the form of democratically managed state, cooperative and collective ownership, including employee co-determination
- Y2** Rejects leaving strategic sectors (energy, transport, housing, healthcare, care, banking and finance) to market logic and advocates their democratically controlled public management
- Y3** Rejects market mechanisms as the primary tool of economic coordination and advocates democratic planning applying the principle of subsidiarity (decision-making at the lowest possible level, as close as possible to those affected)
- Y4** Understands the climate crisis as part of the broader polycrisis and references sustainable development as a globally shared framework for addressing it
- Y5** Rejects reliance on the market as the primary economic mechanism and advocates democratic planning combining local self-governance with coordination at the level necessary to address global problems
- Y6** Rejects leaving decisions about technology and automation to private owners and advocates their democratic control
- Y7** Advocates a just transition ensuring that the costs of transformation are not borne primarily by workers in threatened sectors, but are offset by retraining, employment security and social protection
- Y8** Advocates systemic change through democratic means, participation, self-management and decision-making at all levels from community to regional and global
- Y9** Links the social and ecological agendas as inseparable and interprets the ecological crisis as a consequence of capitalist relations of production
- Y10** Rejects equal distribution of transformation costs and instead advocates progressive taxation of the wealthy and polluters

Methodology

Each of the twenty questions was answered for each subject on the basis of their programmatic documents, using a five-point scale: definitely yes, rather yes, neutral, rather no, definitely no. The corresponding scores are: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1. The ten scores on each axis were averaged to give the subject's coordinate in the diagram. Both axes run from 1 to 5, with the neutral midpoint at 3.

Scores are derived from specific, verifiable passages in programmatic documents (electoral programmes,

ideological statements, official positions). For some subjects, scores were derived with AI assistance from their overall public profile, where programmatic documents were absent or insufficiently detailed.

The authors welcome critical feedback and intend to continue refining both the methodology and the question set.

How to read the compass

The compass maps political subjects in two dimensions. The horizontal axis (growth vs. development) measures the relationship to economic growth. On

the left, growth remains the goal and measure of prosperity. On the right, the subject moves away from growth as the primary criterion and defines prosperity as the fulfilment of human needs and the development of capabilities. The distinction between growth and development is fundamental here: growth is the quantitative expansion of production for profit, while development is the qualitative improvement of life. These concepts do not coincide, and the entire right side of the compass rests on this distinction.

The vertical axis (status quo vs. systemic change) measures the relationship to ownership and economic coordination. At the bottom, the subject leaves the means of production and strategic sectors to market logic. At the top, it advocates democratically managed state, cooperative and collective ownership, and democratic planning where markets fail.

The diagonal from bottom left to top right connects two idealised types: fossil capitalism at point 1,1 and democratic degrowth ecosocialism at point 5,5. These are not real subjects but polar models against which other positions are measured. Points above the midpoint of the vertical axis are shown in red, those below in grey, visually separating subjects tending towards systemic change (the left) from those defending the existing capitalist order (the right).

The coordinates of individual points are derived from the methodology described above, using AI tools and verified by expert correction.

Theoretical approaches

The grey diamonds represent not parties but theoretical currents described in the article above, which define the space of the compass. Closest to the ecosocialist pole lies eco-Marxism (*ekomarxismus* in the diagram): class-based ecological critique linking systemic ownership change with overcoming the growth paradigm. The degrowth current (*nerůstový směr*) also sits in the upper right, somewhat lower on the systemic change axis, because its strong critique of growth does not necessarily rest on Marxist ownership theory.

Productivist socialism (*produktivistický socialismus*) sits high on the systemic change axis but to the left on the growth axis. This is twentieth-century socialism (in practice, state capitalism), which sought to socialise the means of production but did not abandon the idea of unlimited productive expansion. It is precisely this legacy that ecosocialism defines itself against. The nationalist-productivist current (*stačilovský směr*) represents a nationally oriented productivism that rhetorically shares demands for systemic ownership change but is pulled down and to the left by nationalism and authoritarian tendencies.

Green capitalism appears in two forms in the lower part of the space. Green Deal-style green capitalism (*zelený kapitalismus v podobě Green Dealu*) is green

growth promoted through market tools and technological innovation, with growth remaining the measure of success and no genuine social justice dimension. Reformed green capitalism (*reformní zelený kapitalismus*) is its more socially sensitive variant, adding just transition elements and aspects of a well-being economy, but still within a market and growth framework. It should be emphasised that reformed green capitalism is not a current within ecosocialism, but what ecosocialism critiques, even if it may support some elements of the welfare state.

Political subjects

The compass includes both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary subjects relevant to the debate on the left, supplemented by subjects covering the rest of the space up to fossil capitalism, to show the full range of Czech politics. Closest to the ecosocialist pole stand Levice (the Left, as shown in the diagram) and Budoucnost (the Future, a small left-wing movement). Levice does not sit in the corner itself, as it is not yet in practice a degrowth ecosocialist party; its programme contains these elements more as aspiration than accomplished reality.

KSČM (the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia) sits high on the systemic change axis but only at the midpoint of the growth axis, placing it among the productivist left near the corresponding theoretical approach: it advocates public ownership and planning, but subordinates ecological concerns to industrial development. The Greens (Zelení) and the New Social Democracy (Nová sociální demokracie), and partly also Volt, form a reform band above the midpoint. SOCDEM (the Social Democrats) sits somewhere between the nationalist-productivist and reform approaches. The Pirates (Piráti) and STAN (Mayors and Independents) fall into the zone of green liberalism and reformed green capitalism. The right-wing bloc clusters in the lower left, from ANO (Action of Dissatisfied Citizens, the dominant populist party) and TOP 09 through ODS (Civic Democratic Party) to SPD (Freedom and Direct Democracy) and Motoristé sobě (Motorists for Themselves), who stand closest to fossil capitalism.

ČSNS (Czech National Social Party) and SD-SN (Social Democracy – Social Network), as parts of the Stačilo! coalition, are marked with open points, as their programmatic documentation is too limited for reliable scoring; their placement is an expert estimate with low confidence.

Coalitions

The three coalition points are shown as indicative positions based on the dominant current or party, not as a simple average of coalition members. The former five-party coalition SPOLU (*Together*, a centre-right bloc) and PirSTAN (*Pirates and Mayors*) is pulled towards ODS, the fiscally liberal pole, and sits in the lower left. The current government of ANO, SPD and Motoristé sobě is pulled towards ANO. Although the

two blocs rhetorically define themselves against each other, they sit close together on the compass, reflecting the fact that their actual economic policies share a growth-oriented and market-based framework. Babiš's populism is somewhat more social than the purely fiscal conservatism of the five-party coalition, which is why the current government does not sit lower but remains in the same band.

The Stačilo! coalition is a special case. It is represented on the compass both as the subject Stačilo! and as the theoretical nationalist-productivist approach. The coalition itself is pulled by the weight of KSČM, but simultaneously dragged to the lower right by the influence of its right-wing members and associated figures not included in the diagram.

The compass as a work in progress

The compass is a simplification. Its two axes capture the question of growth and the question of systemic change, but do not directly represent other dimensions that ecosocialism considers essential: democracy vs. authoritarianism, and internationalism vs. nationalism, which also encompasses the classical left-right divide.

These dimensions are partly implied by the combination of both axes. Genuine development, understood as the development of capabilities and the fulfilment

of needs, cannot be development for some at the expense of others, and therefore carries within it equality and internationalism. Capitalism, meanwhile, cannot transcend the growth paradigm, so equality within it remains unachievable. The upper right pole thus implies democracy and international solidarity; the lower left, their opposite. This connection holds only partially, however. Subjects such as KSČM and Stačilo! score high on the systemic change axis yet remain far from the ecosocialist ideal, precisely because of their authoritarian tendencies (stemming from the application of the dictatorship of the proletariat) and nationalist inclinations (benefits for us, hostility to migrants and refugees), which the compass captures only indirectly, by placing them on the growth-oriented left side, since national or class inequality cannot be considered development of quality of life.

This version of the compass is a first step. Further work will add questions, refine the scoring methodology, broaden the range of sources and open the compass to wider discussion. The goal is not definitive classification of subjects, but a tool that helps distinguish democratic degrowth ecosocialism from currents that superficially resemble it but diverge from it in one or more essential parameters.

Political subjects mapped on the compass



With Kohei Saito on degrowth, Marx and the future of the left

The interview was first published on 28 September 2023 in [Alarm](#), a Czech left-wing online magazine. Kohei Saito of the University of Tokyo focuses on the ecological and ecosocialist dimensions of Karl Marx's thought. He argues that Marx's work contains ecological insights that have long been overlooked or misread, and that, while Marx himself did not explicitly advocate ecosocialism, his thinking can today inspire ecosocialist movements and policies addressing social and ecological injustice. He set out these findings in *Marx in the Anthropocene: Towards the Idea of Degrowth Communism*, later followed by *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*.

Saito presented his ideas at the 9th International Degrowth Conference in Zagreb in late August and early September 2023, where he was one of the keynote speakers, delivering a lecture entitled "Marx Meets Degrowth: Is It Possible?" The conference, which sought sustainable and just models of economy and society, drew hundreds of participants from around the world, including scientists, academics, activists and politicians. Antonín Hořčíka interviewed him on site. In the interview, Saito reflects on the relationship between degrowth and ecosocialism, and on what the legacy of the Prague Spring and socialism with a human face means today.



Photo: author

How are you finding the international degrowth conference here in Zagreb, especially given its broad scope and the diverse audience it attracts?

It's been great, especially due to the participation of many young people. That's something very different from Japan, where discussion about Marx's ideas often involve older people. I am very inspired by how this idea of degrowth is spreading among the younger generations and I'm very optimistic that we can build a new future together.

It also has a very broad background. Not just Marxists and activists, but also people from different disciplines: natural scientists, economists, philosophers. And it's good that the degrowth concept is becoming so attractive to so many people. This is very important for mobilizing people. After all, it is a political

idea, and this kind of attractiveness is something that we are actually looking for, right?

While it's encouraging to see such a wide audience, don't you feel that there's a lack of clear direction on implementing the "degrowth" idea?

We are all learning from each other. Degrowth is a relatively new idea and often faces criticism for its inconsistency. I understand your concerns about the lack of direction. What should we do now? It is a very tough question. But we are not here to establish a single political party. The aim of this conference is to exchange new ideas, get to know each other, and build international relationships. I think the conference is successful in this regard. However, I understand that we also need to focus on building new strategies, changing politics and transforming the

economic system. And that's something we should work on right now.

And in relation to that, how do you see the role of ecosocialism and eco-Marxism in positively influencing this movement?

Marxism has been here for many years. If we can overcome the antagonism between ecosocialism and degrowth, I think that Marxism, with its political activism, can contribute in various ways. Addressing your point about the missing strategy, I believe Marxism can concretise the degrowth policies, especially concerning the working class, which currently is not very attracted to the degrowth idea. By integrating Marxist principles with degrowth, we can develop strategies that appeal to a broader alliance and a wider movement against the capitalist system and for climate justice.

During your lecture, you mentioned that some eco-socialists promote growth. Isn't it contradictory for someone identifying as an eco-socialist to advocate for growth, perhaps in the form of green socialism? How should ecosocialism address this inconsistency?

Like degrowth, ecosocialism is also a very broad category. I recognize that some people are more optimistic about technological progress, and then they can have ecological socialism more associated with growth. But after reading various literature from the degrowth side, I came to realize that kind of eco-socialist growth is too optimistic. And so now I'm actively trying to convince my Marxist friends and colleagues to abandon that kind of technological optimism and try to look for another solution, which is degrowth communism. So, I think ecosocialism is a broader category where some people are more like growth-oriented ecosocialism, but I'm for degrowth communism, a vision of society without growth.

What is the difference between degrowth communism and the communism Marx wrote about? Does degrowth mean restriction and a reduction in our current level of civilisation, a narrowing of the diversity of human needs and a worsening situation for workers?

My idea of degrowth is not about returning to a pre-modern or primitive way of life. Marx himself argued for a return to a "higher form" of the archaic commune, taking into account the current state of productive forces. It is true that some current modes of production and consumption must be abandoned because of their negative impact on the environment. If a lifestyle includes fast fashion, fast food and SUVs, we should revise it. But new jobs, technologies and

products will emerge that enrich our lives.

Do you know that in Eastern Europe, especially in Czechia, the terms socialism and communism have negative connotations? Some of my friends are trying to restore the original meaning of these terms. Do you think it's worthwhile to do so, or should we seek alternative terminology?

Yes, I know. I come from Japan, where communism and socialism have different implications from those in Eastern Europe. When I talk to some people from Eastern Europe, like Czechs, they often criticize the use of the terms socialism and communism. It's a complicated situation. People should find something that is attractive to them and also historically and politically meaningful. My primary audience is Japanese.

However, when I came here to Croatia to share my ideas with people from different parts of the world, the reaction was rather positive. But I also understand that some people are like "no socialism, no communism, that's like Stalin, it's very authoritarian" and so on. So, if you think in that way, I respect it. The main thing is that we have to overcome capitalism, and then the post-capitalist society can be called whatever we want. I'm not dogmatic and I remain open to new ideas.

In the Czech Republic, we have some historical experience from the '60s, particularly from 1968 when the Russian army, along with other Warsaw Pact forces, intervened to suppress the attempt at "socialism with a human face". One of the primary ideas was to democratise the economy to better serve the people. Do you think that it is still relevant today?

Of course, democratizing the economy is very important. When I talk about the necessity for more planning, we cannot leave everything to the market, competition and price mechanism. We are currently in a very difficult situation due to the climate crisis. And we must invest in what is necessary and avoid what is unnecessary. So, we need planning, but planning is also the term that reminds people of this old Soviet kind of dictatorship. However, when I say communism, socialism, and planning, it's more about democratizing the economy. Today's capitalist economy is not democratic either. We should really seek a new vision of democratising the economy and in doing so, we shouldn't be afraid to criticise capitalism.

What is your view of democratic ecosocialism? Can it be the answer to the changes our society needs?

I believe democratic ecosocialism aligns closely with

my views. I want to make clear that this direction will not pursue infinite growth, but focuses on satisfying basic human needs and protecting the environment. We do not necessarily need to label it "degrowth communism." There can be various names and I am open to suggestions. The key is moving away from a capitalist system centred on constant expansion. With the establishment of socialism, we should abandon this tendency towards expansion. So it is basically degrowth.

The focus on the word "democratic" is crucial in promoting systemic revolutionary change. Active public participation is essential for change to be sustainable. Degrowth economics or other alternative economic models, such as the doughnut economy, require institutional transformation. While movements can engage people and exert pressure on existing institutions, they cannot replace them. So, the real question is: how can we effectively bring about institutional change?

That sounds quite rigid. We mentioned democratic ecosocialism in the context of degrowth. Currently, what we primarily have is a movement. We certainly need to institutionalize our demands. But I still think the movement itself is too small. Given the environmental crisis and the pervasive character of neoliberalism, especially post-pandemic, people are realizing that our society prioritizes profit over human lives.

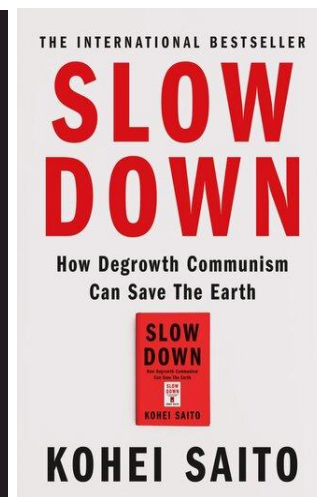
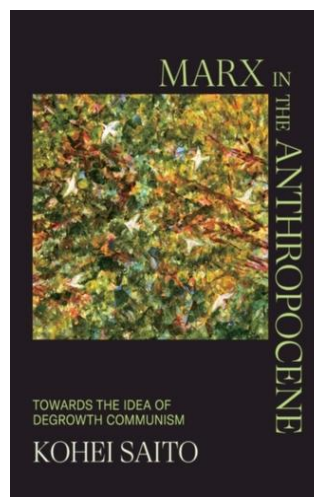
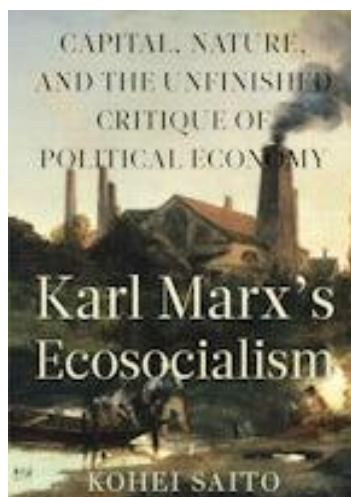
I think we have a chance. This experience of the Soviet Union made our future grim for many years. But after the economic crisis of 2008, we're now embracing new post-capitalist ideas without being burdened by memories of the Soviet era. As I mentioned earlier, a significant number of young people are unhesitant, if not eager, to support post-capitalist ideologies, marking a departure from past sentiments.

We often use GDP as the primary pro-growth indicator; it's almost like a magic word that currently dominates everything. Do you believe there's another way to evaluate societal progress?

There are already many indicators, such as the Human Development Index, Genuine Progress Indicator, and many others that actually take into account our happiness, education, equality, environmental impact, and so on. Maybe we can come up with a new one. I'm not an economist so I cannot make something by myself but it's relatively easy to imagine making things like that. It's just a political choice. If the government decides to put more importance on these new indicators than GDP, we have a different world. And I'm actually advocating for this in Japan because Japan has been stagnating in terms of GDP for more than 30 years so people are worried but actually, if you look at education, if you look at security, like safety, food, culture, these things are quite good in Japan. So why don't we use these measures and then promote them outside Japan? And some people are attracted to this kind of idea. So, I mean, we will try.

Finally, I would like to focus on your work. How did you discover the relation between Marx and ecology? I know that it is mostly described in your two books, but can you summarise?

I went to Germany and I started to look at Marx's notebooks. These notebooks, especially before and after *Capital*, contain a lot of material on natural sciences. And then I was wondering why Marx had read natural science in order to complete *Capital*? *Capital* is about capitalism and critical political economy. It has nothing to do with natural science. Of course, I thought in that way. But then, looking at these notebooks, I realized that he was actually pretty much interested in the issues of ecology, sustainability, and how capitalism actually undermines those conditions. And so, I realized, reading these notebooks,



that Marx was quite interested in ecological issues and then especially that dimension we didn't take into account in the 20th century. By integrating that kind of ecological insight into socialism, I think we can have a more democratic and sustainable type of post-capitalism. That's something we should do now, and we can have more development and more interaction with the degrowth people, learn from each other, and then build a bigger movement and then institutionalize our demands for the future.

I would like to ask one last question.

What will your next book be about?

My next book? So, I'm thinking about the issue of

planning. Planning is very important because we cannot leave everything to the market. So, how do we plan? We want to avoid the Soviet kind of planning, right? We need democratic planning or what is it? That's something that we should consider.

Is this meant as involving people directly in the planning process? The key is to leave some room for people's initiative, to find the right balance so that we don't repeat our negative experiences.

Yes, exactly.

Thank you very much.

Climate justice and just transition

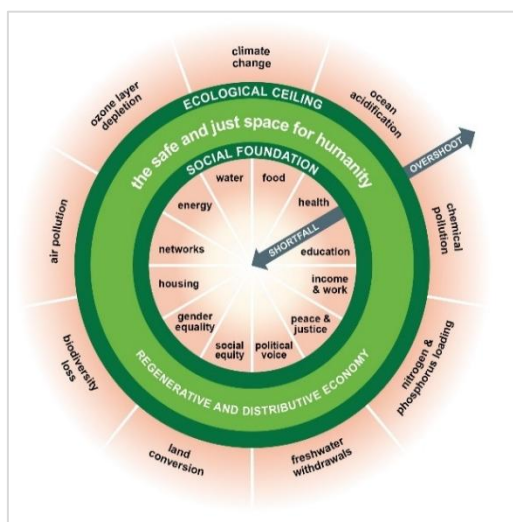
PETRA VALEŠ JELÍNKOVÁ

In this piece, Petra Valeš Jelínková explores environmental policies, social justice policies, and how they intersect. Before starting, it is worth noting that this intersection is not the exception but the rule: it touches on virtually everything — health, migration, spatial development, food, poverty. It is hard to find an area where the environmental and social dimensions are not connected. Environmental issues, and climate in particular, are always simultaneously social issues, and the policies we use to address them must reflect this.

The doughnut and the iceberg

The idea that environmental and social policies are in conflict is widespread. Yet looking at the Yellow Vests movement in France, the protests were not directed against climate measures as such, but against their perceived injustice.

Kate Raworth's doughnut economics offers an inspiring framework for thinking about this intersection. The goal is to find a space between two boundaries:



Source: Wikimedia Commons, Doughnut Economics

an inner social foundation — enough food, water, energy, education, equality, political representation and housing for all — and an outer ecological ceiling of planetary limits we must not exceed. The diagram shows how far those limits are already breached, and

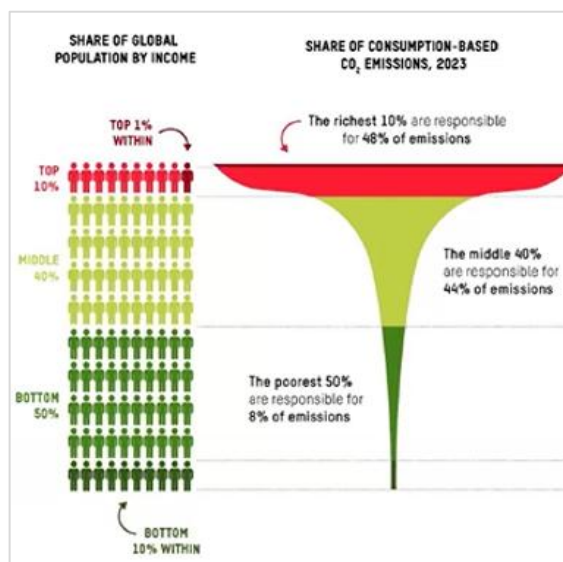
how many basic needs remain unmet. The ecological dimension extends well beyond climate: it includes pollution, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, freshwater depletion and ocean acidification.

A second useful model, rooted in ecofeminism and ecosocialism, is the iceberg model of the economy. Viewed through the lens of GDP, we see only capital and paid labour above the waterline. Below it lies unpaid care work, subsistence production, long-exploited colonies both external and internal, and the extent to which nature itself is being exploited. GDP measures only the tip of the iceberg. Taking everything below the waterline into account would give us very different metrics of development and of who benefits from what.

What is climate injustice?

Climate injustice may sound like a complex concept, but it comes down to a few simple questions: who is causing the climate crisis, who benefits from it, and who finds it harder or easier to cope with its consequences. As the European Economic and Social Committee noted back in 2017, climate justice treats global climate change as a political and ethical issue, not a purely ecological one: those who feel its impacts most acutely are the most vulnerable and the poorest, even though they bear the least responsibility for the emissions driving it.

Looking at CO2 emissions by income, the vast majority are produced by the top ten percent, and above all by the top one percent, while the poorest fifty percent of the world's population is responsible for just eight percent of emissions.



Source: Oxfam / Stockholm Environment Institute (SEI) - Global carbon inequality

This injustice has a clear colonial dimension: the global North versus the global South. But it is not only geopolitical. Large disparities exist within countries of the global North too, whether along class lines or between urban and rural areas, where the issue is not that cities are necessarily better off, but that they face different challenges and have different advantages.

Climate injustice falls hardest on the poorest groups in any given country. It is also heavily gendered: according to UN estimates, women make up seventy percent of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty worldwide. It always hits hardest those who are already vulnerable: older people, children, people with disabilities or chronic illness, migrants, people with less education, minorities. For women, pre-existing social inequalities compound with the climate and environmental crisis, deepening them further. Climate change is therefore far from a purely environmental or physical question; it is profoundly social, and the policies responding to it must reflect this.

The health impacts of climate change are also enormous across virtually every domain: not just heat and extreme weather, but linked phenomena such as freshwater scarcity, land loss, frequent fires and disasters, and the spread of insects and pests. Vulnerable groups bear a disproportionate burden: cardiovascular disease and increased mortality from heat,

respiratory problems, waterborne and vector-borne infections, injuries and deaths from extreme events, malnutrition and gastrointestinal illness, and mental health impacts including stress, anxiety, depression, environmental distress, worsening of existing conditions and loneliness. In many areas, these impacts are only beginning to be studied.

Maladaptation and greenwashing

A climate policy is inadequate if it shifts problems elsewhere, conflicts with social or other environmental goals, is cost-ineffective, creates lock-in, weakens actors' motivation, or simply does not work. This is either maladaptation or greenwashing.

Typical examples include air conditioning as the primary response to heat, concrete flood barriers instead of landscape-based solutions, large-scale seawater desalination, intensive irrigation instead of agroecology, artificial snowmaking, urban displacement and the emergence of luxury climate enclaves. Some such measures appear in national climate strategies.

Air conditioning illustrates the problem well: it is socially regressive (not everyone can afford it) and counterproductive (it accelerates the crisis it is meant to address). The same applies to concrete flood barriers: they address symptoms without tackling root causes and are not sustainable long-term.

A resilience approach

Covering only the most acute shocks is not enough: having a generator for blackouts or a misting fan to survive summer heat. Nor are standard adaptation measures like urban greening or irrigation systems sufficient. Meaningful adaptation requires building the overall capacity of society to withstand crises and shocks.

This means genuinely systemic measures: decentralised renewable energy based on sharing and community ownership, soil management that maintains water retention, restructuring cities, and strengthening local ties. In any crisis, environmental or otherwise, community and social connection are essential — yet this is consistently overlooked. Existing measures tend to be technocratic, piecemeal and incomplete, and actually prevent us from seeing the more complex, transformative solutions we need.



Source: Wikimedia Commons

Ecosocialism in culture and art

HANA POLANSKÁ-TUREČKOVÁ

In Czech independent and progressive culture, something like an implicit ecosocialism exists, but is almost never named as such. Many artistic and cultural practices challenge the logic of growth, competition and individualism, emphasising ecology, care, solidarity and public goods. The problem is that their systemic dimension often goes unnamed, in art itself and in art schools alike. Which raises the question: can we genuinely critique a system if we avoid naming it?

By ecosocialist I do not mean every art with an ecological theme, but approaches that link the climate crisis to a critique of capitalist growth, social inequality, ownership relations and the exploitation of people and nature. This connection is precisely what Czech cultural practice often lacks.

Why art and culture matter

Art brings things into public discourse through routes other than analysis or politics. It can shape imagination and sensibility, introduce new language and narratives, and show alternatives through experience. Political change does not begin only in parliament.

But culture can also function as a tool of cultural hegemony, generating silent consent to the system. Gramsci theorised this; Mark Fisher later coined the term "capitalist realism" for the difficulty of imagining any alternative to capitalism. This is why imagination has become so central to art today: we need to recover the capacity to envision different possibilities and bring them into public space.

Why art doesn't name it

Care, solidarity, interdependence and public goods are central to contemporary cultural practice. Internationally, these themes are well established in performance studies, visual studies and critical curatorial practice. In the Czech context they are present too, but unevenly across disciplines.

When I asked colleagues why they do not describe their work as ecosocialist, the answer was consistent: using the term directly risks being labelled an ideology or radical, making it harder to access schools, institutions or grants. One colleague described a

theatre piece on clothing recycling that she feared schools would reject if presented as an ecosocialist project. I encountered similar caution when an institution backed away from a debate involving Levice (the Left party) once the political label became explicit.

The postcommunist experience plays a role too. For many, socialism still evokes the former regime, and artists fear the "red stamp." The preferred language is sustainability, resilience, green transition or care. I call this soft sustainability: a language that can open important topics but often avoids direct critique of capitalism, ownership and power.

Neoliberal sustainability language

This is a language I try to critique. The sustainability lexicon often lacks any question of power, labour or ownership. Programme notes, festivals and grant calls can depoliticise ecological themes, turning them into cultural management. Institutions support ecology, care or wellbeing as long as these remain within a safe, broadly acceptable frame. Explicit critique of economic growth, ownership relations or the institutions themselves is considerably harder to sustain.

Artists are increasingly aware of this contradiction. Grants are written in the language of wellbeing, sustainability, care and community, because these are the approved terms. But this does not mean that working conditions, resource distribution or power relations in culture are actually changing. We can produce many works about the climate crisis, while the question remains whether they can also critique the system and institutions that help create that crisis and simultaneously fund the art.

The Czech context

Ecological themes are present in Czech art schools, festivals and cultural institutions, but tend to focus on operational questions: carbon footprint, recycling, energy saving, sustainable scenography. Questions of social inequality, labour, ownership and economic systems appear less often, usually wrapped in the general language of sustainability or care.

The picture varies across disciplines. The most explicit critique of capitalism, climate injustice and institutional power is found in visual art and curatorial theory, where Marxism, ecofeminism, postcolonial thought, degrowth and concepts such as the Anthropocene and Capitalocene are more common.



Photo: UMRUM / Kafkárna

Key platforms in this space include tranzit.cz and its exhibition space tranzitdisplay, which connects contemporary art, critical theory, education and activism, and publishes books and translations bringing radical political, feminist, Marxist and postcolonial thinking into the Czech context. The Degrowth initiative (*Nerůst*) explicitly links the ecological crisis to a critique of economic growth, social inequality and current modes of production and consumption. The biennial *Ve věci umění* (*In the Matter of Art*) opens questions of capitalism, care, institutions and unequal power. These spaces come closest to what might be called ecosocialist thinking in Czech cultural life. Anti-capitalist and ecologically oriented thought is present in visual art and critical theory, but rarely extends to other artistic disciplines or to the way cultural institutions organise labour, funding and decision-making.

Dance, the body and extractivism

My own field is dance and physical theatre, where similar questions connect with the body. Exhaustion, care, resistance to productivity and extractivism are recurring themes — extractivism understood not only as the mining of landscapes, natural resources or colonies, but of human bodies too. This brings practices of slowing down, collective work and somatics into art: a more attentive awareness of the body and its relationship to its surroundings.

Such practices can disrupt the pressure to perform and produce. But they are not automatically political critique. They can also become individual techniques for managing exhaustion, allowing people to keep functioning within the very conditions that produce it. This is where the difference lies between care as resistance and care as adaptation to neoliberalism.

In dance and performance, political or ecological positions sometimes manifest primarily at the level of lifestyle and aesthetics: reduced consumption, secondhand clothing, rejecting certain consumer habits. This can be meaningful, but without analysis of power, labour and the economic system, it remains easily individualistic.

Some artistic research today takes place in natural environments, working with landscape, embodiment and sensory awareness. Such art can transform audiences' experience and open different modes of perception. The question is not whether it has immediate measurable political impact, but whether this shift in sensibility remains an isolated aesthetic experience or connects with collective action, institutions and concrete critique of power. Without that connection, even critical art risks becoming a safe form of escape.

Abroad

In encounters with artists and colleagues from Berlin and similar international platforms, left-wing and anti-capitalist thinking is considerably more explicit in some Western European cultural contexts. Critique of capitalism is discussed more openly, while in the

Czech context this language remains burdened by fear of ideologisation, both in universities and in the arts sector.

The concept of climate justice is also used far more readily. It is not about protecting nature or individual choices like recycling or diet, but about power, inequality, historical responsibility and who bears the consequences of the climate crisis and who profits from the economic system.

Documenta offers one example of how such thinking enters curatorial work, performance, architecture and community art. Its recent editions have foregrounded collective modes of working, critique of Western institutions, resource sharing and alternatives to the competitive model of the art world. This does not make Documenta uniformly ecosocialist, but it shows that ecological, social and institutional critique can become part of how a major cultural event is conceived.

Cultural neoliberalism

Artists are paradigmatic precarious workers: they critique the system while functioning within its structures and often embodying it most perfectly. Dependent on short-term grants, required to be endlessly flexible, constantly pitching new projects, they frequently exploit themselves. They operate with words like creativity, sustainability, care and wellbeing, while their own working conditions directly contradict these values.

This creates a tension between the progressive content of art and the neoliberal conditions of its production. Bojana Kunst and André Lepecki have written compellingly about this in performance and dance studies. Critical themes are not enough if the cultural sector continues to run on competition, overload, unpaid labour and permanent precarity.

Artwashing and greenwashing

Art is easily appropriated as a tool for legitimising capital. Private institutions can host ecologically or socially themed exhibitions and support performances on critical subjects, while the origin of their funding may lie in businesses with high social or environmental costs. This is artwashing or greenwashing: culture helps create an image of social responsibility without changing the conditions from which the wealth was generated.

In the Czech context, debates have arisen around the capital origins of private cultural institutions. But the issue is not only moral condemnation of individual patrons. The structural question matters more: why is culture increasingly dependent on private capital, and what kinds of critique remain acceptable to institutions funded this way.

For artists, this raises a difficult question: whether to collaborate with such institutions or boycott them. Many lack sufficient work and resources, so they accept the collaboration on the grounds that at least

they can open an important topic. Yet they work for money from those whose economic activities may be part of the very problem their work critiques. It is an ongoing debate about cultural legitimacy, dependency and the possibilities of genuinely autonomous critique.

What is to be done?

Much Czech art today does not openly identify as ecosocialist. But cultural practices that challenge the logic of growth, competition and individualism do exist, opening space for a different social imagination. In visual art, critical theory and degrowth circles, these questions are already fairly explicit. In dance, theatre and the broader cultural sector, however, the language of care, sensibility and sustainability too often remains the endpoint rather than the starting

point.

I find compelling the idea that ecological art should ask less "how do we save the planet" and more "what economic and social system produces the climate crisis." I would add a further question: how is that system reproduced inside cultural institutions and in the working conditions of artists themselves?

The goal is not for every work to carry a political slogan or for every artist to identify as an ecosocialist. It is for ecological sensibility not to remain separate from questions of power, labour, ownership and social justice. That is when art can recover its subversive and avant-garde role: not only depicting the crisis, but helping us imagine and create a different way of living together.



Photo: N. Zajačiková / MLOKI



Photo: V. Brtnický / MLOKI

Ecosocialism worldwide: one goal, different ways

The global ecosocialist and left-wing scene is diverse. It brings together people and movements with different visions of ecological transformation: from the role of markets and planning to the relationship with growth and the question of who should drive change. We present three reports from the international scene: a position paper by American geographer Matt Huber delivered at the Ecosocialism 2023 conference in London, a report from this year's ecosocialist gathering in Brussels, and information on an upcoming ecosocialist conference in Australia. Together they illustrate the breadth of views within the contemporary ecosocialist movement.

Five theses on degrowth and ecosocialism

At the Ecosocialism 2023 conference in London, American geographer and Democratic Socialists of America member Matt Huber presented five theses critiquing the link between ecosocialism and degrowth.

1. Class power over production is key. Capital determines society's relationship to nature and will destroy it for profit until a comparable counterforce capable of controlling production stands against it.
2. The degrowth movement lacks this power. Its programme is shared only by a narrow educated layer, estimated at around two percent of the US population, almost exclusively people with or pursuing

doctorates.

3. *The problem with capitalism is not growth itself, but who controls resources and investment.* Degrowth advocates also want to shrink arms production and expand clean energy and housing — which is actually planning, not degrowth. Once society controls production, it can freely choose growth, making the "degrowth" label redundant.

4. *Democratic control of production need not mean across-the-board reduction.* 800 million people lack electricity, the renewable transition will require industrial expansion, and a growing global population will need more production, not less.

5. *Only the working class can challenge capital's power.* Not a narrow professional layer of degrowth sympathisers — as illustrated by the West Virginia teachers'

strike, which won its demands in two weeks, and the UAW, which secured representation in new electric vehicle plants.

Huber acknowledges common ground: both sides want democratic control of an economy oriented towards human needs and ecological sustainability rather than profit. But he argues the degrowth movement lacks the social base to build such power, and that time to change strategy is running out.

Source: Matt Huber, "Five Theses on Degrowth and Ecosocialism", Ecosocialism 2023, London, December 2023. Full text at medium.com/@Matthuber78

Many fronts, one struggle: report from the 7th ecosocialist gathering

In May 2026, over 250 participants from forty countries gathered at the Université libre de Bruxelles for the 7th International Ecosocialist Encounters, held since 2014. Dutch activist William van den Heuvel's report describes how three days of discussion on trade unions, care, debt, AI, Ukraine and Palestine shared a single thread: all these fronts stem from the same crisis and can only be reversed together.

The opening geopolitics debate named the grim backdrop: the European Green Deal is being systematically hollowed out and handed to capital, offering little to workers. The far right exploits this gap, framing environmental policy as an attack on ordinary people. Trade unions are therefore central. The Basque confederation ELA embeds emissions and energy commitments directly in collective bargaining and guarantees workers from closed polluting plants alternative employment or retraining. A recurring theme: the opposition between labour and environment is not a law of nature but a political choice.

The second major theme was degrowth and ecosocialism. Ten years ago these were seen as alternatives; today degrowth is increasingly part of a socialist programme. Daniel Tanuro argued that seven of nine planetary boundaries have already been breached: reducing consumption is not a matter of choice, but of whether it happens through planning or catastrophic collision. Without redistribution, feminist voices added, care work simply shifts onto women.

Michael Löwy described indigenous and peasant

movements as the vanguard of the ecological struggle. From Brazil came a concrete victory: actions during COP30 forced the government to cancel the privatisation of three Amazonian rivers. Ukrainian ecosocialists from Sotsialnyi Rukh described the ecological devastation of Putin's invasion and called for solidarity from below, sharing with other speakers a rejection of campism.

Löwy proposed "fossil fascism" for today's far right, which no longer denies climate change but turns against climate policy as an ally of the fossil industry. The Global Ecosocialist Network also presented itself as a worldwide platform for exchange. The next gathering will be in Colombia.

Source: William van den Heuvel, "Vele fronten, één strijd", *Grenzeloos*, 3 July 2026; English: [International Viewpoint](#), "Many Fronts, One Struggle", 7 July 2026.

Ecosocialism 2026: resistance, decolonisation, liberation

The Ecosocialism conference takes place in Brisbane on 11–13 September 2026, organised by Green Left, the Socialist Alliance, Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal and Resistance Books.

The programme opens with a panel on resistance to Trump's "new colonialism" with Brazilian economist Sabrina Fernandes and Indian activist N Sai Balaji. Panels cover sovereignty and solidarity, the rise of the far right from Modi to Trump to Australia's Hanson, debt and ecosocialism in the global South, resistance to the AUKUS military pact, and Generation Z revolts in the region. Ian Angus of Climate & Capitalism joins Fernandes for an "Ecosocialist perspectives" panel; a closing roundtable will draw the threads together.

Beyond climate: Palestinian solidarity, Western Sahara's independence, trans rights, art as a tool of change, and resistance to the "manosphere." Indigenous Australia is represented, including Auntie Sue Coleman-Haseldine, chair of the Australian anti-nuclear alliance. International guests include Helen Yaffe, historian of the Cuban revolution, and activists from Singapore, Malaysia, Pakistan and the Philippines.

Source: ecosocialism.org.au/agenda, Green Left (2026).



The Levice and the Budoucnost seek common ground on ecosocialism

PREPARATORY ECOSOCIALIST WORKING GROUP IN THE LEVICE

Around twenty members of Levice (the Left party) and Budoucnost (the Future movement) met online on 20 May 2025 for a debate on democratic degrowth ecosocialism, moderated by Antonín Hořčica.

Opening contributions

Five contributors opened the debate; their full texts appear elsewhere in this issue: Beil on the polycrisis, Vágner on human alienation from nature, Hořčica on five left-wing approaches to ecology and the political compass, Jelínková on climate justice, and Polanská-Turečková on ecosocialism in Czech culture.

What the discussion showed

Agreement on basic theses did not mean agreement on what to do next. Terminology was contested: is "degrowth" too unclear, "sustainability" too empty, "socialism" too historically loaded? The proposal to contest these terms rather than avoid them gained support. Others questioned whether economic

growth is really the primary driver of the climate crisis, and warned against a paternalistic approach to those who reject climate policy.

A second thread concerned communication: connecting the issue to concrete lived conditions — energy bills, housing, work, care — rather than general climate appeals. Practical proposals included joint public debates, printed materials, and a clear message that transformation costs should fall on corporations and the wealthy, not on workers.

What next

The debate confirmed shared interest in continuing. This issue is one result.

Join the ecosocialist working group

The founding online meeting of the ecosocialist working group in the Levice takes place on Monday 21 September 2026 at 19:00 CET via Zoom. The meeting is open not only to party members but to anyone drawn to the themes in this issue. To register and receive the link, fill in the form here: cloud.jsmelevice.cz



Ecosocialism around the world and in Czechia

Ecosocialism is not only theory but a living international movement with its own networks, conferences, journals and research projects. The overview below is a guide to the key ecosocialist and degrowth actors and events, at home and abroad.

Organisations, networks and journals worldwide

Global Ecosocialist Network (Foster, Angus, Löwy) · globalecosocialistnetwork.net; Network of Ecosocialist Encounters, meeting since 2014 alterecosoc.org; Monthly Review, US Marxist journal monthlyreview.org; Climate & Capitalism (Ian Angus); Emanzipation, German-language ecosocialist journal emanzipation.org; International Degrowth Network degrowth.info; Fridays for Future fridaysforfuture.org



Post-growth projects, EU initiatives and international conferences

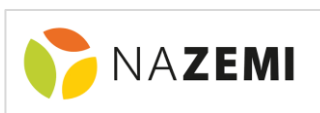
REAL – A Post-Growth Deal, largest EU post-growth research project (2023–2029, Kallis, Hickel, Steinberger) realpostgrowth.eu; MAPS – Models, Assessment, and Policies for Sustainability (Horizon Europe 2025–2028, O'Neill) mapsresearch.eu; Beyond Growth, cross-party European Parliament conference (2023) beyond-growth-2023.eu

Ecosocialist Encounters (7 conferences since 2014, last: Brussels May 2026); Ecosocialism conference (Green Left/Socialist Alliance), Brisbane 11–13 September 2026; ecosocialism.org.au; International Degrowth Conference: Zagreb 2023, Pontevedra 2024, Oslo 2025, next 2027 degrowth.info



Organisations and events in the Czech Republic

Re-set, platform for socio-ecological transformation re-set.cz; NaZemi and its Degrowth Team, coordinating the Czech degrowth working group nazemi.cz; Nerůst, degrowth information hub nerust.cz; Polykrize a socialismus, SOK conference with Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 7 November 2026, Prague.



Ecosocialist library

Democratic degrowth ecosocialism builds on a long tradition of ecological Marxism, degrowth economics and critical thinking about growth, ownership and justice. The titles below are a reading guide, from foundational works on Marx's ecology through contemporary degrowth manifestos to the Czech context and the legacy of democratic socialism.

Ecosocialism and ecological Marxism

John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology* (2000); Michael Löwy, *Ecosocialism* (2015); Ian Angus, *Facing the Anthropocene* (2016); Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism* (2017), *Marx in the Anthropocene* (2022), *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto* (2024), Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution* (2025, Czech)

Degrowth, post-growth and alternative economics

Jason Hickel, *Less Is More* (2020); Giorgos Kallis, *Degrowth* (2018); Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics* (2017); Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014)

Czech context and the legacy of democratic socialism

Michael Hauser, *Socialistický manifest* (2021, Czech); Naďa Johanisová, *Ekologická ekonomie* (2014, Czech); Eva Fraňková, *Lokální ekonomiky v souvislostech* (2015, Czech); Re-set, *Nová dohoda* (2022, Czech); Ota Šik, *Ekonomické reformy a demokratizace* (1987, Czech); Zdeněk Mlynář, *Mráz přichází z Kremlu* (1990, Czech)

