



Utopian horizons of downshifting in Romania. Some mediated stories

Adela Fofiu¹

Abstract

These research notes explore the political potential of online storytelling for the incipient downshifting movement in Romania. Qualitative content analysis techniques are used on a series of articles published in December 2012-January 2014 on www.totb.ro in order to reveal the political stake of the act of storytelling in cases of individual lifestyle changes. This political stake is the empowerment of citizens through individual change that catalyzes everyday dystopian experiences into utopia, into eu-topos, the good spaces where life and living are desired. The current notes summarize some key concepts on downshifting and make an introduction to the sociology of storytelling, while also elaborating some analytical observations on the empirical acts of storytelling in mediated environments.

Keywords

Downshifting, storytelling, political action, empowerment, dystopia, utopia

Introduction

The following research notes approach a series of mediated individual stories of downshifting from Romania, with the aim of exploring the political and emotional stake of individual change in the context of the increasing global crisis. It is not my intent to discuss whether climate activists, for instance, or climate skeptics hold the truth. Rather, I point to a particular type of social and political action that is triggered by the dominant paradigm of economic growth and industrial development.

My analysis of individual stories of downshifting re-contextualizes the famous feminist slogan of the 60s and 70s – *the personal is political* – through the exploration of

¹ Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, fofiu@fspac.ro

individual empowerment in times of unease. After briefly describing the cultural phenomenon of downshifting, I then develop on a sociology of storytelling, based on Plummer's elaboration (1995), in order to proceed to qualitatively analysing the content of a set of stories shared online by downshifter from Romania, in order to later discuss their inherent political value and emotional structure.

Downshifting and dystopia-utopia

This term is appropriated in cultural and social studies as a metaphor inspired by the mechanical action one performs when slowing down a car. To downshift while driving means setting the car into a lower gear, in order to reduce velocity.

In the cultural context of meritocracy, individualism and the pursuit of profit – all of which stimulate competition and imprint a sense of urgency – downshifting refers to the voluntary or intentional behaviour of reducing work hours, revenue and consumption in order to develop a simpler lifestyle focused on family and friends, nature and community. In a liberal approach, downshifting is referred to as the voluntary behaviour of reducing income as a longterm change in lifestyle, other than retirement (Chhetri, Stimson & Western, 2009). My approach in this particular research is broader and focuses on downshifting as personal change infused with political value. In a political sense, downshifting allows people to develop a lifestyle that empowers them, a lifestyle in which they can control what they consume, what they create, what they experience (Leonard-Barton, 1980, in Chhetri et al., 2009). As an interesting result, downshifter are more oriented toward creating culture, as opposed to consuming culture. Indeed, as Juniu discusses, the dominant culture of consumerism – an effect of the Illuminist progress and of modernization - has transformed individuals in passive consumers of culture, rendering them less able, if not unable, to create culture (Juniu, 2000). "Culture consuming" versus "culture creating" (Hemingway, 1996, in Juniu, 2000) appears, thus, as a premise for downshifting as political action.

Downshifting is oftentimes associated with voluntary simplicity, a term that brings together environmental awareness, decreased consumption and personal development into a lifestyle that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich (Elgin, 1981, in Chhetri et al., 2009). Indeed, Juniu discusses downshifting as a necessary action for personal fulfillment and self-actualisation (2000). According to her developments, "we must take a leisurely approach to do things. This requires certain attitudes and behaviors such as taking one's own time and pace" (Juniu, 2000). If Chhetri and colleagues have identified the dimensions of downshifting in the voluntary lifestyle change in accordance with the values of simplicity, belief in a culture less consumer oriented and in the intentional reduction of working hours and income for personal betterment (2009), Juniu sees downshifting as facilitating the shift from individualism to solidarity, from a "live-to-work" to a "work-to-live" philosophy, from materialism to spiritualism and from perfection to creativity (2000).

To continue, my analysis of downshifting stories as political experiences can be framed by the dystopia-utopia dyad. Dystopia has developed, during the last 40 years, as

a preferred leitmotif in science fiction, but with a twist. After about 200 years of apocalyptic literature that imagined, explored and speculated on various possibilities of the final disaster, around 1990 dystopia suddenly became a concealed experience, a backstage happening, shedding the light on the post-apocalyptic (Phelan, 2009). This has led to the understanding of dystopia as a state of existence:

“dystopia [...] bears the aspect of lived experience. People perceive their environments as dystopic and, alas, they do so with depressing frequency. Whereas utopia takes us into a future and serves to indict the present, dystopia places us directly in a dark and depressing reality, conjuring up a terrifying future if we do not recognize and treat its symptoms in the here and now.” (Gordin, Tilley and Prakash, 2010, p.2)

Similarly, a comparative study of literary texts from 1790s and 1990s indicates that 1790s literary projections construct liminal spaces of utopia and of ideal living, while 1990s literature builds on apocalyptic projections (Bode, 2001). As Bode contends, “a culture’s hopes and fears before a turn of the century are highly indicative of its frame of mind” (2001, p. 157), an assumption on which this exploration is further built, given the recent wave of media figurations of apocalypse around the Mayan calendar for 2012. Philosophers and social critics such as Krishan Kumar and Gilles Deleuze contend that we are not living in a post-industrial or post-modern society, but in an apocalyptic one (in Bethea, 2013). Indeed, McKibben (2010, in Dylan, 2012) argues that the altering impact of humanity on the world is irrevocable and without precedent and the world is, thus, in need of a new name - “Eearth”, since “we cannot live on the Earth as we did before.”

I consider utopia, on the other hand, not as the perfect, ideal and non-existing place, but as the good place – *the eu-topos* – where good things happen, where good stories unravel. As Higgins argues for the value of utopianism in times of crisis, now is the most propitious and relevant time for reflexivity and analysis of our social systems, in the light of the future(s) that they imply. This reflexivity consists of three steps: critiquing the current system, envisioning viable solutions, and understanding the obstacles and opportunities of the transition itself (Higgins, 2013).

In this sense, downshifting appears to be a first hand solution to individuals and small communities, otherwise dis-empowered by the mainstream cultural and political environment. In this environment, obedience and passivity are inculcated by spectator sports and entertainment television, political action and political power seem out of the reach of the Many and in the hands of the Few, thus keeping the Many "from trying to get involved with things that really matter" (Chomsky, 2002 in Dylan, 2012). Indeed, from the economically appreciated concept of consumerism in the 1920s – the honorable end of all economic activity – to nowadays, the culture of consumption has shifted from a culture of ever increasing standard of living and comfort to a commodity culture that impedes emancipating political motives (Marcuse, 1964, in Dylan, 2012). This commodity culture has disconnected humanity and nature, which Dylan points to as the premise for the ever-deepening crisis: commodity culture is constructed – and we always need to question the history of our culture, its origins, for it can reveal an understanding of the

current state – in a “corporate time”, disregarding “ecological time” (Dylan, 2012). The extreme pace of the “corporate time” or “economical time” allows for grass to “grow” in your yard in 30 minutes, after rolling out some newly purchased grass carpets. It appears we know grass needs much more “ecological time” to sprout and grow than the economical 30 minutes, but we seldom take the time (sic!) to question the implications of this chronological disconnect between culture and nature. Thus downshifting, as a cultural phenomenon, is a grassroots (re)action to mitigate the effects of this disconnect.

The context in which downshifting emerged is, according to Berry, the inadequate and misleading cultural story of civilization and corporatism (1999, in Dylan, 2012) that has subjected nature to the domination of economy, generating a schism in that exact space in which economy should be embedded in nature to which all living belong (Dylan, 2012). We thus need to question the stories that circulate around us and inside ourselves and be in search or even in the process of creation of new cultural stories that “debunk the old, continually question the eco-ethics of the new, radically transform human-nature attitudes and beliefs, promote survival needs, have a community focus, involve systems thinking and interdependency, and advocate holism” (Plumwood, 2010; Coates, 2003, 2004; Mary, 2009; Lake, 2010, in Dylan, 2012).

Storytelling

In analysing downshifting recounts, I consider the act of storytelling as a political participatory act. The stories may be individual, but their circulation is facilitated by a participatory environment that, at its turn, facilitates the creation of culture – as opposed to consuming culture. In order to structure this approach, I rely on Plummer's development of a sociology of storytelling (1995). According to Plummer:

“a sociology of stories should be less concerned with analysing the formal structures of stories or narratives (as literary theory might), and more interested in inspecting the social role of stories: the ways they are produced, the ways they are read, the work they perform in the wider social order, how they change, and their role in the political process.” (Plummer, 1995)

Plummer regards stories as symbolic interactions, in the traditional sociological sense, and as political processes that give a voice to individuals otherwise unheard. Indeed, a voice that is not articulated into discourse, on one hand, and that is not addressed to an audience, on the other hand, is silence, in a political perspective. Plummer's sociological approach to storytelling takes into account i) the nature of stories, ii) the making of stories, iii) the consuming of stories, iv) the strategies of storytelling and v) the position of stories in relation with power (1995). Three types of actors are involved in this interaction through storytelling: producers, coaxers and consumers. Producers are those who tell their stories. Coaxers are a sort of gatekeepers: they can stimulate, elicit a story to be told by others, while they can also facilitate the circulation of stories into a larger (than the individual) sphere. Consumers are the audiences who listen to the stories. But they are not passive: they engage in dialogic

events around the production and consumption of stories. The audience is as much part of the story, as is the producer. Mitra's elaboration on the idea of voice applied to the Internet is valuable at this point: digitally mediated stories are dialogic in the sense that the audiences appropriate the stories they consume and re-shape them in new, altered discourses about the world (Mitra, 2002). As Jackson argues, print or digital text promotes only an illusion of fixity, since, once consumed, a story belongs to the community, to its own interpretation and revision (Jackson, 2002). The dialogic life of stories is made up by a series of chronological movements of the stories from the private producer to the public or communal consumer. The political power of storytelling resides in the consumer's ability to use the story in accordance with their own context and moment in life. In this sense, I return to the story as participation and use Plummer's framing: "we create communities of concern and arenas of activity where we can make our religions, tend to our 'families', practice our politics, get on with our work" (Plummer, 1995).

Through the analysis on downshifting recounts, I explore the interactionist dynamics of stories. My focus is on the social role that stories play and explore the individual recounts of change in order to understand how these stories can be used to resist or to transform lifestyles and culture in the particular context of everyday experiences of dystopia. As Arendt elaborates, through storytelling, producers can work with others – the consumers and even the coaxers – to transform that which is given into new forms of meaning and experiences that are viable (Arendt, in Jackson, 2002). This is why one of my inquiries on the texts of stories explores the transformation of everyday dystopia into utopian living.

Methodology

The objective of this interpretive research on mediated content is to explore the political value of individual stories of change in lifestyle. My main task is to observe if and how personal stories of changes in lifestyle through downshifting elicit the empowerment of the individual, thus transforming the everyday dystopia into a lived utopia.

To achieve this, I perform content analysis on a series of individual stories published on the Romanian website Think Outside the Box, www.totb.ro. I select these stories by first using the tag downshifting – www.totb.ro/tag/downshifting and then, a second step, by eliminating those articles that are not written in the 1st person singular. With these two criteria applied, the working sample comprises 9 stories, out of the first 11, published between December 14, 2012 and January 17, 2014 – a period of more or less 13 months.

Content analysis is a research method based on the quantitative measurement and/or qualitative interpretation of discursive phenomena in a sampling of a mass-mediated popular art form (Berger, 1998). Of course, content analysis can also be used on non-mass-mediated content, but the readiness of this method for media content is what makes it relevant for approaching the digital sample of stories from [totb.ro](http://www.totb.ro). This method is both non-intrusive and effective in identifying and exploring new information

about people based on what they write. In this sense, through analysing results of various forms of human work and creation, we can make inferences from these products to their creators and conveyors (Berger, 1998, Krippendorff, 2013). The basic assumption of content analysis is that values, attitudes and behaviours found in written materials, for instance, reflect and affect values, attitudes and behaviours of the people that have created those contents (Berger, 1998).

My approach to the stories of downshifting is exploratory and qualitative. I search for the latent content of the discourses and interpret the visible, manifest traits of the stories within the political frame of dystopia-utopia.

Data description and analysis

The downshifting stories take the reader into a journey of initiation, of transgression to parallel realities: the individual reality of life changes, the social reality of the rural, the systemic reality of interdependence. The most frequent recurring themes address the comparison between the rural lifestyle and the city, the value of physical work and the value of time.

The city and the village are constantly contrasted throughout the stories on three main dimensions: social life, consumption and rhythm. The frequency of socializing with friends is, according to these recounts, affected by downshifting to the rural lifestyle. As I have discussed earlier, one of the main motives for downshifting is one's ability and availability to spend more time with friends and family, as opposed to work. The personal downshifting stories from totb.ro frequently return to this exact issue, but with a twist: leaving the city for the countryside has determined the main characters to meet their friends less often, given the distance. Friends are those significant others that, in these cases, did not downshift, at least apparently. As such, friendship seems to be negatively affected by downshifting. Indeed, the producers of the stories are able, at certain points, to articulate their negative emotions related to leaving the city:

“[there are] moments in which nostalgia for the pulse of the city appears, nostalgia for walks on the illuminated streets at night, where you can open many doors, for the noise of hundreds of people that talk at the same time in some hall or gallery, for the diversity accessible at any time.”²

This nostalgic longing for the sociality of the city is not recurrent, though. Rather, the storyteller is able, through developing her story, to regulate her emotions towards the former urban life. More often than not, leaving the city and missing the friends is balanced by the intensified joy of returning to that environment and meeting these significant others:

² “momente în care apare nostalgia pentru pulsul oraşului, pentru plimbări noaptea pe străzile luminate, unde poţi deschide multe uşi, pentru zarva a sute de oameni care vorbesc în acelaşi timp, în vreo sală sau galerie, pentru diversitatea accesibilă oricând.”

<http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

“I enjoy friends and events more.”³

“Although I chose to live in a place that does not have boulevards, I did not choose ascetic withdrawal, I continue to go frequently to Bucharest, which I rediscover as a devoted tourist, where I meet my friends more seldom, but with more enthusiasm. I thus take note that each break in the routine that tends, more often than not, to be confounded with the inevitable state of things, makes me more focused and receptive, and after a week of working on the laptop and in the garden, an evening on a terrace in Bucharest is more intense than all the moments that have previously been chained, on a conveyor belt.”⁴

The definition of downshifting needs some contextual interpretation. The conveyors of the stories have chosen voluntary simplicity for a somewhat long list of reasons apparent throughout their recounts, but gaining more time with their friends was not on this list. But the experience of making life changes becomes reflexive, determining moments of self analysis and self understanding which reveal how the actors go through a change in role playing. They become urban tourists from urban dwellers. This shift reinterprets the world. Indeed, in the symbolic interactions perspective, the stage on which these actors live has changed dramatically. Urbanity is no longer something they belong to, it is something they *visit* from time to time. The city is no longer the mark of quality in social relations, it is only a temporary setting. The distance from the urban is underlined by the reiteration of negative emotions towards, this time, the city itself.

“Sick of urbanism, rush, lack of meaning, I ended up, after those 3-4 months of cold season, when I was preparing the garden for spring, wishing I had the whole experience, not just the experience of one season.”⁵

And the whole experience, as the storyteller elaborates, comprises both the self determination of consumption habits and the reconnection to a different time and a different rhythm:

³ “mă bucur mai mult de prieteni și întâmplări”

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⁴ “Deși am ales să locuiesc într-un loc fără bulevarde, nu am ales retragerea ascetică, continuând să merg periodic la București, pe care-l redescopăr ca turist fidel, unde-mi întâlnesc prietenii mai rar, dar cu mai mult entuziasm. Constat astfel că fiecare ruptură a rutinei care tinde, de cele mai multe ori, să fie confundată cu mersul inevitabil al lucrurilor, mă face mai atentă și mai receptivă, iar după o săptămână de muncă la laptop și grădină, o seară la terasă în București e mult mai intensă decât aceleași momente înnodate însă înainte, pe bandă rulantă.”

<http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

⁵ “Sătulă de urbanism, de goană, de lipsa unui sens, am ajuns, după cele 3 – 4 luni de sezon rece, când pregăteam straturile de primăvară, să vreau experiența completă, nu doar cea a unui anotimp.”

<http://totb.ro/downshifting-dupa-365-de-zile/>

“Winter in the countryside must be prepared in advance, because the shelves are not full of Egyptian melons, Dutch broccoli or Jordanian pineapples to maintain the illusion of a single season of abundance.”⁶

Indeed, downshifting to a rural lifestyle is described as the opportunity to rediscover the rhythm of nature and the interdependence of humans and seasons when it comes to consumption. The city is described as an environment in which the difference between day and night is constantly fading, on one side due to artificial street lights that emulate the day, and on another side due to the ubiquitous availability of consumer goods that construct and maintain the illusion of satisfied needs. In contrast, the rural lifestyle teaches our storytellers how everyday experiences are determined by seasons and by the changes that are characteristic to natural environments. A simple thing, such as not being able to work in the garden due to a sudden heavy rain or such as the need to schedule your morning around shoveling the high snow in the yard, is a strong enough experience to reconstruct the meaning of living and of being in the world. The rural lifestyle teaches the storyteller to be “more calculated and thrifty and to reduce the costs of entertainment and comfort”⁷. Rather, voluntary simplicity brings into focus another value of consumption and comfort. Things produced with the ethics of Do It Yourself are described as “simple joys” around which circadian and annual rhythms are rearranged. Vegetables from the garden – all organic and natural – receive a symbolic dimension of self determination and purification. The city is missed, but it is missed as a touristic entertainment, while life receives a deeper meaning in close relation with nature, gardening, fresh self grown produce and a feeling of authenticity in being able to control personal time.

This control of time takes the reader in two not so distinct directions. First, time becomes ritualized within working hours. All stories in this exploratory sample have some references to physical work as purification and it is directly opposed to the sedimentary, intellectual work of a young urban professional.

“When you are bent over your garden beds, focusing on earth clods with their microscopic universes, especially when the sun hits you strong, this kind of work has all chances to become a sort of active meditation. Your mind is purged of the spam that didn't let it be, focusing strictly on the tangible world that opens up in front of your eyes.”⁸

⁶ “iarna la țară trebuie pregătită din timp, pentru că rafturile nu sunt pline de pepeni egipteni, brocoli olandezi sau ananași iordanieni, care să întrețină iluzia unui unic anotimp al abundenței.”

<http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

⁷ <http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

⁸ “Când stai aplecat deasupra straturilor, focalizând bulgării de pământ cu universurile lor microscopice, mai ales dacă soarele te lovește puternic, munca de felul ăsta are toate șansele să devină un fel de meditație activă. Minte se golește de spam-ul care nu-i dădea pace, concentrându-se strict asupra lumii concrete care i se deschide înaintea ochilor.”

<http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

Physical work is both preached – as relaxing the spirit, opening up the mind and eliminating insomnia – and criticized – as straining the spine and stretching the muscles beyond their “urban” capability. It is rather described as empowering, as investing the urban individual with the capacity of self determination and of determination of the surrounding environment. As Plummer states, power is not static, belonging here or there, it is a flowing process (1995). Through downshifting, the storytellers recount for their challenging experiences of empowerment. Voluntary simplicity is described as a longing while being in the city and as a fulfilling challenge while actually doing it.

Empowerment, at this point in the exploration, is evident throughout two dimensions of the stories. First, it is an immediate and sought for effect of downshifting. Second, it is part of the process of telling the story of downshifting, similar to a feedback loop or to self-enforcement of the storytellers to acknowledge their empowerment through confessing it to a reader.

The empowerment that comes through downshifting is described as the awareness of a former own experience or role of the storyteller as passive consumer in the city, as a child that never grew up:

“the city maintains you in the position of a child that receives things for granted.”⁹

“when boredom kicks in, it is just a sign of the weakness that life imprints on you in a place where almost everything, from food to entertainment, is taken for granted.”¹⁰

On the opposite, downshifting and moving to the countryside has transformed the urban individual into a producer, into an actor that takes organized action to reconstruct their world. In this sense, voluntary simplicity is no longer just the will to simplify your needs and what you consume. It is rather an experience in which the individual is required to learn how to cope with the environment. As such, the environment is no longer taken for granted and at ease to suit various needs. It becomes a challenge – a positive one – that transforms the individual from passive consumer to active creator (Juniu, 2000). In this sense, a downshifter is constructed in our stories as a creator of culture through the mere fact of telling the story. A culture of downshifting is reinforced through personal narratives of change that are mediated into the digital space, to reach larger audiences.

This leads my way in understanding the stories of downshifting as politically empowering. Most of these stories end with a paragraph that stresses on the political stake of the act of storytelling, sometimes directly inviting the reader to collaborate, to mirror, to reflect on the recently read recounts.

“Each downshifting story from Romania that I will bring in here will reveal to you how happiness can be found through simplicity, through the fulfilling work within nature, how you can become more creative, more thrifty, more

⁹ <http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

¹⁰ <http://totb.ro/cateva-lucruri-pe-care-le-am-invatat-mutandu-ma-la-tara/>

focused on what happens around you when you are no longer busy with various useless stuff, with self-created problems or problems that others dump on you. When you are the master of your own time and of your own choices.”¹¹

“The master of your own time and of your own choices.” These words are the discursive expression of individual empowerment through voluntary simplicity. The downshifting phenomenon is interesting exactly because of this effect: the separation of the individual from the epitome of democracy and civil rights – the city – elicits a strong feeling of self-determination and power. From the inside, from within the city walls, the system can be perceived and criticized as faulty, but this criticism takes the shades and colors of an emotional and political individual dystopia. From the outside, the system is still criticized, but the focus shifts on positive emotions and individual revelations that generate power and will. This is why a leitmotif of the stories is the confession of the storyteller as not willing to return to the city, even if it is a small town.

But the empowerment does not hold here. The storytellers stimulate the audience, again, by envisioning a long term project to develop a campaign for downshifting, to call for more and more young urban professionals to move to the countryside and search for their own voluntary simplicity. Such a call is a direct proof of the political and social acuity of the storytellers – their potential roles as creators of culture, of values, of practices, of trends.

Conclusions

The digital stories on totb.ro reveal that downshifting allows people to develop a lifestyle that empowers them, a lifestyle in which they can control what they consume, what they create, what they experience (Leonard-Barton, 1980, in Chhetri et al., 2009). This transforms the downshifter that tell their stories in the digital scape in creators of culture, as opposed to consumers of culture. By choosing a lifestyle that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich (Elgin, 1981, in Chhetri et al., 2009), these storytellers relate how voluntary simplicity has refined their environmental awareness, their consumption habits and their personal development in a complex space that is not taken for granted anymore. Looking at things that matter, as Chomsky stresses (2002 in Dylan, 2012), empowers storytellers and renders them able to acknowledge in their personal recounts the pressuring everyday urban dystopia. This dystopia bears the aspect of lived experience in the corporate time of the city, where the rhythm of days and seasons is interrupted by the permanent availability of produce and products, by the inevitable presence of artificial light, by the perception of social interaction as arrhythmic and agitated. This dystopic everyday experience is in itself subjective, it lies in the eyes of the

¹¹ “fiecare poveste a downshifterilor din România pe care o voi aduce aici vă va dezvălui cum se poate găsi fericirea prin simplitate, împlinirea prin muncă în natură, cum devii mai creativ, mai cumpătat, mai atent la ce se întâmplă în jurul tău când nu mai ești ocupat cu diverse lucruri inutile, cu probleme autocreate sau deversate de alții pe capul tău. Când ești stăpân pe timpul tău și pe alegerile tale.”
<http://totb.ro/downshifting-dupa-365-de-zile/>

beholder, and this is what empowers downshiffters that tell their stories. They become aware of symptoms of their lifestyle, which is culturally determined by the urban context, and this personal awareness is then shifted into political action. The decision to downshift is a political act of recognizing and treating the symptoms of lived dystopia, as opposed to postponing the action and to insisting in the particular cultural patterns of living in the city. The personal experience of dystopia transformed into the utopian feelings of joy and happiness of voluntary simplicity is political due not only to the simplification itself, but also to the responsible, I might say, action of telling the story to larger audiences. Storytelling is, at this point, a political tool for downshiffters. The shift from consuming culture to creating culture is pervasive nowadays in several and intricate layers of the social structure and voluntary simplicity of former urban dwellers is an example as such. The global crisis, as I discussed first, is a propitious context for searching opportunities of change and action. As Case recently elaborated, (co-)creation is the disruption of the dominant or mainstream cultural framework (2013).

This incipient exploratory study of storytelling and its value for downshifting invited further analysis of the narratives. A necessary and distinct research direction is the dystopia-utopia dynamic of everyday experiences through individual empowerment in the stories of personal voluntary simplicity. Another exploration is necessary on the affective implications of downshifting and on the ability of storytellers to give accounts for their affects and to regulate them through the act of storytelling. Furthermore, the comments to these online stories need to be explored in themselves, in order to relate their content to the message of the stories and to explore the digitally mediated relationship between the creator of the story, the coaxer of the story and the consumers of the story.

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Adela Fofiu holds a PhD in sociology. She is a trainer, activist and lecturer, having acquired experience in working with people within a diversity of environments – from academia to local emergent communities. Her research interests include apocalypse, utopia, dystopia, intentional communities, community resilience, globalization, digital research methods and tools, content analysis, online communication.