The act of (de/re)growing: Prefiguring alternative organizational landscapes of socioecological transformations

Maria Ehrnström-Fuentes [iD]
Hanken School of Economics, Finland

Ingrid Biese
University of Helsinki, Finland

Abstract

How does transformative change that restructures humans' relations to the Earth come into being? The proposal for degrowth calls for a drastic reorganization of societies in order to deal with the current planetary socioecological and climate crises. Yet, there is a lack of understanding of how such socioecological transformations are brought into being. In this article, we examine prefigurative processes of socioecological transformations. We introduce the concept of the act of (de)growing, a prefigurative practice in which individuals engage at a personal level as they disentangle from organizational spaces governed by growth (act of degrowing), while entangling with nonhumans (cows, sheep, plants and seeds) to consciously make something else grow (act of growing) in the place that they inhabit. Drawing on 10 personal stories of degrowth in the Nordics, we identify four interlinked dimensions of socioecological transformations that bring new degrowth inspired organizational landscapes into being (disentangling from growth; organizing with nonhumans in place; the emergence of novel subjectivities in place; and the formation of translocal networks of support). We discuss the implications that these dispersed situated forms of socioecological transformations have for breaking with the systemic inertia of societal institutions built on economic growth.

Corresponding author:
Maria Ehrnström-Fuentes, Department of Management and Organization, Hanken School of Economics, Biblioteksatan 16, vasa, 65100, Finland.
Email: maria.ehrnstrom-fuentes@hanken.fi

Introduction

As the main organizing principle of societal life, the idea of unlimited economic growth
has captured collective imaginaries of how to frame and think about the economy, its
ecology and organizations (Asara et al., 2015; Banerjee et al., 2021; Barca et al., 2019;
Fournier, 2008). Despite widespread knowledge about the dire socioecological conse-
quences of the growth economy (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Daly, 2019; Hickel, 2020; Gills
and Hosseini, 2022; Morgan, 2020), the deep-seated shared beliefs that stem from its
imaginary enforce status-quo and prohibit alternative visions to surface (Barca et al.,
2019; Johnsen et al., 2017; Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021; Phillips and Jeanes, 2018). Thus,
there is an urgent need for scholarly work that examine alternative forms of organizing
and contribute to 'a new social imaginary and new theorizing that initially de-centres and
eventually reconceptualizes growth' (Banerjee et al., 2021: 342).

To address the root causes of the current socioecological and climate crises, proponents
of degrowth have called for a radical reorganization of society and the economy. Degrowth
refers to an 'equitable down-scaling of production and consumption that increases human
well-being and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and
long term' (Schneider et al., 2010: 512). The proposal for degrowth involves both changes
in macroeconomic policies (Kallis and March, 2015) and voluntary shifts in individual
desires, practices and imaginaries (Fournier, 2008) from within diverse contexts and institu-
tional arrangements (Barca et al., 2019; Buch-Hansen, 2018) and biophysical environments
(Heikkurinen, 2019). Organizational scholars have a long history of empirically studying
how societal change comes into being through organized collective action (de Bakker et al.,
2013) and alternative organizations (Parker et al., 2014; Zanoni et al., 2017). Yet to date,
theoretical and empirical engagements with degrowth-minded organizing processes of soci-
oecological change are still scarce (Banerjee et al., 2021; Ergene et al., 2020).

Recent debates on prefiguration point at a political activism that draws on horizontal,
autonomous and grassroots actions (Daskalaki, 2018; Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017;
Dinerstein, 2016; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Reedy et al., 2016; Reinecke, 2018; Siltanen
et al., 2015; Skoglund and Böhm, 2020), where movements seek to strategically con-
struct alternatives through everyday practices that build 'a hoped-for future in the pre-
sent' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476). Prefigurative organizing has the capacity to
radically transform people's identities and desires in ways that open up for different ways
to engage in the economy than what established norms and structures would allow
(Siltanen et al., 2015). Such changes at the personal level also enable alternative organi-
zational landscapes and economies to emerge (Farias, 2017; Reedy et al., 2016; Zanoni,
2020). Yet, although the extant research on prefigurative organization acknowledge the
importance of personal transformative experiences (Reinecke, 2018; Skoglund and
Böhm, 2020), they do not account for processes of socioecological change that include
both people and nonhuman actors.

How people engage in prefiguration together with nonhuman beings (e.g. plants, soil, water, animals and insects) is central to processes of socioecological change as their entanglements shape ecologies and the alternatives that emerge (Whatmore, 2002). This calls for a more-than-human approach[1] to study processes of change. More-than-human modes of enquiry neither presume that the dynamics of (organizational) change is an exclusively human achievement (Gherardi and Laasch, 2021) nor exclude the human from the ecology and the production of material things (Greenhough, 2014). For example, more-than-human geography (MTHG) conceives place as relational spaces in which humans, together with living nonhumans and non-living matters, continuously perform the world into being (Greenhough, 2014) in ways that also shape and reshape the actors themselves (Haraway, 2008; Whatmore, 2002). Thus, nature, or the biophysical environment, is not seen as separate from human practices, but also nonhumans, such as soil, water, animals, plants and stones in particular places (from here on referred to as ecology in place), constantly participate in organizing the conditions of (both human and nonhuman) life (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015). While organizational scholars have started to pay attention to these more-than-human aspects of organizing, particularly in the field of sustainability (e.g. Gherardi and Laasch, 2021; Gond and Nyberg, 2017; Moser et al., 2021), there is still a lack of research on system change processes that seek to break with growth as the main organizing principle of societal life (De Bakker et al., 2020).

The aim of this study is to explore the socioecological transformative processes of change that bring place-based degrowth worlds into being. Based on the experiences of 10 persons who have started to build more locally grounded, self-sufficient ecological ways of living in the Nordics, we provide an empirical case that illuminates the dynamics of organizational processes of socioecological transformations. Using a storytelling approach to analyze these 10 'living stories' (Boje, 2008), the study asks how do socioecolocial transformations that reconceptualize growth and restructure our relations to Earth come into being? We introduce the concept of the act of '(de/re)growing,'[2] as a transformative prefigurative practice in which 'degrowers' engage as they disentangle from organizational spaces governed by growth (an act of degrowing), while adopting new ways of consciously making something else grow (an act of regrowing) in the places in which they dwell. We examine how these 'degrowers' through the act of degrowing voluntarily disentangle from the growth world and engage in prefiguration with (non)human others to sustain their conditions of life in the ecology in which they dwell.

We identify four important dimensions of the socioecological transformations enacted through the act of degrowing. First, the transformative change process is initiated by a sense of disassociation with the larger system that creates the urge to disentangle from organizational spaces upheld by growth. Second, prefiguration through acts of degrowing is a transformational force that connects humans and nonhumans in place, enabling the emergence of a new alternative de/regrowing organizational landscape. Third, through these novel human-nonhuman entanglements forged in place, new more-than-human subjectivities emerge. Fourth, translocal networks of support emerge from shared learning and peer support, which connects the dispersed prefigurative organizational landscapes in a larger whole.

Based on these four dimensions, we argue that the processes of socioecological transformations brought into being through the prefigurative act of degrowing are diverse,

place-based and driven by personal trajectories of change, situated in the concrete lived-in reality in the landscapes where they dwell. The transformations involve shifts in how the degrowers perceive themselves and the world, and how they engage with change on a practical level. The engagements in prefigurative practices in the here and now are what shape the degrowers' subjectivities in place and enable new degrowth-inspired organizational landscapes to emerge. The act of degrowing is thus a prefigurative transformative process among humans and nonhumans that leads to the emergence of novel (more-than-human) subjectivities in the ecology of place, connected to other degrowing landscapes through translocal networks of shared learning and peer support.

This article is structured as follows. First, we discuss how previous debates on degrowth and management and organization studies (OMS) stress the importance of locally grounded grassroots processes of change in the prefiguration of alternatives to growth and corporate capitalism. We also point at the role of nonhumans in place as important actors in the processes of socioecological change and discuss what implications this shift towards more posthuman approaches has for theorizing transformative change as an act of degrowing. Then we present the methodology of this study, followed by the empirical findings from the interviews with 10 degrowers across the Nordics. We discuss how our findings differ from previous insights on prefigurative alternative organizing and conclude with the implications of our findings on current debates on prefigurative alternative organizations, degrowth and socioecological transformative change.

Organizing degrowth alternatives

The creation of alternatives is a recurring topic among both degrowth and organizational scholars. While initial degrowth debates focused on developing a vocabulary for a new era (D'Alisa et al., 2015) and future scenarios in rather abstract macro-economic terms (D'Alisa et al., 2015; Kallis and March, 2015; Latouche, 2010), more recent work deals with concrete empirical examples of movements pushing for degrowth in practice (Bloemmen et al., 2015; Jarvis, 2019; Johanisova et al., 2013; Joutsenvirta, 2016; Lloveras and Quinn, 2017; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019). Similarly, debates on alternative organizations explore new ways of organizing that do not reduce 'every activity to its monetary success' (Zanoni et al., 2017: 581) and organizing processes that are not based on the profit-maximizing logics of capitalist corporations (i.e. co-operatives and community-based organizations) (Elzenbaumer and Franz, 2018; Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021; Parker et al., 2014; Reedy et al., 2016). The empirical examples used to illustrate alternative and degrowth-inspired movements tend to overlap (e.g. intentional movements, eco-communities, social enterprises) (Böhm et al., 2015; Casey et al., 2020; Farias, 2017; Jarvis, 2019; Johanisova et al., 2013; Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021). Yet, while organizational scholars mostly focus on the social processes that build alternatives to capitalist organizations (Parker et al., 2014), degrowth scholars tend to explore how these same alternatives contribute to a degrowth-based economy respectful of planetary biophysical boundaries (Barca et al., 2019; Demaria et al., 2019; Lloveras et al., 2018).

In both debates, scholars stress prefigurative practices as the means for achieving transformational change (Carlsson and Manning, 2010; Casey et al., 2020; Gearey and Ravenscroft, 2019; Parker et al., 2014; Zanoni, 2020). The interplay between people and

their biophysical environment is also a common topic in both debates (Heikkurinen, 2019; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019; Phillips and Jeanes, 2018; Skoglund and Böhm, 2020; Vlasov, 2019; Vlasov et al., 2021). Recent research in both fields has also focused on the role of space/place in alternative/degrowth organizations (Demaria et al., 2019; Lloveras et al., 2018, 2021; Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019; Reedy et al., 2016; Reinecke, 2018). In particular, the literature on prefigurative organizing acknowledges the importance of 'exceptional spaces' (Reinecke, 2018) or 'negotiable spaces' (Reedy et al., 2016), which enable personal transformations and allow for opportunities to act in novel ways (Casey et al., 2020; Reinecke, 2018). We suggest that prefigurative forms of organizing and the interplay between people and their biophysical environment in place provide valuable insight to the transformative change processes involved in the act of degrowing.

Prefiguring alternatives in the here and now

Prefigurative politics is described as a form of strategically enacting change using every-day practices 'as building blocks to construct a hoped-for future in the present' (Chatterton and Pickerill, 2010: 476), where 'desired outcomes are created in the here and now rather than projected into the future' (Reedy et al., 2016: 1554). Thus, through their everyday practices in the here and now, prefigurative movements seek to build the alternatives they envision for the future (Dinerstein, 2016; Maeckelbergh, 2011; Yates, 2021).

When prefiguration is conceptualized as actions within some form of distinguishable organization (e.g. grassroots exchange networks, co-operatives, intentional communities), research suggests that the ties that bind its participants together emerge out of collective values (Elzenbaumer and Franz, 2018), shared identities (Reedy et al., 2016) and affective bonds (Farias, 2017). Skoglund and Böhm (2020) develop the concept of 'prefigurative partaking' as a more boundaryless and horizontal form of organizing that occurs both within and outside pre-existing organizations. In these constellations, it is the cause itself and the sharing of knowledge among participants that brings people together in collection action (Skoglund and Böhm, 2020). This type of boundaryless prefigurative organizing can emerge anywhere and at any time when people experience disruptions with what they previously thought was right, which leads them to question the established order and engage in pro-environmental activism (Skoglund and Böhm, 2020).

Yates (2021: 1044) summarizes the critique raised against prefigurative movements as 'a politics of no demands, goals or ideology,' which, in turn, prohibits the possibility of any real change. He suggests that examining how these movements reproduce (using resources, skills and relationships to replace dominant institutions), mobilize (creating conditions of new possibilities by interacting with others) and coordinate their actions (strategically identifying opportunities that lead to change) can give a more realistic view of what kinds of changes can be achieved though prefiguration (Yates, 2021). This view of politics suggests that only changes in the dominant structures of societies and their institutions count as 'real change' and that prefigurative actions at the personal level that change how people engage with the world through their everyday practices do not really count. Previous research on movements striving for autonomy from capitalist societies also suggest that it is impossible to escape the socioeconomic institutions and structures of the political economic system in which they are embedded (Böhm et al., 2010). Hence,

as in much of the social movement literature, the political success of movement actions is not measured based on the alternatives that are set in motion, but on how well movement members manage to influence (or delink from) the socioeconomic system in which they are embedded.

Yet, the strategic potential for change through prefiguration is not just about the kind of 'outward looking practices' (Siltanen et al., 2015: 265) that seek to impact existing organizations' social orders (Laamanen et al., 2019). Instead, prefiguration includes a strong element of a 'politics of possibilities' (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxvii; see also Siltanen et al., 2015; Zanoni et al., 2017) aimed at changing subjects, places and conditions of life for those involved (Gibson-Graham, 2006: xxvii). The potentials of this politics lie in the transformative changes in subjectivities that new social practices, desires and identifications can produce (Gibson-Graham, 2004; Zanoni, 2020). Thus, politics from this perspective is seen as 'an ethical practice of becoming' (Gibson-Graham, 2004: 27) focused on re-shaping the everyday practices that sustain the conditions of life (e.g. household, subsistence, sharing, gifting) but that are not necessarily recognized as part of the economy in a capitalist growth-based society (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Prefiguring alternatives through this ethical practice of becoming rests on the ability to cultivate and sustain novel alternative economic practices that fundamentally reframe our being in the world and the organizational institutions needed to support such alternatives (Zanoni, 2020; Zanoni et al., 2017). Thus, instead of resisting or trying to influence the existing structures, these movements engage in novel forms of 're-existences' beyond what the dominant social order and economic system would allow (Walsh, 2021).

Socioecological transformations in the ecology of place

Place, or the ecology of place, is central to theorizing prefigurative processes of socioecological change as it is in the situated practices in specific ecologies where prefiguration occurs. Gibson-Graham (2004) acknowledges the transformative potential of place as it has the capacity to dislocate the subject from familiar structures and narratives and act as a site of becoming where alternatives can emerge (Gibson-Graham, 2004). Previous research on prefigurative organizing has also stressed the importance of creating 'exceptional spaces' (Reinecke, 2018), 'negotiable spaces' (Reedy et al., 2016) or 'interstitial spaces' (Casey et al., 2020) where participants are able to 'cross boundaries between the actual world and the world they envision' (Casey et al., 2020: 1661). Yet, these studies focus on human organizing and do not account for the socioecological transformations that are central to degrowth-inspired forms of alternative organizing.

Previous research on how people transition towards degrowth ways of being have pointed out that nature plays an important role in the process of change. For example, Vlasov (2019) speaks of how a 'moral awakening' of those who come to recognize their connectedness to nature in place, in combination with the experience of anxiety and burn-out from a life lived in the growth-based world (Vlasov et al., 2021), acts as a catalyst for transformative change. Heikkurinen (2019: 542) refers to this type of change process as a 'metamorphosis' that 'requires the close interplay of the human and nature as a whole.' As Heikkurinen (2019: 542) notes, this kind of personal transformation 'fundamentally changes not only the identity and actions of humans, but those of being

itself.' Yet, these studies conceptualize nature as a passive and static entity rather than composed of a myriad of nonhuman actors that participate in and shape the conditions of life in the ecology in place.

Our understanding of how nonhumans contribute to socioecological transformations is informed by MTHG (Greenhough, 2014; Whatmore, 2002) and posthuman feminism (Braidotti, 2019; Haraway, 2008). The relational ontology that underpins these scholarly approaches to human-nature interaction rejects the prevalent idea of nature (or place, bio-physical environment) being ontologically fixed, transcendental and singular (Greenhough, 2014; Whatmore, 2002). Instead, nature is a relational achievement of assemblages among different human and nonhuman actors (Greenhough, 2014).

This more-than-human approach to studying socioecological processes suggest that the world is performed into being (or 'worlded') through an embodied and situated process that depends on how people actively engage with (living) materiality in the context in which interaction occurs (Haraway, 2008). Through the entanglement (and disentanglements) between humans and nonhumans, nature, just as place, is always open to the possibility of becoming otherwise (Greenhough, 2014). Thus, humans are the fruit of 'becoming with' (Haraway, 2008: 19) nonhuman others and relationally formed through their entanglements with each other (Haraway, 2008). Landscapes are not the production of a visual and static frame where meaning is projected (e.g. mapping), but actively produced by assemblages of actors that bind together stones, soil, water, trees, plants, animals and people, all with their own powers, desires and agencies to act (Greenhough, 2014; Whatmore, 2002). These assemblages are what we refer to as ecology in place; site-specific configurations that are always shaped by the connections among the different human and nonhuman actors that dwell in those places. What this means is that the world, economy or nature is not external to our own doings but shaped by the practices that entangle us with (the powers, desires and agencies of) nonhuman others in the ecology of place (Whatmore, 2002).

The re-subjectivity process that follows prefigurative actions is then not the result of human ingenuity and agency, but performed into being through the complex multiplicity of entanglements that include both humans and nonhumans in the ecology of place. As an ethical practice of becoming (Gibson-Graham, 2004), the transformative process of socioecological change does not just impact human subjectivities or the individuals' desires and identifications separated from nature. Instead, it is a practice that creates more-than-human subjectivities and spaces as the human actors 'become with' (Haraway, 2008) or entangle with nonhuman others in affirmative ways that enhance the conditions of (both human and nonhuman) life in place.

Thus, the prefigurative act of degrowing that leads to socioecological transformations depends on how humans, through their everyday practices, entangle with nonhumans in ways that sustain the conditions of life on other terms than those set by the growth world. The alternative economy that emerges from these practices is a form of 'ecological livelihood' (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015), which consists of an organizational landscape of multispecies communities, who through their interactions in place sustain each other's lives. In this study, we ask how such processes of socioecological transformations come into being and how such organizational landscapes emerge as a result of how people together with nonhuman actors prefigure their lived-in world in the places in which they dwell.

Next, drawing on the experiences of 10 persons who have opted out of full-time salaried employment to build a life more aligned with their ecology in place, we identify four stages in the process of socioecological transformation enacted through prefigurative acts of degrowing. As our empirical material shows, these prefigurative acts of degrowing are not unidirectional or straightforward processes of change; rather the degrowers experience an on-going struggle to disentangle themselves from the dominant growth system as they seek to regrow something new with both human and nonhuman others in the ecology of place in which they dwell.

Methodology

In this study, we examine the prefigurative transformative processes of socioecological change by relying on an approach to storytelling that does not separate between the socially constructed and the material reality of a ready-made world 'out there,' but that suggests that stories are manifestations of reality-making and are inseparable from the narrator's personal experiences and their embodied entanglements to the material, geographic conditions and relationships to (non)human others (Jørgensen, 2020). These kinds of 'living stories' (Boje, 2008) manifest the constantly emerging worlds of the narrators themselves and their practical experiences and engagements with these worlds (Jørgensen, 2020).

Data collection

The 10 stories in this study emerge from a podcast project about people who have started to build more locally grounded, self-sufficient ecological ways of living in the Nordics. These actors (referred to as degrowers, see Table 1) were identified through their engagements with the Degrowth and Transition Networks in Finland, Sweden and Norway. Owing to the format of the data collection, as both publicly released podcasts and as research material, we acknowledge that anonymity is difficult to achieve without compromising too much of the contextual relations. Therefore, our method is based on a process of double-consent by all the participants (pre-recording and post-writing).

The first seven stories were recorded in 2018 and 2019 at the degrowers' homes, as well as longitudinal observations and field notes from the first author's visits to the degrowers' project sites between 2017 and 2020. This enabled us to link the degrowers' stories with direct observations of the landscape being transformed. As a consequence of the travel restrictions caused by the Covid pandemic in 2020, the last three interviews were done online, substantiated with additional web-based materials (e.g. pictures and presentations shared on social media), which made visible how their landscapes were being transformed. Thus, although we primarily rely on recorded conversations, the totality of the material was collected through an ethnographic approach, where the actors were observed in the concrete settings of their activities (Silverman, 2016). The field notes included reflections on the human-nonhuman interactions and place-specific changes over time. What is common to all selected initiatives is that all degrowers had disconnected from the growth world either by quitting their day jobs or reducing time spent working as waged employees. This reduction in work hours signified that less money and time was spent in the growth

Table 1. Background information about interviewed degrowers.

Degrower	Background	Geography	Prefiguration project	Disentangled from
Johanna Kim	In her 40s, university degree in biology, works with education, rural roots. In his 40s, degree in IT, entrepreneur and musician.	Live in the outskirts of a small town in the southwest of Finland.	Restoration of an old house with the aim to be as self-sufficient regarding food and energy as possible. Homestead project includes greenhouse, vegetable garden, rabbits, chickens, solar panels and a small windmill.	Used to consume store bought food, live in a house in the city and work full time. They were very tied to the growth economy and had little influence over or impact on the environment.
Paula Eeva-Stiina	In her 60s, university degree in theology, homesteader. In her 60s, chapel master, homesteader.	Live in the rural outskirts of a middle-sized city in southern Finland.	Have invested their savings in a small house where they have built a life around environmental principles that also serve as information for others. They live off the land and heat the house in the winter with birch wood. They have a few sheep.	Used to work full-time for the church, saving money to be able to buy a house of their own without taking a loan.
Magdalena	In her 30s, university degree in the humanities, works with arts for the municipality.	Lives in a rural area, works in a middle-sized city in western Finland.	Planning to leave her day job to set up a market garden based on permaculture principles to grow vegetables for local needs.	Full-time job at an art museum at the time of the interview. She transitioned to gardening education soon after the interview.
Mathias	In his 40s, university degree in the humanities, artist, writer, construction worker.	Lives in a rural area of western Finland.	Experiments with rubbish for art creation, vegetable garden for his own needs, technological innovations for small-scale gardening. Planning to move back to his homestead and live life according to environmental principles.	Has since his youth thought about 'how to hack the system' so that he does not need to give too much of his time to acquiring money. Disturbed by unsustainable practices in conventional agriculture and in the construction sector, where he has had part-time jobs.
Kaj	In his 50s, vocational education in gardening, homesteader.	Lives in a rural area outside a middle-sized city in western Finland.	Has set up a garden project for his family's own needs and sells some of his produce at a village market every fall.	Used to have a full-time job as cemetery gardener. Left his job owing to health reasons.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Degrower	Background	Geography	Prefiguration project	Disentangled from
Jessica	In her 30s, veterinary training and farm worker.	Lives in a rural area outside a middle-sized city in western Finland.	Works with her animals to build a small family farm that promotes the health of the people, animals and the landscape, relearning old ways of food production and preservation.	Used to work at farms as a seasonal worker and has also worked with homeopathic veterinaries (in Sweden).
Kristina	In her 40s.	Lives in a rural area on the west coast of Sweden.	Has started a small family farm that is more of a life project than a business. Works to enhance the wellbeing of humans and nonhumans and the vitality of the soil and the ecosystem. As a part of that, the farm produces high-quality raw materials like meat, eggs and vegetables packed with nutrition and flavour.	Worked full time as physiotherapist at a large hospital in a nearby large city.
Philipp	In his 40s.	Lives in a rural area in the central part of Sweden.	Works to develop an edible landscape, a food forest of perennial plants that, with very little input, can provide his community with food.	An environmental engineer who worked in the industry and academia before realizing that life is too short to spend it in an office. He quit his job and turned his passion for edible perennial plants into a livelihood, writing books and teaching on the topic.
Andrew	In his 40s.	Lives in rural area of Norway.	Works with ecology and has a greenhouse with deep adaption to climate change. Is an importer and steward of seeds that risk extinction owing to the rapidly changing climate.	Used to work at multinational corporations as an IT specialist.
David	In his 40s.	Lives in rural area in the central part of Sweden.	Has left the urban life in Stockholm to reduce his own fossil fuel dependency and ecological impact. Dedicates his time to set up a partially self-sufficient household economy, including sheep and vegetable production. Works with the community to establish networks of support.	Worked as a journalist and wrote books on issues related to the environment. Grew up and lived in the centre of Stockholm, which was an important part of his identity.

economy while the degrowers dedicated their time to create new ways of sustaining their life connected to nonhumans in place (see Table 1).

Data analysis

We used the hermeneutic triad (Hernadi, 1987) to examine the narratives in three phases: (1) explication (reading the transcripts to understand what is being said in the narrative); (2) explanation (understanding how and why it is so); and (3) exploration (creating an understanding of what this means) (Czarniawska, 2004). After transcribing the narratives, we read through the transcripts individually, focusing on the prefigurative practices found in each story. After this, we compared notes and made connections to find patterns across the stories, which we categorized and colour coded. All the stories included references to 'living in' or 'moving between' two very different ways of being and engaging with the world, which became the main theme we focused on in our analysis. At this point, we read the transcripts carefully and, in some cases, also listened to the recordings to be able to detect nonverbal communicative nuances in mood and emotion in order to create a deeper understanding of what was said in the degrowers' narratives and why. This led us, in the final phase, to explore and focus on the disconnection from organizing processes tied to the growth economy, and the specific connection with nonhumans in place that enabled the degrowers to disentangle and create new degrowing organizational landscapes.

In the analysis, we focus on how the worlds of the degrowers change as they disentangle from the relations that constitute the growth world and start connecting with the living landscape of their homes. We also focus on how degrowth is enacted as a prefigurative practice and what they do in their everyday lives as they delink from the organizational spaces governed by growth and start building something new in collaboration with nonhumans in place. Special attention is paid to how their places, 'realities' or 'worlds' are transformed through the practices in which they engage. We present examples of reducing reliance on monetary exchange, connections with grazing animals (cows and sheep) to restore soil and collect wool, seed saving, wood chopping for heating, tapping, making use of home-made, small-scale technological innovations, and community building based on knowledge sharing and peer support. Thus, to examine degrowth as a prefigurative practice, we focus on the practices that create particular configurations of sustaining lives in place, which contribute to the emergence of post-growth worlds.

This led us, in the final phase, to explore and focus on the disconnection from organizing processes tied to the growth economy, and the specific connection with nonhumans in place that enabled the degrowers to disentangle and create new degrowing organizational landscapes. We discerned and pinpointed four clear recurring themes across the 10 narratives. These themes described the different phases of the degrowers transformative processes as they disentangled from the world of growth and started creating new ways of being in place. It is around these four themes that we also organize our analysis.

Findings

In the following section, we explore the degrowers stories of personal transformations. We organized our analysis around four central themes that emerge out of all 10 stories:

(1) moments when the degrowers decide to disentangle from organizational spaces governed by growth; (2) the creation of alternatives by growing something new through prefiguration with nonhumans; (3) navigating the divide in-between growth and degrowing spaces; and (4) connecting with others to build community across degrowing spaces.

Disentangling from growth

The degrowers are all in the process of disentangling from spaces governed by growth, which they strongly believe no longer are a viable or sustainable way forward. They have started to change their ways of being and doing so in a way that, to varying degrees, they are less dependent on the growth economy for their own existence. Some are almost completely disentangled from the growth economy and others dream of being so one day. Some avoid large investments that require them to take loans (and thus build their economic activities around growth), while still being dependent on capitalist market mechanisms to a certain degree. They all share a desire to engage in prefigurative actions in order to create new organizational landscapes that are not structured by growth but by their own capacity to sustain and revitalize the lives of themselves and (non)human others in the places where they live. Kim comments on how it all started:

> [O]ne started to realize how dependent one was on a lot of things concerning all the basic stuff to be able to live, and there came the food of course, and it was also connected with the economy and large companies . . . like we were served a bunch of things that were mostly designed to create profit for someone else . . . and we were quite horrified. (Kim)

Kristina also notes that it was the vulnerabilities in the food sector that made her family rethink how they wanted to live their lives:

> It felt scary that our basic need for food is so fragile when we get food from the other side of the world and we depend on so many different systems where oil is a part of it but also digital systems, electricity and transport and everything . . . It felt like creating the food where we live will give us some security for an uncertain future. (Kristina)

For Kaj, the decision to take the final step to quit his job and dedicate his time to growing his own food was a result of work-related stress, a hectic lifestyle and exhaustion. He came to a point when he realized he just could not go on the way he had and this became the motivating factor to look for ways to disentangle from the growth economy and from being reliant on salaried employment. For Philipp and Andrew, on the other hand, the urge to transform their own lives came from insights about the dire effects of climate change:

> I worked with [a big energy company's] climate strategy . . . I got to read a lot of interesting works on where we are going, it was kind of gloomy what they were projecting . . . So part of this decision to move out into the countryside was also driven by fear, that society is not very sustainable. We might have to grow our own food and during our lifetime there might be food shortages, energy shortages. (Philipp)

> I was very techno optimistic . . . believing that solar panels and windmills and electric cars would be a huge answer to global warming. Gradually, it dawned on me that this isn't a deep enough change . . . [There were] more and more signs that . . . this isn't going to happen in time . . . People don't want to talk about it . . . Going through that realization is extremely depressing and really makes you wonder where you should put your energy and that's what happened to me. (Andrew)

David experienced a similar process of change when he started to ask himself how the climate question should be solved. The need to radically change his own life came when he realized that 'technological fixes within the limits of the system will not solve this crisis', rather he started to see that there was 'a cultural story about how everything should be larger and faster that needed to be broken down' (David):

> [These insights] started to break down my urban identity and contributed to the emergence of a new identity that was not only attached to another place centred around the countryside, but also included another approach to life itself that depended on what feels meaningful and my relations to nature. These kinds of things slowly pushed me out of the city towards more rural contexts. (David)

For several of the degrowers, the process of change has been gradual, spanning over a long period of time. At the time of the interview, Mathias was still on his journey. He had temporarily opted back in to the growth economy and got a job in construction in order to make enough money to later be able to realize his dream of getting his own place, where he could live sustainably and grow his own food:

> The reason for this work right now is to be able to buy my own land to be able to grow more long term and I want my own forest . . . We are talking about my ideology, we are talking about how one uses one's lifetime, I put . . . every work day on this, these are expensive 15 euros per hour. (Mathias)

For Paula and Eeva-Stiina, not being dependent on the growth economy had been a dream since they were children. However, it was not until they were adults and had already been in salaried employment for a number of years, that they started realizing their dream of acquiring a place where they could grow their own food and live according to their own worldview. For them, finding a place where they could coexist with animals was part of their transformative process.

In fact, the role of place, in its various dimensions, was central in all the degrowers' search for a life that would be less dependent on the growth economy. The deep transformational processes that the degrowers experienced as they disentangled from the growth world did not just involve individual change, but was directly tied to the ecology of the place where they live.

Regrowing something new – prefiguration with nonhumans in place

All the degrowers' accounts suggest that their connection with nonhumans in place was central to their prefigurative practices as they transitioned out of the growth economy. They all acknowledged that their relations to nonhumans, such as forests, plants, insects, animals and soils, played an important part in how they started to create new conditions

for life for themselves. Many note that the path that they are on is one of acquiring knowledge about how to live off the land. For Johanna and Kim, learning how to grow food has been more important than becoming self-sufficient:

> It is maybe more about knowledge than producing food for oneself. More about learning how it is done and how different plants work and how much work it entails. That is why we haven't tried to reach any sort of self-sufficiency . . . We realized very quickly that we know so little that it [will] take longer [for us] to understand. (Kim)

David also notes that his initial prefigurative work involved acquiring the right kind of knowledge or what he refers to as 'earth-based knowledges':

> To a large extent it is a kind of knowledge project to regain these earth-based knowledges; how you can survive in a place and what the earth gives you. And it is very satisfying [to learn these things] especially for a person like me who did not grow up in this environment, for whom a lot of this is new, to really acquire these knowledges. (David)

For Kristina, an essential part of her prefigurative work has been 'to learn how to collaborate with the animals, to learn to read them and understand their needs' in order to revitalize the landscape. She notes the effects that this had had on the wider landscape of her village:

> The people around us say that the landscape has started to become very beautiful. It's really that they see that something is happening in the landscape . . . They explain it as a missing piece of the puzzle that is back . . . It was missed but they did not really understand how much before they got it back. (Kristina)

This interdependency between the collaborative actions with other nonhuman living beings and the conditions of life is also present in Philipp's prefigurative work that centres around the creation of a food forest ecosystem that revitalizes itself from year to year. He explains:

> [I] create edible ecosystems that are adapted to each site and what the site can deliver and what can be made there, so it's growing with the cycles and processes of nature rather than against it and that is probably the biggest contrast to normal gardening where . . . it's a lot of fighting against natural processes. [Creating] a forest garden means I try to embrace those natural processes. (Philipp)

The suggestion that his work with the forest garden follows 'natural processes' indicates that Philipp' prefigurative practices involve collaboration with different species in the garden that shape the conditions of (all) life in affirmative ways. He also notes how the landscape has responded in beneficial ways in a short time to his prefigurative work:

> Just after a couple of years since we started, biodiversity is exploding. Once we stopped cutting the hay and just let nature go through its cycles we saw that a lot of flowers are coming back and all the trees that we planted, all the shrubs we planted, all the mulch we added, the ponds we dug, it was just teaming with life very quickly. (Philipp)

Seeds are another nonhuman actor with which several degrowers connect in their regenerative work. For example, Andrew refers to himself and his role in a community seed

bank as a keystone species. By working with seeds from plants from southern climates he supports the evolution of a resilient food system adjusted to the radical shifts in weather patterns caused by climate change:

> Keystone individuals are for instance an oak tree, where hundreds of species are linked to that species. Humans have played that role of a keystone species . . . But then at some point we sort of disconnected ourselves from nature and . . . forgot that our role was to use our consciousness to enhance ecology and to link with ecology in ways that strengthen the web of life. Community seed banks are all about enhancing ecologies by making sure that diversity is protected through webs of knowledge and good practices. (Andrew)

These examples illustrate how prefiguration is not just a human endeavour but how the prefigurative work connects degrowers with nonhumans in ways that have ripple effects on the organizational landscapes that they co-create. How the degrowers connect with grazing cows, forests, seeds, soils and grass has direct impacts on the conditions of (all) life created by the prefigurative practices.

The relational bonds forged among humans and nonhumans in place also impact how people see themselves as part of the larger web of life. As David explains:

> To live with animals creates a kind of relation to the nonhuman world in a very concrete way. For example, you get this incredible contact with the sheep that have been with you for many years. You get to know each other and you start noticing how they know you and greet you when you pass by, communicate with you in different ways. This [bond to nonhumans] has been a very big part of my journey. (David)

We also noted a clear tension in some of the degrowers' relation to the more-than-human world between this kind of more collaborative (posthuman) prefigurative work, in which nonhumans co-perform the prefigurative work together with the degrowers, and a more 'traditional' viewpoint, where the trees and the land are seen as resources to be used for economic gains. Mathias explains this tension:

> [A]ll these current models that are for . . . economic profit that you use for agriculture and forestry, I wouldn't want to do that because I simply don't see it as ecologically sustainable . . . I want to go back to old-fashioned small-scale forestry where you chop down trees selectively from year to year and have an eternal forest that grows and develops all the time and preferably one that corresponds to my needs because I partly need fire wood and I partly need lumber for my own building projects. (Mathias)

This excerpt shows that although the transformative change of the act of degrowing may involve radically transformed relations to the nonhuman world, for those doing this kind of prefigurative work, it involves constant negotiations about what kind of relations should be forged to the nonhumans.

Navigating in-between worlds

Besides working to set up novel ways of being, through enhancing the ecology and the conditions of life in place, the degrowers also reflected on how their own changing ways

of relating to the economy, structured around a mindset of growth, created certain challenges when navigating in-between worlds. These challenges are also expressions of the changing subjectivities and the negotiations that the degrowers experience as they navigate between the growth and degrowth world.

These personal struggles make it evident how detrimentally different the values, ideals and metrics of the degrowers' worlds are to those of the growth world. What is considered poor in the growth economy may be considered rich in a degrowth world and vice versa. These differences in how the degrowers relate to their own lived-in world vis-a-vis the growth world also creates certain challenges when they need to translate their own ways of sustaining their lives to contexts governed by growth ideals. When people visit the degrowers, they cannot always comprehend what they are doing as it does not correspond to the way 'things are done' in the growth world.

For example, Paula and Eeva-Stiina are almost completely self-sufficient. They only need some money to purchase products that they cannot grow or produce themselves. They solve this minimal need for money by intermittently taking temporary jobs in the growth economy. Many people they know assume that their paid jobs are their 'real' jobs and the work on their property is rather a hobby done in their free time. However, their own understanding of what their 'real' work is has gradually changed over time. Eeva-Stiina comments:

> I have started saying that this is the work we do because we can work for 16 hours a day [on the farm] all summer. I have experienced that I have come to some school to work one day a week and then someone says well now you have started working. So I have said yes, now I have started working, like [what we do on the farm] doesn't count as work. And I have gone along with it myself that what I do is ideological, but it is actually our job. (Eeva-Stiina)

This excerpt shows how novel reframings of what the degrowers consider to be a real job and what is part of their own economy emerge over time. This shift in how the degrowers relate to their work and the economy also influences their subjectivities and ways of relating to the world. David explains the shift he has experienced in the view of himself since he moved out of the big city:

> My identity is today much more connected to the place in which I live, the landscape that surrounds me. The life that takes place in the landscape, the nonhuman life that takes place here and the people that live nearby. It is not like I identify 100 percent with the people that live in the village but there is a big difference to how it was when I lived in Stockholm. My identity is more diverse. I used to think of who I am through my wage work and I spent most of my time with other journalists and if somebody asked me who I am, I would say I am a journalist, my profession defined me. Today, I still have a professional identity but now my identity is more blended with other things, like I grow food, I go out to hunt. These things make my identity broader. (David)

This excerpt makes clearly visible the re-subjectivation process of socioecological transformations. David's changing view of himself depends both on disentangling from established normative institutions in the growth world (where he defined himself based on his

professional identity) and on the novel connections with nonhumans in place (other beings that contribute to his experience of growing food and hunting). To strengthen the novel subjectivities emerging out of the various acts of degrowth over time, we find that it is essential that the degrowers connect within like-minded communities of support, which is the next and final part of the analysis of our findings.

Re-subjectivation through translocal networks of shared learning and peer support

The degrowers reflected on different forms of organizational support and their connections to others. Especially those degrowers who spend a lot of time in the growth world expressed a need to regularly be in touch with fellow degrowers in order to sustain their new realities and to remind themselves that what they are dreaming of and working for really is possible. Magdalena, Mathias and Kaj comment:

> To do this full out I need to see that others also do this. I think that is the thing. To feel the strength of community and networks. (Magdalena)

> When you step out of the box it is a bit scary. Your economy and everything is so different that there is a need to have some sort of collective where you feel coherence, the feeling of being part of a pattern . . . even if you don't meet every day, just knowing that they are there helps a lot. (Mathias)

> [I]t is good to have a social community. It is incredibly important because . . . you quickly start to feel quite alone and different . . . if you have to be alone all the time you start to sort of doubt what you are doing . . . Then it is good to have a support group or at least a social context where you can meet people who think like you. (Kaj)

Others had experiences of strengthening their degrowing visions and practices by creating a community of like-minded people in nearby villages:

> We are several small villages that have . . . created a common village association and tried to increase the collaboration between the small villages along the river . . . Now we are several here who are interested in changing our way of life and trying to find more environmentally friendly alternatives to live and come closer to nature . . . (Kaj)

Community support was also important to sustain the actual prefigurative actions that the degrowers do in their own organizational landscape. Kristina explains:

> The villagers where we live have been very supportive and positive to our ideas to place the animals here in this landscape . . . They help with the cows in the most extraordinary way . . . It feels like the cows are mine but the whole village cares for them and that is really fantastic. I have been thinking a lot about that . . . that this [farm] is only possible because of the people we have around us. (Kristina)

David also notes that connections to others nearby who also have sheep is important:

> In these villages we are maybe 6–7 households with sheep. Just around here, we are three families that have sheep. This means that we can collaborate in different ways. We meet at each other's place and help each other out, which is perfect because then you both get things done and spend time together. You get a quite good sharing of knowledge and experiences automatically when you work together like this. (David)

Connections with others beyond the local sphere were also considered essential to sustain the different prefigurative actions in place. Besides the local groups of like-minded peers, the degrowers engaged in several loosely connected networks both at the national and international level (e.g. the transition network, degrowth associations, community seed bank associations, food forest networks, regenerative farming networks). Philipp notes that passing on the knowledge he has acquired through his own work with forest gardens has led to the spread of his ideas to new networks wherein people share knowledges about how to set up food forests:

> We have probably six or seven forest gardens in the making here and more and more people get inspired to try forest gardening. We also now have a folk high school educational program on forest gardening . . . and there are a few people from the area who are students now . . . So, it's very inspiring to see all these projects popping up. (Philipp)

Andrew has participated in setting up a national network of community seed banks to share knowledge on the adaptation of novel seeds to Norwegian ecology: 'We established a movement and I ended up on the board. And I've been on the board ever since in one form or another. Now I'm the international representative for the Norwegian Seed Savers' (Andrew).

The connection to other like-minded peers, both in the nearby villages and through international networks of support, did not exist prior to the prefigurative actions. Instead, these connections to others slowly emerged as a result of the prefigurations in each of the degrowing landscape, which over time creates multiple, different translocal networks of degrowing organizational landscapes. The degrowers building these landscapes engage in similar practices of, for example, setting up food forests, regenerative farms, community seed banks and self-sufficiency projects. Their reflection on the importance of these connections across degrowing locations suggests that these networks provide the degrowers with both mental and practical support to remain committed to their prefigurative causes.

Discussion

The aim of this study is to explore the prefigurative processes of socioecological transformations that bring place-based degrowth worlds into being. The prefigurative practices associated with the act of degrowing that we have presented do not emerge out of a strategic, intentional and unified collective effort to transform society, as has been discussed in previous research on prefigurative organizations (e.g. Farias, 2017;
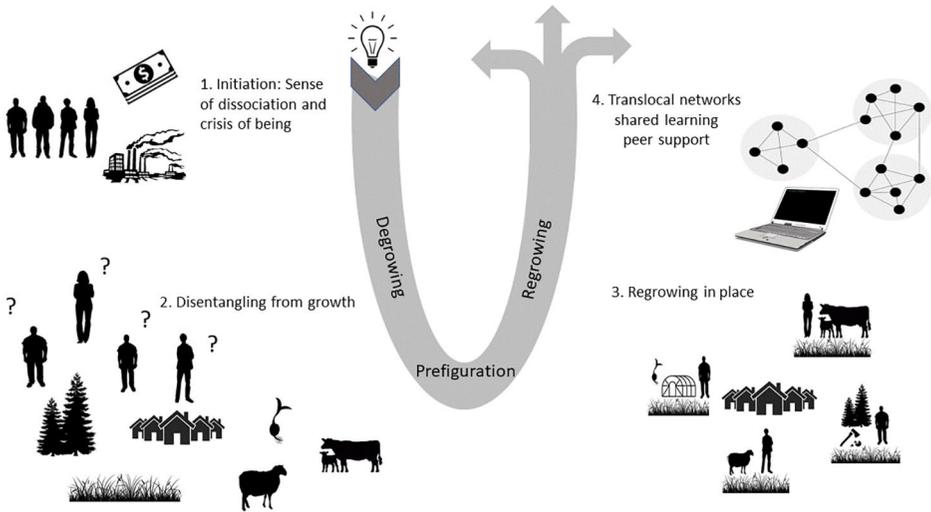
Figure 1. Socioecological transformations through acts of degrowing.

Maeckelbergh, 2011; Reinecke, 2018; Skoglund and Böhm, 2020). In line with Skoglund and Böhm's (2020) recent study on prefigurative partaking, we find that the type of change process that we have presented can occur anywhere, at any time, as people experience disruptions in what they regard as sensible and take action to initiate change in their own lives. These change processes are not prefigured through pre-existing organizations, such as social, grassroots or intentional movements (Daskalaki et al., 2019; Farias, 2017; Reedy et al., 2016; Reinecke, 2018). Instead, we identified four dimensions in the process of socioecological transformations that emerge from prefigurative acts of degrowing and that shape the alternative organizational landscape being formed (see Figure 1).

First, the process is initiated by moments of disassociation with the larger system. It is in these moments when the degrowers start questioning their role and place in the world (Stage 1 in Figure 1). These disruptions in how they relate to the economy and the world around them was not initiated simply by 'ruptures in what was previously thought' (Ranciere cited in Skoglund and Böhm, 2020: 1262), but by a deeper sense of feeling at odds with the system in which they were raised and trained, and by a conscious rejection of the effects that this system has inflicted on their own health and that of the planet (Vlasov et al., 2021). It is the experience of a profound crisis of being – ontologically speaking (Heikkurinen, 2019) – that led the degrowers to question their role and place in the world.

Second, from this sense of being uncomfortable with how things are, emerged the need to degrow, an intentional and transformative process through which the degrowers seek to change how they relate to and sustain their world by disentangling from organizational spaces governed by growth (Stage 2 in Figure 1). They give up the world in which they used to feel at home in very concrete ways to radically change their world according to what feels meaningful to them. The disruptions that they experience

fundamentally change their being in the world (Heikkurinen, 2019) and change how they relate to the economy and the physical landscapes in which they dwell. For some degrowers, this crisis of being in the growth world can even lead to a decision to move out of familiar (urban) biophysical landscapes in order to reroot and regrow themselves in a more rural context. For all the degrowers, it is through this disruption that the intention of organizing their lives differently emerges, and they do so by connecting with their own ecology in place to grow something new. Thus, the act of degrowing in itself is a 'transformative force' (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017) that prefigures alternatives to growth and continuously shapes the coming into being of new degrowth worlds.

Third, the novel connections forged among degrowers and nonhumans in the ecology of place enable the emergence of novel assemblages of alternative organizational landscapes shaped by the ecology in place (Stage 3 in Figure 1). The ongoing entanglements of the degrowers with both humans and nonhumans in the ecology of place continuously (re)assemble the transformational forces through which new degrowing organizational landscapes and subjectivities come into being. It is not primarily the market or the need to grow profits that defines the actions within these organizational landscapes. Instead, it is the urge to sustain the conditions of life, to regrow life-sustaining relations with a diverse set of nonhumans actors (e.g. sheep, trees, cows, seeds and plants) that determines the multiple ways through which the potentialities in place are being explored. Thus, the nonhuman actors contribute in very concrete terms to the prefiguration of degrowth alternatives.

The relations that hold together the alternative organizational landscapes in each of these 'sites of becoming' (Gibson-Graham, 2004: 32) are thereby not composed of collective values (Daskalaki et al., 2019; Elzenbaumer and Franz, 2018), shared identities (Reedy et al., 2016) or affective bonds (Farias, 2017; Reedy et al., 2016) among human actors. Instead, the life-affirming entanglements with other nonhuman beings, such as seeds, plants, trees, sheep and cows, contribute in various ways to sustain the ecological livelihoods and shape the emergent potentialities in place (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015). Thus, these nonhuman beings also contribute to regrowing something new with concrete impacts on the ecology in place (e.g. enhancing biodiversity and improving the health of plants and soils, while adapting the local ecology to a changing climate).

Contrary to Skoglund and Böhm's (2020) assertation that prefigurative partaking is boundaryless, referring to pre-established well-defined (economic and human-made) organizations, the act of degrowing is very much influenced by how the ecology in place shapes, enables and constrains the endurance of the degrowing landscape over time. In contrast to other types of prefigurative-oriented grassroots movements (Daskalaki and Kokkinidis, 2017), the degrowers do not mobilize across different spaces to build alternatives. Rather, the potentialities in the ecology of place is what define the degrowers' own agency to act in ways that sustain their own and other nonhumans' lives in place. In this sense, place itself holds an agency to create alternative economies of ecological livelihoods (Gibson-Graham and Miller, 2015) through which humans 'become with' (Haraway, 2008) the ecology in place. This entanglement with other living nonhuman beings is what allows the degrowers to engage in socioecological transformative change that replaces their growth-based subjectivities with a place-based and diverse sense of self (Braidotti, 2019). It is no longer just their professional identity that defines who they

are, rather all the practices that they pursue together with nonhumans contribute to diversifying their sense of self, aligning or, literally speaking, rerooting themselves and their economic life-sustaining practices in the place they call home (Roelvink and Gibson-Graham, 2009).

Thus, the sense of 'being at home' is not just a metaphor of 'sites of belonging that [allow] people to be themselves' (Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021: 2). Rather, the interactions with the nonhumans in the ecology in place strengthens the conditions of life and the relational subjectivities grounded in their own home ecology. This finding of how prefiguration is entangled with the potentialities at home calls for future research on alternative organizations situated in home environments (for an opening, see Houtbeckers, 2018). While some research on prefiguration already points at how alternative identities are shaped by a shared sense of place (Reedy et al., 2016; Reinecke, 2018), how the home itself influences processes of socioecological change is less clear.

The act of degrowing is not only about downscaling and disentangling from organizational spaces governed by growth, but just as much about how the transformative experiences forge new more-than-human subjectivities that regrow their own being in place, rerooting them in the ecology of the place that they call home. This emergent organizational landscape, based on acts of regrowing, contributes to creating novel subjectivities, desires and practices aligned with degrowth ideals (Zanoni, 2020). Thus, the concrete alternatives and (physical) landscapes that emerge from these more-than-human regrowing organizing processes directly depend on how the degrowers connect with a diverse set of nonhuman actors to create new life-sustaining relations in the ecology in place.

Forth, the act of regrowing involves a distinct form of horizontal organizing in which the degrowers forge new connections with fellow practitioners and like-minded peers across regrowing landscapes. Although the prefigurative act of regrowing something new relies heavily on organizing together with nonhumans in place, this more translocal horizontal organizing process includes the creation of connections to others who work on similar prefigurative projects elsewhere and who, through their own acquired and situated knowledges, can help the degrowers in their everyday practices and work. Thus, the formation of horizontal organizing does not emerge from shared ethical commitments to specific causes (Skoglund and Böhm, 2020), affective bonds (Farias, 2017) or ideologies (Laamanen et al., 2019), but from the specificities of the practical projects that the degrowers pursue. For example, by working together with nearby neighbours, David learned new ways of handling his sheep, while also receiving support from like-minded peers.

The sharing of knowledges through online communities is also central when spreading prefigurations to new places. For example, the rapid spread of food forest initiatives to neighbours and other places can be attributed to the online communities that evolved around Philipp's food forest project. Andrew got involved in the international network of community seed banks, where he shares knowledge and learns about seeds, which helps him create a more resilient food system in rapidly changing northern climates. These translocal connections, centred around specific practices sustained through virtual spaces on the internet or among like-minded peers in the degrowers' home villages, also provide emotional and hands-on support that help the degrowers remain committed to the alternative degrowth ideals and prefigurations they have set in motion.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that none of these four stages are settled nor unidirectional, rather the degrowers constantly juggle in-between worlds. Some return back to salaried jobs (at least part time) while others distance themselves further away (see the arrows pointing in different direction in Figure 1). In fact, the degrowers' personal struggles as they navigate in-between worlds are an expression of the often-invisible struggles that a politics of possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2004, 2006; Siltanen et al., 2015) entails. They exemplify the difficulty (or impossibility, see Böhm et al., 2010) to completely escape the socioeconomic institutions and material structures of the growth world. This shows how important the 'we' is for personal transformative change (Braidotti, 2019). Although these processes are initiated individually, they cannot be sustained over time without having access to a community of support. Our study shows how fostering a sense of belonging among like-minded peers both in the home community and online helps the degrowers strengthen their emergent alternative sense of self based on identifications and practices aligned with degrowth ideals, while overcoming the feeling of being alone with their thoughts and living in isolation from the (growth) world. However, these horizontal forms of organizing also contribute to the spread of ideas of how to engage in acts of degrowing. Thus, rather than becoming 'isolated, inward-looking communities that escape rather than change wider societies' (Reinecke, 2018: 1302), they do change (parts) of the society through the spread of transformative practices that enable people to (partly) disentangle from the growth world.

To conclude, we also would like to point out that the degrowers in our study live in countries in which they all have access to tax-funded, essential state services that offer a social safety net, and ensure equal learning opportunities in school and a decent standard of living, regardless of heritage and economic standing (Houtbeckers, 2018). This can have a decisive impact on their choices to engage in acts of prefiguration, as there is no need to gain an income to pay for children's education or healthcare as elsewhere in the world. However, by opting out of paid labour, and high(er) taxations, they no longer contribute to the system that they, at least in part, continue to rely on. This tension between benefitting (at least partially) from a system while also purposefully trying to delink from its more destructive features, calls for a larger debate in future research on the role of the welfare state in times of multiple socioecological crises. In parallel, future research also needs to pay attention to aspects of inequality associated with these types of prefigurative grassroots processes of change. For example, access to affordable land is a major obstacle for those opting out of paid wage labour (Houtbeckers, 2018). An important question that needs to be addressed is what inequalities and hierarchies are created when only those with sufficient financial means to 'exit the growth economy' can pursue this path.

Conclusions

In this article, we have developed the concept of the 'act of (de)growing' as a prefigurative practice of personal socioecological transformations that bring new organizational landscapes into being. Our findings show how socioecological transformations emerge when individuals prefigure their own lived-in worlds in various ways after they come to realize the detrimental effects that the growth world has inflicted on their own health and

that of the planet. These processes are diverse, place-based and driven by personal trajectories of change, situated in the concrete lived-in reality in the landscapes where the degrowers dwell. The socioecological transformations involve shifts in how the degrowers perceive themselves and the world, and how they engage with change on a practical level. The engagements in prefigurative practices in the here and now are what shape the degrowers' subjectivities in place. The grounded and material conditions of the relations to nonhumans in place make it possible to disentangle and create different conditions for life, without which transformative socioecological change would not happen. The prefigurative work together with nonhumans in place creates novel possibilities to sustain the degrowers' conditions of lives beyond the organizational spaces governed by growth.

The findings point at a form of prefigurative politics that change ways of being through an ethical practice of becoming rooted in the ecology in place (Gibson-Graham, 2004, 2006; Roelvink and Gibson-Graham, 2009; Zanoni, 2020; Zanoni et al., 2017). This is a politics of possibilities that through changes in everyday practices opens up for new opportunities to emerge, rerooting personal desires, practices and identifications in the more-than-human relations in home places where the degrowers dwell. Instead of everyday forms of resistance (e.g. Scott, 1985), this type of politics points at a kind of everyday form of re-existence that 're-signifies and redefines the meaning of life on and with nature, territory and land' (Walsh, 2021: 476, see also Nirmal and Rocheleau, 2019). The more-than-human subjectivities that these re-existences create act as a disruptive and creative force that re-configures economic practices as life-sustaining relations in ways that put the well-being of people, community and ecology above economic gains and profits.

However, our findings also make clear that all the degrowers continue to be dependent on the growth world to varying degrees and thus must navigate the divide between the two worlds. Without larger constituents of support, the degrowers will continue to be drawn back into the growth world temporarily, intermittently or even permanently. This raises questions of how these types of personal transformations can cause a shift in the wider system that would support their prefigurations. To create stronger and persistent movements that can reframe the societal conversation about the structures of the (growth) economy, these dispersed prefigurative projects would need to become more strategically interlinked (Yates, 2021). Such political work is needed both to strengthen the degrowers' own projects and to overcome the regulatory and institutional constraints that enforce status quo and make it difficult for more people to get involved. To some extent this work is already underway as many of the degrowers (although not all) contribute to networks such as the Degrowth movement in Finland and the Transition network in Sweden. Yet, what is needed is stronger linkages across and outside the different types of degrowing landscapes that politicize these practices and contribute to a more coherent societal story about how projects such as those present in this study can challenge imaginaries and structures based on unlimited economic growth (Banerjee et al., 2021; Fournier, 2008).

Nevertheless, the politics of possibility as an 'ethical practice of becoming' (Gibson-Graham, 2004: 32) is not primarily concerned with challenging or replacing the existing system through politicized public discourses (Gibson-Graham, 2004). Instead, its political power lies in the (invisible) struggle at the personal level that inspires people to continuously reflect on their own being in the world and to initiate acts of degrowing on their own terms. As our findings show, the motivations to engage in the politics of

prefiguration do not depend on a predefined ideological common vision of the future, but originate from a deep existential crisis of being in the (growth) world. As part of a larger network of prefigurative socioecological transformations, each of these personal stories of acts of degrowing provide insights to economic practices and organizing processes that de-centre and reconceptualize the idea of (economic) growth (Banerjee et al., 2021). Thus, despite their fragmented solutions and dispersed activities, these alternatives are powerful in and of themselves in so far as they provide seeds of inspiration to re-signify the meaning of the economy and its organizations as something that can regrow, rather than destroy the planetary web of life.

The degrowers' search for alternative modes of living invites us to ask questions about the kind of organizational landscapes needed to regrow the conditions of (both human and nonhuman) life in place. As the stories of the degrowers show, there is no single answer to such questions, rather each act of degrowing depends on the preferences and knowledges of those involved and the potentialities that reside in the ecology in place. Each transformative act of regrowing something new depends on the degrowers' own evolving relations to (various) nonhumans in place, and the knowledges shared in translocal networks of like-minded peers. No matter how small, incomplete or insignificant these projects may seem for the larger societal whole, it is important to remember that each act of degrowing contributes with concrete, real-life examples that challenge the assumption that 'there is no alternative' (Kociatkiewicz et al., 2021) and lay new paths towards degrowth-minded futures.

ORCID iD

Maria Ehrnström-Fuentes [iD] https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3030-2328

Notes

1   In this article, we use the word nonhuman in 'a straight-forward, pragmatic sense that disrupts common, unconscious, anthropocentric associations with human to bring attention to the existence, agency, and necessity for respectful, relational consideration of beings who are not human' (Abbott, 2021: 1061). The term 'more-than-human' refers to the relational aspects of organizing processes in which both humans and nonhumans collectively partake (Greenhough, 2014).

2   From hereon we use the word degrowing; however, throughout the article we refer to the double meaning of (de/re)growing as an act of disentangling from the growth world and an act of regrowing into a degrowth world.

References

Abbott S (2021) Approaching nonhuman ontologies: Trees, communication, and qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry* 27(8–9): 1059–1071.

Asara V, Otero I, Demaria F, et al. (2015) Socially sustainable degrowth as a social–ecological transformation: Repoliticizing sustainability. *Sustainability Science* 10: 375–384.

Banerjee SB, Jermier JM, Peredo AM, et al. (2021) Theoretical perspectives on organizations and organizing in a post-growth era. *Organization* 28(3): 337–357.

Barca S, Chertkovskaya E and Paulsson A (2019) The end of growth as we know it: From growth realism to nomadic utopianism. In: Chertkovskaya E, Paulsson A and Barca S (eds) *Towards a Political Economy of Degrowth*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1–18.

Bloemmen M, Bobulescu R, Le NT, et al. (2015) Microeconomic degrowth: The case of community supported agriculture. *Ecological Economics* 112: 110–115.

Boje DM (2008) *Storytelling Organizations*. London: SAGE.

Braidotti R (2019) *Posthuman Knowledge*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Buch-Hansen H (2018) The prerequisites for a degrowth paradigm shift: Insights from critical political economy. *Ecological Economics* 146: 157–63.

Böhm S, Bharucha Z and Pretty J (2015) *Ecocultures: Blueprints for Sustainable Communities*. London: Routledge.

Böhm S, Dinerstein C and Spicer A (2010) (Im)possibilities of autonomy: Social movements in and beyond capital, the state and development. *Social Movement Studies* 9(1): 17–32.

Carlsson C and Manning F (2010) Nowtopia: Strategic exodus. *Antipode* 42(4): 924–953.

Casey K, Lichrou M and O'Malley L (2020) Prefiguring sustainable living: An ecovillage story. *Journal of Marketing Management* 36(17–18): 1658–1679.

Chatterton P and Pickerill J (2010) Everyday activism and transitions towards post-capitalist worlds. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35(4): 475–490.

Czarniawska B (2004) *Narratives in Social Science Research*. London: SAGE.

D'Alisa G, Demaria F and Kallis G (2015) *Degrowth: A Vocabulary for a New Era*. New York: Routledge.

Daly H (2019) Growthism: Its ecological, economic and ethical limits. *Real-World Economics Review* 87: 9–22.

Daskalaki M (2018) Alternative organizing in times of crisis: Resistance assemblages and socio-spatial solidarity. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 25(2): 155–170.

Daskalaki M and Kokkinidis G (2017) Organizing solidarity initiatives: A socio-spatial conceptualization of resistance. *Organization Studies* 38(9): 1303–1325.

Daskalaki M, Fotaki M and Sotiropoulou I (2019).Performing values practices and grassroots organizing: The case of solidarity economy initiatives in Greece. *Organization Studies* 40(11): 1741–1765. DOI: 10.1177/0170840618800102

de Bakker FGA, den Hond F, King B, et al. (2013) Social movements, civil society and corporations: Taking stock and looking ahead. *Organization Studies* 34(3): 573–593.

de Bakker FGA, Matten D, Spence LJ, et al. (2020) The elephant in the room: The nascent research agenda on corporations, social responsibility, and capitalism. *Business & Society* 59(7): 1295–1302.

Demaria F, Kallis G and Bakker K (2019) Geographies of degrowth: Nowtopias, resurgences and the decolonization of imaginaries and places. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 2(3): 431–450.

Dinerstein AC (2016) *Social Science for an Other Politics: Women Theorising Without Parachutes*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Elzenbaumer B and Franz F (2018) Footprint: A radical workers co-operative and its ecology of mutual support. *Ephemera* 18(4): 791–804.

Ergene S, Banerjee SB and Hoffman A (2020) (Un)sustainability and organization: Studies: Towards a radical engagement. *Organization Studies*. Epub ahead of print 25 July 2020. DOI: 10.1177/0170840620937892

Farias C (2017) That's what friends are for: Hospitality and affective bonds fostering collective empowerment in an intentional community. *Organization Studies* 38(5): 577–595.

Fournier V (2008) Escaping from the economy: The politics of degrowth. *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 28(11/12): 528–545.

Gearey M and Ravenscroft N (2019) The nowtopia of the riverbank: Elder environmental activism. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 2(3): 451–464.

Gherardi S and Laasch O (2021) Responsible management-as-practice: Mobilizing a posthumanist approach. *Journal of Business Ethics*. Epub ahead of print 22 September 2021. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-021-04945-7

Gibson-Graham J (2004) The violence of development: Two political imaginaries. *Development* 47: 27–34.

Gibson-Graham JK (2006) *A Postcapitalist Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Gibson-Graham JK and Miller E (2015) Economy as ecological livelihood. In: Gibson J, Rose D and Fincher R (eds) *Manifesto for the Living in the Anthropocene*. Brooklyn, NY: Punctum Books, 7–16.

Gills B and Hosseini S (2022) Pluriversality and beyond: Consolidating radical alternatives to (mal-)development as a commonist project. *Sustainable Science*. Epub ahead of print 27 March 2022. DOI: 10.1007/s11625-022-01129-8

Gond JP and Nyberg D (2017) Materializing power to recover corporate social responsibility. *Organization Studies* 38(8): 1127–1148.

Greenhough B (2014) More-than-human geographies. In: Lee R, Castree N, Kitchin R, et al. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of Human Geography: Two Volume Set*, London: SAGE, 94–119.

Haraway D (2008) *When Species Meet*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.

Heikkurinen P (2019) Degrowth: A metamorphosis in being. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 2(3): 528–547.

Hernadi P (1987) Literary interpretation and the rhetoric of the human sciences. In: Nelson JS, Megill A and McCloskey DN (eds) *The Rhetoric of Human Sciences*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 263–275.

Hickel J (2020) *Less is More: How Degrowth Will Save the World*. London: Heinemann.

Houtbeckers E (2018) Land in transition: The role of land for Finnish households striving for self-sufficiency. *Nordia Geographical Publications* 47(5): 75–84.

Jarvis H (2019) Sharing, togetherness and intentional degrowth. *Progress in Human Geography* 43(2): 256–275.

Johanisova N, Crabtree T and Franková E (2013) Social enterprises and non-market capitals: A path to degrowth? *Journal of Cleaner Production* 38(1): 7–16.

Johnsen C, Nelund M, Olaison L, et al. (2017) Organizing for the post-growth economy. *Ephemera: Theory & Politics in Organization* 17(1): 1–21.

Jørgensen KM (2020) Storytelling, space and power: An Arendtian account of subjectivity in organizations. *Organization*. Epub ahead of print 15 June 2020. DOI: 10.1177/1350508420928522

Joutsenvirta M (2016) A practice approach to the institutionalization of economic degrowth. *Ecological Economics* 128: 23–32.

Kallis G and March H (2015) Imaginaries of hope: The utopianism of degrowth. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 105(2): 360–368.

Kociatkiewicz J, Kostera M and Parker M (2021) The possibility of disalienated work: Being at home in alternative organizations. *Human Relations* 74(7): 933–957.

Laamanen M, Bor S and den Hond F (2019) The dilemma of organization in social movement initiatives. In: Ahrne G and Brunsson N (eds) *Organization Outside Organizations: The Abundance of Partial Organization in Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 293–317.

Latouche S (2010) Editorial: Degrowth. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 18 (6): 519–522.

Lloveras J and Quinn L (2017) Growth and its discontents: Paving the way for a more productive engagement with alternative economic practices. *Journal of Macromarketing* 37(2): 131–142.

Lloveras J, Marshall A, Warnaby G, et al. (2021) Mobilising sense of place for degrowth? Lessons from Lancashire's anti-fracking activism. *Ecological Economics* 183: 106754.

Lloveras J, Quinn L and Parker C (2018) Reclaiming sustainable space: A study of degrowth activists. *Marketing Theory* 18(2): 188–202.

Maeckelbergh M (2011) Doing is believing: Prefiguration as strategic practice in the alterglobalization movement. *Social Movement Studies* 10(1): 1–20.

Morgan J (2020) Degrowth: Necessary, urgent and good for you. *Real-World Economics Review* 93: 113–131.

Moser C, Reinecke J, den Hond F, et al. (2021) Biomateriality and organizing: Towards an organizational perspective on food. *Organization Studies* 42(2): 175–193.

Nirmal P and Rocheleau D (2019) Decolonizing degrowth in the post-development convergence: Questions, experiences, and proposals from two Indigenous territories. *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 2(3): 465–492.

Parker M, Cheney G, Fournier V, et al. (eds) (2014) *The Routledge Companion to Alternative Organization*. New York: Routledge.

Phillips M and Jeanes E (2018) What are the alternatives? Organising for a socially and ecologically sustainable world. *Ephemera* 18(4): 695–708.

Reedy P, King D and Coupland C (2016) Organizing for individuation: Alternative organizing, politics and new identities. *Organization Studies* 37(11): 1553–1573.

Reinecke J (2018) Social movements and prefigurative organizing: Confronting entrenched inequalities in Occupy London. *Organization Studies* 39(9): 1299–1321.

Roelvink G and Gibson-Graham JK (2009) A postcapitalist politics of dwelling: Ecological humanities and community economies in conversation. *Australian Humanities Review* 46: 148–158.

Schneider F, Kallis G and Martinez-Alier J (2010) Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *Journal of Cleaner Production* 18(6): 511–518.

Scott J (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Siltanen J, Klodawsky F and Andrew C (2015) 'This is how I want to live my life': An experiment in prefigurative feminist organizing. *Antipode* 47(1): 260–279.

Silverman D (2016) *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*, 4th edn. London: SAGE.

Skoglund A and Böhm S (2020) Prefigurative partaking: employees' environmental activism in an energy utility. *Organization Studies* 41(9): 1257–1283.

Vlasov M (2019) In transition toward the ecocentric entrepreneurship nexus: How nature helps entrepreneur make venture more regenerative over time. *Organization & Environment* 34(4): 559–580.

Vlasov M, Heikkurinen P and Bonnedahl KJ (2021) Suffering catalyzing ecopreneurship: Critical ecopsychology of organizations. *Organization*. Epub ahead of Print 9 June 2021. DOI: 10.1177/13505084211020462

Walsh C (2021) (Re)existence in times of de-existence: Political–pedagogical notes to Paulo Freire. *Language and Intercultural Communication* 21(4): 468–478.

Whatmore S (2002) _Hybrid Geographies: Natures Cultures Spaces_. London: SAGE.

Yates L (2021) Prefigurative politics and social movement strategy: The roles of prefiguration in the reproduction, mobilisation and coordination of movements. _Political Studies_ 69(4): 1033–1052.

Zanoni P (2020) Prefiguring alternatives through the articulation of post- and anti-capitalistic politics: An introduction to three additional papers and a reflection. _Organization_ 27(1): 3–16.

Zanoni P, Contu A, Healy S, et al. (2017) Post-capitalistic politics in the making: The imaginary and praxis of alternative economies. _Organization_ 24(5): 575–588.

Maria Ehrnström-Fuentes is Assistant Professor at the Department of Management and Organization at Hanken School of Economics, Finland. Her research focuses on the interaction of people and nonhumans in place in grassroots organizing for sustainable futures. She has also an extensive record of critical examination of the politics of CSR and conflicts over land and resources in the global economy. She has published in international scholarly journals such as _Journal of Management Studies_, _Geoforum_, _Organization_, _Journal of Business Ethics_ and _Journal of Cleaner Production._ Part of her research on socioecological transformations is available as podcasts at www.worldsintransition.com. [Email: maria.ehrnstrom@hanken.fi]

Ingrid Biese is a postdoctoral researcher at the Swedish School of Social Science at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her main area of research is the phenomenon known as opting out, and her research includes both men and women who leave successful careers to adopt new lifestyles where they can live and work on their own terms. Other areas of interest are globalization, individualization, gender, masculinity and identity. Biese regularly engages in public debates on sustainable careers and lifestyles, for example through her blog theoptingoutblog.com. [Email: ingrid.biese@helsinki.fi]