

# The degrowth alternative

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# The concept

- ▶ Degrowth / Radical sustainability / Social-economic transformation: A theoretical normative approach and conceptual framework
- ▶ Economic growth → a taboo → a kind of religious faith
- ▶ Growth causes
  - ▶ Ecological damage
  - ▶ Economic inequalities
  - ▶ Social degeneration (consumerism)
- ▶ Degrowth ≠ Economic recession. It is rather a critique against the negative socio-environmental consequences of growth for the sake of growth (Cattaneo et al., 2022)

# The concept

- ▶ Definitions:
  - ▶ "An ecological-economic perspective as a socially sustainable and equitable reduction (and eventually stabilization) of society's throughput." (Kallis, 2011)
  - ▶ "An equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions." (Schneider et al., 2010).
  - ▶ "Degrowth is about sufficiency and limits -slowing down, reducing throughput and impact, sharing the commons, increasing justice, and autonomy." (D'Alisa, Kallis, and Demaria, 2015)

# The concept

- ▶ Growth for the sake of growth is both impossible and undesirable:
  - ▶ **Impossible:** "Take the global economy in the year 2000 and grow it at the usual rate of 3% a year. Even at this modest-sounding increment, economic output will double every twenty-three years, which means quadrupling before the middle of the century, within half a human lifetime. And if we continue growing at that same rate, by the end of the century the economy will be twenty times bigger. (Hickel, 2020)
  - ▶ **Undesirable:** the destruction brought about by a military operation that causes an environmental catastrophe provides positive input to GDP (the production and trade of weapons, employment of military staff, post-war construction).
- Exchange value vs. Use value

# Origins

- ▶ Ecological perspective
- ▶ *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process* (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971)
  - ▶ No unlimited economic growth is possible in a closed thermodynamic system
- ▶ “The Limits to Growth” report (Meadows et al. 1972) – Club of Rome
  - ▶ "If the present growth trends in world population, industrialization, pollution, food production, and resource depletion continue unchanged, the limits to growth on this planet will be reached sometime within the next one hundred years."
- ▶ We are already using 125 % of the Earth's regenerative capacity. (Filipo, 2008)

# Origins

- ▶ Social and cultural perspective
  - ▶ An institution needs to grow to the extent that it reaches the point where the benefits falls behind its marginal costs. (Illich, 1973)
  - ▶ Consumerism vs. simplicity; speed and complexity vs. conviviality
- ▶ Third worldist perspective
  - ▶ Inequality between Global North / Global South
  - ▶ Criticism of developmentalist approaches (including socialism)
  - ▶ Works of Gorz, 1991; Latouche, 2005; Besset, 2005

# Degrowth movement

- ▶ The International Conference on Degrowth (since 2008)
  - ▶ "From a degrowth perspective, the current economic crisis is the result of systemic limits to growth. It is not a cyclical crisis or fault in the credit system."  
(D'Alisa et al., 2015 )
- ▶ Academic association: [degrowth.org](http://degrowth.org)
- ▶ Social movement: [degrowth.info](http://degrowth.info)
- ▶ Political party: [partipourladecroissance.net](http://partipourladecroissance.net)
- ▶ After Paris Agreement (2015) Green/Sustainable growth vs. degrowth
- ▶ Wellbeing Economy Governments ([weall.org](http://weall.org))

# Policy implications

- ▶ A positive agenda for implementation, instead of being alarmist about future environmental catastrophe
- ▶ "Prosperity" is not unique to growth economics, but rather related to public investment and spending.
- ▶ Peter A. Victor, *Managing without growth* (2008); Tim Jackson, *Prosperity without growth* (2017); Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics* (2017); Jason Hickel, *Less is More* (2020)
- ▶ The common character of their policy implications was to separate wellbeing from growth, and to share the pie more evenly rather than making it bigger.



# Policy implications

- ▶ **Climate debt:** Responsibility of the global north and multinational corporations.
- ▶ **Re-localization:** Global supply chains → high carbon footprint, and → labor exploitation
- ▶ **Reducing working time and job sharing:** Three outcomes; sharing employment, reducing throughput and liberating time
- ▶ **Wealth and income caps:** Caps on wealth and/or income to reduce inequalities.
- ▶ **Universal basic income and universal services:** Allocating everyone unconditionnaly a living income. Free health, education, transportation, culture and the art services.

# Policy implications

- ▶ **Employment guarantee:** Provision of decent work to anyone willing to work.
- ▶ **Sectors to be cut:** Advertising, mining/extraction, fossil energy, military industry, finance, luxury consumption.
- ▶ **Care income:** Childcare, elderly-care, care for nature should be remunerated.
- ▶ **Ending planned obsolescence:** Longer use of industrial products.
- ▶ **Sharing instead of ownership:** Less private and more common goods,
- ▶ **A simple life:** Shift from a high-consumption lifestyle to a simpler one

# Sources

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# Conclusion

- ▶ Degrowth is a movement of thought in the making.
- ▶ The most tangible gain that degrowth can bring is to end the view of growth as something only positive
- ▶ While degrowth's implications are only finding limited application today, they are inspiring other green economy projects



Thank you for listening...