

# The Limits to Growth: Sustainability and the Circular Economy

## Lecture 10: Beyond the Circular Economy

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# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction

### CE Recap

- Goals of the CE:
  - Maintain natural resources and minimize the discharge of substances that are harmful to health and nature
  - Ecological modernization of the economy to increase resource efficiency, e.g., by technical innovation and digital solutions
  - Products/services designed and constructed in such a way, that they can be returned to the economic and material flows at any time with little financial and energetic effort
  - Increase/maximize utilization of resources, e.g., Performance Economy

# Introduction

## CE Criticism

- Replace the LE with circularly oriented forms of consumption and production
- CE focus mostly on earned value management (“Wertschöpfungsmanagement”), product-service systems, product/business model innovations within existing power asymmetries
- Decouple economic growth and consumption of natural resources

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**→ But why do we need never ending economic growth and why is it good to consume as many goods and services as possible?**

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**→ But why do we need never ending economic growth and why is it good to consume as many goods and services as possible?**

- Alternatives:
  - Sufficiency strategies and lifestyle changes
  - Question the prevailing entrepreneurial orientation towards the shareholder concept
  - Deconstruction of existing power and hegemonic relations

# ECO-SUFFICIENCY



# Eco-Sufficiency

## Eco-Efficiency - Definition

Eco-Efficiency →

# Eco-Sufficiency

## Eco-Efficiency - Definition/Example

Eco-Efficiency → *Minimise the material input required to achieve a certain economic result, i.e. to improve the ratio between the use of resources and the production of goods.*

- Example:

# Eco-Sufficiency

## Eco-Efficiency - Definition/Example

*Eco-Efficiency → Minimise the material input required to achieve a certain economic result, i.e. to improve the ratio between the use of resources and the production of goods.*

- Example: A car that consumes 3 liter per 100km is 2x more ecologically efficient than a car that consumes 6 liter.

# Eco-Sufficiency

## Eco-Consistency - Definition

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# Eco-Sufficiency

## Eco-Consistency - Definition/Example

Eco-Consistency → *Ecological consistency is based on the damage intensity and environmental impact of the resources used. Instead of reducing their quantity, their nature or the product design should be optimised so that no emissions or waste are produced, regardless of the level of consumption → i.e., Circular Economy*

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- Example: A battery electric vehicle (BEV) that runs on green energy (e.g., solar/wind/etc.)

# Eco-Sufficiency

## Efficiency + Consistency - Example

- Example:
  - First, minimize the fuel/energy consumption of a car
  - Second, operate the car with carbon-neutral fuel/energy



# **Eco-Sufficiency**

## **Definition(s)**



## Eco-Sufficiency

### Definition(s)

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*“A set of policy measures and daily practices that avoid the demand for energy, materials, land, water, and other natural resources while providing wellbeing for all within the planetary boundaries.” - IPCC*

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**Sufficiency → All you need is less**

# Eco-Sufficiency

## Example - New Apartment

- Scenario:
  - Size: 120m<sup>2</sup>
  - Heat demand: 130 kWh pro m<sup>2</sup> and year

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- Sufficiency: Live in a smaller apartment (or utilize less space per person)

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- Problem(s):
  - Efficiency and consistency allow us to either:
    - a) continue living a nice life using less resources
    - b) Live even more comfortably using the same amount of resources



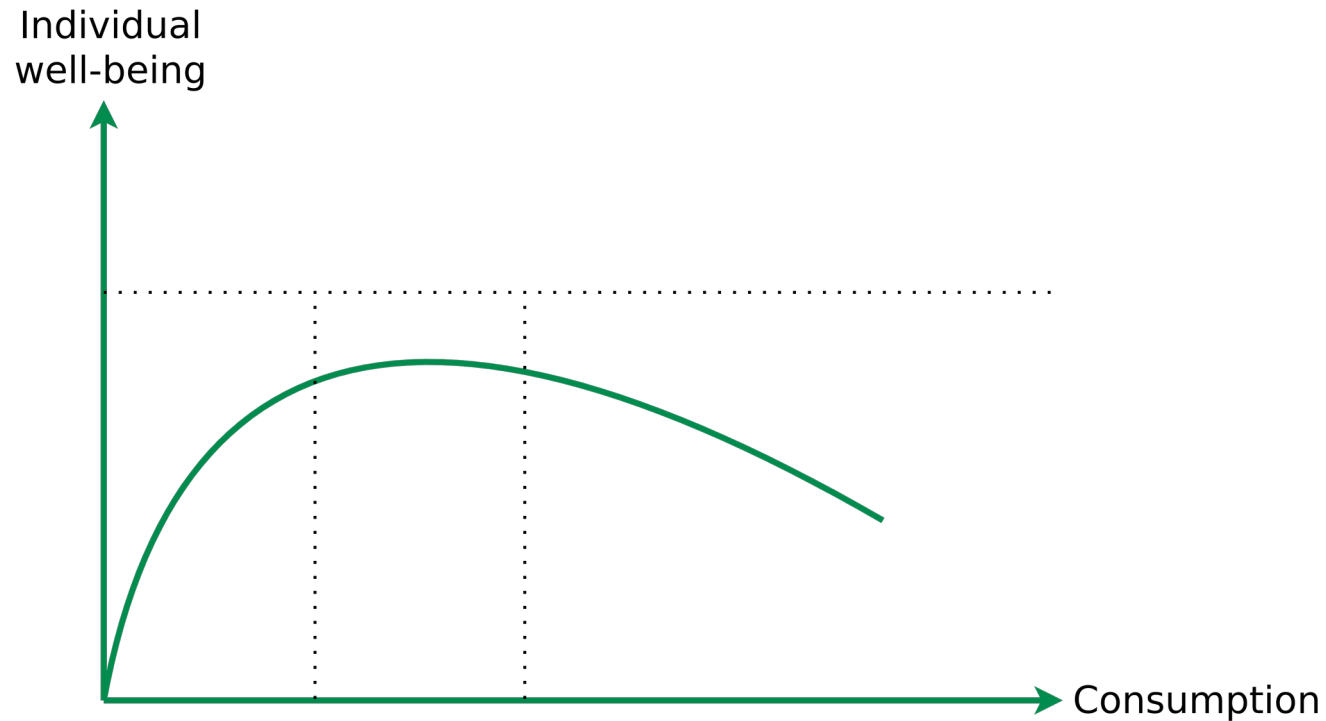
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    - b) Live even more comfortably using the same amount of resources
  - They promise to maintain your individual freedom (of choices) by fixing ecological challenges/downsides using technological/political action
    - Also personal responsibility by buying yourself out of this mess → just buy high-prices eco-friendly products and everything will be fine. No need to consume less.

# Eco-Sufficiency

## Sufficiency vs. Overconsumption



**DETOUR**

## Detour Sustainability

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- Consume less → Less money spend, i.e. lower living costs?
- Lower living costs → Less work hours required to cover costs, e.g., 20h work week?
- Technological advances reducing workload even further?

## Detour

### 15h Work Week

John Maynard Keynes predicted a 15h work week in his 1930 essay *“Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren”*

## Detour

### Why am I working 40+h a week?

- Lively debates pertaining to Keynes prediction – especially among economists.
- Main problem: Keynes did not account for the massive increase in consumerism → Majority of people chooses more toys and pleasure over less work hours



## Detour

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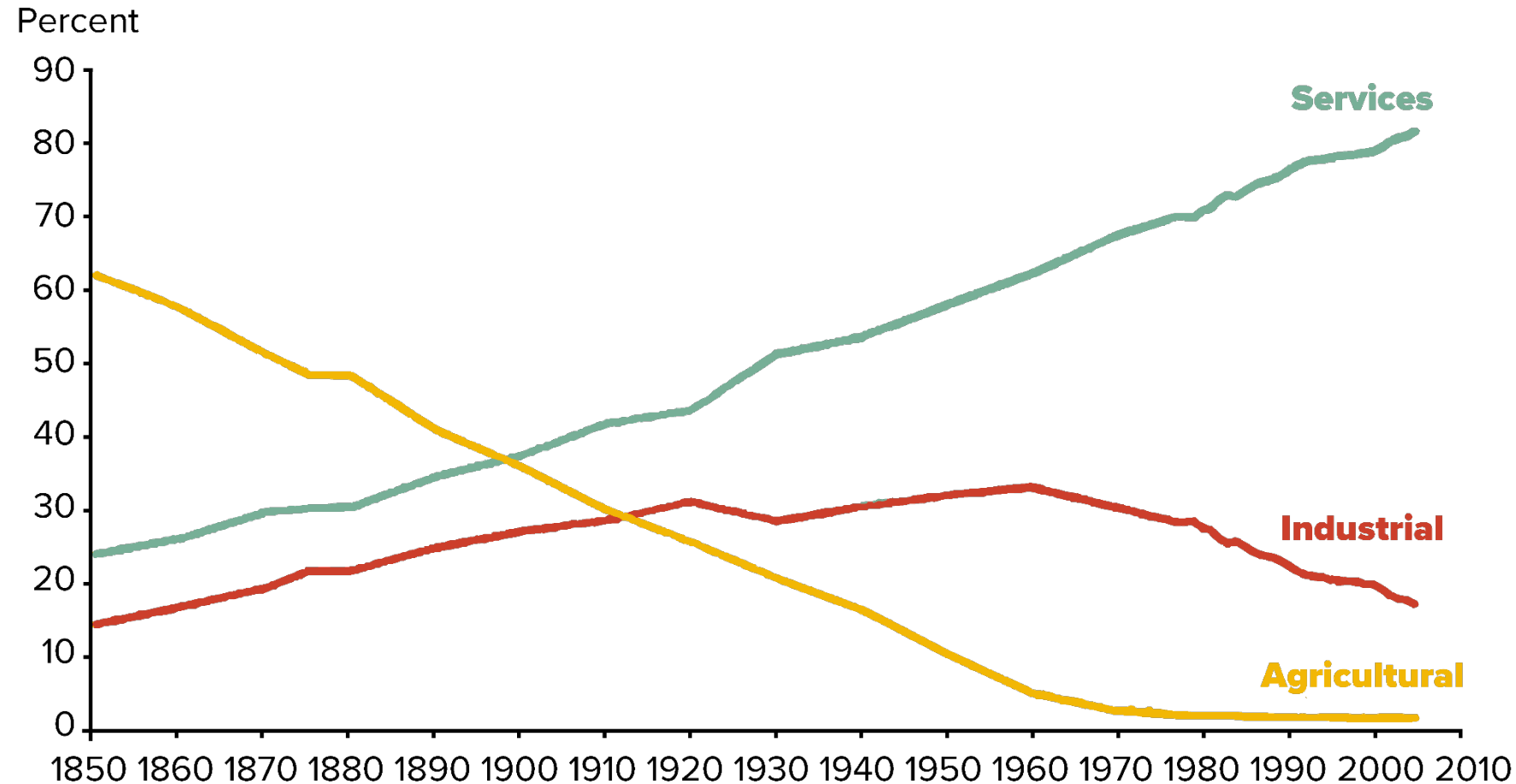
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**Contradicts our sustainability paradigm (consume less).**

## Detour

### Shift in Labor Force 1850 - 2010



## Detour

### Bullshit Job - Essay and Book by David Graeber

- Essay: *On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs: A Work Rant* (2013) - [Link](#)
- Book: *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (2018)

## Detour

### Bullshit Job - Definition

*„Form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of employment, the employee feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case.“*

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→ Inefficiencies in capitalism?



# Detour

## Bullshit Jobs - Categories

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- Taskmasters: Create extra work for those who do not need it, e.g., middle management, leadership professionals

# Detour

## Bullshitization

*Transition of a meaningful job into a bullshit job through corporatization, marketization or managerialism.*

## Detour

### Changes in full-time staff size and student enrollment (1976-2011 and 1976-2018)

|                          | 1976       | 2011       | % change 1976-2011 | 2018       | % change 1976-2018 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|--------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Faculty                  | 434,000    | 762,114    | +76%               | 832,119    | +92%               |
| Executive/Administrative | 97,003     | 231,602    | +139%              | 255,881    | +164%              |
| Other Professionals      | 150,319    | 699,867    | +366%              | 830,189    | +452%              |
| Nonprofessional Staff    | 630,511    | 742,445    | +18%               | 631,675    | +0.19%             |
| Student Enrollment       | 11,012,137 | 21,010,590 | +91%               | 19,645,918 | +78%               |



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*(Oxford Dictionary)*

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  - Fulfilling those desires → Reward for suffering through pointless work
  - Bullshit jobs also serve political ends, in which political parties are more concerned about having jobs than whether the jobs are fulfilling.
  - Also → Populations occupied with busy work have less time to revolt

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### Bullshit Jobs - Now What?

- **Graeber's solution → Universal Basic Income (UBI) → Livable benefit paid to all, thus letting people work at their leisure**

## Additional Resources

- Manfred Folkers, Niko Paech (2020) – All you need is less
- David Graeber. *Debt: The First 5000 Years* (2011).
- David Graeber. On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs – Essay (2013) – [Link](#).
- David Graeber. *Bullshit Jobs* – Book (2018).

# Questions?