



Spotlight

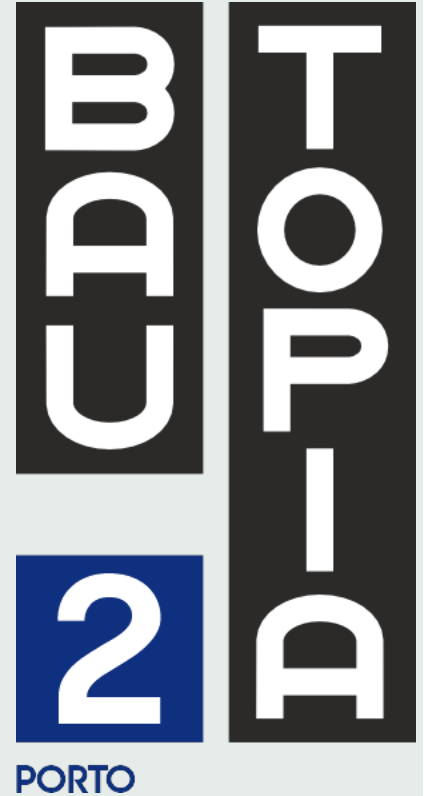
Degrowth leads the way to creativity

Daphne Dragona gave an inspiring speech on the future of the creative sector at the Bautopia 2 Conference by raising concepts such as degrowth, progress and changing pace.

Key Takeaways

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Glocalization in culture and creativity. Empowering the sectors through knowledge exchange.



The future suddenly started to appear dystopic. To confront it we incorporated new terms to improve the creative and cultural sector, including sustainability, innovation and development. But what do we really need to change in order to evolve while also maintaining our own inspirations and act in respect of the planet?

During her keynote speech at Bautopia 2 Daphne Dragona, freelance curator and writer, guided us through the journey of degrowth following three steps. The ruins of progress, degrowth in the arts and changing pace.

We live in the shadow of a planetary emergency. When the present very much feels intolerable and the future sometimes feels even impossible.

-Daphne Dragona

The uncertainty and difficulties our society is experiencing in the last decade has paused our lives and changed many habits and working practices. We are confronted with extreme weather phenomena, resource depletion, species extinction that will continue to affect the following generations. Dragona described the present saying that “We live in the shadow of a planetary emergency. When the present very much feels intolerable and the future sometimes feels even impossible.”

She also referred to different scholars from the fields of anthropology and sociology who have talked about the moment we live in by referring to it as a moment that we are invited to learn to live in the ruins.

Modernity naturalised concepts of finance progress and growth imposed on the ways community, survival and of course life have long been understood.

- María Belén Sáez de Ibarra, What about Activism

What these scholars underline is the need to find ways to learn to live in these ruins even if a new world somehow seems impossible. Dragona addressed the problem of growth by describing how time has become linear. “Our understanding of time also kind of changes, because time somehow becomes money, velocity, acceleration, different temporalities and rhythms. Life cycles are set aside, not taken into consideration. The problem with the ruins is that they are not safe places and they are not the same for all of us. Ruins might be meant metaphorically but they might also be meant very literally.”

In a global state of precarity, we don't have choices other than looking for life in this ruin.

- Anna Tsing, The Mushroom at the End of the World

Tsing referred to these ruins as the ruins of progress. “These are the ruins of the so called modern world and mostly privileged, western and careless and a world that made progress a principal and a goal and ignored the boundaries that were meant to be respected.” Dragona said.

The second part of the speech further explored degrowth in the sector of arts. The term first appeared in the mid '70s in a book called Ecology as Politics by Andre Corz. Dragona mentioned that unavoidably at some point human activity will meet nature's limits. "Here implies the problem of what growth in relation to competition and optimization brings along. Growth is to a great extent about respecting the limits of the planet, while also acknowledging the mutual dependencies on a social and ecological level and it very much has to do with principles of conviviality and coexistence."

After the pandemic and lockdowns degrowth became again a trending topic and there was a moment that felt like human activity paused for a while. Dragona explained how health became a priority and started to overshadow the economic activity. But as soon as the means were found it became very clear that one needed to return to the normality of productivity and progress. For artists the discussion included terms as exploitation, extractivism and sustainability principles.

The paradox and contradiction that we face is that we are still facing, at least in the fields of art, overproduction.

- Daphne Dragona

Dragona brought up two exhibitions that specifically focused on growth. In 2011 "The Metaphor of Growth" at the Kunstfort in Hanover questioned how and why growth is understood as desirable and natural. "The Very Hungry Caterpillar" took place at SAVVY Contemporary in Berlin and referred to the myth of endless consumption, exemplifying the problems of growth but discussing the paradoxes found in one of the most powerful economies, Germany.

"The paradox and contradiction that we face is that we are still facing, at least in the fields of art, overproduction. Overproduction of works, events, initiatives and the funds are not necessarily enough for how much it is being produced."

For the final part of her speech Dragona raised a question that would define the existence of growth. Can we really change pace?

To answer the question she brought two examples. Sakiya is an initiative and venue at Ramallah in Palestine initiated by two architects that invites people from different backgrounds and generations to work together and share their values and objectives.

The Forest Curriculum by artist and curator Abhijan Toto, is an itinerant system of pedagogy that proposes to work with academics, film makers, artists, musicians, activists, students and stakeholders to produce systems of sharing located knowledge, organised around the issue of a particular location and field of operation. In these two cases humans are no longer at the center. They create events that in a way encounter people who can learn, spend time together and interact.

How we grow and approach environmental goals, could make the cultural sector feel safe and secure.

- Daphne Dragona

Dragona explained that the common value between these projects is that they don't have a defined outcome, a fixed plan or a specific target. "They are more open and not outcome oriented. This is how the understanding of time changes. This is how they aim to create and sustain bonds between individuals, communities, species and worlds. They allow time for observation and acknowledgement."

Her speech was a wake up call about the need to change habits and redefine the way we think about work, life and sustenance. "Sustainability in a way implies some sort of exploitation. How we grow and approach environmental goals, could make the cultural sector feel safe and secure."

