



# Degrowth

in Scotland



Degrowing the economy.  
Regrowing our lives.

Course handbook



centre for  
human ecology



# Introduction

**A**s we write, the world reels from the impact of the Coronavirus epidemic, which has caused both catastrophic human suffering and the cratering of economies based on consumption and extractivism. As societies cautiously emerge from lockdown and governments attempt to resuscitate capitalism under various iterations of ‘building back better’, the time is favourable to offer a reconsideration of what ‘growth’ means, and articulate critiques and alternatives.

Creating new useful knowledge, making it freely available, and continuing to update and reflect based on new evidence are values that seem central to responding to the ‘meta-crisis’ of environmental, political and social instability we are currently living through. In this spirit, we offer this first iteration of a Degrowth Handbook as part of this ongoing journey of meaning-making.

This handbook introduces some historic gains and problems of economic growth and the principles of degrowth and ecological economics, different frameworks for an economics of radical sufficiency, meeting fundamental human needs and promoting new rhythms and ways of working for a more just and sustainable world. New ideas and projects are introduced, which promote the flourishing of degrowth principles in a Scottish context.

These ideas are presented in five sections containing overview and in-depth readings.



*“New ideas and projects are introduced, which promote the flourishing of degrowth principles in a Scottish context.”*

Links to resources cited in this document, and up-to-date readings can be found at [www.enough.scot/degrowthhandbook](http://www.enough.scot/degrowthhandbook).



*"The course is a dynamic and evolving project..."*

## Process and rationale

This handbook was developed for the short course Degrowth in Scotland: Degrowing the Economy, Regrowing Our Lives run jointly by the Centre for Human Ecology and Enough! Scotland.

The readings contained within the handbook are all Creative Commons licensed by their authors and publishers, but were collated by us for the handbook. The entire handbook is a freely available resource under the Creative Commons (CC) license Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International. Others can remix, adapt, and build upon it non-commercially, as long as they credit the license holders and license their new creations under the identical terms. If you do this, please contact us at [info@enough.scot](mailto:info@enough.scot) to let us know how you've used the material.

The handbook is a work in progress, and this version (v1.0) was first published online in autumn 2020. The course is a dynamic and evolving project, and we intend to update and improve this handbook accordingly. The stable link for the most recent version is <https://enough.scot/degrowthcourse/>

We also invite those with expertise and knowledge to contribute to future versions and help us to improve the content. If you are interested in this, please contact us. Likewise if you discover any errors or wish to suggest corrections and amendments.

## Course Content and Overview

The five sections which make up the handbook correspond to the course structure and content.

**Session 1: Economic Growth, its History, Gains & Problems**

**Session 2: Introducing Degrowth Principles**

**Session 3: Degrowth in Practice: Human Flourishing**

**Session 4: Rhythms of Time and Work**

**Session 5: Degrowth in Scotland: Ideas and Practice**

**Session 6: Action Inquiry Participant Presentations**

# How to use this handbook

Each section has the following structure:

## Topic overview

- (A) One page introduction
- (B) One or two fundamental overview articles

## Further detail

- (C) Some in-depth readings
- (D) Extra resources

We hope that you will critically engage with the material and be inspired to put it into practice as well as sharing it with the communities and activist circles you are part of.

*Warmly,*

The 'Degrowth in Scotland' Course Team



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# Session 1

## Economic Growth: History, Gains and Problems

### Themes

- Basic principles of mainstream economics:  
GDP growth
  - The problems with economic growth
  - Growth imperatives: why does our  
economic system depend on growth?
  - What does growth depend on?  
i.e. colonialism and extractivism
- 



# A) Introduction

We hear talk about economic growth all the time.

How many times have we heard in the news: “the economy grew by x%” ? Or, as it is the case for times of lockdowns: “the economy shrank by x%”? The way these messages are communicated and received do not make people question much about what they actually mean: there is an implicit agreement that growth is positive and shrinking is negative. “The economy”, which we willingly or not consider the most important element of public life, broadly determining the quality of our livelihoods, politics and so on, gets to be defined by a single number. Now, what is this powerful number in reality? It is Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a “monetary measure of the market value of all the final goods and services produced in a specific time period.” This number has only influenced 0.8% of the period we normally make correspond to human civilisation. Before 1934, nobody ever thought of calculating such a thing. It was only when Simon Kuznet was asked to write a report for the US Congress that he developed the first formula for GDP, while warning “The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income.” Politicians, policymakers and economists of course ignored the warning and, since then, GDP is widely considered as the world’s most powerful statistical indicator of national development and progress.

Yet GDP does not account for: (a) Non-market activities: caring for our children, elders, loved ones; growing our own veggies; making clothes and exchanging them etc. (2) Composition of output: it makes no difference between producing weapons or bicycles (3) Inequalities: an economy where everything goes to a couple of billionaires while 99% of the people is getting poorer could be a growing economy (4) Quality of life: health, life expectancy, happiness etc. (5) “Externalities”: deforestation, extraction, pollution, etc. But what are, then, the gains of GDP growth that were able to sustain it up until now? First of all, it is necessary for making people richer. In the last decades, rich people have appropriated the capital produced by GDP growth, while the middle and lower strata of society captured none or only small portions of this wealth (2) However, this allows rich people to claim that growth ultimately makes everyone richer. This is a very powerful discursive weapon in order to avoid the other way in which poor people could get richer: having a higher share of the wealth currently

*“The welfare of a nation  
can scarcely be inferred  
from a measurement of  
national income.”*

- Simon Kuznet



1. “Gross Domestic Product | U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA)”. [www.bea.gov](http://www.bea.gov). Retrieved 29-08-2020.

2. The start of “human civilisation” is commonly corresponded to the beginning of the neolithic, in 10,000BC.

## "What sorts of "development" and "progress" does GDP account for?"

captured by the rich i.e. redistribution. (3) Another strong argument for GDP growth is that more production means more salaried jobs, and salaried jobs are the main form of sustaining livelihoods (in capitalist societies). (4) Also, it is not to deny that there are economies who might benefit

from some increased material wealth, and that this could contribute to some happiness. But, as shown by the famous Easterlin Paradox, this is true only up to a certain point. After that point, increases in GDP correspond to actually slowly decreasing happiness [we will focus on this aspect more thoroughly in week 3].

And of course, let's not forget the elephant in the room: there cannot be infinite growth on a finite planet. However, we will focus on this in session II. For now, we will start with an overview article calling for the retirement of GDP (→ B.1 \*). The following, longer, overview reading (→ B.2 \*\*) is a contemporary assessment of the present debate on growth, as well as a complete and insightful analysis of the main problems associated with it.

We then delve into in-depth readings. Both address core structural mechanisms underlying economic growth, answering questions such as: why is our economy dependent on economic growth? What does economic growth depend on? The answer to the first question has to do with so-called growth imperatives, which you can read about in the first article (→ C.1 \*\*). An answer to the second question, instead, can be found in the second short article (→ C.2 \*), which explains how GDP growth is inevitably linked to extractivism and colonialism. Since the dawn of capitalism, in fact, there could not have been any growth without extracting ever increasing value from nature (land and people), by colonizing territories, dispossessing people, and expanding the commodity frontiers, a process that has been ongoing since.

Overall, in this session we reflect on questions such as: What sorts of "development" and "progress" does GDP account for? What is left out? What is its role in capitalism (or in socialism)? Why are our economies dependent on growth? What are the underpinning mechanisms that make economies dependent on growth? What is the effect of this in the long term? Having a grasp of these issues will prepare us for delving into ecological limits to growth and the case for degrowth in the next session.





## B. Overview readings

### B.1 GDP, time to retire!

Lorenzo Fioramonti

The gross domestic product (GDP) has turned 86. It was indeed in 1934 that a young economist by the name of Simon Kuznets (who would later on receive a Nobel Prize for this) presented his first report on the design of national income accounts to the US congress.

Those were the hard times of the Great Depression and governments were desperately seeking some type of indicator to gauge if and how the economy was recovering. GDP did exactly that: it conflated the amount of spending in goods and services into one single number, which would go up in good times and down in bad times.

A few years later, the Second World War gave GDP unparalleled prominence in politics, as the availability of regular statistics about industrial output helped the American government outpace its enemies in terms of munitions' production.

More importantly, it allowed for the conversion of the civilian economy into a war machine without hampering internal consumption, a major advantage in generating revenues for the war (thus avoiding bottlenecks such as those experienced by Hitler's Germany) and propelling large-scale consumption in the post-war period. After that, the UN, the World Bank and the IMF began to export the GDP accounts to the rest of the world, turning this number into the gold standard of economic success.

Much more than a number, GDP has since come to represent a model of society, thereby influencing not only economic, but also political and cultural processes.

Our geography, our cities, our lifestyles are defined by the GDP circle of production and consumption. GDP has also colonized the lexicon of governance and the distribution of power at the global level. International clubs such as the G8, or the G20 have been defined according to their members' contribution to the world's gross output.

The concepts of 'emerging markets' and 'emerging powers' refer to a nation's current and projected GDP growth, as well as the 'ambivalent' distinction between the developed and the under-developed (or developing) world.

GDP is 'gross'

With the convergence of economic, social and environmental crises, there is now growing concern among progressive economists, politicians and scholars about the flaws of this number. Recently, the

*"Much more than a number, GDP has since come to represent a model of society, thereby influencing not only economic, but also political and cultural processes."*

magazine Nature published a global appeal to "leave GDP behind". GDP is 'gross' in so far as it does not include the depreciation of assets utilized in the production process (such as machineries, tools, vehicles, etc.).

Whatever is exchanged outside the market (e.g. within households, in the informal economies, through barter, etc.) does not count. In addition, GDP disregards the value of the natural resources consumed in the process of economic growth, as these are obtained free of charge from nature.

Moreover, it does not even consider the economic costs of pollution and environmental degradation, which are obvious consequences of industrial development. All these important omissions make GDP a very selective (some may rightly say myopic) measure of economic performance, let alone social welfare.

Household services, for instance, have a fundamental economic impact even though they are not formally priced. If governments had to pay for the innumerable services rendered at the household level (from child and frail care to education), our economies would arguably grind to halt. A study by the Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates that the value of household production in the US accounted for over 30% of economic output every year from 1965 to 2010 with a peak of 39% in 1965, declining to 25.7% in 2010.

In many countries, the 'odd jobs' and the goods and services exchanged informally provide the necessary subsistence to millions of people and often constitute the backbone of the real economy, albeit they do not feature in GDP.

Similarly, disregarding the input of natural resources just because they are not priced by nature makes us forget that economic growth is only possible because of a continuous provision of 'capital' from our ecosystems. Agricultural production would not be attainable without clean soil, water, air and other essential ecosystem services. Industrialization would have not been achieved without the fossil fuels, hydrocarbons and energy sources made available by the planet.

When these resources are depleted, however, we risk endangering not only economic progress, but also the very natural equilibrium that makes life possible. Is this the type of development model we aspire to achieve in the 21st century?



3. In the original copy of this article GDP had just turned 80 (© 2014, Fioramonti L.; Open Democracy; CC BY-NC 4.0; retrieve at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/openeconomy/gdp-turns-80-time-to-retire-o/>).

Accounting 101 tells us that profit equals income minus ‘all’ costs. As GDP systematically disregards key sectors in the economy and neglects critical costs, no reasonable businessman would use it to run a company. Yet, it has become the key parameter to run entire societies.

Even the OECD recognizes that:

“if ever there was a controversial icon from the statistics world, GDP is it. It measures income, but not equality, it measures growth, but not destruction, and it ignores values like social cohesion and the environment. Yet, governments, businesses and probably most people swear by it.”

The prestigious commission set up by Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen also highlighted the profound inadequacy of GDP as a measure of economic welfare.

Its 2009 report identified a number of alternative indicators and reminded us that GDP is just a measure of income, though it has often been treated as if it were an indicator of progress: “Conflating the two can lead to misleading indications about how well-off people are and entail the wrong policy decisions.”

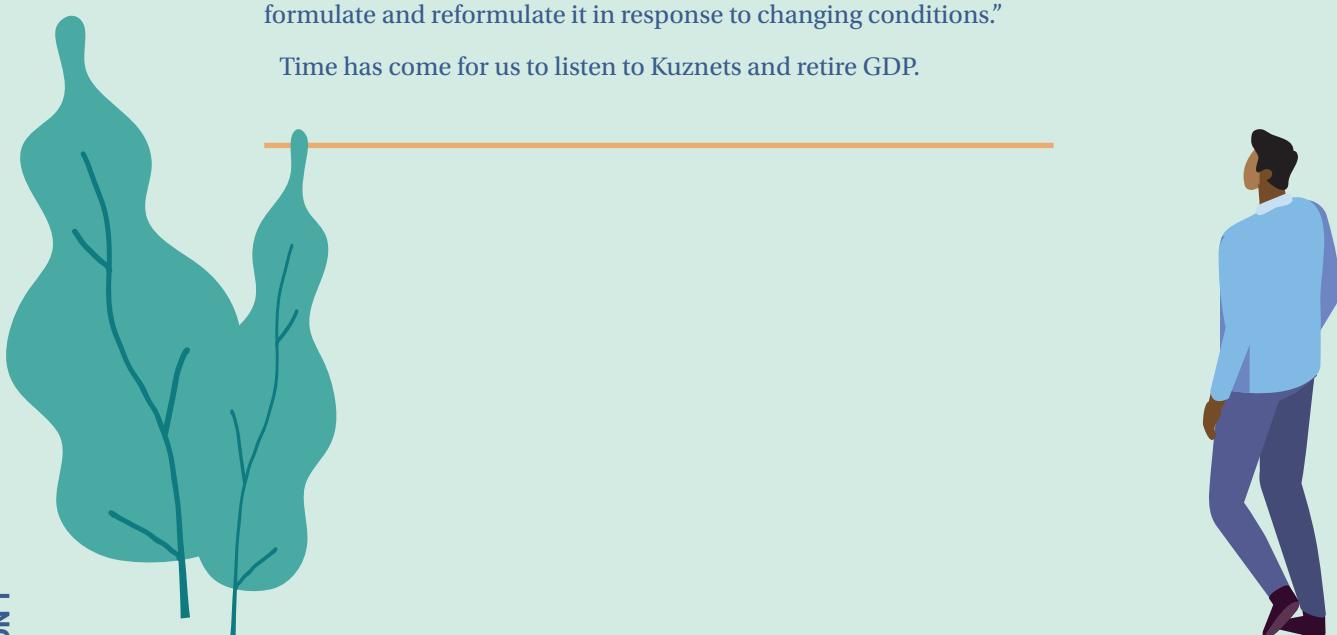
Back in 1934, Kuznets warned policy makers that, “the welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measure of national income.”

Later he pointed out that it makes no sense to simply seek GDP growth per se. Given that the assessment of a society’s economic goals is key to stir its political and social development, he recommended that each generation should change the way in which progress is measured, “to formulate and reformulate it in response to changing conditions.”

Time has come for us to listen to Kuznets and retire GDP.

*“It measures income, but not equality, it measures growth, but not destruction...”*

OECD



## B.2 Challenging the growth paradigm

By Positive Money<sup>4</sup>

Despite widespread recognition of GDP's deficiencies as a measure of progress, the growth paradigm remains firmly in place. Across policymaking, academia, and the media, social and environmental issues are still too often framed in terms of economic growth. Proponents of growth make three key arguments in its favour: (i) it increases life satisfaction; (ii) it alleviates poverty; and (iii) it helps us protect the environment. However, these are 'false promises'. When a closer look is taken at the impact of GDP growth, we find that the contrary is true: increasing wellbeing and avoiding environmental disaster requires embracing an end to economic growth.

### 1.1 Growthmania: Alive and Well

Recent years have seen a flurry of work discussing the inadequacies of GDP as a proxy for any form of 'economic progress' or 'wellbeing'. In some cases, policymakers appear to be taking these findings on board. For example, numerous cities in China have abandoned GDP targets, and the governments of Scotland, New Zealand, and Iceland have united in a 'Wellbeing Economy Governments' (WEGo) group aimed at incorporating wellbeing indicators into the policy process. International institutes such as the OECD (Ramos and Hynes, 2019) and the European Commission have launched "Beyond GDP" agendas. In the UK, a cross-party parliamentary group on Limits to Growth was established in 2016, and a parliamentary debate was held in 2019 to challenge the pursuit of economic growth.

Nonetheless, beyond acknowledgments of flaws in the measure of economic growth, the growth paradigm remains largely unchallenged in academia, policy and the media. Mainstream economists play a key role in perpetuating this status quo. For example, William D. Nordhaus won the 2019 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences for his work that justified delayed action on climate change partly due to the alleged hit to GDP that immediate action would cause. His model's 'damage function' establishes a mathematical relationship between temperature rises and GDP decreases, producing estimates of 'future damages' to GDP. This approach leads him to label a path to 4 degrees Celsius of warming as "optimal" (Nordhaus, 2018). Meanwhile, climate scientists tell us that such a level of warming would be catastrophic, possibly resulting in the death of much of the world's population (Vince, 2019).

Influenced by such analyses, as well as the mainstream narrative of high GDP growth reflecting the success of government programmes, many policymakers continue to prioritise growth over environmental and social issues. For example, the UK government's main document outlining its environmental strategy is entitled the "Clean Growth Strategy", framed entirely around achieving GDP growth. More recently, the Treasury published its "Green Finance Strategy", which is also framed in the context of the global shift "towards cleaner, more resilient economic growth" (p.6). Further, in response to a question about the UK's dependency on growth, the government stated: "Our economic priority



as a Government is to ultimately see the economy grow, therefore, we make no apology for ‘growth dependency’’ (Bennett, 2020).

Equally, In the EU, the European Commission (EC, 2019b) is presenting its ‘Green Deal’ as a “new growth strategy” for a future EU economy “where economic growth is decoupled from resource use.” The associated “massive public investment and increased efforts to direct private capital towards climate and environmental action” is touted as “an opportunity to put Europe firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth.” International organisations including the UNEP, the OECD, the World Bank, and the IMF are all framing their response to climate change as reigniting growth in a ‘green’ manner (e.g. World Bank, 2018). As far as monetary policymaking is concerned, the grip of growth is enshrined in legislation. The Bank of England’s website explains:

“whenever we consider different possible policy actions (such as a change in interest rates), our remit requires us to pick whichever actions will boost economic growth the most while still meeting our primary objective for low and stable inflation. We also have responsibilities to ward off the chances of a financial crisis from happening. This also helps create the conditions for economic growth. And here, too, our remit explicitly requires us to factor in the impact on growth when deciding on policy actions that help to keep the financial system safe.”

Furthermore, public debate and commentary on immigration (Goldin, 2018), fiscal policy (Stirling, 2019), Brexit (Tetlow and Stojanovic, 2018) and other topics are still often largely framed in terms of economic growth. Generally, one faction claims a particular policy is good for economic growth, while the opposing faction claims it is not, both combining varying degrees of rhetoric and evidence.<sup>6</sup> Only in relatively rare cases do commentators (Goodfellow, 2019) and politicians (Lucas, 2019) effectively escape the ‘growth’ framing of such issues. Even in the case of Covid-19, some have framed the debate on public health measures in terms of their negative (Young, 2020; Whipple, 2020) or ultimately positive (Reyes, 2020; Wolf, 2020) impact on economic growth.

All of the above inevitably has an impact on the private sector as well. Financial markets, private companies, and to some extent consumers are influenced by GDP predictions and updates. As with any forecasts that impact behaviour, this produces self-fulfilling prophecies, such that GDP fixation can create a pro-cyclical effect (Van den Bergh, 2009).

While the flaws of the GDP measure are being increasingly recognised, the grip of the growth paradigm remains deeply entrenched across pretty much all sectors and organisations. A critique of our primary measure of economic growth, the GDP indicator, provides little prospect for the change we need without an accompanying critique of economic growth itself.



## 1.2 The False Promises of Growth

This section reviews the three main false promises of growth that remain common in public discourse. These are that growth is necessary to: (i) increase life satisfaction; (ii) alleviate poverty; and (iii) protect the environment. We show that in all three cases, growth is in fact counterproductive to achieving these goals. Ensuring wellbeing and avoiding ecological disaster will require a new model of development.

### 1.2.1. Increasing life satisfaction

#### The promise:

**Growth is an effective means of increasing life satisfaction.**

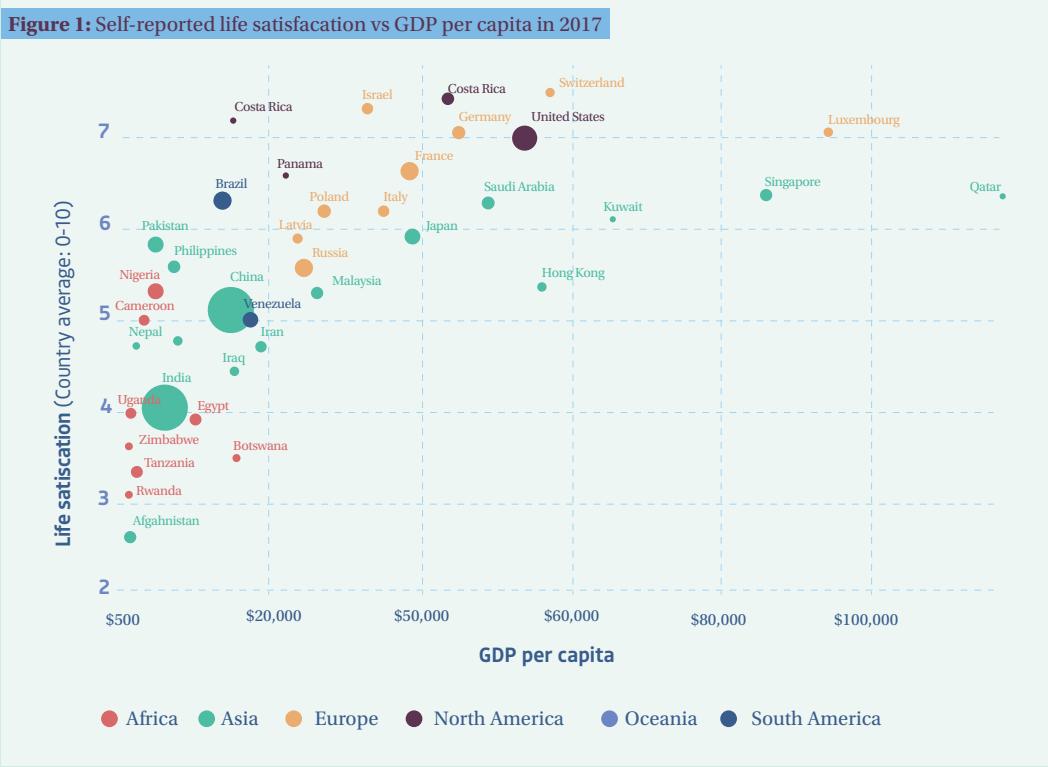
#### The reality:

**Growth has minimal, if any, positive impact on life satisfaction.**

There are two empirical approaches to assessing the relationship between GDP growth and life satisfaction that are the most frequently taken. The first is cross-sectional analysis of GDP and life satisfaction in multiple countries at a given point in time, and the second is time-series analysis of changes in GDP and life satisfaction over time. The two approaches yield slightly different results, though both show that at least in high-income countries, further GDP growth does not improve life satisfaction.

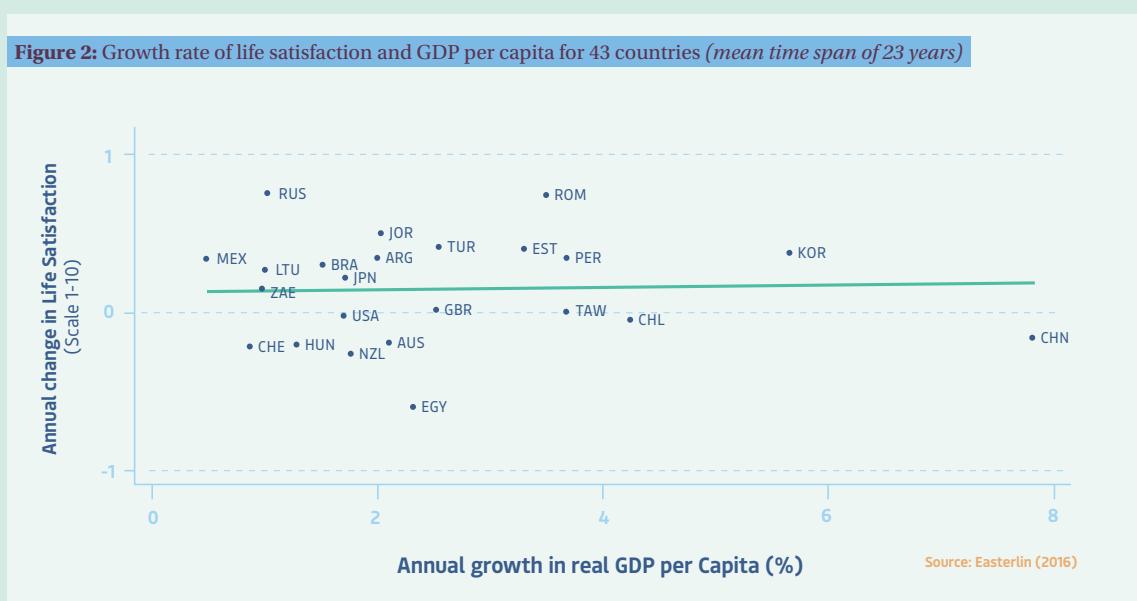
The first approach, a cross-sectional snapshot of self-reported life satisfaction, shows diminishing increases in life satisfaction from increased GDP per capita (displayed in Figure 1). This suggests that for countries with a relatively high GDP per capita, further growth will not further enhance life satisfaction.<sup>7</sup> For lower-income countries, this data seems to imply that further growth could enhance wellbeing.

**Figure 1:** Self-reported life satisfaction vs GDP per capita in 2017



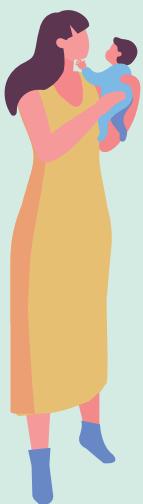
However, based on extensive time-series data on countries across the income spectrum, Easterlin (1974, 2013, 2016) has consistently found no positive relationship between GDP growth and life satisfaction, as displayed in Figure 2. China is an exemplary case of this, as real GDP has grown at an unprecedented rate in the last two and a half decades, yet reported life satisfaction has not grown at all (Easterlin et al., 2012).

**Figure 2:** Growth rate of life satisfaction and GDP per capita for 43 countries (*mean time span of 23 years*)



Growth does not deliver an increase in life satisfaction because it mostly goes to the world's wealthiest (Matthews, 2017) and does not entail greater success in meeting human needs (Hickel, 2020a). In fact, growth thrives off of many socially and environmentally detrimental activities, such as war mobilization and post-war reconstruction, environmental disasters that require investment for restoration, planned obsolescence, and marketing campaigns that consistently pressure people to consume at faster rates and in higher quantities.

Easterlin's studies suggest that even in lower-income countries GDP growth does not chart a path toward greater wellbeing. This suggests the common claim that growth is an effective means of alleviating poverty may be mistaken, as discussed in the next section.



### The impact of growth on the risk of pandemics and environmental crises.

Pandemics like Covid-19 and environmental crises are deeply interlinked, both fundamentally caused by the widespread destruction of ecosystems (Vidal, 2020). Sidelining environmental concerns in the economic response to Covid-19 would be entirely counterproductive, as the consequent increase in environmental pressures would exacerbate the risk of further pandemics down the line, on top of the other catastrophes caused by climate and ecological breakdown (Banque de France, 2019). Therefore, a recovery focused primarily on economic growth would be equally counterproductive, given the tight coupling between growth and environmental pressures. Rather, recovering from Covid-19 must entail profound shifts in economic structures and political focus. Building a resilient economy that meets human needs, free of the shackles of growth dependency, is now more urgent than ever.

## 1.2.2. Alleviating poverty

### **The promise:**

**Growth is an effective means of alleviating poverty.**

### **The reality:**

**Growth drives economic injustices, borne by the world's poorest.**

Environmental economist Lord Stern has labeled calls to end the pursuit of growth as “close to reprehensible”, justifying this primarily with the narrative that growth alleviates poverty (Confino, 2014). Even among critiques of GDP, many high-profile authors, such as Jackson (2011), argue that growth should not be abandoned in low-income countries. We approach these claims with skepticism, highlighting the economic injustices driven by the pursuit of growth.

Much of the GDP growth that low-income countries have seen in recent decades has been the result of shifts from informal to formal economic activity, rather than a reflection of any increase in the provision of new goods and services to the poor (Van den Bergh, 2009). Most importantly, such shifts have involved increases in inequality, often “accompanied by a loss of local community and subsistence agriculture, as well as migration of farmers to urban slums, with predictable negative consequences for food availability, health and quality of life” (Van den Bergh, 2009, p.126). Consequently, a majority of the world’s poor are actually concentrated in countries that have experienced strong economic growth in recent decades (Nilsen, 2018).

‘Post-development’ authors have led the charge in unveiling these dynamics. They show how the narrative that growth is a proxy for development is grounded in “a narrowly defined concept of poverty that ignores cultural diversity” (Spash, 2020, p.9). This school of thought also documents how the ‘development equals growth’ narrative originated in US imperialist policy, and was subsequently adopted by the governments of other wealthy countries (Hickel, 2017). Promoting this narrative encouraged the incorporation of more cheap labour and natural resources into global production chains, presenting greater profit opportunities for multinational corporations.

A form of economic imperialism, established in trade agreements and the architecture of the international monetary and financial system, secured the prospects for growth in high-income countries by allowing for the continued exploitation of land and labour in low-income countries (Hickel, 2017). Where such formal arrangements are insufficient, military force is used to secure resources - fossil fuels in particular - necessary to guarantee the ongoing success of the growth economy. For example, Klare (2014) argues that control over oil and gas reserves have been at the center of recent conflicts in Iraq and Syria, South Sudan, Ukraine, and the South China Sea. Therefore, strong militaries backed by substantial public investment are needed to support the pursuit of endless growth (Spash, forthcoming).

*“A majority of the world’s poor are actually concentrated in countries that have experienced strong economic growth in recent decades”*

**Nilsen 2018**



To the extent that certain low and middle-income countries have increased their share of global growth in more recent decades, it has largely failed to improve the lived experiences of poor and marginalised communities (Bhaduri, 2014). For example, in response to recent concerns over India's slowing growth rate, Roy (2020) highlights that the country's economic boom in the 2000s was partly built on the destruction of forests and indigenous lands and has fueled spiraling inequality. Bhaduri (2014, p.62) has described India's growth as 'predatory' explaining that "India is said to be poised to become a global power in the twenty-first century, with the largest number of homeless, undernourished, illiterate children coexisting with billionaires created by this rapid growth."

In India - and other countries that have relatively recently moved into the middle-income bracket - economic growth has been used to justify the dispossession of the poor and environmental damage. Poor and marginalised communities at the brunt of growth's destructive consequences are not being fooled by talk of progress and poverty alleviation (Bhaduri, 2014). Alternative development models, free from the imposition of economic exploitation and based instead on strengthening democratic processes and achieving social and environmental wellbeing, would be a far better choice to alleviate poverty.

### **1.2.3. Protecting the environment**

#### **The promise:**

**Growth enhances our ability to protect the environment.**

#### **The reality:**

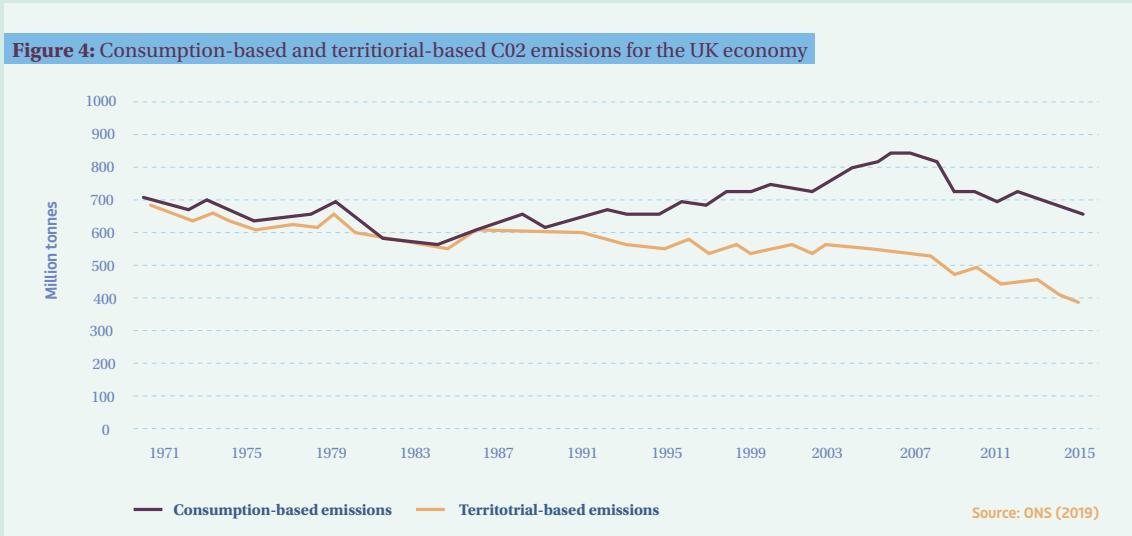
**Growth drives a continuous increase in environmental pressures.**

Mainstream economics asserts the existence of a so-called 'environmental Kuznets curve', which claims that environmental degradation increases up until a certain GDP per capita is attained, after which it begins to decrease as GDP per capita continues to increase (Van Alstine and Neumayer, 2010). In reality, however, evidence is mounting that continued economic growth fuels climate and ecological breakdown.

Positive Money's previous report on this issue (Boait and Hodgson, 2018) began by laying out why continuous GDP growth is in direct tension with environmental sustainability. In particular, we highlighted that the economic system, as a subsystem of the biosphere, necessarily has a material and energetic 'throughput'. In other words, it requires natural resources as input, and inevitably produces waste at the other end of the production and consumption process. Perpetually growing the economy is therefore inherently unsustainable and undesirable. Furthermore, we argued that achieving an absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures, especially one that is substantial enough to deal with environmental challenges, would require "technological breakthroughs unlike anything seen to date" (Boait and Hodgson, 2018, p.15).

Despite all efforts to disprove them, misleading claims regarding the decoupling of economic growth and environmental pressures continue to circulate. For example, a common claim in policy debates is that since 1990, the UK economy has grown by over two thirds while carbon emissions have fallen by 40%. Crucially, however, this number does not take into account the embodied emissions in the UK's growing volume of imported goods. While it is true that the UK's carbon emissions from domestic industry have declined, this has largely come as a result of the outsourcing of manufacturing to other countries (ONS, 2019).<sup>12</sup> If we measure emissions on a consumption basis, <sup>13</sup> the illusion of any

absolute decoupling quickly disappears, as emissions have distinctly continued to rise with a decrease only occurring in the years following the financial crisis. A comparison between consumption-based and territorial-based emissions is displayed in Figure 4 below:



Since the 2008 financial crisis, there are signs of absolute decoupling of carbon emissions from economic growth in high-income countries, including the UK (ONS, 2019). This can be observed in Figure 3, as consumption based carbon emissions in the UK remained on a downward trend during the post-crash economic recovery. The problem, however, is that this decoupling is not happening rapidly enough, nor is it happening at all for resource use (Hickel and Kallis, 2019).

Misleading claims regarding resource use - such as steel, aluminium, and copper - are also widespread. For example, a recent book by Andrew McAfee (2019), supports the green growth argument based on the claim that the US and other rich countries have decoupled their economic growth from resource use. Again, however, the data used is territorial-based, and fails to account for the off-shoring of production since the 1980s. Using a consumption-based measure such as 'material footprint' it becomes clear that the US and other rich EU and OECD economies have barely experienced any dematerialisation whatsoever (Wiedmann et al., 2015). In other words, for resource use, we have not even seen a relative decoupling from economic growth.

There is a large and growing body of evidence that disproves claims of growth decoupling from environmental pressures. In 2019, the European Environmental Bureau published a comprehensive literature review concluding that there is "no empirical evidence supporting the existence of a decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures on anywhere near the scale needed to deal with environmental breakdown" (Parrique et al., 2019, p.3). A key dynamic explaining these findings is the so-called 'rebound effect' by which efficiency gains fail to significantly reduce material and energy usage as cost-savings are used to expand production and consumption (Freire-Gonzalez, 2017).

Based on the extensive literature on decoupling, our knowledge of the rebound effect, and further theoretical insights of ecological economists (Georgescu-Roegen, 1971), absolute decoupling of a sufficient speed and magnitude to meet climate and ecological goals appears highly unlikely, if not virtually impossible. Therefore, the climate and ecological emergencies necessitate that we end our pursuit of GDP growth.

### 1.3. Abandoning the GDP Indicator: A First Step

Currently, many that critique GDP as an indicator of economic progress refuse to fully displace it, or indeed accept the need to end growth itself. In 2008, the French government launched the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, led by French economist Jean-Paul Fitoussi and Nobel Prize winners Joseph Stiglitz and Amartya Sen. This Commission produced a report that outlines in much detail the deficiencies of the GDP indicator, but still suggests that we should continue to pay attention to it:

*“Changing emphasis does not mean dismissing GDP and production measures. They emerged from concerns about market production and employment; they continue to provide answers to many important questions such as monitoring economic activity.”*

**Stiglitz et al., 2009, p.12**

This fails to acknowledge the extent of the GDP indicator's ongoing influence and the negative repercussions of growth outlined in section 1.2.15 Enhancing human wellbeing and avoiding environmental disaster requires directly challenging and moving beyond the growth paradigm. In this sense, being growth 'agnostic' (Raworth, 2017) is also insufficient. Achieving an economy that meets human needs within planetary boundaries will entail ending growth in a planned and controlled manner, as advocated most consistently by proponents of 'degrowth' (D'Alisa et al., 2014).

Ending growth does not entail simply targeting zero or negative GDP growth using existing measures of economic activity. While this would likely result in a decrease in environmental pressures, it would still not tell us whether the level of economic activity is environmentally sustainable, nor would it give us any information on human wellbeing. Instead, as a first step to achieving a socially and environmentally beneficial end to growth, we recommend that in the UK, the ONS stop publishing GDP figures and the Treasury stop targeting GDP growth. This would immediately remove the negative impact of the GDP indicator, and allow for a comprehensive shift to alternative indicators of wellbeing.

Continuing to publish GDP figures, even if tweaked or complemented with other indicators, would perpetuate the current growth paradigm. GDP would likely continue to dominate public discourse and policy making, undermining the pursuit of social and environmental wellbeing. Putting an end to our misguided fixation with GDP growth requires that we stop measuring, reporting, and targeting it altogether.

As will be explored in the next chapter, an end to economic growth itself can only safely occur if structural transformations of the economy are simultaneously undertaken. Otherwise, so-called 'growth imperatives' will generate their own crises if growth is too low or negative. [...]



## C. In-depth readings

### C.1 Structural Growth Imperatives

#### Positive Money

Alongside shifting away from using GDP as an indicator, the structures of our economic system that demand GDP growth must be identified, so they can be safely adapted or replaced. These structures - referred to as growth imperatives - require growing GDP in order for financial, economic, and social systems to be relatively stable. If growth is low, zero or negative, growth imperatives generate crises.

Focusing on the financial system, we first look at how financialised banking requires growth to service the high burden of private debt it produces. Financial practices that drive a high private debt burden actually hinder growth, resulting in a crisis-prone system. Therefore, decreasing financialisation could be an effective way to foster stability and growth, but would not address the negative repercussions of growth. Instead, we must transition to a nonfinancialised and non-growing system.

In the absence of growth, all known forms of capitalism have strong tendencies towards creating mass unemployment and deepening inequality, which suggests that structural growth imperatives are a defining feature of capitalist economies. The monetary system is central to these dynamics, as interest-bearing debt created by commercial banks led to the development of capitalism and its growth imperatives. We find that a monetary system based on interest-bearing debt is incompatible with a non-growing economy. This shows the need for transformative monetary and financial policies to escape the growth imperatives of capitalism.



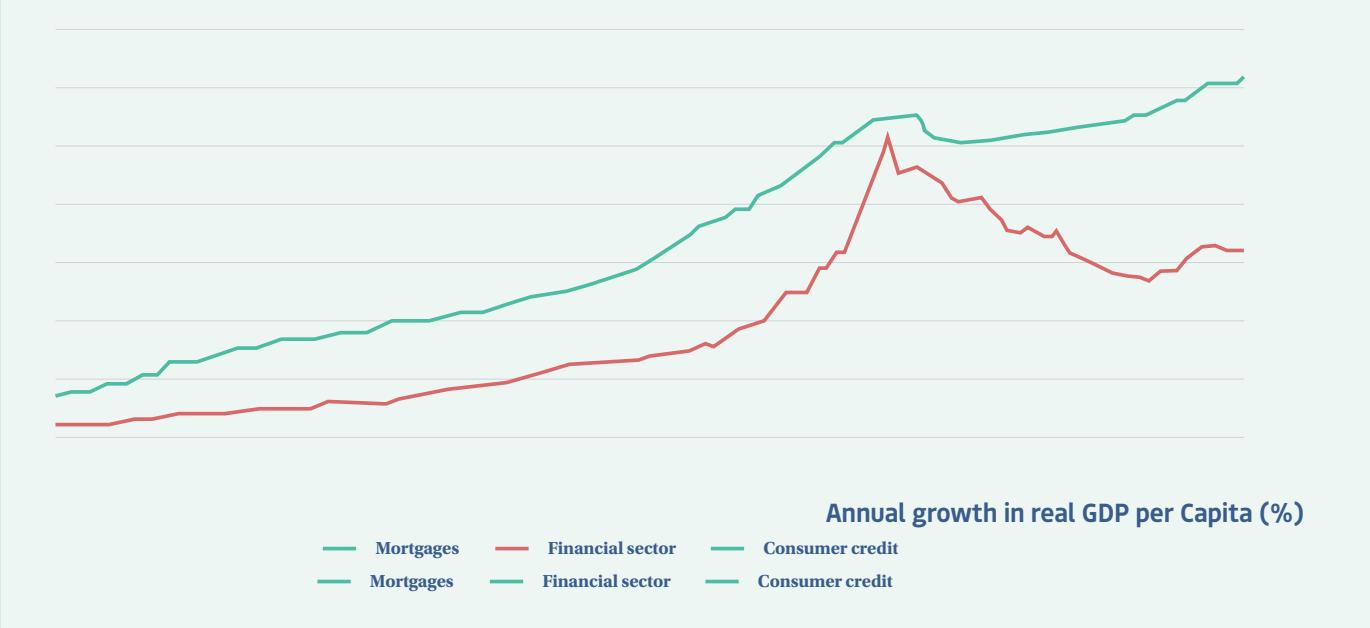
## 2.1. The Tension Between Financialisation and Growth

This section focuses on how our financialised banking system generates excessive private debt, which requires GDP growth in order to reduce the risk of financial crises. We highlight that commercial banks' disproportionate allocation of loans to the finance, insurance and real estate (FIRE) sectors hinders growth, thus making the private debt burden unstable. A low growth, highly financialised system prone to crisis has therefore resulted from the financial deregulation of the 1980s. Decreasing financialisation would increase stability by allocating finance to productive income-generating activities, but this would likely generate high-growth, which this report has shown to be unsustainable. This presents a barrier to achieving a stable non-growing economy.

### 2.1.1. The instability of financialised banking

Banks' power to allocate credit plays a key role in determining what economic activity is undertaken in the economy. Since the deregulation of the financial system in the 1980s and the subsequent rise of financialisation, banks increasingly serve FIRE sectors. As shown in Figure 5, UK monetary financial institutions lend disproportionately to mortgages and the financial sector, much of which fuels asset price inflation.<sup>17</sup> Further, given the high degree of financialization of large non-financial corporations (Krippner, 2005), lending to this sector is also not necessarily used for productive economic activity. Finance allocated to large corporations (as well as their internal funds and money raised through financial markets) has been increasingly used for commercial mortgages, mergers and takeovers, stock buybacks, etc. (Bezemer and Hudson, 2016).

**Figure 5**



This pattern of financialised bank lending generates a high burden of private debt, without fostering productive, income-generating economic activity that can service this debt. The high private debt burden amounts to a growth imperative starved of growth.<sup>18</sup> Securitisation of loans (packaging them up into tradable financial instruments known as asset-backed securities) facilitates the expansion of private debt by freeing up space on banks' balance sheets for further lending. Although securitization slowed down following the financial crisis of 2007-08, it has been back on the rise in more recent years. Recently, Aramonte and Avalos (2019) from the Bank of International Settlements warned of excessive issuance of collateralized loan obligations, the global market for which now totals approximately \$750 billion.

Financialised banking systems generate excessive private debt while holding back GDP growth, resulting in unstable asset price bubbles. As shown by Vague (2019), all financial crises around the world in the last 150 years were preceded by private debt growth outstripping GDP growth.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, as credit rose inexorably to record levels throughout the 1980s and 1990s, there was no positive effect on GDP. Subsequently, financial deepening had a negative impact on both GDP growth and financial stability (Sawyer, 2017). Therefore, by simultaneously requiring and undermining growth, the current banking system repeatedly generates financial crises.

*Financialised banking systems generate excessive private debt while holding back GDP growth, resulting in unstable asset price bubbles.*

### **2.1.2. The unsustainability of a high-growth alternative**

Escaping financialisation would involve ensuring that banks reallocate lending from the FIRE sector to the productive sectors of the economy. This would avoid asset price inflation and foster the income generation necessary to pay back loans, maintaining systemic stability. This is often seen as desirable, as many small innovative firms do not receive sufficient finance. While these innovative firms represent a very small fraction of the economy, they have significant growth potential (Mazzucato and Wray, 2015), which, if realised, would produce employment and income to pay down private debt, reducing the risk of financial crises.

Escaping financialisation would therefore boost growth through two main channels: (i) the financial system would become purely focused on productive and innovative activities; and (ii) severe financial crises that impact the real economy would become less likely. This is why data shows

a positive impact of finance on growth prior to the 1980s, where moderate levels of credit contributed positively to GDP growth (Sawyer, 2017).

We experienced this high-growth alternative in the period from 1940 to the 1970s, when policies of the welfare state and Bretton Woods constrained the financial system, ensuring that it would serve the productive sectors of the economy rather than itself. The post World War II era therefore saw high levels of GDP growth. However, this positive effect on growth poses a problem in the quest for a prosperous post-growth economy. As outlined in chapter 1, aggregate economic growth is socially and environmentally unsustainable. Re-orienting financial flows towards production and innovation is to some extent necessary,<sup>22</sup> but also risks being destructive by boosting GDP growth.

Our financial system appears stuck between two undesirable scenarios: (i) excessive financialisation resulting in high private debt and low growth, causing financial crises; or (ii) low levels of financialisation, constraining private debt growth but driving higher levels of growth. Yet what we need is a financially stable and non-growing economy. We have never witnessed such a state in advanced modern economies, as shown in Figure 6:



Currently, we find ourselves in the bottom right position of Figure 6. Effective financial regulation and fiscal policy could possibly bring us to the top left scenario, but this no longer an option if we are to meet environmental goals. We urgently need to move to the bottom left quadrant, which is unknown territory.

Many of the current widely supported fiscal, financial, and monetary policies are aimed at bringing the economy to a ‘greener’ version of the top left quadrant. This includes proposals that revolve around greening monetary policy and financial regulation, as well as fostering counter-cyclical green public investment. Demands for such policies are intensifying in the context of seeking a ‘green recovery’ from Covid-19’s economic fallout. Most of these proposals show a deep understanding of macroeconomics and monetary and financial policies, increasingly grounded in Post-Keynesian economics. However, if implemented alone, they are unlikely to be as ‘green’ as expected, given their likely positive impact on economic growth and consequent increase in environmental pressures.

Some authors (e.g. Stratford, 2020) argue that such policies can be aligned with post-growth economics if complemented with environmental protections such as caps on resource use. While this approach may prove successful, it also risks being insufficient. If such environmental protections restrict economic growth, yet growth imperatives exist in the basic features of the capitalist economic system, crises would result, as discussed in the following section.

## 2.2. Capitalism, Growth, and Interest-Bearing Debt

Given that neither the high-growth capitalism of post-WWII or the low-growth financialised capitalism of recent decades are compatible with a stable non-growing economy, can any variety of capitalism exist without growth? This section argues that capitalism has deeply embedded growth imperatives that would generate tendencies toward multiple crises in the absence of growth. The monetary system is central to these growth imperatives, as interest-bearing debt created by commercial banks was a key factor in the very development of capitalism. This shows why transformative monetary and financial policies must be central to effort to shift to a low, no, or negative growth economy.

### 2.2.1. Capitalism without growth?

In this section, we briefly categorise the different positions on capitalism and growth and outline some of the central growth imperatives embedded in the system. Given these growth imperatives, the possibility of a stable and socially just capitalism without growth is in doubt (Blauwhof, 2012), though still remains an open question (Barrett, 2018). Either way, achieving a post-growth economy requires the removal of capitalism's structural growth imperatives.

To avoid any ambiguity, we define capitalism as follows: (i) production of goods and services is, for the most part, carried out by wage-earning workers; (ii) this production is carried out primarily for the purpose of profiting employers that own the means of production; and (iii) the realisation of profit occurs via the sale of goods and services in markets, which operate under varying degrees of competitiveness. By contrast, we define the broad notion of 'anti-capitalism' as any set of socioeconomic arrangements characterised primarily by more democratic ownership of the means of production.<sup>24</sup>

A basic categorisation of the different views on growth and capitalism results in four broad camps, displayed in the Figure 7 table below, with examples of publications that can be positioned in each.



*"Even if some form of stable no-growth capitalism may be possible, it would require profound transformations in order to overcome its deeply embedded growth imperatives."*

All these authors are putting forward a vision of how to build a sustainable economy. Despite authors in the upper row (barring McAfee, (2019)) offering challenges to orthodox economic thinking, pro-growth solutions are incompatible with sustainable visions of the future (as we covered in Chapter 1). The bottom row recognises this incompatibility. The bottom left suggests capitalism can safely operate within a non-growing economy, while the bottom right views the two as being fundamentally irreconcilable.

While this is an ongoing debate, research suggests that no-growth capitalism would have strong tendencies towards crises of mass unemployment (Richters and Siemoneit, 2019) and ever-deepening distributional conflict(Blauwhof, 2012; Cahen-Fourot and Lavoie, 2016). This has been the typical consequence of previous periods of no-growth capitalism, including the last decade following the Global Financial Crisis, which also resulted in environmental regulation being sidelined in the interest of restoring growth (Smith, 2010). Today, the current Covid-19 recession is driving unemployment rates to unprecedented highs (Partington, 2020), and anxiety about negative growth has led many (Young, 2020) to argue in favour of disregarding public health measures, which would imply the sacrifice of many thousands of lives to reboot the economy.

Therefore, it is safe to say that even if some form of stable no-growth capitalism may be possible (Barrett, 2018), it would require profound transformations in order to overcome its deeply embedded growth imperatives.

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## 2.2.2. Interest-bearing debt and capitalism

A number of studies (Jackson and Victor, 2015; Cahen-Fourot and Lavoie, 2016) previously concluded that the monetary system does not contain a growth imperative. In particular, they find that interest-bearing debt and no-growth can theoretically co-exist under a condition of zero net private savings. The latest research on this topic (Svartzman et al., forthcoming), however, shows that the existence of interest-bearing debt cannot be treated as entirely independent from the high propensities to save and accumulate that are incompatible with a non-growing economy in these models.

Svartzman et al., (forthcoming) explain that interest-bearing debt created by commercial banks was central to the evolution of capitalism. The invention in the 13th century of depersonalized bills of exchange to serve trade and capital accumulation over extended geographical distances was a key innovation in the birth of early forms of capitalist relations (Braudel, 2014). Merchant bankers became the central managers of this system of payments, initially acting as simple bookkeepers of mutual credits and debts, and subsequently issuing their own liabilities, further facilitating the stimulation of capital accumulation (Aglietta, 2002).

With this development of money-creating banks serving an emerging capitalist system, positive interest rates became an increasingly established feature of the economy. As outlined by Svartman et al. (forthcoming), this had at least three major consequences: (i) with a rate of interest, money now had a price, effectively becoming a commodity that could be stored and accumulated (Fantacci, 2013); (ii) interest enabled credit/debt to become disconnected from real relations of trust between people, providing holders and in particular producers of money with an anonymised, impersonal power over debtors and the creation of economic value (Graeber, 2014); and (iii) financial institutions with their newfound economic power became increasingly interwoven with political and military power (*ibid.*). These historical observations display how, in many ways, the widespread imposition of interest-bearing debt is foundational to capitalist economic systems, possibly to the extent that it should be considered part of the very definition of capitalism (Ulgen, 2013).



Accordingly, there is little sense in treating aspects of the real capitalist economy, such as savings and investment behaviours, as independent of the existence of interest-bearing debt. As Svartzman et al. (forthcoming) summarise, “the progressive generalization of interest-bearing debt money, beginning in the Middle Ages, was intricately related to the legitimization of money in its function as store of value, which in turn increased the propensities to save and accumulate [...]”. If money had never become commodified in this way, it seems unlikely that it would have become such an object of desire and accumulation in the first place.

As a key pillar of the capitalist system, interest-bearing debt is deeply linked to the system’s multiple growth imperatives, and we find no convincing evidence that it could comfortably co-exist with a non-growing economy. Acknowledging this reasserts the need to explore transformative monetary and financial policies for post-growth [...].

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*“...there is little sense in treating aspects of the real capitalist economy, such as savings and investment behaviours, as independent of the existence of interest-bearing debt.”*



## C.2 Extractivism

Diana Vela Almeida

**O**ne could simply define extractivism as a productive process where natural resources are removed from the land or the underground and then put up for sale as commodities on the global market. But defining extractivism is not really this easy. Extractivism is related to existing geopolitical, economic and social relations produced throughout history. It is an economic model of development that transnational companies and states practice worldwide and that can be traced back more than 500 years all the way to the European colonial expansion. You can't tell the history of the colonies without talking about the looting of minerals, metals, and other high-value resources in Latin America, Africa, and Asia—looting that first nourished demands for development from the European crowns and later from the United States, and more recently also from China.

Today this model of accumulation of wealth remains a key part of the structure of a globally dominant capitalistic system—a system where power is in the hands of those who control money and industry—that has extended the extractive frontier to the detriment of other forms of land and resource uses. Such exploitation has also appropriated human bodies in the form of slaves or, more recently, as labor-intensive precarious workers. Extractivism is entirely tied up with exploitation of people.

Today's extractive industries such as gas, oil, and mining have an egregious reputation of violating human and environmental rights and supporting highly controversial political and economic reforms in poor countries.

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What follows is a copy of the entry "Extractivism" in the articles' series Resources for a better future of Uneven Earth. A copy can be retrieved at [www.unevenearth.org](http://www.unevenearth.org)

## Expanding the global frontiers of extraction

Since the mid-20th century, extractive frontiers have expanded around the planet as global demand for commodities has increased. Most non-industrialized countries (but also industrialized countries such as Norway, Canada, and the US) have activated their primary sectors of production to exploit landscapes that were previously inaccessible, such as in the case of fracking and tar sands extraction in the Arctic or in the open sea.

The central idea behind such state-sanctioned extractivism is that extractive projects are strategic ventures for national development in resource-rich countries that can thereby strengthen their comparative economic advantages—that is, their economic power relative to the economic power of other nations. In other words, poor nations can exploit their natural resources as a means for economic growth, a source of employment, and ultimately a tool for poverty reduction.

*“Indeed, in some places that are rich in natural resources—typically in African countries with large oil or mineral deposits—there is an inverse relationship between poverty reduction and economic performance.”*

This idea has been ingrained for many years in developing countries, and yet these countries have historically been unable to convert resource wealth into so-called development. Indeed, in some places that are rich in natural resources—typically in African countries with large oil or mineral deposits—there is an inverse relationship between poverty reduction and economic performance. This means that a lot of extractive activity is coupled with high levels of poverty, economic dependency on capital flows from developed countries, and political instability. This phenomenon is known as the “resource curse.”

In the last 20 years, several governments in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have challenged the “resource curse” by asserting national control over new forms of primary-production extractive industries. These are oriented around intensive and large-scale projects that cover previously inconceivable environments (again, like off-shore mining or fracking), as well as new forms of economic exploitation such as the agroindustry, fisheries, timber extraction, tourism, animal husbandry, and energy megaprojects.

These endeavours require national policy reforms. In Asia and Africa, extractivist national policies adhere to what is called “resource nationalism” and include the total or partial nationalization of extractive industries, renegotiation of contracts with foreign investment, increased public shareholding, new or higher taxation to expand resource rent, and value-added processing of resources.



In Latin America, the commodity boom at the beginning of the 2000s, marked by the increase in commodity prices together with transnational investments, led to great economic growth in what is called “neoextractivism”. Neoextractivism is a relative of resource nationalism and its emergence coincided with the rise to power of several progressive governments in the region that also seized more state control over natural resources within their national boundaries.

Advocates of neoextractivism claimed that new extractive practices would be “environmentally friendly” and “socially responsible”, thereby minimizing the disastrous impacts of extractivism as it was practiced throughout colonial and neoliberal history. Despite this, extractive industries have expanded and continue to expand in new frontiers with the negative effects of dispossessing people from their land, subjugating communal values to the values of extraction-driven development, and disrupting social structures, territories, and alternative forms of life.

In the debate over extractivism, there is no consensus about how to solve the problems caused by this mode of development. Some people think that extractivism should be viewed positively because of the economic growth and increased public spending that was accomplished during the early 2000s in Latin America. Others emphasise that most of the wealth produced is siphoned out of the producer countries to transnational investors, while negative impacts remain locally or regionally. And from the perspective of those who are directly affected by extractive industries, it is clear that economic revenues are not translated into socially just well-being and that these revenues are generated through the destruction of their lives and their land.

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## Not a neutral economic model

To further understand the complexity of the problem with extractivism, let us look at three interrelated dimensions of what makes up the extractivist economic model—and then consider how to go beyond the economic considerations of extractivism.

First, for extractivism to work, any biophysical “nature” becomes exclusively framed as a natural resource. That is, nature is conceived as an input (e.g. a resource like oil, soil, or trees) for the production of a commodity (e.g. gas, food, or timber). This simplifies the multiplicity of sconature relations with which such an economic model is entangled.

*“A cascading effect of environmental change indeed often occurs in ecosystems that are impacted by extraction, and thus interrelated elements of nature become irreversibly altered.”*

When thinking about the environmental impacts of extraction, we surely need to consider what will happen to other elements in nature that are interconnected with the extracted resource, including water, air, soil, plants, and human and non-human animals. A cascading effect of environmental change indeed often occurs in ecosystems that are impacted by extraction, and thus interrelated elements of nature become irreversibly altered.

Second, extractive projects are normally located in or close to marginal, poor, and racialized (i.e. conceived as non-white) populations. Extractivism arrives with promises of improved life conditions, more jobs, and infrastructure development. But large-scale extractive industries are by no means necessarily interested in forwarding local employment and improving the livelihood of people. Instead, experience tells us that they often serve to diminish alternative economic activities and disrupt existing community networks and social structures. Extractive industries have frequently dispossessed people of land rights with the result of cultural disruption and violence.

Marginal populations still bear the brunt of the social costs of extractivism and don't necessarily reap any benefits. In response to this, demands for social and environmental justice revolve around claims that the social and environmental costs of extractivism are higher than any economic benefit but that these costs are not accounted for in the decisions.

New demands from feminist movements and women Indigenous defenders highlight the relation between extractivism and patriarchal and racial violence and how this disproportionately impacts women. Examples are the increase in prostitution and sexual violence in communities restructured by extractivism and the externalization the social costs—the transfer of responsibilities for caring that are pivotal for the functioning of any economy—to women. As women are primarily responsible for the reproduction of life, they are highly vulnerable to the rupture of community or loss of territory. Because of that, women organizations have become the frontline defenders of their territories in the resistance against extractivism.

Finally, extractivism is a highly political endeavour that maintains a model of capital accumulation and destruction. It has led to the increase of socio-environmental conflicts around the globe, involving measures by states and industry to control resistance and criminalize social protest.

So, in sum, one should define extractivism as far from neutral or apolitical; it is an economic model that reflects a specific political position that relies on a given, predefined understanding of growth-oriented development as the ultimate good. Extractivism thereby reinforces political-economic arrangements that are biased against marginalized people who are deprived of their power to influence political decisions.

*“Anti-extractivism is about focusing on what type of life we want to achieve as a whole and how we build global systems of justice.”*

From an extractivist political perspective, resistance against extractivism is naïve, obstinate NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard-ism), or ignorant of the economic needs of the countries that could be “developed” by extractive projects. In reality, actions of resistance are contestations that challenge the dominant extractivist worldview and the uneven power relations between actors who decide, actors who benefit, and actors who bear the negative consequences of extraction. Under these conditions, extractivism is in complete contradiction to social and environmental justice and care for nature and life itself.

All in all, extractivism as a single model of production remains one of the most expansionist global enterprises and it squashes any other ways of living with the land. The 500 years’ legacy of extractivism is part of ongoing imperialist interest from industrial powers in securing access and control over natural resources around the globe, even in today’s green energy transitions. As such, extractivism stands in sharp contrast to flourishing alternative forms of land use and livelihoods.

Opposition to extractivism does not mean that people can’t use a resource at all and by no means implies a binary choice between either extractivism or underdevelopment. Instead, anti-extractivism is about focusing on what type of life we want to achieve as a whole and how we build global systems of justice. We can nourish ourselves from several non-extractivist modes of production and reproduction that center on a dignified life for all.

## D. Additional Resources

Spash, C. (2020) Revisiting critiques of economic growth in a time of crisis CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 Here ecological economist Clive Spash draws an impressively complete and complex picture of the history of growth vis-a-vis capitalism and climate change, also in light of Covid-19. In particular, he explains why an agnostic vision on growth or on capitalism is not sufficient for creating a socio-ecological society; he reviews the arguments defending economic growth against limits. While the text could result intense to some, it gives a comprehensive yet precise nuanced picture of the problems with growth.

Here is anthropologist Jason Hickel condensing in two minutes why and how our addiction to economic growth is killing us.

### D.1 Suggested books

Hickel, J. 2020. Less is More: How Degrowth will Save the World. Penguin Books - This is probably the most clear and compelling introduction to Degrowth. If you are unsure, read this review by Joe Herbert. Fioramonti, L. 2013. Gross Domestic Problem: The Politics Behind the World's Most Powerful Number. Zed Books - This book, instead, is focused entirely on GDP's history and politics.





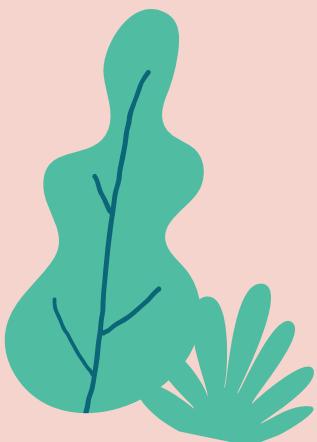
# Session 2

## Introducing Degrowth Principles

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### Themes

- Green growth, limits to growth, decoupling.
  - Why degrowth needs to be feminist:  
towards a care-full transformation.
  - Degrowth and the Global South.
- 



## A) Introduction

In this session we delve into another huge problem with growth: the fact that it has got limits. While the notion that things cannot grow infinitely is quite commonsensical for all human beings, it has not been accepted into mainstream economics until today.

In 1972 the first actual study demonstrating ecological limits to GDP growth (*The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by The Club of Rome) was published. Although at the time it influenced substantially the public conversation about development and growth, it was soon silenced with more fashionable concepts.

The neoliberal shift of the 80s reverted the public discourse to one where growth (and capital accumulation) can go hand in hand with respect for the environment. Actually, it went even deeper: global powers reunited at the Rio conference on Environment and Development of 1992 affirmed that growth was fundamental for achieving ecological goals. Thus, the notion of Sustainable Development was created.

Fortunately, since the beginning of the 2000s activists in the Global North re-started to problematise growth and development (in the Global South they had been doing it for much longer) and launched slogans such as the one of “Degrowth”. Since then, Degrowth has evolved from a slogan to a multifaceted, elaborate and proactive critique to the growth society.

In particular, scholars investigating degrowth and activists fighting for it highlighted that, ecologically, a planned reduction of energy and resource use is necessary in order to address the ecological crisis and climate change. More than that: degrowth encompasses the idea that this reduction has to be designed to bring the economy back in to balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being.

Below, you can find a brief introduction to the problems with green growth and sustainable development in relation to climate change (→ B.1) and a short explanation of why degrowth is needed (→ B.2). This is followed by a manifesto written collaboratively by the Feminist and Degrowth Alliance (→ B.3) in times of pandemic, highlighting the fundamental ways in which feminist thought is fundamental for degrowth (and vice versa) in the process of building a society based on care for others and for everything that sustains our lives.

In the in-depth readings, you can find a debunking of the concept on which the notions of sustainable development and green growth rest: decoupling (→ C.1). Finally, we move our look beyond the Global North to see what's up with degrowth in the Global South. This (→ C.2) is probably the most comprehensive academic research of degrowth vis-a-vis environmental justice movements so far.

*“Degrowth encompasses the idea that this reduction has to be designed to bring the economy back in to balance with the living world in a way that reduces inequality and improves human well-being.*

## B. Overview readings

### B.1 Green growth is trusted to fix climate change – here's the problem with that

Christine Corlet Walker

You may have missed it, but a recent report declared that the main strategy of world leaders for tackling climate change won't work. It's called green growth, and it's favoured by some of the largest and most influential organisations in the world, including the United Nations and the World Bank.

Green growth is a vague term with many definitions, but broadly speaking, it's the idea that society can reduce its environmental impacts and slash its emissions, even while the economy continues to grow and the quantity of stuff that's produced and consumed increases.

This would be achieved by improving the efficiency of production and manufacturing processes, transitioning to cleaner energy sources and developing new technologies to deal with the pollution that economic activity creates. Better yet, it's argued, all of this could be done fast enough to meet the Paris Agreement target of keeping global warming to below 1.5 C.

Fixing the climate crisis without having to compromise on economic growth sounds appealing. But the Decoupling Debunked report echoes work by prominent academics in finding that there is no evidence that societies have ever managed to decouple economic growth from emissions at this scale in the past, and little evidence they have the capacity to achieve it in the future.

It's no surprise that, historically, global carbon emissions have gone up as economies have grown. The processes that produce the goods and services we all consume use raw materials as inputs and generate pollution, carbon emissions and waste.

Making these processes more efficient and swapping fossil fuels for renewables can, and has, reduced the average emissions that come with each additional dollar of economic growth. This is known as "relative decoupling", because each dollar of new economic growth

*"Is absolute decoupling of economic growth from carbon emissions possible? And can it be done fast enough to prevent catastrophic climate change?"*



has fewer emissions attached to it, relative to each dollar of past growth. But, emissions still rise in absolute terms because the economy is still growing.

Since it is the total amount of carbon in the atmosphere that matters in the race against climate change, we need to contrast this idea of “relative decoupling” with the stronger concept of “absolute decoupling”. Absolute decoupling means that even as the economy grows, total carbon emissions fall year-on-year.

With this distinction in mind, the question becomes: is absolute decoupling of economic growth from carbon emissions possible? And can it be done fast enough to prevent catastrophic climate change?

### The scale of the challenge

According to the IPCC, there is a 66% likelihood that the world can remain under the Paris Agreement target of 1.5°C of warming if we emit no more than 420 billion additional tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere, from early 2018.

Humans currently emit about 37 billion tonnes of carbon every year, and that number is still growing. Even the most generous projections suggest that if emissions continue at this rate, the carbon budget will be used up in less than 20 years.

The rate of decarbonisation that’s needed is huge, and far in excess of anything that’s been seen previously. Economic growth makes that challenge even harder, as gains in decarbonisation may be outweighed by increases in production and consumption. But green growth advocates insist it’s possible.

The IPCC’s Special Report, released in October 2018, gives 90 scenarios that would be consistent with limiting warming to 1.5°C, while also continuing with economic growth. So far, so good. But almost every single one of these scenarios relies on a negative emissions technology called Bioenergy Carbon Capture and Storage (BECCS) that’s completely untested at large scales.

BECSS involves growing large plantations of trees, which draw down carbon from the atmosphere, then harvesting and burning them to generate energy. The CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from this process are then stored underground. To limit warming to 1.5°C, this technology would need to absorb 3-7 billion tonnes of carbon from the atmosphere every year. That’s at least 2,000 times more than it’s currently capable of doing.



*The rate of decarbonisation that's needed is huge, and far in excess of anything that's been seen previously. Economic growth makes that challenge even harder..."*

In order to absorb that much carbon, an area two to three times the size of India would need to be covered with tree plantations. Think about the difficulty of acquiring that much land, the pressure it would put on other land uses, like food production, and how much natural habitat it could erase.

No one can say that these feats are categorically impossible. But the evidence suggests that the chances of meeting the 1.5°C warming target alongside continued economic growth are, at best, highly unlikely. Can we really take this risk — relying on unproven technologies to rescue us from the threat of climate change? Given the consequences of getting the gamble wrong, surely the answer is no.

#### **Where does this leave us?**

Proposals for green growth that rely solely on technology to solve the climate crisis are based on a flawed idea. This is, that the limits to the world's physical systems are flexible, but the structure of its economies are not. This seems entirely backwards and more a reflection of the importance of politics and power in determining what solutions are deemed viable, than any reflection of reality.

So society should ask, are these global institutions promoting green growth because they believe it's the most promising way of avoiding climate breakdown? Or is it because they believe it's simply not politically feasible to talk about the alternatives?

If we can be optimistic about humanity's ability to develop fantastical new technologies to bend and overcome the limits of nature, can't we lend that same optimism to developing new economic structures? Our goal in the 21st century should be creating economies that allow people to flourish, even when they don't grow.



## B.2 Time for degrowth: to save the planet, we must shrink the economy

**Jason Hickel**

What is so refreshing about the UN's Sustainable Development Goals is that they recognise the inherent tension between economic development and the ecology of our planet. Or so it seems. The preamble affirms that "planet Earth and its ecosystems are our home" and underscores the necessity of achieving "harmony with nature". It commits to holding global warming below 2<sup>o</sup>C, and calls for "sustainable patterns of production and consumption".

This language signals awareness that something about our economic system has gone terribly awry – that we cannot continue chewing through the living planet without gravely endangering our security and prosperity, and indeed the future viability of our species.

But if you look more closely, a glaring contradiction emerges. The core of the SDG programme relies on the old model of indefinite economic growth that caused our ecological crisis in the first place: ever-increasing levels of extraction, production and consumption. SDG 8 calls for "at least 7% GDP growth per annum in the least developed countries" and "higher levels of economic productivity" across the board. In other words, there is a profound contradiction at the heart of these supposedly sustainable goals. They call for both less and more at the same time.

This call for more growth comes at an odd moment, just as we are learning that it is not physically possible. Currently, global production and consumption levels are overshooting our planet's biocapacity by nearly 60% each year. In other words, growth isn't an option any more – we've already grown too much. Scientists tell us that we are blowing past planetary boundaries at breakneck speed and witnessing the greatest mass extinction of species in more than 66m years.

The hard truth is that our ecological overshoot is due almost entirely to over-consumption in rich countries, particularly the West.

*"The hard truth is that our ecological overshoot is due almost entirely to over-consumption in rich countries, particularly the West."*

SDG 8 calls for improving "global resource efficiency" and "decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation". Unfortunately, there are no signs that this is possible at anything near the necessary pace. Global material extraction and consumption grew by 94% between 1980 and 2010, accelerating in the last decade to reach as high as 70 billion tonnes per year. And it's still going up: by 2030, we're projected to breach 100 billion tonnes of stuff per year. Current projections show that by 2040 we will more than double the world's shipping,

trucking, and air miles – along with all the things those vehicles transport. By 2100 we will be producing three times more solid waste than we do today.

Efficiency improvements are not going to cut it. Yes, some GDP growth may still be necessary in poorer countries; but for the world as a whole, the only option is intentional de-growth and a rapid shift to what legendary ecological economist Herman Daly calls a “steady-state” that maintains economic activity at ecological equilibrium.

De-growth does not mean poverty. On the contrary, de-growth is perfectly compatible with high levels of human development. It is entirely possible for us to shrink our resource consumption while increasing things that really matter such as human happiness, well-being, education, health and longevity. Consider

the fact that Europe has higher human development indicators than the US in most categories, despite 40% less GDP per capita and 60% less emissions per capita.

This is the end toward which we must focus our full attention. Indeed, the surer route to poverty is to continue on our present trajectory, for, as top economist Joseph Stiglitz points out, in a world of ecological overshoot, GDP growth is diminishing living standards rather than improving them.

We need to replace GDP with a saner measure of human progress, such as the Genuine Progress Indicator, and abandon the notion of exponential economic growth without end. Sadly, the SDGs pass this urgent challenge down to the next generation – at the bottom of SDG 17 it states: “By 2030 build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement GDP.” In other words, they shelve the problem until 2029.

But what of employment? Whenever I lecture about de-growth, this is always the first question I get – and we have to take it seriously. Yes, de-growth will require eliminating unnecessary production and work. But this presents us with a beautiful opportunity to shorten the working week and give some thought to that other big idea that has captured the public’s imagination over the past couple of years: a universal basic income. How to fund it? There are many options, including progressive taxes on commercial land use, financial transactions, foreign currency transactions and capital gains.

Let’s face it – in an age of rapid automation, full employment on a global scale is a pipe dream anyhow. It’s time we think of ways to facilitate reliable livelihoods in the absence of formal employment. Not only will this assist us toward necessary de-growth, it will also allow people to escape exploitative labour arrangements and incentivise employers to improve working conditions – two goals that the SDGs set out to achieve. What’s more, it will allow people to invest more of their time and effort into things that matter: caring for their loved ones, growing their own food, nourishing communities, and rebuilding degraded environments.



*“It is entirely possible for us to shrink our resource consumption while increasing things that really matter such as human happiness, well-being, education, health and longevity.”*



## **B.3 Collaborative Feminist Degrowth: Pandemic as an Opening for a Care-Full Radical Transformation**

### **Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA)**

The crisis we face as a global community must be understood not only as a public health crisis, or as an economic crisis of the capitalist mode of production, but also, fundamentally, as a crisis of the reproduction of life. In this sense, it is a crisis of care: the work of caring for humans, non-humans, and the shared biosphere.

The pandemic is a historical rupture. It's also an opening for reworlding--as one recent meme says, "There is no going back to normal because "normal" was the problem." As a group of activists and scholars from the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA)<sup>1</sup>, we take this opportunity to reflect on how we can, from our diverse positions, face this moment, organize, and collectively imagine radical alternative modes of living: those with more time for community, relationship building, and care for each other as well as the non-human world.

This collaborative reflection is motivated by the following concerns: First we would like to stress that this crisis is NOT our degrowth. Secondly, we want to clarify what an intentional (feminist) degrowth project means, and why it is more necessary now than ever. Thirdly, we want to bring attention to dimensions of care and reproductive work that have been so centrally relied upon, yet so invisible and neglected, in this pandemic. Finally, we want to offer proposals for how this crisis can help us move towards care-full economies in the long term.

GDP is plummeting, resource use exploitation and pollution are declining, CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have fallen, and in some places non-human life is able to reinhabit spaces made through diminished human activity. At a first glance, these items might read like a degrowthers' or environmentalists' wishlist, and yet we want to underline that the slowdown in the global economy provoked by the pandemic is NOT to be confused with feminist degrowth. On the contrary, some responses by dominant actors present worrisome and dangerous paths within surveillance, authoritarianism, and ecofascism. As the slogan proclaimed in the context of the last financial crisis: "your austerity is not our degrowth."

Economic recessions or depressions are crises, they are not equitable to care-full social transformations, and they serve nothing to disentangle economic models from biophysical impossibilities of indefinite capitalist growth. Feminist degrowth embodies the vision of a radical

What follows is a copy of the article originally published on Degrowth.info. Please find the original publication here: <https://www.degrowth.info/en/feminisms-and-degrowth-alliance-fada/collective-research-notebook/>

transformation towards a just, sustainable, and convivial society brought about by voluntary change. Degrowth is an umbrella term for visions of doing economies otherwise, in ways which do not have growth and accumulation as their overriding aim but instead focus on care, well-being, conviviality, solidarity, provisioning economies, commons and commoning, and a concern for equality, human flourishing, and meeting basic needs as defined in context. It is rooted in collective, and democratic decision making.

Responses to the crisis in some quarters have included a much-needed re-evaluation of public collective goods and infrastructures, and an acknowledgment of governments' capacity and responsibility to provide for their citizens, moves on which we want to build. However, we must be wary and vigilant against other visions seeking to capitalize on this moment that may mobilize inequality, authoritarianism, austerity, and repression. This includes Silicon Valley fantasies of provisioning to those who can afford it via Amazon drones, the fortification of global hyper-surveillance states, and a further deregulation of wage work which is already being implemented in many places. Many who are dropped from formal, more stable employment in the context of this crisis will not recover it afterwards, as countries pass special legislation allowing precarious contracts and short-time work in order to "save" businesses. Meanwhile, interventions to flatten the curve of contagion rely on repression including militarization of countries such as Ecuador, India, and Kenya, to enforce physical distancing in absence of a functional public health system, opening the way for recurrent human rights violations.

Our intervention therefore asks: how can we use this moment to democratically rebuild social organization of labor and care work? To reconstruct the realm of public welfare that has been so depleted by decades of neoliberalism, austerity, structural adjustment, and the privatization of education and healthcare? How can this opening lead our economies towards emancipation from the grips of the growth paradigm founded in heteropatriarchal capitalist principles? A feminist degrowth project calls for an end to the subalternization of reproduction in service to the realm of production.

We suggest here some priorities behind an intentional degrowth informed by a democratic and feminist approach that empowers all facets of society to engage, mobilize, and transform:



*Economic recessions or depressions are crises, they are not equitable to care-full social transformations, and they serve nothing to disentangle economic models from biophysical “impossibilities of indefinite capitalist growth*





## **1. Towards a Provisioning Economy: Recognize and regenerate social and ecological reproductive capacities**

As all but essential services are locked down, this crisis invites us to (re) consider the nature of the essential and the superfluous. As “productive” enterprises are shuttered, the material bases that sustain and regenerate life and that which we cannot live without are starkly emphasized. Some have termed those material bases the provisioning economy, one which provides what people actually need for their well-being and reproduction. This refocusing on basic material needs has sparked appreciation for the farmers who grow our food, to the supermarket workers who stack the shelves.

This capacity to provide is further based on the maintenance, recycling, repair, and restoration of environmental, infrastructural and social resources. These undergird social and environmental reproduction and are sometimes termed the reproductive economy--the work done to reproduce ourselves. It includes unpaid work in the home, as well the protection, regeneration and defense of the ecological capacities to reproduce life, often led by peasants, activists and Indigenous peoples who engage in care-full work and struggles to feed the soil, to keep water sources free from contamination and air unpolluted. Their reproductive and care labor has been considered free of charge and available for exploitation, while the including air, water, and soil fertility have been long considered a “free gift” to capitalism.

Focusing on provisioning and the reproductive economy brings economics back to its core. The word economics comes from the Greek oikonomia, which means administration of the household. A feminist degrowth calls for restructuring our economy to shift the emphasis from the production of things to feed the growth imperative and endless desires, and towards the reproduction and provisioning of life and meeting needs. It is crucial to foster this provisioning set-up of economic practice--without romanticizing ideas of the ‘local’ or forgetting gendered impacts of any economic transformation.

The sustainability of life should constitute the main goal of social organization. This requires the recognition, regeneration and strengthening of social and ecological reproductive capacities as well as a transformation of markets and modes of exchange as modes of provisioning.

Therefore, we urgently call for a society that not only stays within planetary boundaries, but replenishes and boosts both social and ecological reproductive capacities. One example are food systems based on small peasant agriculture or community supported organic agriculture which both increase local resilience, support the regeneration of the soil and reduce dependence on global supply chains.



## 2. Home as a site of production and reproduction

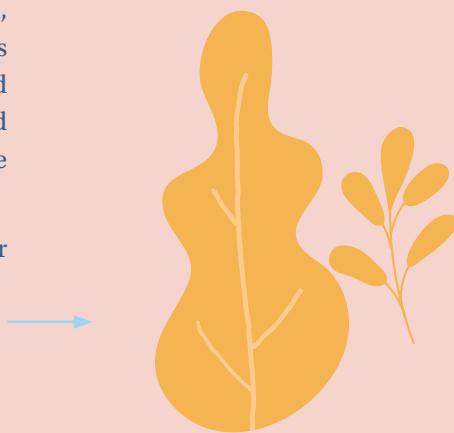
"I stay at home because I care for the vulnerable" is a common phrase we hear to promote physical distancing (problematically called social distancing) in this uniquely uncertain time. Unpacking this call for retreat into the domestic sphere as an act of caring brings up multiple questions. Who gets to stay home safely? Who are the vulnerable? And how can we care for others beyond isolation?

Firstly, we should note that the home as refuge is made luxury under existing capitalist social organization. The wealthy are those who have the luxury to shelter in place and maintain their salaries, the disadvantaged less so. In some cases, their work cannot be done from home. Some have to go out to care for others. Others don't have a home at all. The virus, like pollution, is not democratic. It discriminates across structural inequalities, modulated by forms of oppression and discrimination which cumulate and interlock across gender, race, class, (dis)ability, age, and place, among others. Men are dying in higher numbers due to Covid-19 across all locations. In the US, black communities are more impacted, to give only some examples.

Further, the home is not always a safe space. Measures to restrict movement confine vulnerable people to the same space with their abusers leading to increasing levels of domestic violence against mainly women and children. As employers expect people to do care work and wage work at the same time, either in home offices, in their factories or on their fields, while replacing teachers at home, without due attention, gendered divisions of labor become ever more defined and unequal. This collision of wage work and care work in the home has starkly revealed what feminist scholars have always pointed out: that the household has always been a work-place and that the workplace depends on the household whether or not they are the same place or different places.

Finally, we must ask how we can center care for each other and our

*"As employers expect people to do care work and wage work at the same time, either in home offices, in their factories or on their fields, while replacing teachers at home, without due attention, gendered divisions of labor become ever more defined and unequal."*



communities and social solidarity while maintaining physical distance. How can the conviviality and solidarity integral to degrowth thrive over alienation in these moments? While the state assumes that all households are made up of hetero-patriarchal families, and these will serve as safety nets to absorb the social and economic dislocations of this crisis; the reality is that in many countries, the most common household type is a single person.

This atomization means that forms of practical solidarity and, in fact, social proximity are needed. All over the world, communities are building support and care networks that reach beyond the heteropatriarchal nuclear family, and that support and interconnect members of non-nuclear family households, which make up the majority in every country. We share the enthusiasm of anarchist thinkers for affinity groups as one model for recreating networks of “odd-kin” rather than “god-kin” (in Haraway’s words) for surviving the virus. They suggest that by choosing a group of people you trust and with whom you share similar risk factors and levels of risk tolerance, we can joyously engage in togetherness and care now to preserve our mental and physical health. Such affinity groups can then be connected in broader groups of mutual aid which can engage in broader practical solidarity with the homeless, migrants and refugees, and collective mobilization and support for each other’s struggles and resistance--from rent strikes and labor movements to direct solidarity with care workers, LGBTIQA+ and prisoners’ rights groups.

Creating these networks of care now, beyond our homes, can overcome alienation and provide fertile ground for the necessary collective mobilization to create the futures we want in this historic moment. Further it can help us imagine more collective ways to organize the reproduction of their lives, while relying on commoning, community resources and attending community needs.

### **3. Towards a Caring Economy. Care Labor and Care Income**

In most countries today, the majority of nurses, health aids, and child-care workers are women, while essential positions where men are concentrated include hospital orderlies, garbage collectors, agricultural laborers, doctors, delivery-people, and others. Many of these essential positions are occupied by informalized, undocumented, or migrant workers. As such, these workers face specific difficulties accessing public health and welfare services. If they fall sick they likely will still have to continue to work. So they also face greater risk of being fired or criminalized, as in many cases they will be forced to choose between hunger and health.

We consider degrowth a question of regeneration. While many aspects



of our global economy need to degrow, some critical democratic infrastructures, such as infrastructures of care, will have to flourish. Therefore, we need to invest in transformative policies that center around the (re)production of life and the commoning of care. In a feminist degrowth future, the provision of community, domestic, and environmental care beyond the market and the state will be based on radically different logics than profit maximization, competition, or efficiency. We therefore also call for the socialization of all universal health care, the socialization of utilities, the decommodification of food, housing, medicines, education, and other basic services.

This pandemic has raised the pitch of calls for a Universal Basic Income (UBI), by actors ranging from Pope Francis to the Spanish Parliament and US tech venture capitalist Andrew Yang. Defined as a modest sum paid monthly to each resident to secure conditions of life, the UBI has been advocated as part of wide-ranging visions and purposes. Degrowth aligns with those proposals that seek material conditions that can liberate individuals from exploitative employment, support transformation away from environmentally-damaging regimes, and help move beyond battles of jobs vs. environment toward politics that address viable livelihoods as inseparable from a sustainable earth.

As feminist advocates of degrowth, we propose a Care Income that builds on and differs from other proposals by foregrounding the social recognition of unpaid and gendered care work that we all perform to sustain the life and wellbeing of households and communities. Care income seeks to foster equity and solidarity by conceptualizing this income as an investment out of common wealth in capacities for all citizens to take care of ourselves, our kin, and others. For example, we support the call for a care income by the Global Women's Strike (GWS) and Women of Color GWS, which urges governments to recognize the indispensable role of (re)productive work of life and survival, that we now depend on even more than ever.

## **4. Towards a Solidarity Economy**

In the immediacy of the pandemic, we need to strengthen existing affinity groups, mutual aid networks, and all related efforts. We acknowledge that solidarity comes in many forms. Therefore, we need to support each other's struggles and resistance--from rent strikes and labor movements, to direct mutual aid solidarity with precarious care workers, unhoused persons, and prisoners. In recognition of the enduring coloniality of North-South relations, a global foreign debt relief for states in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

We need long-term structural solutions to protect those who are vulnerable. We need shelters, sanctuaries and direct support for refugees,



undocumented people, and the homeless. We also need the decarceration of immigrant detention centers and prisons, as a proven proliferation ground for community spread magnified by systemic human rights abuses, and as a further claim for a united effort for care-full transformation. Care-based crises can't be solved by mass incarceration, or the closure of national borders. Degrowth is about planetary thresholds, not borders. The pandemic shows us that life (and its backside, death) does not recognize borders, but it does hinge on limits, for example, as deforestation from agro-industry incurs into forestlands and viruses jump from displaced wildlife to livestock and then to humans.

For now, world leaders are focusing on saving the economy. They need to focus instead on saving the biosphere, by way of swift policies like a solidarity-based Global Green New Deal. We don't need to choose between jobs or climate protection, nor do we want to return back to 'normal' life or business as usual. The pandemic reveals that climate policy will require a much wiser, better-organized approach than 'normal'. Given the global climate thresholds we have already unleashed, this concerns everybody's survival although vulnerabilities vary strongly: while the resulting crises are distant and punctual for the privileged, their effects are disproportionate on the most vulnerable.

The pandemic offers an unprecedented, vital insight: the true, total interdependence of all humans on the biosphere. It reveals the interdependent and systemic way in which we must transform economies in the face of the growing climate and environmental emergencies to foreground care for humans and the environment. We need an economics based first and foremost in care, stewardship, cooperation, sharing, and commoning. For industrialized societies, this means vast resource and wealth redistribution, sweeping protection of ecosystems and biodiversity, as well as degrowth, and decarbonization of the economy. This must include social and environmental justice that make up for centuries of coloniality and plunder.

Change needs to be systemic to match the scale of the emergency and the inequalities uncovered and reproduced by the pandemic. This crisis can and should be used as a collective learning point for a transformation towards an alternative feminist degrowth future.

We demand a more care-full world!

*"The pandemic offers an unprecedented, vital insight: the true, total interdependence of all humans on the biosphere."*



# C. In-depth readings

## C.1 Decoupling

Timothée Parrique

Is economic growth compatible with ecological sustainability? To answer this question, we need to talk about decoupling. The term ‘decoupling’ refers to the possibility of detaching economic growth from environmental pressures. Economic growth is a measure of market activity, most often Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while environmental pressures include all the consequences an economy has on nature – a useful distinction being between resource use (materials, energy, water, and land) and environmental impacts (e.g. climate change, water pollution, biodiversity loss).

Generally speaking, two variables are said to be ‘coupled’ if one evolves in proportion with the other (e.g. more of A means more of B), and they decouple when they cease to do so. What matters for sustainability is the nature of that decoupling: its magnitude, scale, durability, and how effective it is in achieving environmental targets.

Relative or weak decoupling, for example between GDP and carbon emissions, refers to a situation where the emissions per unit of economic output decline but not fast enough to compensate for the simultaneous increase in output over the same period, resulting in an overall increase in total emissions. Said differently: even though production is relatively cleaner, total environmental pressure still goes up because more goods and services are produced. Absolute or strong decoupling, on the other hand, is a situation where, to stay with the same example, more GDP coincides with lower emissions.

Local decoupling refers to cases where decoupling is observed in one specific place (e.g. decoupling of water consumption and GDP in Australia), while global decoupling occurs at the planetary scale. Also, decoupling can be temporary or permanent – just as GDP and environmental pressures can decouple at one point in time, they can also recouple later on.

Finally, decoupling can be evaluated based on its magnitude and fairness. Decoupling can be either sufficient or insufficient in reaching a specific mitigation target. And following the principle of shared but differentiated responsibilities, decoupling needs to be sufficiently large in affluent countries in order to free the ecological space necessary for consumption in regions where basic needs are unmet.



What follows is a copy of the entry “Decoupling” in the articles’ series Resources for a better future of Uneven Earth. A copy can be retrieved at [www.unevenearth.org](http://www.unevenearth.org)

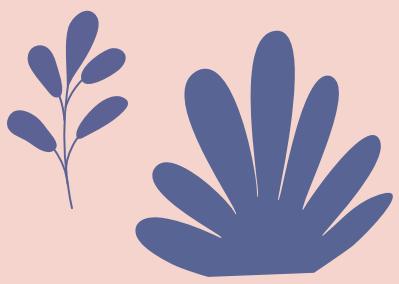
## **Green growth vs. degrowth**

The debate on decoupling has two main sides. Proponents of “green growth” expect efficiency to enable more economic activity at a lower environmental cost; on the other hand, advocates of “degrowth” appeal to sufficiency, arguing that less goods and services is the surest road to ecological sustainability.

Many proponents of the green growth narrative have put forward that economic growth inevitably leads to more efficiency and, therefore, to reduced environmental costs. In the 1990s several economists conducted empirical work that led them to believe that economic growth was negatively correlated with environmental pressures. Environmental damages would first grow but then decline. This inverted bell-shaped development came to be referred to as an Environmental Kuznets Curve, named after economist Simon Kuznets, who, in the 1950s, proposed that, as a society industrializes, it would first become more unequal, and then less. Over the years, scholars developed several theoretical reasons to explain such phenomena. For example, as income per capita grows, basic needs get satisfied and nations can afford to dedicate more of their attention and resources towards environmental protection. Another explanation is that richer nations’ industries are able to develop and afford cleaner and less resource-intensive technologies. They also transition from industrial activities to services, which are assumed to be less natural resource-intensive.

However, it is now widely recognised that decoupling does not occur naturally by the mere fact of a country increasing its GDP—thereby complicating the Environmental Kuznets Curve hypothesis. Responding to this, some argue that policies such as carbon taxes, quota markets, and other regulations could foster it. Many also argue that a shift to clean energies, the establishment of a circular economy, incentives for environmentally-friendly consumption, turning products into services, and ecological innovations like, for example, exhaust filters, water-saving irrigation systems, and carbon capture and storage could make decoupling happen.

For green growth advocates, decoupling is either inevitable or has not yet occurred because of lack of adequate policies and technological development. Degrowth proponents, however, argue that the reason why this long-awaited decoupling has not yet occurred is that because it is impossible. Here is a list of seven reasons why this is so:



(1) Rising energy expenditures. It takes energy to extract resources. The less accessible the resource, the higher the energy bill. Because the most accessible resources have already been used, the extraction of remaining stocks is a more resource- and energy-intensive process, resulting in a rising total environmental degradation per unit of resource extracted.

(2) Rebound effects. Efficiency improvements are often partly or totally compensated by a reallocation of saved resources and money to either more of the same consumption (e.g. using a fuel-efficient car more often), or other impactful consumptions (e.g. buying plane tickets for remote holidays with the money saved from spending on meat). It can also generate structural changes in the economy that induce higher consumption (e.g. more fuel-efficient cars reinforce a car-based transport system at the expense of greener alternatives, such as public transport and cycling).

(3) Problem shifting. Technological solutions to one environmental problem can create new ones and/or exacerbate others (e.g. the production of electric cars puts pressure on lithium, copper, and cobalt resources; nuclear power generation produces nuclear risks and logistic concerns regarding nuclear waste disposal).

(4) The underestimated impact of services. The service economy can only exist on top of the material economy, not instead of it. Services have a significant footprint that often adds to, rather than substitutes, that of goods.

(5) Limited potential of recycling. Recycling rates are currently low and only slowly increasing, and recycling processes generally still require a significant amount of energy and raw materials. Most importantly, in the same way that a snake cannot build a larger skin out of the scraps of its previous, smaller one, a growing economy cannot rely on recycled materials alone.

(6) Insufficient and inappropriate technological change. Technological progress is not targeting the factors of production that matter for ecological sustainability (it saves labour and not natural resources) and not leading to the type of innovations that reduce environmental pressures (it is more profitable to develop new extraction techniques than it is to develop new recycling techniques); it is not disruptive enough as it fails to displace other undesirable technologies (solar panels are being used in addition to coal plants and not instead of it); and it is not in itself fast enough to enable a sufficient decoupling.

(7) Cost shifting. In competitive, growth-oriented economies, firms have incentives to relocate activities where environmental regulations are the lowest. What has been observed and termed as decoupling in some local cases was generally only apparent decoupling resulting mostly from an externalisation of environmental impact from high-consumption to low-consumption countries enabled by international trade.

## **Empirical evidence for decoupling**

The validity of the green growth discourse relies on the assumption of an absolute, permanent, global, large and fast enough decoupling of economic growth from all critical environmental pressures. As Parrique et al. (2019) have recently showed, there is no empirical evidence for such a decoupling currently happening. Whether for materials, energy, water, greenhouse gases, land, water pollutants, and biodiversity loss, decoupling is either only relative, and/or observed only temporarily, and/or only locally. In most cases, decoupling is relative. When absolute decoupling occurs, it is only observed during rather short periods of time, concerning only certain resources or impacts, for specific locations, and with very small rates of mitigation.

## **Debunking the decoupling hypothesis**

The decoupling hypothesis has played an important role in legitimating a growth-based economy with a disastrous record in terms of social-ecological justice. Its meagre achievements in the last two decades cast serious doubt as to whether prospects for the future are better. Given the historical correlation of market activity and environmental pressures, relying on decoupling alone to solve environmental problems is an extremely risky and irresponsible bet. Until GDP is actually decoupled, any additional production will require a larger effort in reductions of resource and impact intensity to stay away from resource conflicts and ecological breakdown. Decoupling should today be recognised as what it is, a figment of statistical imagination. This should prompt us to reframe the debate altogether: what we need to decouple is not economic growth from environmental pressure but prosperity and the good life from economic growth.



## **C.2 Not So Natural an Alliance? Degrowth and Environmental Justice Movements in the Global South**

**Beatriz Rodríguez-Labajos et al.**

### **ABSTRACT**

Both environmental justice (EJ) and degrowth movements warn against increasing the physical size of the economy. They both oppose extractivism and debt-fuelled economies, as well as the untrammelled profit motive which fails to incorporate full environmental and social costs. They both rely upon social movements that have led scholarship in its activities and achievements, in part through challenging power structures. Therefore, some argue the existence of an obvious alliance between degrowth and EJ movements in the Global South. Yet, direct observation unveils concerns from EJ activists in the Global South about the plausibility of alliances until some significant divergences have been examined and reconciled. Activists inspire, promote and disseminate transformations that overcome several forms of domination. Their perspectives on degrowth advance informed cooperation. Our aim is thus to systematically evaluate tensions and possible analogies between the scope of action of EJ organisations operating in the Global South and the main propositions of the Degrowth movement. The argument relies on methodical scrutiny of core themes in the degrowth debate by critical thinkers in the Global South. It incorporates insights from EJ struggles in Ecuador, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uruguay, with important implications in Brazil, Mozambique, and Indonesia. The paper contributes to an exploration of the implications of the degrowth debate for the Global South, with the purpose of strengthening potential synergies, through an assertive recognition of the barriers to doing so.

Keywords: Degrowth; Environmental justice; Global South; Activism; Alliances; Socio-environmental conflicts

### **1. Introduction**

For more than a decade, the globalisation of the environmental justice (EJ) discourse has been presented either as a case of diffusion abroad from its formulation in the United States (Carruthers, 2008; Sze and London, 2008), or as the outcome of claims from diverse movements struggling against similar problems around the globe (Sikor and Newell, 2014). Today, the two-way nature of this globalisation of ideas is well established, and made apparent through the infusion of EJ notions from movements in the South, in the campaigns of their northern counterparts (Agyeman et al., 2016). The central roles of the climate debt concept and opposition

wto financialising emissions in climate justice campaigns are cases in point (Schlosberg and Collins, 2014; Warlenius, 2017).

Grassroots organisations leading EJ movements in the South have thus contributed greatly to expanding a shared vocabulary which academic researchers have also refined in their studies (Martinez-Alier et al., 2014). Activists and environmental defenders in the South denounce and resist mechanisms of domination and dispossession in a variety of fields, from food to energy production (Giunta, 2014; Obi, 2010). They confront directly the industries and environmental criminals that operate such mechanisms (White, 2013), despite this threatening their own lives (The Guardian, Global Witness, 2018). EJ organisations in the South are not only pioneers in initiatives that could reshape international environmental agendas (Oilwatch, 2015), but they also put forward alternative visions and transformative pathways for society, from a radically democratic and egalitarian stance (Kothari, 2014).

Understandably, degrowth movements have looked towards these EJ organisations when searching for allies. Besides the trust built as a result of consistent counterhegemonic activism in their respective geographic domains (Hosseini et al., 2017; Loureiro and Layrargues, 2013), movements for EJ in the South and degrowth in the North share further matters of concern. One is the increase in the physical size of the economy –a long-held tenet of ecological economics– as well as issues of democracy and social justice (Pueyo, 2014; Sachs, 2002). Extractivism and debt-fuelled economies are their common enemies (Brand et al., 2017; Gerber, 2015; Hornborg and Martinez-Alier, 2016). Importantly, they both rely on social movements which have led an engaged scholarship in its activities and achievements (Demmer and Hummel, 2017; Martinez-Alier et al., 2014).

Some argue the existence of an obvious alliance between degrowth and EJ movements in the Global South (Martínez-Alier, 2012). Recent works based on the analysis of different empirical contexts in South Asia and Latin America confirm this perspective (Gerber and Raina, 2018; Otto, 2017). This development is also consistent with the turn of the degrowth movements –particularly after the 2014 International Degrowth Conference held in Leipzig, Germany– to explicitly search for alliances with other critical currents and initiatives around the globe (Burkhart et al., 2016).

Along with the search for commonalities, there are definite tensions between degrowth and transition discourses such as postdevelopment (Escobar, 2015). In a similar vein, direct observation reveals concerns from EJ activists in the South about the plausibility for alliances, until some significant divergences are examined. These concerns were originally sparked in discussions within the collaborative project ‘Environmental Justice Organisations, Liabilities and Trade’



(EJOLT) (Martinez-Alier et al., 2011). EJOLT united activists and academics in coproducing a variety of EJ-related studies, such as collective reports on topics such as tree plantations (Overbeek et al., 2012), mining conflicts (Özkaynak et al., 2012), and land grabbing (GRAIN et al., 2014). The compilation of a global database of EJ conflicts also initiated at that time (Temper et al., 2015), enabled sound analyses about the civil society organisations involved in the conflicts (Aydin et al., 2017).

All in all, this space of collaboration served to reinforce the significance of movements with radical views which bring the dominant societal model into question. While doing this, the movements inspire, promote and disseminate transformative actions that tackle the roots causes of today's socio-environmental problems. Arguably, gaining such movements' critical perspectives on degrowth is crucial in promoting informed cooperation. Examining perceptions from the South also helps counterbalance the fact that most degrowth literature is generated from high-income countries (Weiss and Cattaneo, 2017). The likely clash of ethical assumptions regarding notions of justice and lifestyles (Muraca, 2013, Muraca, 2012) provides another reason to incorporate a southern lens into the debate.

Therefore, this paper aims to systematically evaluate both the main tensions and possible analogies between the actions of environmental justice organisations in the Global South and the propositions of the degrowth movement. Our purpose is to contribute to a strengthening of potential synergies, through an assertive recognition of the barriers to do so. In particular, we offer responses to the following questions:

- a) **What are the main concerns or critiques from environmental justice organisations in the South about degrowth's propositions?**
- b) **What are the analogies or equivalences between core themes in the degrowth debate and environmental justice movements, in the countries where specific environmental justice organisations operate?**

This paper is intended for audiences that are familiar with the degrowth discourse and want to better understand how it is perceived in different parts of the world. It introduces an activist perspective which the present authors deem still to be missing in the literature.

To this end, the following section presents the methods employed. Subsequently, results and discussion are organised in two sections. The first section develops a nuanced analysis of why the alliance between degrowth and EJ movements is not straightforward. The second section highlights an assortment of analogies, which provide reason to think that the start of a conversation between the two movements is possible. The final section concludes, offering some recommendations which might foster such conversation.

## 2. Methods

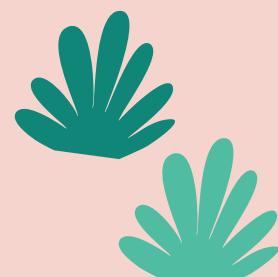
Our argument is based on scrutinising core themes in degrowth debates through semi-structured interviews. Interviewees are critical thinkers who worked in environmental justice organisations (EJOS) involved in the EJOLT project. These EJOS are the Acción Ecológica, A Sud, the Center for Civil Society, Nature Kenya, Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria and the World Rainforest Movement. While the claims in this article are informed by the work within these organisations, they do not necessarily reflect the views of specific individuals and organisations, which are as plural as the composition of the organisations themselves. The views of participants do not guarantee that all EJ perspectives are represented. Still, the discussion incorporates insights from EJ struggles in Ecuador, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Uruguay, with important implications in Brazil, Mozambique, and Indonesia. The interviewees are experienced activists, having worked consistently in their respective fields for periods ranging from ten years to over three decades. As such, they have a solid knowledge of EJ discussions around mining, industrial plantations, oil and gas extraction, mega-infrastructures, agrodiversity, nature conservation, climate change and water management.

It is worth mentioning that by ‘South’ we mean lower income countries otherwise referred to as ‘Third World’, ‘Periphery’, or ‘Developing countries’. Inequalities affect all countries. Therefore, by ‘Global South’ we mean territories both in the South and in the poorer regions of the North impacted by a “history of colonialism, neo-imperialism, and differential economic and social change” (Dados and Connell, 2012: 13).

Once the idea of producing this paper was agreed, the subsequent task was to formulate questions whose answers could be supportive of an informed rapprochement of degrowth and EJ in the South. In line with principles of collaborative research (Jull et al., 2017; Kishk Anaquot Health Research, 2008), interviewees are acknowledged as co-authors and as such were integrated into the research design. The resulting interview script is presented in Annex 1.

There is no unified set of proposals among degrowth movements, admittedly diverse in their transformative approaches (Eversberg and Shmelzer, 2018). Prior to the interviews, some participants have attended degrowth-related events (conferences or talks). For supplementary information, some core themes were identified using the topics presented as ‘dimensions of degrowth’ in the website of the organisation ‘Research and Degrowth’ (R&D). These topics were used to create working groups at the Second International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity, in Barcelona. Members of R&D have supported the respective organising committees of the degrowth conferences since 2012. The themes in question are: time, resources availability, hard infrastructure, finances, institutions and socio-economic organisation, social comparison, material needs, and consumer imaginary (R&D, 2010).

After a round of individual responses (either through face-to-face interviews or email exchange), the verbatim transcriptions were coded. The codes were then structured around arguments against and for an alliance between EJ movements in the South and degrowth. The arguments were further elaborated by the authors





after being discussed at several international fora. They are presented below in a discussion with the relevant literature.

As a note for self-assessment, the authors are aware of the pervasive issue of power relations involved in translations, and in encounters between possible allies that are distant from each other and have different histories (Lohmann, 2015). This cannot be fully prevented. Where there is disagreement, the different views are reported. The exercise does not aim to produce consensus, or a comprehensive account, but rather to map notions which may be considered as central in the debate.

### **3. Not So Natural an Alliance! Really? But Why?**

Mounting evidence shows increasing global inequalities, both in high-income and low-income countries. Among the 34 OECD members, the richest 10% of the population earn about 9 times the income of the poorest 10% (OECD, 2018). Countries that have exceeded expectations in their growth-oriented projects – such as China, with 2.4 m millionaires living in the country in 2013, projected to double in 2015 – observe widening inequalities in wealth and incomes (Hassan, 2016).

One might imagine that these striking realities could contribute to the development of synergies between movements seeking EJ in the Global South and the critics to growth. In fact, the idea of an ‘obvious’ alliance with degrowth movements bothers some people in EJ movements of the South. Table 1 compiles some of reasons why this might be, based on responses from the interviews. A further elaboration of these ideas follows in the remainder of the section.

Table 1. Reasons against an obvious alliance between degrowth and environmental justice in the South

Key Points	Associated ideas
<b>Degrowth is not an appealing term in the South</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different history/experience of poverty and scarcity</li> <li>• ‘Voluntary’ degrowth, only through crises and urban elites</li> <li>• Against the people’s basic principles of living and working hard</li> <li>• Growing (e.g. healthy crops, creativity) is part of EJ agendas</li> <li>• Austerity is a “degrowth strategy for poor people”</li> </ul>
<b>Beyond detached terms, detached ideas &amp; approaches</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple meanings of ideas in multi cultural, pluri-national countries</li> <li>• Degrowth is too anthropocentric</li> <li>• Issues framed differently from how Southern groups organize and discuss problems</li> </ul>

### **3.1. Degrowth is Not an Appealing Term in the Global South**

In parts of Africa, Latin America and many other regions of the Global South, including poor and marginalised communities in Northern countries, the term degrowth is not appealing, and does not match people's demands. In fact, there are debates about the provocative term 'degrowth' within the degrowth discourse itself (Asara et al., 2015; Drews and Antal, 2016). The cultural and historical differences between Northern and Southern countries and their societies, and the different struggles people and movements have gone through should also be considered in this debate.

On the one hand, ideas like 'frugal living' (Manno, 2011; Videira et al., 2009) or creating 'beautifully poor' spaces (Leblanc, 2017) may not be received sympathetically when one has grown up in a slum or a favela with unambiguous deficiencies of sanitation or public education. For many people in the South - especially social movements - 'degrowth' will not make sense because of their own history and experiences, having often suffered from situations of poverty and scarcity of the most basic needs. Some 'growth' to reach more security in terms of survival is regarded logical. Therefore, focusing the struggle on degrowth is not only perceived as 'missing the point' but is also in some ways a 'luxury' debate.

Those who might be willing to discuss this in Southern countries are often more middle-class, urban, academic or NGO workers, who do not know poverty from their own experience. In the view of the interviewees, pushing for a debate on degrowth in Africa or India, or even less advantaged European communities, would not get very far. In these places, the overall discourse of 'degrowing' might seem farfetched and a concern of elites. The understanding of the idea requires a context of overall welfare and over-consumption from which to degrow. This is a major issue. As revolutionary socialists have put it, how can we explain 'uneven and combined development' (Davidson, 2017; Justin Rosenberg, 1996) in world historical terms, so that the main burden of world degrowth falls upon those who have accumulated most already, and the opportunities for meeting social needs and enjoying the benefits of modernisation (electricity, water systems, the internet, etc.) can be transferred to the world's poorest?

On the other hand, the use of the term 'degrowth' is in itself negative and goes

*"For many people in the South - especially social movements - 'degrowth' will not make sense because of their own history and experiences, having often suffered from situations of poverty and scarcity of the most basic needs."*



against the mindset and basic principles of living and working hard. Degrowth scholars have responded to this issue of framing (Asara et al., 2015) by stressing the need to decolonise the social imaginary from the never-ending pursuit of accumulation, changing our language to produce, from today, a subversive tomorrow (Kallis and March, 2015). However, positive meanings of the term 'growth' are also fundamental to the imaginaries and agendas of EJ movements in the South: healthy children grow, staple crops grow, ideas grow, creativity grows, autonomy and sovereignty grow... so why should the South support the idea of not growing? Should EJ movements not grow? Should resistance and alternatives to ecologically damaging projects not grow? Family and child care systems, should they not grow? What about small-scale organic agriculture, both in the South and in the North?

This position brings us back to analogous debates among some ecological economists in the North contesting the term Degrowth. They ask 'degrowth of what?' claiming that degrowth gives excessive importance to changing standard macroeconomic indicators, leaving aside the real need to recognise the material boundaries of the economic system (Naredo, 2011). In line with some concerns expressed in the current project, these economists also argue that the term degrowth does not effectively communicate alternatives, which highlights the need to think carefully about the labels given to transformative movements (Drews and Antal, 2016).

On the top of the reasons above, the economic crisis and austerity policies play a role in people's reluctance. Voluntary degrowth is directed at elites in the North, and its supporters emphasize that it does not equate to recession (Asara et al., 2015). Yet more and more people living in precarious conditions both in the North and the South draw this equivalence between degrowth and austerity measures. For them, austerity is an unwelcomed degrowth strategy for the poor.

### **3.2. Beyond Detached Terms, Detached Ideas?**

Together with the barriers of understanding regarding the use of the term 'degrowth', the interviewees express concerns on the concepts and ideas behind it. Take, for instance, the degrowth proposals on time allocation. The Western idea of 'time' clashes with that of the 'pueblos' (communities, people), the aboriginal or indigenous temporalities (like the Andean 'Pacha'), and the times of nature. What does 'reduction of the working time' as studied by degrowth researchers (see, e.g., Shao and Rodríguez-Labajos, 2016) mean then?

Questions are raised as to what extent degrowth movements recognise and understand the multiple meanings of time(s) in the South, particularly in those countries characterised by plurinationalism, multiculturality and pluriversality. Conceptions of time allocation involved in these debates are categorically diverse and preclude homogeneity and comparability. Following this example, the interviewees argue that each of the core topics in the degrowth debates (e.g., limits, resource

availability, and consumer imaginary) may generate a similar reaction. Ultimately, many ideas present in the degrowth approach are perceived as very anthropocentric, and far too influenced by economic theory. This is in part attributed to degrowth's "insufficiently developed critique of modernity" (Escobar, 2015:456). At this point, the EJ organisations invite degrowth to learn about non-anthropocentric thinking and practices from people in Latin America when conceiving of radical transitions.

Clarification is demanded on the concrete meaning of degrowth measures. For instance, in Nigeria, and more generally in Africa, energy production is increasing yet there is more inequality and energy poverty. This seems an analogous problem to that which degrowth presents. But what would degrowth mean in this context? Freezing production, increasing equity, increasing assets? Widening access to people who do not have access to energy? Is this just another word for energy transition? A certain level of contradiction is likely in the answers to these questions.

As argued below, degrowth generates sympathy among the social movements in the South. However, some degrowth ideas still sound too pragmatic for many groups in the Global South. In the realities which EJOs have been working in (for instance, in Brazil), social movements are concerned with political strategies, and tactics that can contribute to them, to transform the dominant model. In this respect, the problem with the degrowth debate is that it frames the issues very differently from how the diverse Southern groups and movements organize and discuss problems. This creates barriers in communication.

Related to this, what would probably call for the most attention is that the way degrowth 'strategies' are approached and disseminated. In Southern social movements -which work in terms of what often is called 'political strategy'- it would be surprising for a movement to publish its strategy openly on a website. The set of degrowth proposals are seen as a confusing mix of strategies and tactics, a point also made by Cosme et al. (2017). This point is not trivial, because EJOs -as experienced political actors- are aware of the ways effective alliances and networks between groups and movements are built (Aydin et al., 2017). For instance, another EJO points out the convenience of creating alliances with consumer organisations at the tactical (specific-goal oriented) rather than strategic (generic) level. Building of ongoing joint initiatives between organisations in the South and in the North is seen favourably as a learning base for constructing strategic alliances. Therefore, shared approaches to both political and organisational developments are essential.

### **3.3. Communication and Dissemination Issues**

While formally educated people may not find problems accessing the messages of the degrowth debate, the situation is different for people involved in EJ struggles, both in the North and the South. In the Global South, the concept of degrowth is relatively new (especially in Africa) and the interviewees reported a very limited presence of the debates within their communities.

The most common pathway to learn about degrowth seems to be participating in



conferences or learning about the international degrowth conferences held in the past. This convinced at least one of the interviewees of the robustness of degrowth as an intellectual and political current. The internet is another source of information, for instance, through mailing lists or online fora (e.g., on biological conservation or consumption). Direct interaction with degrowthers via other civil society groups, or through common projects (e.g., EJOLT) was also mentioned. In one case, interaction with degrowth came while collaborating in the preparation of a documentary series (*Story of Stuff*).

Both during the EJOs' local work with communities and social movements, and with international networks, the interviewees noticed few or no mention of degrowth among Southern groups. To compare this with evidence of public attention to degrowth vis-à-vis EJ, we used Google Trends.<sup>1</sup> This resource does not unveil patterns for activists only, who might in fact be reluctant to use corporate web browsers, however it helps to get an idea of the general interest on topics over time and in different countries. Two key findings emerge from this.

Firstly, environmental justice – an older set of movements – generated twice as much curiosity as degrowth at the beginning of the period of recorded data (2004). However, this situation reversed as interest in degrowth increased globally and reached its peak in 2009. At this time, the gap in relation to the less searched-for EJ terms was around 30%. Presently, both debates generate similar levels of curiosity. Unsurprisingly, the number of total queries has vastly increased over the years, but the comparisons presented here are in relative terms. As a reference point, the term 'financial crisis' generated 4.4 times more search interest than 'degrowth' over the same period (and 'terrorism' 34 times more).

Secondly, focussing on the location of the queries, interest in EJ dominates over degrowth in the countries of some of the interviewees, including South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, and Brazil. In contrast, general curiosity in degrowth is superior to EJ in Ecuador, Uruguay and Italy. This points to a diversity of contexts in the countries typically described as the Global South, which should be kept in mind when studying links between (northern) degrowth movements and EJOs in the global South. At the same time, it is important to reflect on the possible reasons why degrowth does not interest those involved in struggles for environmental and social justice in some areas of the world.

Again, regarding communication issues, there are semantic controversies that come with naming a movement as the inverse of a 'false solution'. For example, the term 'non-white' is fiercely contested by black leadership as well as grassroots justice organisations in South Africa, in light of historical exclusionary policies based on race (and the semantics of the oppressor). Here, a concern emerges about the legitimacy of the discourses employed in the debate. Branding a movement as the denial of that which is being challenged, could contribute to legitimising that existing structure and disempowering the movement (by downplaying that which is liberatory about its politics).

Therefore, the language with which degrowth ideas are articulated and

communicated is critical. When dealing with poor and marginalised groups, concepts of redistribution and appropriate use of welfare and resources – in line with principles of EJ – are more suitable.

### **3.4. Eurocentric Thinking (Again!)**

A pervasive criticism of degrowth is that its European roots have percolated the type of proposals it makes. Once again, an idea is launched to the world with an undeniable Eurocentric (or Northern) origin. This alone generates logical resistances from groups that employ decolonial theoretical perspectives (Alimonda, 2011; Grosfoguel, 2011; Mignolo and Escobar, 2010), and support political projects promoted by indigenous movements, landless workers, and those fighting environmental racism in impoverished settings. This is mirrored in the class struggles and claims of unequal access to welfare of EJ organisations operating in peripheral areas of the North.

To be fair, similar critiques were raised against the language and political implications of EJ when applied outside its North American origins, yet this discourse has become global (Carruthers, 2008). Degrowth, on the other hand, is seen as the epitome of a developed-countries centred approach. It applies to contexts of substantial welfare in rich, high-consumption societies. This is not the case in vast areas of the global South, which makes the overall framework less relatable. Alongside this comes the critique of degrowth's approach being too individualistic, like the Western societies themselves.

There is an awareness that organisations in the North which have created solidarity networks with EJOs in the South, support degrowth movements. For instance, the network Ecologistas en Acción, well-known by one of the interviewees, has endorsed the campaign 'Menos para vivir mejor' (Less to live better) for several years. This is seen positively, but does not mitigate the risk that the degrowth proposals become uniformising principles operating against the diversity that EJOs defend. This is not only seen as dangerous for the movements in the South, but possibly also for initiatives in Europe which cannot flourish because they are influenced by degrowth too early in their own development.

### **3.5. Not Radical Enough**

Although the dominance of the paradigm of economic growth needs to be criticized, to propose 'degrowth' as the way forward is felt by some interviewees to miss the point. Some economic studies postulate a growth imperative in capitalist economies (Vergara-Camus, 2017). Historically, non-capitalist processes also suffered (and continue to suffer) from an obsession for growth (Kallis, 2017), but this is not the reality that the EJ organisations in many parts of the world face.

Drawing on a perspective from Brazil, two different processes are observed. On the one hand, capitalists are interested in profit, and not necessarily in growth per

se. On the other hand, the main problem with the dominant economic growth-based model is the power of a restricted group of (capitalist) actors, that benefit from maintaining the present model of extraction (of 'raw materials'), production, commercialization, and consumption. Therefore, EJ groups do not pay so much attention to 'economic growth' (and therefore may not see 'degrowth' as the solution) as the main issue with how capitalism operates in their countries.

Scholars respected by some interviewed EJ activists emphasize that current ecological and economic crises are both part of the same fundamental crisis of Western capitalist civilisation, deeply rooted in modern industrialisation (Löwy, 2005). Although national and global debt bubbles have arisen during the crisis, there are already strong indicators of 'deglobalisation' since 2007. These include dramatic declines in trade/GDP ratios (and the crash of the Baltic Dry Index measuring shipping), foreign direct investment/GDP ratios (and rates of return on such investment), cross-border financial flows, and non-refugee labour migration (Bond, 2018). All these indicators suggest that instead of working against the grain of 'growth' the degrowth movement should be preparing for the case that the devalorisation is even more redirected towards the most anti-ecological, anti-social investments. This includes fossil fuel capital but also over-exposed financial capital in the form of banks' excessive credit-based power over ordinary borrowers.

In this respect, some interviewees do not perceive a deep, radical criticism of capitalism in degrowth. This is not unanimous, but for several EJ activists, degrowth proposals seem to accommodate stances within the boundaries of the prevailing system. Then, the question becomes: is degrowth an anti-capitalist position? Radical proposals strongly supported by the EJOS, such as the scheme 'leave the oil in the soil' are not only held because they protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems, but also because they are concrete steps to start 'killing capitalism' and building a radical and idealistic critique of oil-based civilisation. In contrast to the perception that EJ movements are post-political (Swyngedouw, 2009), this demonstrates that global EJ movements actually encourage radical changes, and actively demand a debate around alternatives to the dominant capitalist development model.

Then why not move the discourse towards other models of economic organisation? Some EJ organisations proclaim alternative models based on socialism. Aware of semantic issues as raised above, and the bad memories that this term calls upon, eco-socialism and labour de-alienation are proposed instead (Brownhill et al., 2012). The recuperation or creation of gendered commons are also a part of EJ claims, as a way of producing and consuming goods that do not become commodified. In this respect, the 'decommodification' of basic needs and degrowth strategies will overlap. A consideration of the ecological debt between the North and the South from a degrowth perspective, with a similar level of refinement to the analyses of debt within northern countries (Kallis et al., 2012), would be a necessary step forward. A radical missing topic is the non-anthropocentric/Nature's perspective that leads to an absolute transformation of the relationship between humans and their environments.

Table 2. Identified analogies between degrowth and environmental justice in the South

Core themes in degrowth	Analogies with environmental justice struggles	Concrete examples in the participant organisation
<b>Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sumak Kawsay</li> <li>Grassroots and political time through political engagement</li> <li>Time needed to socialise, to rediscover the own lost soul</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rediscovering citizen's role in society through popular epidemiology (EPiCentro experiment and Veritas Project)</li> </ul>
<b>Resource availability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Campaigns against land grabbing or extractive projects</li> <li>Fair distribution of environmental burdens (reduction) and benefits</li> <li>Critique of Africa's multiple Resource Curses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leave the oil in the soil, leave the coal in the hole, leave the tar sands in the land ... plus 'climate debt approach'</li> <li>Paralysed biodiesel (Jatropha) projects in the Tana Delta (Kenya) for Europe's fuel needs</li> <li>Biocidio coalition, No Triv coalition</li> <li>Analyses of ways the Resource Curse (including climate change)</li> </ul>
<b>Hard Infrastructure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Struggles against mega-projects &amp; useless infrastructures (dams, high-speed train)</li> <li>Demand for extension of basic needs infrastructure</li> <li>(International) solidarity work (e.g. ALBA) vs large infrastructures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Struggle against high speed trains or highways</li> <li>Opposition to mega projects in south africa and Nigeria</li> </ul>
<b>Finances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Role of finance in strengthening environmental injustice</li> <li>Need to impose capital controls, lowering the ratio of finance to real economic activity, nationalising financial assets</li> <li>Need to diversify sources of currency against fiscal imperialism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arguments to impose capital controls, to lower the ratio of finance to real economic activity and to nationalize financial seets</li> </ul>



Core themes in degrowth	Analogies with environmental justice struggles	Concrete examples in the participant organisation
<b>Institutions and socio-economic organisation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities that conquer back territories invaded by tree plantations</li> <li>Community energy committees in Nigeria (demonstrative stage)</li> <li>Rationalisation of production on the basis of real, local needs and local available materials</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promotion of small, local and environmentally friendly production</li> <li>Critiques of the power structures in all global, continental, national and municipal scales (governmental/corporate)</li> </ul>
<b>Commons</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forest collectively controlled and used by communities</li> <li>Protection of communal lands, used for communal purposes only</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National movement for water (and energy) in Italy</li> <li>'From rights to commons'</li> </ul>
<b>Social comparison</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering equalities in terms of access to basic resources and distribution of environmental burdens</li> <li>Desire to end Africa's artificially drawn borders (or Bealia in 1865)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stop Bincidio coalition and support to sacrificed communities</li> <li>Anti-xenophobia research and programming</li> <li>Nigeria's National Basic Income Scheme (NaBIS)</li> </ul>
<b>Material needs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food energy sovereignty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth for basic needs projects (e.g. South Africa's failed Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994)</li> </ul>
<b>Consumer imaginary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Need to rebuild peoples' imaginaries into appropriate consumption</li> <li>Critique of hedonistic consumption norms (when applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Story of Stuff project (2000) (including on cap-and-trade critique)</li> </ul>



## **4. But Still, We Want to Cooperate. From Analogies to Homologies**

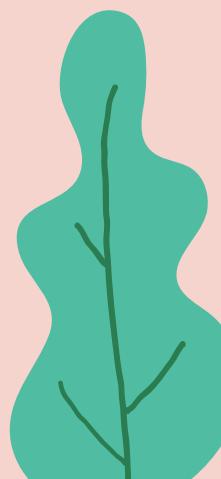
The combination of factors mentioned above means that currently the degrowth debate is not a priority for many EJ movements in the South. Yet the interviewees saw that several points defended by the 'degrowth' movement could lead to interesting discussions with Southern groups. Evidence from the European semi-periphery indicates that, while limited, there is potential there for degrowth to theoretical frame the EJ movements (Domazet and An i , n.d.). Recent attempts to present degrowth hand-in-hand with other transformative alternatives help to illustrate the benefits of this exercise in developing research and activist agendas (Demaria and Kothari, 2017; Escobar, 2015).

Moreover, some economies in Southern countries have embraced imaginaries of economic growth and are deploying them at a fast pace. Such is clearly the case in Brazil, now the seventh largest economy in the world and still maintaining a steady growth rate. Social movements there could take up the degrowth discourse to articulate their own demands. Looking at degrowth proposals may provide a way to link local struggles with the larger-scale drivers that trigger them.

The basic premise for promoting alliances, the interviewees argue, is that the different proposals do not exclude each other but learn and benefit from each other. A way to approach this can be to identify analogies. An analogy supports the necessary exercise of cross-cultural encounter and the identification of similar origins, or homologies. It sustains the fundamental idea of unity in diversity, which is a powerful concept that prevails across cultural contexts and even disciplinary fields. To this end, the present section presents a summary of responses to the question 'What are the analogies or equivalences between the core themes in the degrowth debate and environmental justice in the context of the country(-ies) where your organization operates?' (also presented in Table 2).

### **4.1 Time(s)**

In response to the question of how to spend or share time, there is a call for using time to socialise, to re-discover the own lost soul, but also to expand the active societal role of the self. In the powerful analogy of 'living well', as expressed through the Andean notion of Sumak Kawsay, the use of plural forms of time in community work helps to strengthen social cohesion. There is therefore an invitation to recognise the time lived through political engagement as a valuable dimension of time. Specific examples are provided in relation to existing popular epidemiology initiatives in Italy, such as allowing citizens to rediscover themselves through interaction with others (the EPiCentro Civitavecchia experiment), or the teamwork between people with cancer, activists, and researchers in areas heavily exposed to environmental pollutants (Veritas project).



## 4.2. Resource Availability

Reducing natural resource extraction and consumption is very much a core interest of several interviewees. Interesting analogies emerge from the evidence of Africa's multiple resource curses, and from the analyses of ways these curses are revealed, including climate change aspects.

Several cases of land grabs in Kenya help to exemplify the local impacts of economic growth in other parts of the world. For instance, in the Tana Delta, the company G4 Industries wanted 28,000 ha for biofuel production for the UK; Bedford Biofuels wanted 160,000 ha of Jatropha for biodiesel for Europe, and Kenya Jatropha Energy Limited wanted 50,000 ha, some of it indigenous forest. All these schemes aimed at satisfying energy needs for Europe, in response to EU renewable energy policies which clearly cannot be met by Europe's agriculture. As a result, involuntary 'degrowth' occurs in Kenya, and global disparities increase. Therefore, campaigns against land grabbing are identified as a source of analogies with degrowth propositions on resource availability.

More and more extraction is clearly not the solution, especially given its increasingly violent side (The Guardian and Global Witness, 2018). Therefore, the interviewees argue that a great deal of unnecessary natural resource extraction should be halted, especially when the natural resource wealth shrinkage far exceeds profits retained and capital reinvested (Bond, 2018). Stopping the flow of materials and labour from the South to the North –a selective 'delinking' as Samir Amin (1990) put it– is seen as a prerequisite for degrowth in the North.

In relation to underground materials, the approach is characterised by claims of 'leave it in the ground' and 'climate debt'. The campaign for Yasuní is perhaps the most illustrative case (Yasunidos, 2018). There is also an urge to coordinate actions for the defence of sacrificed zones affected by contamination, and to stop the expansion of the extraction frontier, as in the case of the 'Stop Biocidio' and 'No Triv' coalitions, against oil drilling in Italy. Numerous joint initiatives already exist on projects aimed at halting extractivism. Through them organisations in the North offer concrete solidarity against corporations which are targets of EJ movements in the South (such as Italian organisations against ENI oil drilling in Nigeria and South Africa).

Defended principles here are the fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens (or their absolute reduction), fair access to natural resources, and the halting of excessive consumption. Not only bans but also environmental education and communication work are emphasized. Another source of potential alliances relies on the link between the claims for EJ in the South and the North, such as mining conflicts in the extraction frontier in Canada, Sweden, Spain or Greece, or oil and gas conflicts in Italy. In any case, there is a need to consider what a 'resource' is, what 'availability' is, and how both are conceptualised within the degrowth debate.



## 4.3. Hard Infrastructure

The critique of mega-projects is an important part of the EJ movements' agenda, and a rich source of analogies with degrowth. In Nigeria, issues arise as a result of the pressure that subsidy-dependent mega-infrastructures impose on public financing. In Italy, where struggles against unwanted infrastructures – starting with the high-speed train – are well known, conflicts entailed a review of the purpose of transportation and its relation to time, because fast is often unnecessary. This example also teaches how to connect different resistances, as the local struggles related to the construction of a high-speed line cooperated with the 'Stop Biocidio' coalition mentioned above, which was particularly active in denouncing impacts of environmental contamination on people lives.

Opposition to large-infrastructure comes together with a demand for the extension of appropriate infrastructures for basic needs, and the creation of networks of solidarity work. For instance, the 'Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra' (MST) is a social movement of landless peasants that has huge experience in solidarity work and missions in other countries. Also in Latin America, it is worth looking at the ALBA initiative, a cooperation not based on strengthening infrastructure to facilitate exports (like the IIRSA plan for infrastructure among South-American countries), but cooperation between countries based on the social and human dimensions, e.g. through the exchange of doctors for improving medical assistance, fellowships in universities, experiences with certain types of agriculture and other activities, scientific cooperation, and solidarity missions.

## 4.4. Finance

EJ movements emphasize the role of finance in exacerbating environmental injustices. The search for economic profit is seen as the root of environmental and social destruction, commodification of nature, and climate change. In the case of Nigeria, an interviewee indicates that the concept of gross domestic product (GDP) does not represent the economic development ethos of the country or the people. Comparing Nigeria with other countries based on their GDP then becomes another method of financial and fiscal imperialism. Therefore, there are strong arguments to impose capital controls, lower the ratio of finance to real economic activity, nationalize financial assets, and diversify the sources of currency.

Alternative forms of wealth accounting are also important. Measuring the rapid decline in Nigeria's non-renewable resources – i.e. the subtraction of natural wealth that is responsible for rising 'income' when oil is extracted and sold – through, e.g., the Genuine Progress Indicator would provide Nigerians a sense of the ecological cost of growth. This strategy should deter an economic policy based on extractivism and export-led 'growth'. In most countries of the South engaged in primary product exploitation, accounting for natural resource depletion is far superior to GDP (Gaborone Declaration, 2012). In Africa such measurements (even by the World Bank) already suggest a USD150 billion/annum net loss from extractivist activities (Bond, 2018).

## 4.5. Institutions, Socio-economic Organisation, and Commons

Power structures at scales of global, continental, national and municipal governments and corporations are strongly critiqued by EJ movements. In the global call for system change, new institutions are critically required. Their task is organising the rationalisation of the production process on the basis of real local needs and locally available materials, while respecting environmental reproduction times. Several examples can be found. In Brazil, communities take back their territories that were dispossessed for tree plantations. Areas of tropical rainforest collectively controlled and used by communities keep production at small scales and promote community participation while providing materials for local and regional needs. This in contrast to the export-oriented and developmentalist idea of increasing exports to increase economic growth. In Italy, new groups promote small, locally based and environmentally friendly production, in areas ranging from food to architecture. Cooperatives for managing water systems and energy systems are proposed worldwide. For instance, in Nigeria, community energy committees are piloting forms of local renewable energy production.

Based on high-profile campaigns and discussions, e.g., on the ‘right to water’ in South Africa and Italy, it was clear for some organisations that the human rights approach –based on liberal constitutionalism– was too individualistic. It provides a false hope for justice given prevailing power relations in the courts. After losing a Constitutional Court battle for water in 2009, Soweto activists resumed sharing of municipal water through illegal reconnection as a form of commoning (Bond, 2013). Where possible, this seems to be the most appropriate response against injustices. As another striking example in South Africa is the activist-driven commoning of Intellectual Property so as to supply generic AIDS medicines in the late 1990s. This was followed by substantial decrease in HIV/AIDS treatment costs in the country and a subsequent life expectancy increase.

Commons are important realities in the day-to-day life of many communities engaged in EJ struggles. Commons do not ‘passively’ exist, but rely on their permanent (re)production in the territory. They are rooted in a democratic- and community-based vision that addresses the issue of fair resource distribution according to sufficiency and ‘natural’ availability. Traditional commons exist in Nigeria, where land tenure is basically communal and exclusively used for community purposes through, customary structures. As with many countries in Africa, this system is not exempt from disputes in relation to tenure arrangements over land, typically herder-farmer conflicts. Yet importantly, interviewees emphasize the requirement that communal lands are protected from private uses.

Commons also provide a framework to develop innovative schemes of ‘compensation’ in face of climate injustices. The idea is commoning the climate debt through payments from people in the North to people already impacted by climate change in the South. The experience of the Basic Income Grant pilot in Otjivero, Namibia, funded by the German Namibian Evangelical Lutheran church, showed immediate benefits in terms of poverty alleviation and independently earned

income (Carnegie Council, 2010). This could be considered as a social pillar for the recognition and restitution of the ecological and climate debts, complementary to another pillar reliant on the Yasunisation-Ogonisation strategy.

However, two important warnings emerged from the interviews. Firstly, from the Italian experience of political work on water and energy, in practice there is no strong and concrete relation between the movements for the commons –very strong between 2011 and 2013 due to the national referendum on water- and degrowth. Secondly, there is concern that commons –now a popular topic in research– could become a passing intellectual trend.

## **4.6. Social Comparison, Material Needs and Consumer Imaginary**

Environmental injustice is clearly related to social and economic inequalities: the poorest and the more marginalised are more at risk of exposure to environmental damage. Impoverished people also lack access to basic needs and essential services. Initiatives aspiring to social equality and redistribution include a campaign launched in Nigeria demanding a National Basic Income Scheme (NaBIS); a stipend of around USD 100 for all unemployed Nigerians. The NaBIS proposal seeks to redistribute wealth and reduce inequality in Nigerian society. Interestingly, an analogy emerging at this stage was related to the desire to end Africa's artificially drawn borders (in Berlin in 1885) and their effects, and promote anti-xenophobia research and action.

Trying to push for a more locally sustained economy that respects nature is a notion that resonates well with Southern groups in struggles for social and environmental justice. Several of the local ‘alternatives’ that communities are trying to implement in the global South would defend these principles, as in the case (mentioned above) of communities taking back territories that were dispossessed for tree plantations.

In the same line of thinking, food sovereignty is a very much a defended principle by La Via Campesina and the peasant organisations that are members. Therefore, it could become an important source of analogies with degrowth. This is a critically important issue that requires making connections with struggles in the North, as it is apparent when looking through the products and ingredients on the shelves in most European supermarkets that most of them come from Southern countries. Here the notion of commodity chains can help to connect materially and symbolically the struggles.

However, there are also social movements in the South whose main concern revolves around wealth redistribution, rather than a locally sustained economy and respect for nature. A case in point would be the movement ‘O petróleo é nosso’ (the oil is ours) led by trade unions, especially the oil extraction workers one, and other social movements in Brazil that seek redistribution of oil revenues. Here the



pro-growth spirit percolates the aspirations for social and environmental justice. In such cases, the key is respecting sufficiency in the satisfaction of basic needs. This is exemplified by the 'Growth for basic needs' strategy within South Africa's (failed) Reconstruction and Development Programme of 1994.

This eventually leads to the question of whether or not degrowth can be applied to high and medium income strata in the global North, regardless of where they are located. There is evidence of extreme inequalities also in Southern countries. In rural and urban areas in the South, most of the population lacks access to the most essential requirements. In some cases, like in South Africa, there is an open critique from EJ organisations of (mainly white) hedonistic consumption norms and evidence of overconsumption. Even amid impoverished communities, hard earned money is being misused in purchasing expensive mobile phones as a symbol of status. What happens to the 'catch up mentality' where people strive to follow in the footsteps of the 'developed'? For EJ movements, the whole idea of society tagging along with corporations is a deep concern. In fact, there are many analogies in terms of the need to rebuild peoples' imaginaries in line with low and appropriate consumption, albeit paying careful attention to the considerations presented in the previous sections. This brings EJ and degrowth movements very close. Clearly, environmental education and communication work is key. An example presented is the 'Story of Stuff' project which includes a critique of cap-and-trade. The desire to critically influence the consumer imaginary can also foster (tactical rather than strategic) links between EJ organisations in the South and consumers' organisations in the North.

## **5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The alliance between the degrowth movement in the global North and EJ movements in the Global South has been explained as the logical consequence of their desire to combat similar disruptive drivers. In this paper, well-known activists for EJ in the Global South have critically examined this proposition. Significant differences between movements have been highlighted, in regards to terminology, underlying values, strategies for communication, dissemination and planning, history of ideas and political stances. These have been discussed with the explicit purpose of strengthening positive and constructive convergences between degrowth and Southern EJ movements.

These are possible and, as indicated above, desirable, despite the many divergences between the two broadly conceptualised sets of movements. However, they will only occur if alliances are mutually beneficial. Rather than looking for commonalities, analogies between both sets of movements are presented in relation to core themes of the Degrowth debate. In this paper, analogies are used as an epistemic resource that facilitates cross-cultural encounters, since they promote learning without losing the essence of plurality. Analogies eventually help to identify homologies between movements that can become a base for collaboration.

Note that 'a' global strategic alliance is difficult in a context of plurality both in EJ and in degrowth movements. Yet, constructive processes are possible. Ideas such as those of subsistence-living, balance between all living beings and reciprocity, self-sufficiency and self-reliance open the possibility for debates in which both sets of movements can contribute. From there, specific alliances on concrete projects may flourish around topics such as convivial technologies, critique of debt, neoliberalism and accelerationism, and the support of alternative economies. With this in mind, and building on the political experience of the authors, some recommendations are presented so as to further progress towards a conversation between movements.

- a) Alternative terminologies need to be found. Admittedly, it is necessary to disseminate more broadly and clearly what degrowth is, in the South. The heterogeneity and pluralism within degrowth ideas themselves are still little known. Yet, organisations in the South have participated little in the conceptual development of the degrowth. Leaving aside the well-known critiques about 'degrowth' as an unfortunate term, a revised terminology is needed that gives people in the South an opportunity to contribute. In the terminological and conceptual exchange, proponents of degrowth need to be explicit about points such as: what should the debate focus on? Who needs to degrow? Where and when should degrowth start? For instance, should it start in places where consumption can no longer be sustained by locally available natural resources?
- b) Recognise diversity of contexts and entry points. Explicit calls from degrowth researchers calling for an organic alliance between plural movements, rather than imposing a homogeneous model for transformation, do not alter the fact that worldwide interest in degrowth has resulted from a body of literature emerging from Northern countries. EJ movements around the globe represent a multiplicity of grassroots experiences, struggles and strategies, each one coming from a different history and territory. There is not a correct strategy or principle for all movements, even if this is the idea of downscaling the impact of humans on the planet. Every exchange is embedded in context and experience. As such, there will unlikely be 'an' alliance, but specific practices of solidarity with other people's struggles and concerns. In each case, the entry point for the discussion may be very different. A corollary for degrowth researchers would be to articulate explicitly the contextual nature of their studies. Generic messages which do not situate the researchers themselves and their analysis in a clear manner may be counterproductive.
- c) Aim at tactic alliances based on concrete cases and examples, and only then think about strategic alliances. The conversation can start from identifying and exploring practical links. For this, EJ organisations propose to start asking ourselves about the relation between degrowth and the campaigns and projects EJ movements are currently engaged in, from transport mega-projects to young people's groups opposing oil extraction in the Amazon. These events overlap with degrowth politics and may become key sources of concrete alliances. There is also an invitation to examine the alliances that degrowth has already created with some local EJ movements in the North, and to explore together the agreements and disagreements from such processes.

d) Accept that timing matters in the conversation between movements. For an understanding of degrowth to flourish in the South, it needs to connect with the identities and realities of the Global South. This is a process and takes time. Degrowth is a useful frame that has been very effective and clearly positive for social movements and intellectuals in the North. That was the context for which this transition paradigm was intended. There it has created important alliances and has generated strong multiplier effects. Whether it will also connect with the movements in the Global South depends on the necessity and opportunity of this discussion there. A line of thought indicates that degrowing in the Global North may make more space for growth in the Global South e.g., in relation to carbon emissions. One could argue that the Global North must degrow because it is consuming too much. As elaborated above, there are homologous ideas between degrowth and EJ movements, and mutual learning has already started through existing collaborations. This is promising, but it is up to the people of the Global South which ideas to endorse and when. The same goes for movements in the North.

The need for EJ and degrowth movements to work together is fundamental if they are to become more influential in their respective scopes of action, and to offer each other solidarity where feasible. The global influence of social movements is undeniable, as witnessed when the green groups walked out of UN climate talks in 2013. However, the situation today for EJOs in the South is different, and not necessarily better than it was five or ten years ago. Alliances with a thriving set of movements such as degrowth is therefore beneficial, and surely welcome, as long as they reinforce each other's strengths and do not unintendedly create new forms of intellectual domination.

One might imagine that these striking realities could contribute to the development of synergies between movements seeking EJ in the Global South and the critics to growth. In fact, the idea of an 'obvious' alliance with degrowth movements bothers some people in EJ movements of the South. Table 1 compiles some of reasons why this might be, based on responses from the interviews. A further elaboration of these ideas follows in the remainder of the section.



# D) Additional resources

## D.1 On Decoupling

- REPORT: European Environmental Bureau, 2019. Decoupling debunked – Evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability.
- Hickel J. and Kallis, 2019. Is Green Growth Possible? New Political Economy.

## D.2 On Degrowth

- Demaria, F., Schneider, F., Sekulova, F., Martinez-Alier, J. (2013). What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement. *Environmental Values* 22 (2): 191-215.
- Hickel, J., What Does Degrowth Mean? (2020)
- Mastini, Riccardo; (2017) Degrowth: The case for a new economic paradigm, OpenDemocracy

## D.3 On Feminism and Degrowth

- Eicker, J. and Keil, K.; Who cares? Towards a convergence of feminist economics and degrowth in the (re)valuation of unpaid care work

## D.4 On Planetary boundaries

- Steffen, W. et al. 2015. Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science* 347: 1259855.
- Millward-Hopkins, J. T.; Steinberger J. K.; Rao, N. D.; Oswald Y.; 2020; Providing decent living with minimum energy: A global scenario, *Global Environmental Change* 65

## D.5 On Degrowth and the Global South

- Quantifying national responsibility for climate breakdown: an equality-based attribution approach for carbon dioxide emissions in excess of the planetary boundary - Jason Hickel C



### WEBINARS:

Degrowth, Feminism and The Pluriverse with Federico Demaria, Corinna Dengler and Julia Steinberger

Decolonising Degrowth: voices from the majority world with Mladen Domazet, Miriam Lang, Brototi Roy.

Other relevant webinars: DegrowthTalks

### Suggested books

- Kallis, G., Paulson, S., Demaria, F., D'Alisa, G. 2020. The Case for Degrowth. Polity Press.
  - Liegy V. and Nelson A., 2020. Exploring Degrowth A Critical Guide. Pluto Press.
  - Burkhardt, C., Treu, N., Schmelzer, M., 2020. Degrowth in Movement(s): Exploring Pathways for Transformation. Zer0 Books..
  - Salleh, A. 2009. Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology. Pluto Press.
  - Mies, M. Shiva, V. 2014. Ecofeminism. Zed Books.
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# Session 3

## Rhythms of Time and Work: Commoning Care

### Themes

- The significance of culturally constructed notions of time in relation to narratives of acceleration
  - Clock-based work
  - Task-based time
  - Labour, home and care
  - Commoning care work: community and post-developmental perspectives
- 

*Workin' 9 to 5,  
What a way to make a livin'  
Barely gettin' by  
It's all takin' and no givin'  
They just use your mind  
And they never give you credit  
It's enough to drive you crazy  
If you let it*

- Dolly Parton



# A) Introduction

The economic framework shapes our lives and livelihoods, and vice versa. In this session, we will look at how notions of time influence work patterns. We will look at the close affinity between linear notions of time and work patterns shaped by the industrial revolution, and between tasks and cyclical notions of time with an affinity to indigenous ways of life. We will then delve into explorations of care economies from a feminist perspective and highlight the commons and the role of communities as a possible point of convergence. From this perspective, we can begin to co-produce radically different degrowth paradigms that centre communal care.

## A.1 Clock-time and Work

While the majority of folk in Scotland and across the UK no longer strictly work 9 to 5 as in Dolly Parton's lyrics, the demands made on workers' time still largely conform to a strictly measured number of hours. The popular saying "time is money" indicates how closely time is associated with the economy in the cultural psyche. Mechanised, optimised time effectively works as a growth enabler.

How do we make sense of the relationship between time, work and the economy? The linear structure of time as measured by the clock was a necessary feature of the industrial revolution, to enable the centralised management of factories and workforces. The logic of capitalist production created and enforced a division between the domains of work and social or 'home' life. Tim Ingold argued in his 1995 article "Work, Time and Industry" that "clock time is as alien to us as it is to the people of pre-industrial societies: the only difference is that we have to deal with it" (p.5).

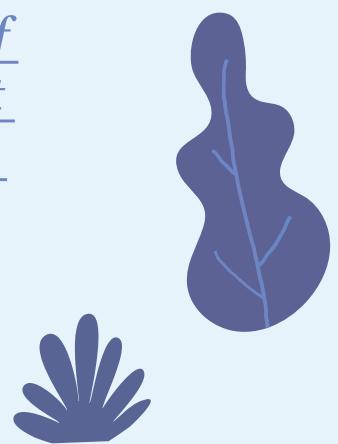
Waged labour, organised by clock time, is homogenous and quantitative: "effected by the logic of capitalist relations, the sociality of work is dissolved" (Ingold 1995, p.12). This does not mean that there are no social relations between colleagues at the workplace. Rather, the social structures that comprise communities and family units are denied "within the straitjacket of a 'Western' or commodity-based institutional and ideological framework that seeks at every turn to deny the reality of situated social experience" (Ingold 1995:27). Ultimately,

Ingold argues, “we are human beings whose lives are caught up in the painful process of negotiation between ... the dwelling and commodity perspectives. In this process lies the temporal dynamic of industrial society” (1995: p. 27).

However, upholding the framework of time-measured waged labour is the substantial un(der)valued body of work performed in the domestic sphere, largely by women (→ see Overview Reading on Degrowth and Feminism: B1, p. 9). Ingold describes how the rhythms of the householder, a role still predominantly performed by women, are not wholly attuned to the clock and hence has not fully moved out of pre-industrial society’s conventions.

*“The domain of householding, although by no means confined within the four walls of the house or dwelling, was until quite recently (though less so today) centred upon the figure of the ‘housewife’ who certainly used to enjoy no division between work and leisure. For her, work was indeed life, and consisted in a multitude of tasks of child-rearing and domestic maintenance. Moreover, unlike the industrial worker, the housewife remained formally in command of her own working capacity: although her work was necessary and unavoidable, often punishing in its demands of energy and endurance, it was not done under external imposition.”*

Ingold 1995, p.17



Overlapping with the householding domain, care work is another area of work that is mostly performed by women, highly invisible, often unpaid with little control over the timing and over the amount of work that is being performed (Akbolut 2017) → see Overview Reading on Carework as Commons: B2, p. 12. In its most straightforward sense, care work is defined as “labor performed to fulfill the needs of those who cannot do so themselves, such as food provision, cleaning, health, etc” (Akbolut 2017). However, more broadly, care work is best understood as “paid and unpaid labour that ensures social reproduction in general” (Akbolut 2017), whereby ‘social reproduction’ includes the intergenerational continuity of existing inequalities, including patriarchial relations.

An artificial division between the domains of waged labour and householding/ care work and leisure is self-perpetuating. We labour for money in order to be able to afford basic needs such as housing, and we are incentivised to labour more by the promise of more exciting leisure pursuits. High rent, land and house prices force people into seeking waged employment, while leaving less room for activities that serve to secure subsistence in other ways. Meanwhile, householding and care work remains unpaid or underpaid, not only perpetuating the gender pay gap but also forming a backdrop of overwhelm which became especially evident during the lockdown phases of the covid-19 pandemic.

What are the lessons for degrowth or postgrowth? In a nutshell, Mair et al. suggest that we need to work more but differently, producing less in the process:

*“The key to creating a post-growth utopia lies in addressing the issue of labour productivity growth. Labour productivity growth is implicated in the violation of biophysical limits, the degradation of work, the generation of inequality, and the devaluing of reproductive work. Tackling labour productivity growth enables us to transition to a world of less environmental damage, and stronger social bonds.”*

(Mair et al. 2020)

→ see In-depth Reading on work in a postgrowth society: C1, p.15

## A.2 Task-orientation and Time

Before and in parallel to the establishment of clock-time, the perception of time was centred on tasks. Ingold argues that “task-orientation remains central to the experience of work in industrial society, even though the reality of that experience is systematically denied by the ‘Western’ discourse of freedom and necessity” (1995: p.5). Tasks are inherently skills-driven, objective-focused and embedded in social relations.

“Machines don’t perform tasks, but people do. Thus with a task-orientation the human subject, equipped with a competence acquired through practicing alongside the more experienced hands, is situated right here at the centre of productive activity. Second, tasks are defined primarily in terms of their objectives, without necessarily entailing any explicit codification of the rules and procedures to be followed in realizing them. And these objectives, far from being independently prescribed in the form of exercises in problem-solving (as in the entirely artificial tasks of ‘testing’ in the school or psychological laboratory), themselves arise through the agent’s involvement within the current of social life. Third, the particular kinds of tasks that a person performs are an index of his or her personal and social identity: the tasks you do depend on who you are, and in a sense the performance of certain tasks makes you the person you are. And, finally, tasks are never accomplished in isolation, but always within a setting that is in itself constituted by the co-presence of others whose own performances necessarily have a bearing on one’s own.” (Ingold 1995: p.8-9)

Conceiving of work as task-based rather than driven by clock time softens or dissolves the division between external labour, the home and care work. It also allows for a more organic relationship to time.

Indigenous conceptions of time tend to be cyclical rather than linear. This is reflected, for example, in the Life Plan community planning model (film: Life Mosaic) pioneered by the Misak, an indigenous Colombian people, and taken up by other indigenous communities across Latin America. Jeremias Tunubalá Ullune and Liliana Pechene Muelas, two Misak leaders, travelled to different community groups in Scotland in 2018 to teach this model. Their cyclical notion of time manifests itself in the practice of cultural memory at the heart of all community planning, and in how stages of life are understood. Liliana, sharing their epistemology in a residential on the Isle of Bute in 2018, elaborated on this non-linear, cyclical concept of time. In this way of being in the world, the community’s older people- their Elders- are associated with the future, as their practices, memories, heritage and traditions are considered



to be crucial to the future flourishing of their territory and community. Conversely, children are conceptually associated with the past, as they represent the continuation and regeneration of the ancestral wisdom that they are born into. This is in striking contrast to cultural concepts in which ‘senior citizens’ can be perceived as burdens that have outlived their productive working lives, or children seen as necessary workers for future economic growth.

Indigenous Scottish practices of working the land also follow cyclic rhythms. The film ‘Land Makar’ directed by Margaret Tait about crofter Mary Graham Sinclair portrays the life on a croft on the edge of a small loch where swans and other birds nest in the grass. It was filmed over a number of seasons and portrays sequences of work in the traditional crofting style, mostly done by one woman’s labour. Task-orientation and a cyclical perception of time allows for a better integration of different areas of work in home and community life.

### **A.3 Commoning Care: Community-centred Perspectives**

Weaving together the different threads of rhythms of time and work, a degrowth economy can formulate and restore a healthier relationship to care, community and the commons.

Challenging and dismantling the gendered aspects of care work necessitates a shift towards acknowledging care work as a practice of mutuality, sharing, reciprocity and the commons: “the most fundamental basis of social reproduction to which we all contribute and to which we all owe our existence.” (Akbulut 2017)

The ‘commons’ are loosely defined as that which has been previously a shared resource, often enclosed and removed from such shared use by capitalist economic forces (Berge and Van Laerhoven 2011).

Among degrowth thinkers and practitioners from the global south, commoning is part of a post-development discourse. This must be contextualised in the competition for ownership of knowledge that was previously in the public domain, which Hess and Ostrom (2003) called an ‘intellectual land grab’.

“Multiple forces are vying for capture and restriction of traditionally available knowledge: corporations versus indigenous peoples, such as Monsanto owning the patent on the genetic structure of the neem; federal and state governments versus citizens regarding balancing encryption and digital surveillance with individual privacy; universities versus professors as to whether institutions or individuals will own intellectual property; and publishers versus libraries in the ephemeralization of library collections through licensing, bundling, and withdrawal of information.” (Hess and Ostrom 2003: p.112)

The production of traditional ecological knowledge has an affinity with the commons, as it is transmitted between generations. Traditional ecological knowledge arises from and reinforces an “ethic of reciprocal respect and obligations between humans and

the nonhuman world" (Wall Kimmerer 2002). The wealth of this information is under threat from those wishing to patent it, while there remains a vast body of traditional knowledge we are only beginning to learn from.

"The scope of traditional ecological knowledge includes detailed empirical knowledge of population biology, resource assessment and monitoring, successional dynamics, patterns of fluctuation in climate and resources, species interactions, ethnotaxonomy, sustainable harvesting, and adaptive management and manipulation of disturbance regimes (Berkes 1999). Case histories of the utility of TEK in conservation biology span a range of biomes from the tundra to the tropical rainforest." (Wall Kimmerer 2002)

## What are the Commons?

The term 'commons' itself has had "various histories, from property to shared spaces to notions of democratic ideals. It refers to the house of British Parliament representing nontitled citizens, and agricultural fields in England and Europe prior to their enclosure. In the United States, commons refers to public spaces such as the New England town square, campus dining halls, and concepts of the "common" good. In almost all uses, the term has been contested." (Hess and Ostrom 2003: p.115) For their long-term longevity and proper use, commons must be collectively and skilfully managed or governed.

"The commons" is not a precisely defined concept, and maybe less so today than it was when Hardin (1968) popularized the metaphor of the "Tragedy of the Commons." Hardin's (1968) explanation for the need to enclose the commons confounded the resource with its governance regime (Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975). By 1990, the concept of a common pool resource (Ostrom and Ostrom 1977) had emerged as a key to understand under what conditions it can be expected that resource governance regimes may result in more sustainable forms of resource use (Ostrom 1990). The core problem of commons regimes is of course related to the governance of individual rational action in a context where outcomes are dependent on the actions of all other resource users. This is in essence "the" problem of collective action." (Berge and Van Laerhoven 2011)

Radical human ecology aims to follow the principles of traditional ecological knowledge in the sense that "when Human Ecology becomes radical it invites us elementally to integrate our perception of Earth, as the physical exteriority of reality, with Spirit, as its metaphysical inferiority. As such, our Human Ecology must be very grounded in the scientific physical basis of reality, but equally grounded in the metaphysics - the "behind," "beyond" or "transformed-from-within" physics of our deep humanity" (McIntosh 2012).

Feminist thinkers have argued that there can be no commons without community, which tallies with the folk wisdom that it takes a village to raise a child. If "commoning" necessitates the collective management of resources for the common good, we need to learn, in Federici's words, to produce ourselves as a common subject:

This is how we must understand the slogan "no commons without community." But "community" not intended as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests separating them from others, as with community formed on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Community as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to

each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals" (Federici 2010) → see In-depth Reading on Feminism and the Commons: C2, p.34

In relation to care work, Akbulut understands commons as "non-commodified modes of social reproduction (2017) that include relationships, networks, practices and struggles from radical childcare co-operatives to neighbourhood and community-based care provision. They are accessible to all and not mediated by the state or the market. The mutual aid groups during the covid-19 pandemic are one such example.

In practice, "commoning care would mean organizing carework in a non-patriarchal, egalitarian and democratic way. In this sense, the commoning perspective does not only locate care within collective-cooperative production and use, but highlights the fundamental gender dimension implicated especially in carework" (Akbulut 2017).

Commoning care can involve learning from indigenous visionaries and communities and others who hold a set of common values that includes "collective working and solidarity, respect for diversity and pluralism, the dignity of labour, empathy and respect for the rest of nature, simplicity, equity and justice, rights with responsibilities, self-reliance, and others." (Kothari 2016).

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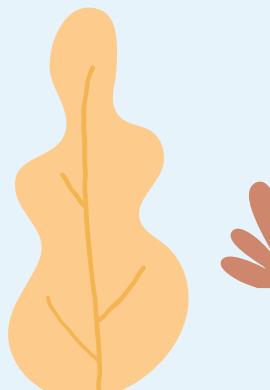
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# B Overview Readings

## B.1 Degrowth and Feminism

by Corinna Dengler and Birte Strunk

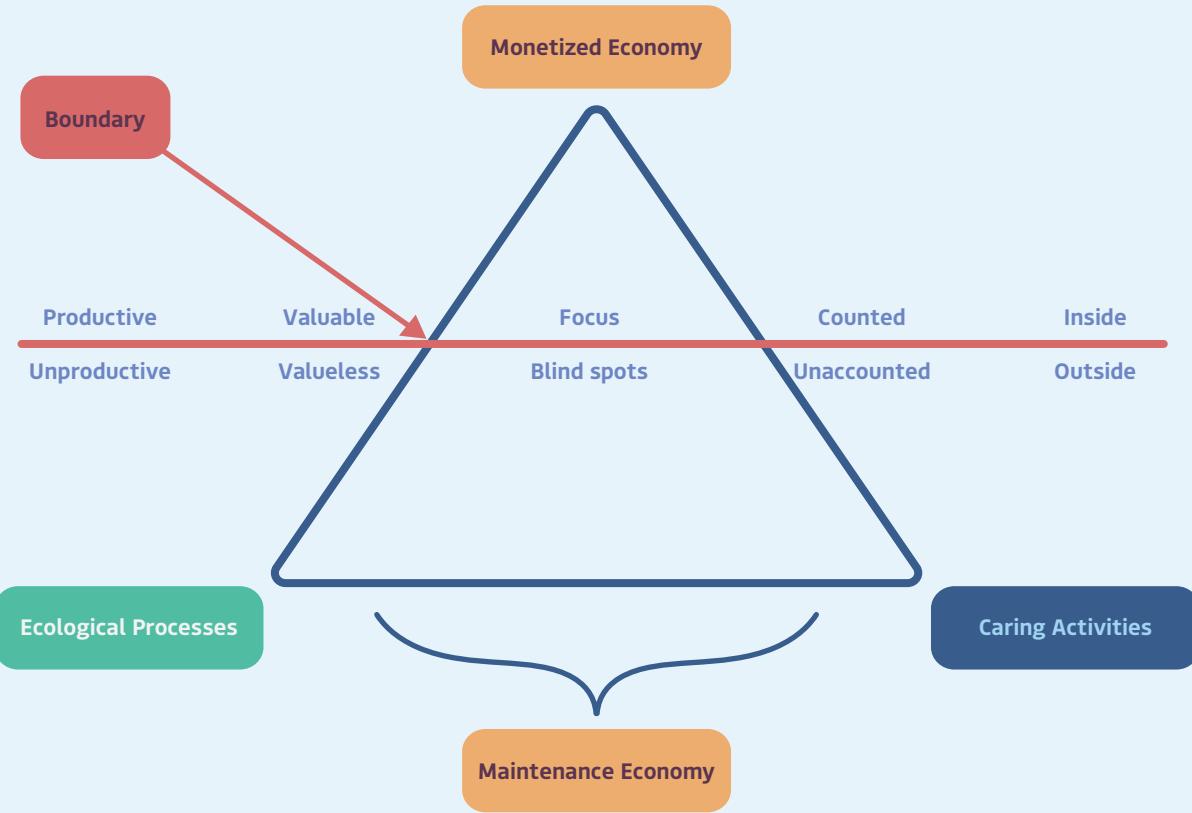
### How a feminist degrowth approach can alleviate ecological and gender injustices

Is it possible to reconcile sustainable development, a fair distribution of both paid and unpaid work among genders, and an economic strategy based on growth? In our article “The Monetized Economy versus Care and the Environment? Degrowth Perspectives on Reconciling an Antagonism”, a contribution to the 2018 Feminist Economics Special Issue on “Sustainability, Ecology, and Care”, we argue that the growth paradigm perpetuates existing gender and environmental injustices. We offer ‘degrowth’ as a potential candidate for a Feminist Ecological Economics perspective that could pave the way towards a ‘caring economy’. However, in order to live up to this potential, we argue, degrowth must necessarily become more feminist.

#### The Conceptual Framework

Our argument builds upon an adapted version of the triangle-shaped ICE model developed by Jochimsen and Knobloch in 1997.

Figure 1:



The model divides the economy into the ‘maintenance economy’, consisting of caring activities and ecological processes, and the formal ‘monetized economy’. While the former is necessary for the latter to exist, the monetized economy tends to ignore or devalue the maintenance economy. We argue alongside other feminist scholars that the boundary between those two spheres needs to be overcome in order to arrive at a ‘caring economy’, as envisioned by both degrowth and feminist scholars, and thus at environmental and gender justice.

### **The Ecological Critique: Sustainability in a Growth Paradigm?**

We proceed by analyzing how the growth paradigm undermines and devalues ecological processes (ecological critique) and caring activities (feminist critique). The ecological critique we provide in the article very much resembles the growth critique in the degrowth discourse. We describe how the concept of sustainable development is frequently regarded as a means to address environmental injustices in a growth paradigm. A ‘Green Economy’ is meant to reconcile the social, the ecological and the economic sphere and is proposed as a panacea for environmental challenges. However, empirical evidence shows that until today decoupling production from negative environmental consequences happens only in relative (per unit) but not in absolute terms.<sup>1</sup> We illustrate how an unchallenged acceptance of economic growth as the yardstick for economic development contributes to a perpetuation of the boundary between the monetized and the maintaining.

### **The Feminist Critique: Gender Equality in a Growth Paradigm?**

The other side of the coin, the feminist critique, illustrates how in a growth paradigm, the boundary between visible wage labor and invisible unpaid labor remains intact. Trying to overcome the boundary by simply including women into the uncontested category of work is not a solution to the problem, as it often leads to a double burden for women, who are faced with both paid and unpaid work responsibilities. If instead care work is outsourced to paid care providers, the boundary might no longer be strictly dividing (white, middle-class) women and men, but nonetheless persists between the vulnerable and the profiting, and thus the boundary itself remains unchallenged. Hence, a narrative change that encourages a fair division of work in paid and unpaid sectors is necessary. We illustrate that this narrative change is difficult to achieve within a growth paradigm, where the focus on GDP increase only captures what is quantifiable. This is the first argumentative step towards our claim that a degrowth paradigm, which proposes different societal norms beyond quantifiable measures, carries the potential of alleviating gender injustices if taking feminist concerns seriously.

## **Degrowth: A Way Forward?**

We thus use parallel critiques of feminist and ecological economists to show that both lines of thought recognize the difficulty of overcoming the boundary between the monetized and the maintaining in a growth paradigm. We argue that degrowth offers ground for structurally re-evaluating ecological processes and caring activities by challenging core tenets of the monetized economy, primarily the reliance on GDP growth as an indicator for economic and societal well-being. But how can degrowth concretely inform policy-making? We demonstrate this with the case of work-sharing, a degrowth proposal for reducing working hours. Using a feminist-ecological lens to analyze different work-sharing proposals, we argue that work-time reduction schemes should focus on the working day (i.e. reducing working hours per day) rather than on the working week (i.e. working less days a week). While ecological benefits would be present in both, the feminist call for dividing paid and unpaid work more equally among the genders is better supported by a work-sharing proposal focused on the day, due to the daily nature of caring activities. Now, we want to be clear: A work-sharing proposal alone will bring about neither gender equality (especially if we fall into the old trap to reproduce the often criticized ‘work = wage work’ formula!) nor can it alone lead the way towards a degrowth society. However, as part of a broader transformation it can constitute a step into the right direction and we argue that it is a practical example to demonstrate how feminist concerns in the degrowth discourse have been, so far, ‘add-ons’ rather than integral parts.

### **A feminist degrowth approach**

Research on how to make degrowth more feminist is still rare, however, over the last two years the topic has received increasing attention. The formation of the Feminisms and Degrowth Alliance (FaDA) at the 2016 Degrowth Conference in Budapest has opened up the floor for a wider debate. With our article, we hope to advance this debate in the degrowth community one step further and, at the same time, to introduce the idea of degrowth in the Feminist Economics community. We see much potential for cross-fertilization between the two discourses and hope that this link will be further elaborated upon in future research on both theoretical and empirical grounds.

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This article is part of a small series around the JoinInConference “Caring for Change” from 17.-19. November 2017 in Leipzig (Germany).



## B.2 Carework as Commons: Towards a Feminist Degrowth Agenda

### **Bengi Akbulut**

The debates around post-growth transitions to just socio-ecological futures – while undoubtedly variegated – all emphasize that such a transition will involve a fundamental change in the way we organize economic relations and processes. At a first glance, this implies both nominal and a structural, change with corresponding shifts in production, labor and consumption patterns. Whereas nominal change is understood as a reduction in the volume of material and energy throughput, structural change is a shift in the relative importance of economic sectors. At the same time, it also implies reorienting economic relations and processes towards other objectives than growth with different motivations.

Care and carework have gained heightened attention within this context: emphasis is put on care labor and care-centering of communities, understood not only as caring between humans, but also between humans and the non-human environment. In the words of Kallis, Demaria and D'Alisa, “the degrowth imaginary centres around the reproductive economy of care”[1] A similar emphasis on care and broader reproductive activities is found within other central debates of the degrowth proposal, such as those on conviviality, worksharing, commons, etc.

#### **Recognition is not enough**

Such focus on care and carework is crucial, especially in broadening the existing notions of labor and production and recognizing that reproductive activities are essential forms of work that contribute to our well-being. Yet recognition, though welcome, is not enough. What is largely missing from the celebration of care as the cornerstone of the post-growth transition is how carework is to be organized in a socio-ecologically just future. This is crucial, since re-centering a society around care does not imply gender justice. Quite the contrary, carework has historically been one of the most exploitative, flexible and invisible forms of labor performed by women.

Especially at a time when the need for building alliances between degrowth and feminism is being stressed, problematizing care from a feminist perspective is imperative for the degrowth proposal. Feminist economists, among others, have for long emphasized that gender implies different constraints and opportunities in the face of socio-economic change. And a post-growth transition, envisaged to reorient both the motivation and the organization of economic processes, is one such change.

What I propose here is to approach carework from the perspective of commoning as a possible starting point for a feminist agenda for degrowth.

### What is Carework?

The most straightforward (yet admittedly narrow) definition of carework is labor performed to fulfill the needs of those who cannot do so themselves, such as food provision, cleaning, health, etc. Broader understandings of carework stress that such work is often performed in tandem with and complementary to other types of (unpaid) reproductive labor and cannot be considered separate from the broader sphere of social reproduction. That is to say, carework is better seen as the more comprehensive field of paid and unpaid labor that ensures social reproduction in general.

A long tradition of feminist activism and scholarship has problematized carework, in particular its gendered performance, its high invisibility and flexibility. Carework is often performed by women as unremunerated labor under patriarchal relations. Gender norms and gendered division of labor often make

*“Carework is a basic form of labor that sustains social life and enables any kind of social system to function; it is a field that all of us draw upon to survive.”*

it difficult for women to bargain away carework responsibilities. Even when care services are provided via the state or the market they are highly feminized; and subsidized by the substantial amount of unpaid carework that continues to be performed by women within households. On the other hand, women rarely have control over the timing, amount and the conditions of the care labor they perform. That care is predominantly seen as a part of the reproductive rather than the productive domain and the fact that it is usually unremunerated serves to codify it as non-work and renders it invisible.

### Carework as Commons

Yet the field of care is not only a realm of immense value and production, but it is arguably the largest and the most fundamental commons on which all of us depend. Carework is a basic form of labor that sustains social life and enables any kind of social system to function; it is a field that all of us draw upon to survive. All of us have relied and continue to rely on care provided through families, friends, and other types of social networks and relations. In return, all of us perform carework and contribute to the sustenance and well-being of others. Relations of mutuality, sharing, and reciprocity that sustain our daily lives and social interactions (as well as economic transactions) all involve an element of care. In that sense carework is a commons: it is the most fundamental basis of social reproduction to which we all contribute and to which we all owe our existence.

Carework, just like other types of commons, has historically served to support capital accumulation. Especially when it is performed as unpaid and flexible labor, carework serves to lower the monetary cost of labor's reproduction for capital: the cost of sustaining the laborer such as healthcare or eldercare are not shouldered by the capitalist, but rather shifted to the households. This is particularly so within the contemporary era where state-supported care services (e.g. healthcare, childcare, eldercare) are increasingly withdrawn. Seen in this way, carework commons resonate closely with ecological commons insofar as they provide unpaid goods and services that support capital accumulation.

However, what distinguishes carework most significantly from other types of commons are perhaps the egregious inequalities involved in its production (rather than its consumption). Many have discussed commons from a social justice perspective by focusing on who can access them and who can appropriate their benefits (e.g. enclosures). Yet who is involved in the production and reproduction of the commons, and what this implies in terms of social justice are questions that have received remarkably little attention. And this is arguably a more pressing issue for carework as a commons.

### **Commoning Care**

Locating carework within the perspective of commoning offers a way to not only draw attention to the inequalities in its production, but also to complement the degrowth emphasis on care. This perspective is outlined, for example, in the works of Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, Massimo de Angelis and the broader Midnight Notes Collective on commons and commoning.[2]

These works emphasize an understanding of the commons not only as fixed entities between the market and state to include an amalgam of social relations and practices. This perspective conceptualizes commons as non-commodified modes of social reproduction, accessing resources and fulfilling social needs. As such, they include forms of relationships, networks, practices and struggles (in addition to shared forms natural and social wealth) that provide varying degrees of access to means of material and social reproduction – outside the mediation of the market.

This perspective also stresses the particular characteristics of the social practices constitutive of the commons: open to all who contribute to their reproduction; sustained and reproduced by collective and cooperative labor and regulated non-hierarchically. More specifically, then, commons are defined as spaces and processes of social reproduction that are non-mediated by the state or the market and ensure equitable access. Their reproduction and production take place under collective labor, they provide equal access to means of (re)production and they are marked by egalitarian forms of decision-making.

By organizing carework in a way that is not mediated by market or state,



commoning care implies a range of practices that provide various degrees of autonomy from both. It involves performing care labor – whose benefits are to be received and shared by all – collectively and cooperatively. Perhaps most importantly, commoning care would mean organizing carework in a non-patriarchal, egalitarian and democratic way. In this sense, the commoning perspective does not only locate care within collective-cooperative production and use, but highlights the fundamental gender dimension implicated especially in carework.

Existing practices of commoning care can be found in radical childcare cooperatives, neighborhood care collectives, and community-based care provision. One notable example within this context is the Regeneración Childcare Collective in New York City. Regeneración aims to link household laborers, radical parents and immigrant and queer families active in social struggles. It was originally founded to provide care services to low-income queer and minority parents so that they could participate in social struggles. Today, Regeneración collaborates with other independent childcare collectives and cooperatives to foster relations of collective self-management and mutual empowerment across care workers and radical parents, especially within the field of care.

#### Feminism Here and Now

In their piece on the commons, De Angelis and Harvie write “it is difficult today to conceive emancipation from capital – and achieving new solutions to the demand of *buen vivir*, social and ecological justice – without at the same time organising on the terrain of commons, the non-commodified systems of social production.”[3] This resonates closely with the centrality of both care and the commons within the degrowth debates. Yet, romanticizing care (and reproductive activities in general) can also serve to mask the gender injustices implicated within it. It is this junction of feminism and degrowth that calls for more thinking and action; something commoning care can be part of.

On the other hand, perhaps the most important point illuminated by the experience of Regeneración is that commoning care can effectively support and strengthen struggles in other fields, including those for degrowth. In that sense, commoning care is not only a vision for a post-growth future, but a necessity to be organized here and now in order to realize potential paths towards that future.

*“It is difficult today to conceive emancipation from capital – and achieving new solutions to the demand of *buen vivir*, social and ecological justice – without at the same time organising on the terrain of commons, the non-commodified systems of social production.”*

#### De Angelis and Harvie

# C In-depth Readings

## C.1 A tale of two utopias: Work in a post-growth world

**Simon Mair, Angela Druckman and Tim Jackson**

### **Abstract**

In this paper, we aim to contribute to the literature on post-growth futures. Modern imaginings of the future are constrained by the assumptions of growth-based capitalism. To escape these assumptions we turn to utopian fiction. We explore depictions of work in Cokayne, a utopian tradition dating back to the 12th century, and William Morris's 19th century News from Nowhere. Cokayne is a land of excessive consumption without work, while in News from Nowhere work is the route to the good life. These competing notions provide inspiration for a post-growth vision of work. We argue that biophysical and social dynamics mean that in a post-growth economy we are likely to have to be less productive and work more. But, this can be a utopian vision. By breaking the link between work and consumption at the level of the individual, we can remove some of the coercion in work. This would free us to do jobs that contribute to the social good, rather than generate exchange value, and empower us to fight for good work. Finally, we draw on eco-feminist analyses of capitalism to argue that by challenging labour productivity growth we can also challenge wider forces of oppression.

**Keywords:** Utopia, Post-growth, Environmentalism, Environmental limits, Work, Employment, Futures, Post-work, Post-capitalism, Feminism

### **1. Introduction**

To achieve sustainable societies we are likely to have to move beyond growth based economies. Historically, economic growth has been coupled with environmental impact. It is extremely unlikely that we will be able to decouple one from the other (Hickel and Kallis, 2019; Jackson and Victor, 2019). There are a number of dynamics that drive the growth-environment coupling. One key example is that the socio-economic structures that incentivise resource efficiency gains also incentivise using those gains to fuel further growth in production. Under such dynamics, efficiency gains ultimately drive up resource use (Jackson, 2017; Mair, 2019; Sakai et al., 2019). Addressing this and other drivers of growth will have major implications for how we live. In this paper we take the issue of work as a case in point.



### 1.1. Work beyond growth?

Currently, work is bound up with growth dynamics. Take, for example, the ‘productivity trap’ (Jackson and Victor, 2011). To reduce their costs, grow profits and break into new markets, firms attempt to increase labour productivity. The net result of labour productivity growth is that fewer people are needed to produce the same amount of goods. This means that without growth people are made unemployed. Under the political economy of growth-based capitalism, unemployment means a loss of social status and only limited access to the material goods of life. Consequently, the political economy of work in wealthy capitalist economies puts pressure on all of us to support growth.

A second example is the way that work is organised to support growth. When economists and politicians speak of growth they are usually discussing increases in ‘real’ GDP (Kallis, 2017). GDP is primarily designed as a way to measure and understand market activity (European Comission et al., 2008). Consequently when our economies are organised to drive growth, this results in the expansion of markets and market work – often at the expense of non-market forms of work (Dengler and Strunk, 2017). Feminists and ecological economists have for a long time argued that endless pursuit of market growth degrades other forms of work, notably ‘reproductive’ work. This is the work done by nature, and that done in the commons and in the household. This work is essential to the reproduction of society but is rarely rewarded financially. It is not coincidental that the forms of work that are degraded are those that came to be associated with women in the Middle Ages (Federici, 2014; Saunders and Dalziel, 2017).

Ecological economists have put forward two key ideas for how work might function in a post-growth or degrowth economy. 1) Reducing the number of hours worked and 2) reducing the amount of goods and services produced for each hour worked. In other words, we can reduce working hours (Hayden, 1999; Jackson and Victor, 2011; Victor, 2012; Dengler and Strunk, 2017; Zwickla et al., 2016). We can stop, reverse, or slowdown labour productivity growth (Jackson and Victor, 2011; Nørgård, 2013; Ferguson, 2016; Jackson, 2017). Or we can do both.

In this paper we bring a new perspective to these debates. We use an exploration of depictions of work in historical utopian fiction as the basis for a discussion of work in post-growth futures. We argue that the most fruitful focus for research, policy, and activism towards post-growth futures is to challenge the dynamic of labour productivity growth.

### 1.2. The value of utopian thought

We turn to utopian fiction because we believe that a central challenge of post-growth economics is the difficulty of finding appropriate models in today’s economic structures, which are dependent on growth. Utopian fiction is a valuable resource for critically rethinking socio-economic structures and drawing inspiration for new ecologically sound and socially just post-growth economic futures.



Utopian fiction in particular, and literary analysis more generally, has been underused by ecological economists. However, there are a few notable exceptions that point to the possibilities that utopian fiction opens up for ecological economics.

Kallis and March (2015) use the anarchist society described in Le Guin's (1974/1987) *The Dispossessed* to explore the political appeal and purpose of the degrowth concept. Other ecological economists have pointed to the utopian impulse of ecological economics (Martinez-Alier, 1992; Ingebrigtsen and Jakobsen, 2012). Recent contributions from Foster (2017) and Levitas (2017) engage with utopian fiction and pick up themes familiar to ecological economists. Foster uses William Morris's *News from Nowhere* to discuss possibilities for work in a sustainable future. Levitas argues for the potential of utopian fiction to help us envisage the radical social change required for a 'sustainable prosperity'. In this paper we aim to build on these works and show how utopian fiction can be a useful part of the ecological economics toolkit.

We aim to show that utopian fiction can be used to expand our collective economic imaginations. Fictional narratives have ethical impacts on readers, changing how they engage with the world (Gregory, 1998; Johns-Putra, 2016). Utopian fiction in particular provides a critical distance from today's problems, encouraging us to view how we live now in the light of how we might live tomorrow (Levitas, 2017). These qualities are essential for developing a forward-looking ecological economics.

We live under a form of 'capitalist realism' (Fisher, 2009) – the collective belief that there is no way to organise social relations other than those we see under capitalism. Under such conditions the utopian act of imagining a future, with different social institutions, is itself a form of resistance and struggle (Davies, 2018). Yet it is one that is extremely hard to do – more often than not, future visions are either apocalyptic, or based on technological, rather than social, innovation (Slaughter, 2004). By virtue of being written at different points in time, historical utopian fiction has the advantage of distance from the apocalyptic and tech fuelled economic imaginaries that permeate our everyday experiences. In this way it enables us to achieve critical distance from today's economy. This is essential for constructing post-growth economic theory which must be radically different from the economics we live with day-to-day.

We treat historical utopian fiction as analogous to economic theory. Historian of economic thought Warren Samuels argues that economic models and utopian novels are similar in form. Both tell a "story not about actual economies but of an abstracted rational reconstruction" (Samuels, 2003, p. 204). And, like models, utopias are often explicitly informed by economic thinking. For example, utopian author Kim Stanley Robinson's recent work was informed by green and ecological economists including: Hazel Henderson, Herman Daly and E.F. Schumacher (Robinson, 2016). Here we seek to uncover these economic elements in the work of William Morris, and in the utopian tradition of Cokayne. Like studying the

history of economic thought or interrogating an economic model, bringing the economic ideas embodied in historical utopian fiction into conversation with modern insights can be a useful way of developing new economic theory.

### 1.3. Aims and contribution

In this paper we ask what a positive future of work could look like in a post-growth society. To this end we focus on visions of work in two contrasting utopias. First, we explore a variety of interpretations of the depiction of work in the Cokaygnian tradition of folk utopias. Cokaygnian tales span the 12th and 21st centuries and are all set in a land of plenty where work is forbidden. We then explore the concept of work in *News from Nowhere*, a late 19th century English utopia written by the socialist and romantic William Morris. In contrast to Cokaygne, *News from Nowhere* makes work a central route to the good life. Finally, we bring the ideas of Cokaygne and *News from Nowhere* into conversation with insights from ecological and feminist economics. On this basis we sketch our own ideas on the role of work in a post-growth economy.

Our vision of a post-growth future is one in which we work more, but radically differently: we are less ‘productive’. We argue that this is necessary because labour productivity growth is a dynamic that is symbiotic with growth and degradation of the environment. Consequently, a move to a post-growth economy must also be a move to a low labour productivity growth economy. However, this symbiosis also means that labour productivity growth is also implicated in over production, and the degradation of work. By removing coercive market forces we can improve working conditions and reduce levels of production by freeing people to work in socially useful ways. Drawing on eco-feminist analysis, we then show that labour productivity growth is implicated in patriarchal oppression. Therefore, challenging labour productivity growth will allow the post-growth movement to build a broad-based coalition of interests against growth based capitalism and towards greater equality and happier lives.

## 2. Cokaygne: utopia without work?

Cokaygne is the setting for a long tradition of folk utopias, a fantastical land of plenty where people feast on self-roasting geese and sleep all day. Cokaygne is well known in the utopian literature, but has received little attention in ecological economics or futures studies. Here we introduce readers to the tradition and a selection of its varying interpretations. The multiple interpretations of the Cokaygnian tradition demonstrate the richness of utopian writing on the economics of work.

The Cokaygnian tradition peaked in popularity in 12-16th century Europe (Lochrie, 2016). One of the earliest surviving Cokaygnian manuscripts is the French poem ‘*De Cocaingne*’, written as a performance piece in 1250. *De Cocaingne* (reprinted in Parsons, 2015) establishes numerous tropes that are



characteristic of later Cokaynes. These include linking idleness to monetary reward, and animals that cook themselves. Slightly later comes ‘The Land of Cokaygne’, a Middle English poem written in Ireland around 1300 (reprinted in Millett, 2003). ‘The Land of Cokaygne’ takes the imagery of De Cocaingne and sets it in the context of a monastery. An example of Cokaygne from later in this period (1567) is ‘The Land of Cockaigne’, a painting by the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (Fig. 1).

The Cokaygnian tradition survives in more modern cultures. Perhaps the most established modern Cokaygne is The Big Rock Candy Mountains , a folk song describing a hobo’s paradise, a land filled with cigarette trees and whisky lakes. The song was brought to prominence in 1928 by the singer Harry McClintock, but was written in 1905 based on earlier oral traditions (Raulerson, 2013).

The thread connecting all Cokaygnian tales is a land where the link between labour and production has disappeared. For example, in De Cocaingne, “the more you sleep the more you earn” (Parsons, 2015 lines 26–28). Alternatively, The Big Rock Candy Mountains does away with the means of production: “there are no short-handled shovels, no axes, spades or picks”. Presumably these were disposed of when the residents “hung the jerk/That invented work” (Raulerson, 2013 Verse 3 lines 6–7). But the lack of workers and means of production does not mean that Cokaygne is a place of material restraint.

Cokaygne is a land where everything is produced without labour and consumption is spectacular. In Medieval Cokaynes it is common to find rivers, lakes and streams “Of oil and milk, honey and wine” (Millett, 2003 line 46). More modern Cokaynges have “lemonade springs... And a gin lake too.” (Raulerson, 2013 verse 1 line 6 and verse 4 line 6). So it is unsurprising that we don’t find dairy farmers or distillers. Likewise, in Cokaygne there are no cooks, but they aren’t missed because the animals of Cokaygne prepare themselves to be eaten. De Cocaingne has “Fat geese, turning/All by themselves, and fully ready” (Parsons, 2015, lines 38–39) and Bruegel’s The Land of Cockaigne features a roast pig walking around with a knife strapped to its side. Similarly, the preparation of places to feast happens with no servants in sight. For example, in De Cocaingne (Parsons, 2015, lines 41–44),

“...at all times / In the streets and  
in the lanes / You find tables already  
laid / And spread over with white  
cloths”

In short, Cokaygne is a land where no-one ever appears to work but where everyone consumes extravagantly.



## 2.1. Between utopia and moral instruction

Cokaygne's extravagant consumption most likely started life as a satirical take on paradise myths. Manuel and Manuel (1979) and Kumar (1991) argue that the roots of Cokaygne are in satirical mockings of the Ancient Greek myth of the Golden Age. Medieval Cokaynes mock the relative poverty of the Judaeo-Christian paradise. For example, The Land of Cokaygne (Millett, 2003, lines 5–8) opens with:

“Though Paradise is fair and bright, / Cockayne is a finer sight.”

The poet then goes on to contrast the sparseness of heaven, with the luxury of Cokaygne (Millett, 2003, lines 9–17):

*“Though paradisal joys are sweet,  
/ There’s nothing there but fruit to  
eat; / No bench, no chamber, and no  
hall, / No alcoholic drink at all.”*

The poet continues this comparison at some length, finally concluding that “Cockayne offers better fare” than heaven.

Cokaygne's extravagance has also been used to satirise excessive consumption. For Lochrie (2016), Cokaygne started life as a utopia, but became increasingly moralised as the Middle Ages progressed. By the time of Bruegel's painting (Fig. 1), Lochrie argues that Cokaygne has ceased to be a utopia. Rather, Bruegel's lifeless figures warn us away from Cokaygne's life of excess. For Parsons (2015) this narrative is only partially correct. Cokaygne hasn't become a moral lesson, it has always been a moral lesson. Discussing De Cocaingne (written three centuries prior to Bruegel's painting), Parsons notes that two out of the three original manuscripts are found alongside poems that have moral intent. Based on this and what he terms its “grotesque imagery” (p. 173), Parsons concludes that Cokaygne “is in essence an exercise in *reductio ad absurdum*, taking the belief that happiness can be attained in the material world to its most ridiculous possible extreme in order to direct its reader towards more spiritual ends” (p. 180).

However, this view is far from settled – where Parsons sees grotesquery, others see a ‘carnival spirit’ (Kendrick, 2004). In this view, rather than being a warning to avoid a life of materialism and leisure, Cokaygne is seen as depicting a desirable life. This utopian reading sees Cokaygne's combination of fantasy and comedy as expressions of desire that overwhelm any moral intent. There is some contextual evidence to support this idea: one early copy of De Cocaingne is introduced as and included alongside several French ‘fabliaux’, known for their obscene humour (Parsons, 2015; Lochrie, 2016). However, the utopian case for Cokaygne



is more usually based on its imagery and content.

Most authors who see a utopia in Cokayne do not argue against its satirical intent, but maintain that this is undermined by the use of rich imagery and appealing central concept. For example, Kumar (1991) argues that Cokayne ends up looking like a drunken feast of the type enjoyed by medieval peasants. Manuel and Manuel (1979, p. 79) suggest that this comes about because the writers of Cokayne are too close to their audience to “dismiss their vulgar aspirations with philosophical contempt”. The result is that even if Cokayne started life as a cautionary tale of excess, its writers got so caught up in the imagery that things “quickly got out of hand, and the satire was swallowed up in the Utopia” (Morton, 1969, p. 17).

## 2.2. Cokayne as a critique of inequality

The utopian reading of Cokayne is facilitated by the assumption that the Cokaygnian audience are those who have worked long hours and lived in material poverty. In this vein, Cokayne is seen as the utopia of “those at the bottom of the social hierarchy” (Sargent, 2015, p. 21). The idea here is that utopias are an expression of desire for a better way of living. Therefore, a utopian vision is one free from the struggles that most plague its audience.

From this perspective, Cokayne – the land of abundance and idleness – makes sense as a utopia for those who are burdened with arduous work and poverty. Following this logic, Medieval Cokaynes are often thought of as the utopia of peasant farmers (Levitas, 1990; Pleij, 2001). In the USA, the Cokaygnian tradition is thought to belong to various poverty-stricken groups: African-American slave communities, Native Americans (after colonisation), and the unemployed of the Great Depression (Sargent, 2015). Cokayne makes sense as utopia for these groups because “for people who were constantly hungry, with little or no chance of earning money to buy food, and dependent on handouts, these images [of Cokayne] have an obvious appeal” (Sargent, 2015, p. 32). Because of this basis in appealing imagery, the Cokaygnian utopia has been interpreted as a naïve compensatory fantasy (Parsons, 2015; Lochrie, 2016).

However, the view that Cokayne’s audience is primarily the overworked and marginalised poor lends itself to a more critical utopian reading. This interpretation does not dispute the base pleasures of Cokayne’s materialism or idleness, but it argues that alongside this is a critique of inequality and injustice (Morton, 1969; Kendrick, 2004; Lochrie, 2016). In contrast to the real world, in Cokayne people have everything they need regardless of their wealth or status. For example, The Land of Cokayne states that “All is common to young and old/ To strong and stern, to meek and bold.” (Millett, 2003, lines 63–64). Similarly, in De Cocaingne (Parsons, 2015, lines 45–56):

*"You can drink, and eat as well, / As much as you want with no problem, / With no challenge, and no refusal. / Nor does anyone have to pay the bill / After he eats, for no-one keeps count."*

The explicit recognition in this passage that consumption has nothing to do with the ability to pay, can be seen as a critique of the way that actually existing economies of the time distributed goods in ways that excluded the poor. This interpretation roots Cokayne's utopianism in a critique of economic inequality.

A central element of the critical utopian reading of Cokayne is the way it takes the lifestyle of the aristocracy and makes it available to the poor. Lochrie (2016) interprets the way that Cokayne disrupts the work-production relationship as redistribution, taking the lifestyles of the wealthy and making them available to all. From this perspective, De Cocaingne's maxim 'the more you sleep, the more you earn' can be seen as a reflection of the lives of medieval European aristocracy writ large. In Medieval Europe, almost all economic surplus was taken from peasant farmers by the aristocratic class (Milanovic et al., 2010). By contrast, in Cokayne everybody has access to material comfort.

Some authors go a step further, arguing that rather than distributing goods to everybody, Cokayne distributes goods only to the poor. Morton (1969) argues that rich people cannot access Cokayne. Sargent (2015) makes the same point, noting that in several Cokaygnian texts, to get to Cokayne the traveller has to endure trials that reflect everyday experiences of peasants but are alien to the aristocracy. To get to The Land of Cokayne, for instance, a "Gentlemen, well-bred and kind" (Millett, 2003 line 183) must spend seven years wading "through pigshit to his chin" (Millett, 2003 line 181). For Morton (1969, p. 24), the meaning of such imagery "is clear enough: the land of Cokayne is, like the Kingdom of Heaven, harder for a rich man to enter than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle."

### 2.3. Cokayne as a sham utopia

Finally, it is useful to turn to an interpretation of Cokayne which serves to connect the critical utopia and the moral lesson. Cokayne as a moral lesson points to the emptiness of Cokayne's lifestyle. Cokayne as a social critique highlights the way that Cokayne inverts existing economic relationships to make consumption more widely available. The final interpretation we raise here is also based on a critique of economic relationships but is more critical of Cokayne's lifestyle than the utopian reading.

The central relation in the 'sham' interpretation of Cokayne is exploitation. This is particularly clear in some versions of The Big Rock Candy Mountains which bookend the verses about the wonders of Cokayne with interactions between an older 'joker' and younger 'punk'. These interactions reframe Cokayne as a lie told by the older man in order to convince the younger man to join him on the road (Raulerson, 2013). Eventually the punk refuses:

*I've hiked and hiked till my feet  
are sore, / I'll be God damned if I hike  
any more, / To be buggered sore, like a  
hobo's whore, / In the Big Rock Candy  
Mountains.*

Raulerson (2013) argues that as well as highlighting exploitative sexual politics that can be found in hobo culture, these additional verses support a wider political intent from McClintock. McClintock was a member of the revolutionary global union the Industrial Workers of the World. In the versions of Cokayne with the additional verses, Cokayne represents the lie told by the employer class to workers. There is no Cokayne, at least not for the working class. This is a perpetual lie, a false promise designed to keep workers in line. The punk's retort represents the working class becoming aware of their oppression and refusing to go along with the lie of Cokayne.

#### 2.4. Leaving Cokayne

We are not arguing here for one or other of these interpretations as correct. Nor is our discussion here comprehensive – there are other interpretations of Cokaygnian tales. Texts take on a life of their own, and are always ambiguous in their meaning. In part this is the usefulness of Cokayne specifically and utopian studies more generally. Reading various Cokaynes and seeing how they are interpreted by others gives us an insight into multiple possible understandings of work. Engaging with multiple interpretations gives us space to reflect on work in the here and now. In Section 4 we will reflect on some of the themes of Cokayne in the light of our understanding of today's economy. But first we turn to another utopia with an altogether different depiction of work.

#### 3. News from nowhere - work as prosperity?

Written by William Morris, *News from Nowhere* is a late 19th century utopia. Morris takes us into 'Nowhere' through the eyes of 'William Guest' who one-day finds himself in a post-revolutionary England. Guest tours this strange new land and finds that communist revolution has transformed England into a classless, stateless and moneyless utopia populated by artisans. Unlike Cokayne, *News from Nowhere* is relatively well known in sustainability circles (e.g. Miller, 2011; Foster, 2017). While the previous sections served primarily to introduce an unfamiliar utopian tradition and the multitude of ways its view of work can be interpreted, in this section we demonstrate how engaging with the economic thought embodied in utopian fiction can provide a basis for new economic theorising. To this end we present our account of the economic thought underpinning the depiction of work in *News from Nowhere*.

At the heart of *News from Nowhere* is a theory of work as key to human wellbeing – a position re-emphasised recently in relation to prosperity (Jackson, 2017; Foster, 2017). Throughout his travels in Nowhere, Guest meets people engaged in various forms of work (mending roads, studying mathematics, blowing glass). Although much of this work has



instrumental value, people undertake it primarily because they derive something from the work itself. This is most explicitly illustrated in an exchange between Guest and 'Hammond' (a resident of Nowhere),

"how do you get people to work when there is no reward of labour, and especially how do you get them to work strenuously?" / 'No reward of labour?' said Hammond, gravely. 'The reward of labour is life. Is that not enough?' (Morris, 1890b emphasis in original)

Hammond goes on to tell Guest that people work in Nowhere in order to create, and the reward of creation is "the wages which God gets" (Morris, 1890b). Through this and other interactions we learn that in Nowhere people find meaning through their work. However, Morris's theory of work in News from Nowhere should not be read as an endorsement of the reality of work in the 19th century.

In fact, the theory of work as prosperity is one of the most utopian elements of News from Nowhere. Morris saw most work in late 19th century England as "useless toil" characterised by a lack of pleasure (Morris, 1884b). Morris believed that capitalist dynamics made work bad by pushing the division of labour (that is, the simplification of tasks, and specialisation of workers) to its extreme, and through the production of unnecessary goods. Consequently, in News from Nowhere the economy is reimagined: there is no consumerism, and production is motivated by art and need rather than profit.

### 3.1. Morris on the division of labour

Morris's principle argument against the division of labour is that it takes creativity and variety out of work. This argument draws heavily on his mentor John Ruskin's belief that the division of labour improved productivity by taking thought out of work:

"You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line, and to carve it; and to copy and carve any number of given lines or forms, with admirable speed and perfect precision; and you find his work perfect of its kind: but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, to consider if he cannot find any better in his own head, he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks, and ten to one he thinks wrong; ten to one he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being." (Ruskin, 1853/2009, p. 161)

For Ruskin, thought is not only the process by which we make mistakes in work, it is also the process which makes us human. Consequently, he argues that a loss of productivity from less specialised labour organisation is justified because when you give a worker the freedom to think, you make "a man of him ... He was only a machine before, an animated tool" (p. 161).

Morris's interpretation of Ruskin was that work would be good when made so creative that it became art (Kinna, 2010). In the preface to an 1892 reprint of Ruskin's *The Nature of Gothic*, Morris (1892) wrote: "the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour". In his own writing, Morris argues that 'art' is not restricted to "pictures, statues, and so forth, but has been and should be a part of all labour in some form or other" (Morris, 1888). In News from Nowhere, Morris realises this ideal: in Nowhere, there is no longer a word for art "because it has become a necessary part of the labour of every man who produces" (Morris, 1890b).

To enable the condition of art as work in Nowhere, Morris limits the division of labour. Residents of Nowhere are artisans who move between occupations as they please (Kinna, 2000). Early in News from Nowhere, we are introduced to this idea through Bob “a weaver from Yorkshire, who has rather overdone himself between his weaving and his mathematics” because both are “indoor work” (Morris, 1890b). Consequently, Bob has decided to spend time working as ferryman: outdoor work. But despite having the freedom to practice multiple occupations, the residents of Nowhere are not self-sufficient and there is still a substantial division of labour. Bob cannot survive on rowing, weaving, and mathematics alone: some people are engaged in cooking, cleaning and growing food. Consequently, Morris is not describing a complete removal of the division of labour. Rather he is advocating what he sees as the ideal level of the division of labour, closely modelled on his view of medieval artisans (Breton, 2002). This limits the division of labour to a level which allows substantial variety and creativity in work.

### **3.2. Over-production and over-work**

It is worth comparing Morris’s views on the division of labour with those of Adam Smith. Though Smith had reservations about its social effects, he believed that the division of labour was necessary to increase material wealth. Book I of the Wealth of Nations is largely concerned with the benefits of the division of labour for economic growth. In the opening lines Smith (1776) argues that “the greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour ... seem to have been the effects of the division of labour”. The fundamental difference between Morris and Smith is that where the latter sees a need for increased levels of production Morris believes that 19th Century England is over-producing.

In much of Morris’s writing he is railing against the wastefulness of an emergent consumer capitalism. Consumer capitalism is an economic system that seeks growth and profits by attempting to subsume all other wants into the desire for new and immediate pleasures that lack wider social value (Fisher, 2009; Jackson, 2017). We see these themes in Morris’s writing. For example, Morris thought that the profit motive had led to most production being socially useless (Kinna, 2000). Speaking to Leicester Secular Society in 1884, Morris argued that in order to get and maintain profits, capitalists must sell a “mountain of rubbish... things which everybody knows are of no use”. In order to create demand for these useless goods, capitalists stirred up:

*“a strange feverish desire for petty excitement, the outward token of which is known by the conventional name of fashion—a strange monster born of the vacancy of the lives of rich people.”*

**(Morris, 1884a)**

By contrast, in Nowhere, nobody makes goods “on the chance of their being wanted; for there is no longer any one who can be compelled to buy them. ... Nothing can be made



except for genuine use" (Morris, 1890b). Morris never uses the term, but his description of a production system driven by the consumption of novel goods in a vain attempt to foster personal wellbeing parallels modern understandings of consumer capitalism.

### 3.3. How Morris limits the division of labour

To understand how Morris limits the division of labour in *News from Nowhere*, it is useful to look at his historical analysis of the transition from feudal society to industrial capitalism. In large part, Morris's analysis falls under 'traditional commercialisation' accounts, where the transition from feudalism to capitalism is the result of the expansion of market forces (Wood, 2002). For example, Morris (1890b) argues that in the early Medieval period "Capitalism does not exist" because "there is no great all-embracing world-market; production is for the supply of the neighbourhood, and only the surplus of it ever goes a dozen miles from the door of the worker". This changes with the rise of a "commercialism" and a turn to "foreign commerce" (Morris and Hyndman, 1884; Morris, 1890a). Morris argues that the quest for profit and the rapid expansion of overseas markets was a key driver of the privatisation of commonly held land. As markets expanded, "the landed nobility... so got hold of the lands and used their produce, not for the livelihood of themselves and their retainers, but for profit" (Morris, 1890a). For Morris, this rapid expansion of markets and the giving over of land to the production of goods for profit was the key to the rise of industrial capitalism and the extreme division of labour.

Specifically, Morris believed that market expansion led to the breakdown of the artisan guilds, and it was this breakdown that enabled a greater division of labour. On the one hand, the displacement of peasants from their land meant that "the towns were flooded by crowds of the new free labourers" (Morris, 1890a) who would provide the larger workforce required to split production into smaller, more specialised stages. Simultaneously, Morris argued that the rapid expansion of the world market required an increase in production levels, which meant a "wider organisation of labour was needed, and, therefore, ... a more and more regulated division of labour, supplanted the old handicraft." (Morris and Hyndman, 1884). For Morris, these processes were complete and a global market established by the 18th century.

The key consequence of the transition to a global capitalist system for Morris was that it established labour as a resource. This is outlined through Hammond in *News from Nowhere*, who says that under the World-Market:

*"it became impossible ... to look upon labour and its results from any other point of view than one - to wit, the ceaseless endeavour to expend the least possible amount of labour on any article made."* (Morris, 1890b)

For Morris, this is the final and most fundamental consequence of the expansion of markets: the re-conceptualisation of labour into a form of economic capital to be squeezed through the extreme division of labour. This historical analysis frames the solutions that Morris proposes in *News from Nowhere*.

In order to limit the division of labour in *Nowhere*, Morris scales back of the geographical scope of production, and removes market exchange altogether. Hammond tells Guest

"men make for their neighbours' use as if they were making for themselves, not for a vague market of which they know nothing; and over which they have no control... [and] there is no buying and selling" (Morris, 1890b)

In short, having identified the expansion of markets as the ultimate degrader of working conditions, Morris does away with them altogether in *News from Nowhere*. Under Morris's historical analysis, there can be no profit if there is no exchange, and there is no need to gain productivity if there is no pressure to supply an expanding world market. So, by getting rid of these mechanisms, Morris removes what he sees as the key drivers of the extreme division of labour. In doing so he attempts to create the conditions under which work can become art, and useless production disappears.

#### **4. The post-growth utopia: let's be less productive**

Our vision of a post-growth utopia is one with more work, not less. We see a post-growth future as being more dependent on a greater quantity of human labour in order to function. Reducing the energy and material throughput of society and living more satisfying and meaningful lives requires us to work more but differently. Inspired by the visions of work we find in both Morris and some interpretations of Cokaygne we believe that a world with more but better work can not only be utopian in the best sense of the word but can provide a platform from which to agitate for a post-growth society.

The key to creating a post-growth utopia lies in addressing the issue of labour productivity growth. Labour productivity growth is implicated in the violation of biophysical limits, the degradation of work, the generation of inequality, and the devaluing of reproductive work. Tackling labour productivity growth enables us to transition to a world of less environmental damage, and stronger social bonds.

##### **4.1. In a post-growth economy, productivity growth must fall**

Labour productivity growth is an endogenous dynamic of fossil-capitalism. Labour productivity growth has historically had a symbiotic relationship with capitalist markets and fossil-energy. Economic histories locate the transition to fossil fuels as a key dynamic in the transition from a low productivity to a high productivity economy. The low labour productivity period is characterised by the use of wood and water, the high labour productivity period by fossil fuels (Wrigley, 2016; Malm, 2016). Fossil fuels were a dense energy store that greatly improved the productivity of other economic processes (Hall and Klitgaard, 2012; Smil, 2017). But fossil fuels alone are not enough to drive growth. China had widespread coal use in its economy at the time the industrial revolution started in Britain. However, Britain's labour productivity and growth rapidly expanded in the 1700's while China's remained steady (Broadberry et al., 2018).

The explanation for this is in the difference of the social structures of Britain and China at the time. Coal in China:

"did not create new social needs, did not constantly push the borders of its own market outwards...proto-industrialisation and economic growth were remarkable achievements but failed to generate an accelerated division of labour." (Debeir et al., 1991)

On the other hand, in Britain, the consolidation of a new set of social relations meant that the energy of fossil fuels was used to create new markets and restructure the organisation of labour to make it more productive. This can be interpreted in Marxian terms as fossil fuels being used as a tool of social control by the capitalist class (Malm, 2016), or in liberal terms as the result of new institutions and cultural attitudes that afforded social status to entrepreneurs (McCloskey, 2010). Either way, labour productivity growth has historically been bound up with both the use of highly dense energy sources, and the dynamics of capitalist markets.

Because of the way that productivity growth emerges from fossil-capitalism, it is hard to disentangle productivity growth from the overproduction that drives ecological crises. The endogenous view of productivity growth that we propose here suggests that productivity growth emerges from the same dynamics that drive endless economic expansion. This is not to say that labour productivity growth is a necessary consequence of economic growth. Rather, the dynamics that enable economic growth are a necessary (but not sufficient) pre-condition for labour productivity growth.

Both work sharing and reduced productivity proposals threaten to disrupt key dynamics of capitalist economies in ways that may also act to prevent future productivity growth. Both cases seek greater redistribution of surplus and less production. This will reduce profits. Capitalist markets are competitive environments which encourage producers to re-invest their profits in ways that reduce their costs and increase their sales. This is necessary for survival on the micro-level – firms have to be profitable to survive. A corollary of this is that productivity gains are necessary for the survival of the macro-economy as we know it. Firms without profits eventually stop investing, triggering economic collapse (Gordon and Rosenthal, 2003; Binswanger, 2009). This story sees productivity growth as emerging from the concentration of wealth and in the pursuit of over production. Consequently, even those work sharing proposals that do not see a need for productivity growth reductions (e.g. Schor, 2015) may end up leading to declining or stagnating productivity growth. But this is not the only reason to focus on productivity dynamics. We also face another, more biophysical, threat to productivity growth.

Fossil-capitalism has been able to generate enormous productivity growth because fossil fuels have high energy return on energy invested (EROI). EROI is a measure of energy quality. It is a ratio of energy outputs to energy inputs. Fossil fuels have been able to drive productivity growth because we have to invest relatively few resources to get large amounts of energy out of them.

We may be entering an era in which the quality of available energy sources is declining. Though the science is not yet settled, we appear to be on the edge of a precipitous decline in EROI values (Rye and Jackson, 2018; Brockway et al., 2019). Estimates suggest EROI has been declining over time as energy production shifts to more unconventional sources (Hall et al., 2014; Jackson, 2019). Renewables are also thought to have low EROI, especially when issues such as intermittency are addressed (Victor and Sers, 2019). It is possible that in the near future EROI could reach such low levels that the energy sector effectively ‘cannibalises’ other sectors (Sers and Victor, 2018). That is, it is possible that EROI could fall so low that in order to maintain the levels of energy use we see today, we have to put so much energy and other economic resources into energy generation that the resources available to be used in other economic activities will be severely reduced. If this happens, a reduction in overall productivity levels is likely to be forced upon us (Elkomy et al., 2019).

Whether we run up against physical limits, or we successfully transform our societies such that they are more equal and no longer built around chasing output growth, we are likely to continue to face falling productivity growth. In either case, we must be prepared to work more. Can this be a utopian vision?

#### 4.2. Free from the threat of hunger: working more, but working better

Both Cokayne and News from Nowhere offer inspiration as to how working more could be utopian. Specifically, both can be read in such a way as to see them as being about the social conditions around work rather than work itself.

The key dynamic that could make work utopian is the removal of coercive forces. We see this in both Cokayne and News from Nowhere. In both utopias, no-one can be forced to work because they have access to everything they need. Cokayne achieves this with recourse to the supernatural, breaking the link between labour and consumption altogether. Though unrealistic, this serves an important lesson drawing our attention to the freedom that comes with material security. News from Nowhere achieves the same freedom but in a more promising way. In News from Nowhere, there is still a link between work and consumption – but this link is at the societal rather than the individual level. In News from Nowhere, each worker produces not to secure their own material conditions, but instead as part of a collective effort to construct a society capable of providing for all its inhabitants. On the surface, Cokayne and News From Nowhere are very different. But they share at least one key attribute: those who do not work, do not sacrifice their ability to meet their material needs.

By removing the threat of material loss from any individual worker if they do not work, we weaken the coercive powers that force people into work. This is why some feminist and other radical scholars have called for a universal basic income (e.g. Weeks, 2011; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). They argue that a universal basic income hands power to workers by allowing them to refuse work they do not want to do. For this reason, a universal basic income has been characterised as a ‘utopian demand’ capable of destabilising the capitalism (Weeks, 2011). This comes about because a genuinely universal basic income creates the security for individuals to refuse work.

Removing the coercive forces that push people into work will benefit individuals and society as a whole. Without having to fear losing our access to material goods, we will be free to refuse work with conditions that we do not like. We will be free to demand better working conditions and to form new ways of working. At the societal level, removing coercion will also help put a stop to the over production that threatens to take us beyond biophysical limits.

A lack of coercion creates the conditions under which we are free to refuse work that serves no social purpose. People working in jobs they believe to be socially useless often express unhappiness and a desire to work more usefully (Graeber, 2018). Conversely, people working in undeniably useful jobs – such as nursing – often put up with very low material reward and unpleasant working conditions. This is because they are primarily motivated by the knowledge that they are performing a socially useful task (Folbre and Smith, 2017). Unfortunately many of these people are eventually forced out of such jobs by their material conditions (Morgan et al., 2013). This suggests that if people are free to choose, they are likely to choose work they believe is socially useful. Moreover, it suggests that people will choose this work even if that it is commonly believed to be challenging, difficult or simply unenjoyable (as is often the case with care work).

Much work in modern Western society is something we are coerced into doing in order to secure our individual material conditions. Removing coercive forces enables workers to safely and securely refuse work, creating the conditions for a radical reimagining of work as something done out of a desire to contribute to the social good.

#### 4.3. Challenging productivity, challenging the master subject of capitalism

So far we have discussed the removal of coercion via a separation between work and consumption at the level of the individual. This is effectively the removal of the coercion associated with markets. However, not all forms of coercion are purely market based. The gendered nature of work is largely ignored in both the utopias we have discussed. Both lack substantive discussion of reproductive work: care work and housework. This work is not free from coercion simply because it resists market reasoning (Weeks, 2011; Dengler and Strunk, 2017). Non-market work also emerges from a history of violent coercion (Federici, 2014). While not purely market driven, however, the market and productivity are implicated in these other forms of coercion.

Feminism offers us an analytical framework with which to understand the interlinked nature of coercion in market work, coercion in non-market work, and the origin of environmental crises. Using a feminist framework we can locate productivity as a part of the oppressive force of growth based capitalism, and outline the ways it is implicated in patriarchal as well as capitalist forces of oppression.

One key idea for thinking through the implications of labour productivity is the ‘master subject’ of capitalism. Introduced by Hartstock (1990) and Haraway (1991), and elaborated by Plumwood, 1993a, Plumwood, 1993b the master



subject of capitalism is a logic of domination that sits at the heart of capitalism. One of the reasons it is so difficult to escape capitalist structures in our thinking is because our thinking has been colonised by the ways of knowing that gave us capitalism (Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). This domination of our thought is ‘the master subject of capitalism’ and it confines our ways of knowing to a limited and specific form, while presenting itself as objective and universal (Haraway, 1991).

The perspective of the master subject relies on a logic system based on false dualities (Plumwood, 1993b). The core duality is the association of ‘reason’ and ‘rationality’ with the master subject (who is human, masculine, white and western), while nature, animality and emotion are associated with the other (who is inhuman, feminine, of colour, and non-western). In this way, Plumwood argues, nature and the feminine are bound up together and seen as less valuable, less than human. While there are many aspects to this dualism, here we focus on production vs. reproduction, a key feature of the concept of labour productivity.

The master subject of capitalism privileges certain forms of work and production while backgrounding and delegitimising others. The transition to capitalism, as Morris recognised, is marked by production for the market, rather than for use (Wood, 2002). In this way, capitalist production separates work for ‘production’ from work for ‘reproduction’. This separation is unique to capitalism (Federici, 2014). The separation of productive and reproductive work enables a distinction to be made between market work which is termed ‘valuable’ and work carried out by nature and in the household which is not considered valuable. The feminization of nature is older than capitalism. For example, in Ancient Greek mythology, the earth is feminised as a ‘mother’ and the heavens masculinised as a ‘father’ (Hamilton, 1942). But it is under capitalism that ‘feminine’ reproductive work becomes effectively valueless.

Federici (2014) provides the relevant historical context for this framing, arguing that the development of capitalism required not only the division of labour in terms of work-tasks, but also in terms of gender. Prior to the complete takeover of market-based production, Federici argues that work for production and work for reproduction were not understood as separate and the work itself was not gendered. Rather, as all work was in aid of supporting the household, it was participated in by both men and women. In addition, although gendered discrimination did take place, women’s dependence on men was limited by the fact that they had access to resources held in common – principally land. Capitalist social relations developed by excluding women from waged work. Federici sees land enclosures as a relatively minor part of the development of capitalism and is critical of theories that place large emphasis on them. However, she does note that land enclosures meant the loss of non-market subsistence for women. Many men lost access to land, but they gained access to the women who were now dependent on them. As a result: “women themselves became the commons, as their work was defined as a natural resource, laying outside the sphere of market relations” (Federici, 2014, p. 97).

The systematic devaluation of feminised non-market work is found throughout

the history of labour productivity. Histories of productivity often refer to Adam Smith's notion of productive and unproductive labour (Bleischwitz, 2001; Abbott, 2018). While Smith (1776) does not explicitly deal in gendered terms he is clear that 'productive' labour is that which directly supports the accumulation of wealth – either by producing material goods or by producing goods that can be sold. On the other hand, unproductive labour is that which supports maintenance of the household – reproductive labour (Blaug, 1990). As Smith writes in the opening lines of Book 2 Chapter 3 of *The Wealth of Nations*:

"The labour of a manufacturer adds, generally, to the value of the materials which he works upon, that of his own maintenance, and of his master's profit. The labour of a menial servant, on the contrary, adds to the value of nothing."

This way of thinking remains codified in the national accounts today, which exclude inputs to production from nature and the household (Waring, 1988; European Comission et al., 2008; Saunders and Dalziel, 2017). Labour productivity (conventionally measured as market output divided by hours worked in the labour market) is intimately linked to the dominating logics of capitalism.

By challenging the value of labour productivity, we therefore challenge a powerful part of the master subject of capitalism. Power (2004) argues that the proper starting point for economic analysis should be as a system of social provisioning: the way in which societies organise to meet their collective needs. Similarly, Weeks (2011) argues that we must reclaim the economy by directing it away from generating profit to generating the conditions to support life. From these perspectives, what matters is not how much market value is created for how little resources, but how well society is able to care for all its inhabitants. This stands in stark opposition to the working of modern labour productivity chasing economies, where people are forced to work jobs they believe to be useless, or to leave jobs they believe to be useful because of a need to access the market to maintain their livelihoods (Druckman and Mair, 2019). We have already argued that the removal of coercion may lead to more care work being done, because this work is socially useful. Note that care work resists the market mentality, more often than not being the preserve of the public and charitable sector. Note also that care is a profession that requires emotional as well as 'rational' intelligence (Druckman and Mair, 2019). In these ways, the removal of coercion challenges the master subject by challenging productivity.

#### 4.4. Work without coercion may be less productive

Removing the threat of coercion may reduce labour productivity growth. Though it originally came from the abstract notion of the production of 'value' productivity has become synonymous with the production of market value (Foster, 2016; Abbott, 2018). A useful post-growth project may be to reject the current notion of productivity, arguing instead that we should care about life rather than exchange value. The proliferation of 'bullshit jobs' suggests that socially useful work will not coincide with market work (Graeber, 2018). At the very least, the experience of the health and care sectors suggests socially useful work is unlikely to coincide with the most profitable forms of market work (Druckman and Mair, 2019). A

reduction in market activity could drive a reduction in labour productivity growth.

Moreover, improvements in working conditions may also reduce productivity growth. Economists have believed since Adam Smith that measures that improve productivity can have negative impacts on workers. Although he believed it necessary to increase material production, Smith (1776) himself thought that highly specialised labour would degrade our capacities for moral and mental reasoning. And, as we have seen, Morris and Ruskin believed specialised work to be dehumanising. Modern sociological accounts of work argue that autonomy is key to good work – the ability to have control over what and how we do our work (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Specialisation and the division of labour limit this. Consequently, it is unlikely that free people would consent to work in highly specialised roles and thus would be less productive.

Finally, as a strategy that challenges the master subject of capitalism, freeing workers from coercion is a challenge to the very idea of productivity. The modern notion of productivity is hard to understand outside a market context. The frameworks we use for measuring productivity do not work in non-market contexts (Diewert, 2018). What may develop in its place is unclear. But it is unlikely to follow the dynamics we see today.

#### **4.5. Towards an ecological utopia?**

Removing coercive forces and overthrowing the productivity drive leaves us with questions not adequately answered by Cokayne, or News from Nowhere. Namely, how do we decide what to produce, how it should be produced, and how do we get there?

These questions return us to old debates around socialist calculation, but with new elements introduced by the frame of environmental limits. The socialist calculation debates revolve around the possibility of determining the collective economic needs in the absence of capitalist markets, and specific mechanisms for doing so. On the one hand, the fact that we have likely already crossed some planetary boundaries (Steffen et al., 2015) shows us the deep problems that come with leaving production decisions to markets. But this does not mean that we should endorse central planning. When the socialist calculation debate is occasionally revisited, it is sometimes noted that we now have much increased computing power with which to approach socialist calculation (e.g. Srnicek and Williams, 2015). This notion has also been explored in utopian fiction (e.g. Le Guin, 1974/1987). But while it may be possible to use algorithms to determine how many goods people want, acknowledging environmental limits to production provokes a more radical question. In this case, we must decide not only what to produce but when to stop. Environmental limits mean that we have to decide what not to produce. This is not a question that can legitimately be left to a machine. Rather, it requires debate and deliberation (O'Neill, 2002; Hammond, 2019). The question of what and how to produce are normative, not technical, questions.

The need for democratic apparatus in work is highlighted in feminist works. 

example of this is Weeks's (2011) life centred economy. One of Weeks's primary concerns is that many forms of work happen outside the market economy. So it is not sufficient to get rid of the market and assume that a) the distribution problem will solve itself and b) that we will be free from compulsive forces. Rather we must construct new ways of working and being that are free from coercion. This raises the distributive question of how we as a society decide how much of our resources go into these new structures. Morris ducks this issue by assuming that in localised economies people's needs are immediate and obvious. It is not clear that this is actually the case, particularly when we consider an expanded understanding of work from the feminist perspectives of social provisioning or the reproduction of life.

In this context it is also useful to recognise that we are dealing with multiple intersecting systems of oppression. The forces that compel us into work are not only capitalist, they are also patriarchal. The discussion of feminist work in Section 4.3 highlights that the development of capitalist markets went hand in hand with the degradation of working and daily life for women. We must also be aware that many men actively participated in the degradation of life for women. This was partly as a way to retain their own power as it was diminished by the expansion of markets. Indeed in Federici's (2014) account of the development of capitalism this was the intended outcome: proto-capitalist states deflected antagonism between the classes into an antagonism between genders.

This has practical insights for how we organise a post-growth society. On the one hand we must seek to rebuild broad-based class support (Collard and Dempsey, 2018; Ruder and Sanniti, 2019). This means recognising that growth-based capitalism seeks and maintains growth by creating differences within classes (Collard and Dempsey, 2018). Our response to this must be to build what Fraser (2019) calls 'progressive populism'. This requires building an inclusive politics that recognises power differentials within classes and couples this with a radically egalitarian economic vision. We must also be aware that if this vision threatens existing economic and social power structures, it will be actively opposed – as it has been since before the emergence of capitalism (Federici, 2014). Building this kind of broad-based support can be done by recognising that the drivers of both social and ecological challenges have shared roots.

Based on the above analysis we suggest that a post-growth movement centered on challenging the productivity growth dynamics would be well positioned to build such a broad base of support. Labour productivity growth has its roots in capitalist practices that degrade work, the environment and gender equality. It therefore offers us a new front on which to struggle and begin to build broad based class solidarity.

Work in a post-growth utopia should combine an understanding of work as a means of social provisioning with the view that the economy must be materially restricted. This allows us to build away from a system of labour productivity growth predicated on capitalist and patriarchal oppression and towards a life centred economy built on a democratic basis. In a life centred economy, work becomes something we do to create meaning (as in Morris) but also something we do to produce collective goods and collective freedoms (as in Weeks). In this way we can understand the problem of the economy not as a calculable question of how we produce the things we want, but as a normative question of what we want to produce and how we want to do it. In this view the utopian demand is for an economy in which we can all negotiate a meaningful life.



## 5. Conclusion

In this paper we have explored utopian ideas of work, using an analysis of depictions of work in the Cokaygnian tradition and in *News from Nowhere*. Cokayne is a fanciful land where labour has been taken out of the production process: so no-one ever works. But whether this is a utopian or a dystopian lesson is disputed. For those who see Cokayne as a moral lesson its imagery is a caricature of consumption and reveals the emptiness of a life without work. On the other hand, the utopian interpretation of Cokayne points to the hardships endured by the presumed audiences of Cokayne. Utopian readers suggest that what was intended as a moral lesson could look like a utopian dream to overworked and poverty stricken peasants. Some interpretations of Cokayne go further, taking Cokayne out of the realm of fantasy by grounding it in a critique of economic inequality. This perspective views Cokayne as the ultimate land of redistribution – a land where everyone lives like the 1%.

*News from Nowhere* differs from Cokayne in that it sees work as the proper route to fulfillment. Morris, following Ruskin, argued that work could be meaningful and creative, and *News from Nowhere* is his attempt to set out a society in which work fulfills these roles. However, *News from Nowhere* and the utopian reading of Cokayne are not entirely at odds. Both recognise that in the real world, work can be painful. Where they differ is in their solutions to this problem. Morris understands that although there is pain in work, work is also valuable in personal and social terms. Consequently he focuses his utopia on transforming work into something good.

Drawing inspiration from Cokayne and *News from Nowhere* we sketched the outline of work in a post-growth utopia. The key to this vision is that we work more rather than less, but we work less productively. We argued that this was necessary for both biophysical reasons, and because all proposals for work in post-growth economies are likely to reduce productivity growth. However, Cokayne and *News from Nowhere* both share dynamics that enable us to see how more work could be made utopian. In both utopias, a key coercive element is removed. People can no longer be forced to work because their individual consumption is not dependent on their individual production.

Removing coercion, such as through something like a universal basic income, is likely to reduce productivity growth. As a result, it could contribute to ending over production, improve working conditions, challenging the master subject of capitalism and the patriarchy. We pointed to evidence suggesting that workers desire socially useful jobs but remain locked in jobs that do not fulfil this criterion due to the threat of losing their livelihoods. We further argued that the concept of productivity is implicated in Plumwood's (1993b) master subject of capitalism: it is bound up in the human-nature duality by its adherence to 'production' over 'reproduction'. Removing the coercive forces that push workers into market work challenges this story. Moreover, by giving workers the ability to refuse work that is useless or in bad conditions, removing coercive forces is likely to undermine productivity and the very idea of productivity itself. In these ways working more comes to be seen as part of a project for a better, more equal world with an economy more in line with the feminist notion of social provisioning. However, achieving this means engaging with questions left open by the utopian literature around how we as a society decide how to produce the means of daily life.

## C.2 Feminism and the Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation

Silvia Federici

### Introduction: Why Commons

At least since the Zapatistas, on December 31, 1993, took over the zócalo of San Cristóbal to protest legislation dissolving the ejidal lands of Mexico, the concept of the “commons” has gained popularity among the radical Left, internationally and in the United States, appearing as a ground of convergence among anarchists, Marxists/socialists, ecologists, and ecofeminists.

There are important reasons why this apparently archaic idea has come to the center of political discussion in contemporary social movements. Two in particular stand out. On the one side, there has been the demise of the statist model of revolution that for decades has sapped the efforts of radical movements to build an alternative to capitalism. On the other, the neoliberal attempt to subordinate every form of life and knowledge to the logic of the market has heightened our awareness of the danger of living in a world in which we no longer have access to seas, trees, animals, and our fellow beings except through the cash-nexus. The “new enclosures” have also made visible a world of communal properties and relations that many had believed to be extinct or had not valued until threatened with privatization.

The new enclosures ironically demonstrated that not only commons have not vanished, but new forms of social cooperation are constantly being produced, also in areas of life where none previously existed, as for example the Internet. The idea of the common/s, in this context, has offered a logical and historical alternative to both State and Private Property, the State and the Market, enabling us to reject the fiction that they are mutually exclusive and exhaustive of our political possibilities. It has also served an ideological function, as a unifying concept prefiguring the cooperative society that the radical Left is striving to create. Nevertheless, ambiguities as well as significant differences exist in the interpretations of this concept, which we need to clarify, if we want the principle of the commons to translate into a coherent political project.

What, for example, constitutes a common? Examples abound. We have land, water, air commons, digital commons, service commons; our acquired entitlements (e.g., social security pensions) are often described as commons, and so are languages, libraries, and the collective products of past cultures. But are all these “commons” on the same level from the viewpoint of devising an anticapitalist strategy? Are they all compatible? And how can we ensure that they do not project a unity that remains to be constructed? With these questions in mind, in this essay, I look at the politics of the commons from a feminist perspective, where feminist refers to a standpoint shaped by the struggle against



sexual discrimination and over reproductive work, which (quoting Linebaugh) is the rock upon which society is built, and by which every model of social organization must be tested. This intervention is necessary, in my view, to better define this politics, expand a debate that so far has remained male-dominated, and clarify under what conditions the principle of the common/s can become the foundation of an anticapitalist program. Two concerns make these tasks especially important.

### Global Commons, World Bank Commons

First, since at least the early 1990s, the language of the commons has been appropriated by the World Bank and the United Nations, and put at the service of privatization. Under the guise of protecting biodiversity and conserving “global commons”, the Bank has turned rain forests into ecological reserves, has expelled the populations that for centuries had drawn their sustenance from them, while making them available to people who do not need them but can pay for them, for instance, through ecotourism.

On its side, the United Nations, in the name again of preserving the common heritage of mankind, has revised the international law governing access to the oceans, in ways enabling governments to consolidate the use of seawaters in fewer hands. The World Bank and the United Nations are not alone in their adaptation of the idea of the commons to market interests. Responding to different motivations, a revalorization of the commons has become trendy among mainstream economists and capitalist planners, witness the growing academic literature on the subject and its cognates: “social capital,” “gift economies,” “altruism.” Witness also the official recognition of this trend through the conferral of the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 to the leading voice in this field, the political scientist Elinor Ostrom. Development planners and policy-makers have discovered that, under proper conditions, a collective management of natural resources can be more efficient and less conflictual than privatization, and commons can very well be made to produce for the market. They have also recognized that, carried to the extreme, the commodification of social relations has self-defeating consequences. The extension of the commodity-form to every corner of the social factory, which neoliberalism has promoted, is an ideal limit for capitalist ideologues, but it is a project not only unrealizable but undesirable from the viewpoint of the long-term reproduction of the capitalist system. Capitalist accumulation is structurally dependent on the free appropriation of immense areas of labor and resources that must appear as externalities to the market, like the unpaid domestic work that women have provided, on which employers have relied for the reproduction of the workforce. Not accidentally, then, long before the Wall Street “meltdown,” a variety of economists and social theorists warned that the marketization of all spheres of life is detrimental to the market’s well-functioning, for markets too—the argument goes—depend on the existence of nonmonetary relations like confidence, trust, and gift-giving. In brief, capital is learning about the virtues of the “common good.” In its July 31, 2008



issue, even the London Economist, the organ of capitalist free-market economics for more than one hundred and fifty years, cautiously joined the chorus. “The economics of the new commons,” the journal wrote, “is still in its infancy. It is too soon to be confident about its hypotheses. But it may yet prove a useful way of thinking about problems, such as managing the internet, intellectual property or international pollution, on which policymakers need all the help they can get.” We must be very careful, then, not to craft the discourse on the commons in such a way as to allow a crisis-ridden capitalist class to revive itself, posturing, for instance, as the guardian of the planet.

### What Commons?

A second concern is that, while international institutions have learned to make commons functional to the market, how commons can become the foundation of a noncapitalist economy is a question still unanswered. From Peter Linebaugh’s work, especially *The Magna Carta Manifesto* (2008), we have learned that commons have been the thread that has connected the history of the class struggle into our time, and indeed the fight for the commons is all around us. Mainers are fighting to preserve their fisheries and waters, residents of the Appalachian regions are joining to save their mountains threatened by strip mining, open source, and free software movements are opposing the commodification of knowledge and opening new spaces for communications and cooperation. We also have the many invisible commoning activities and communities that people are creating in North America, which Chris Carlsson has described in his *Nowtopia*. As Carlsson shows, much creativity is invested in the production of “virtual commons” and forms of sociality that thrive under the radar of the money/market economy.

Most important has been the creation of urban gardens, which have spread, in the 1980s and 1990s, across the country, thanks mostly to the initiatives of immigrant communities from Africa, the Caribbean or the South of the United States. Their significance cannot be overestimated. Urban gardens have opened the way to a “rurbanization” process that is indispensable if we are to regain control over our food production, regenerate our environment and provide for our subsistence. The gardens are far more than a source of food security. They are centers of sociality, knowledge production, cultural and intergenerational exchange. As Margarita Fernandez writes of gardens in New York, urban gardens “strengthen community cohesion,” as places where people come together not just to work the land, but to play cards, hold weddings, have baby showers or birthday parties. Some have a partnership relation with local schools, whereby they give children after school environmental education. Not last, gardens are “a medium for the transport and encounter of diverse cultural practices,” so that African vegetables and farming practices (e.g.) mix with those from the Caribbean.

Still, the most significant feature of urban gardens is that they produce for neighborhood consumption, rather than for commercial purposes. This



distinguishes them from other reproductive commons that either produce for the market, like the fisheries of the “Lobster Coast” of Maine, or are bought on the market, like the land-trusts that preserve the open spaces. The problem, however, is that urban gardens have remained a spontaneous grassroots initiative, and there have been few attempts by movements in the United States to expand their presence, and to make access to land a key terrain of struggle. More generally, how the many proliferating commons, being defended, developed, fought for, can be brought together to form a cohesive whole providing a foundation for a new mode of production is a question the Left has not posed. An exception is the theory proposed by Negri and Hardt in *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and more recently *Commonwealth* (2009), which argues that a society built on the principle of “the common” is already evolving from the informatization of production. According to this theory, as production becomes predominantly a production of knowledge organized through the Internet, a common space is formed which escapes the problem of defining rules of inclusion or exclusion, because access and use multiply the resources available on the net, rather than subtracting from them, thus signifying the possibility of a society built on abundance—the only remaining hurdle confronting the “multitude” being presumably how to prevent the capitalist “capture” of the wealth produced. The appeal of this theory is that it does not separate the formation of “the common” from the organization of work and production as already constituted, but sees it immanent in it. Its limit is that it does not question the material basis of the digital technology the Internet relies upon, overlooking the fact that computers depend on economic activities—mining, microchip and rare earth production—that, as currently organized, are extremely destructive, socially and ecologically. Moreover, with its emphasis on science, knowledge production and information, this theory skirts the question of the reproduction of everyday life. This, however, is true of the discourse on the commons as whole, which has generally focused on the formal preconditions for their existence but much less on the possibilities provided by existing commons, and their potential to create forms of reproduction enabling us to resist dependence on wage labor and subordination to capitalist relations.

### Women and the Commons

It is in this context that a feminist perspective on the commons is important. It begins with the realization that, as the primary subjects of reproductive work, historically and in our time, women have depended more than men on access to communal resources, and have been most committed to their defense. As I wrote in *Caliban and the Witch* (2004), in the first phase of capitalist development, women were in the front of the struggle against land enclosures both in England and the “New World,” and the staunchest defenders of the communal cultures that European colonization attempted to destroy. In Peru, when the Spanish conquistadores took control of their villages, women fled to the high mountains, where they recreated forms of collective life that have survived to this day. Not surprisingly, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw the most violent attack



on women in the history of the world: the persecution of women as witches. Today, in the face of a new process of Primitive Accumulation, women are the main social force standing in the way of a complete commercialization of nature. Women are the subsistence farmers of the world. In Africa, they produce 80 percent of the food people consume, despite the attempts made by the World Bank and other agencies to convince them to divert their activities to cash-cropping. Refusal to be without access to land has been so strong that, in the towns, many women have taken over plots in public lands, planted corn and cassava in vacant lots, in this process changing the urban landscape of African cities and breaking down the separation between town and country. In India too, women have restored degraded forests, guarded trees, joined hands to chase away the loggers, and made blockades against mining operations and the construction of dams. The other side of women's struggle for direct access to means of reproduction has been the formation, across the Third World—from Cambodia to Senegal—of credit associations that function as money commons. Differently named, “tontines” (in parts of Africa) are autonomous, self-managed, women-made banking systems, providing cash to individuals or groups that can have no access to banks, working purely on the basis of trust. In this, they are completely different from the micro-credit systems promoted by the World Bank, which functions on the basis of shame, arriving to the extreme (e.g., in Niger) of posting in public places the pictures of the women who fail to repay the loans so that some have been driven to suicide. Women have also led the effort to collectivize reproductive labor both as a means to economize on the cost of reproduction, and protect each other from poverty, state violence and the violence of individual men. An outstanding example are the ola communes (common kitchens) that women in Chile and in Peru set up in the 1980s, when, due to stiff inflation, they could no longer afford to shop alone. Like collective reforestation and land reclamation, these practices are the expression of a world where communal bonds are still strong. It would be a mistake, however, to consider them as something prepolitical, “natural,” a product of “tradition.” In reality, as Leo Podlashuc notes in “Saving the Women Saving the Commons,” these struggles shape a collective identity, constitute a counterpower in the home and the community, and open a process of self-valorization and self-determination from which we have much to learn. The first lesson to be gained from these struggles is that the “commoning” of the material means of reproduction is the primary mechanism by which a collective interest and mutual bonds are created. It is also the first line of resistance to a life of enslavement, whether in armies, brothels or sweatshops. For us, in North America, an added lesson is that by pooling our resources, by reclaiming land and waters, and turning them into a common, we could begin to de-link our reproduction from the commodity flows that through the world market are responsible for the dispossession of so many people in other parts of the world. We could disentangle our livelihood, not only from the world market but from the war-machine and prison system on which the hegemony of the world market depends. Not last we could move beyond the abstract solidarity that often characterizes relations in the movement, which limits our commitment and capacity to endure, and the risks we are willing to take. Undoubtedly, this is a



formidable task that can only be accomplished through a long-term process of consciousness raising, cross-cultural exchange, and coalition building, with all the communities throughout the United States who are vitally interested in the reclamation of the land, starting with the First American Nations. Although this task may seem more difficult now than passing through the eye of a needle, it is also the only condition to broaden the space of our autonomy, cease feeding into the process of capital accumulation, and refuse to accept that our reproduction occurs at the expense of the world's other commoners and commons.

### Feminist Reconstructions

What this task entails is powerfully expressed by Maria Mies when she points out that the production of commons requires first a profound transformation in our everyday life, in order to recombine what the social division of labor in capitalism has separated. For the distancing of production from reproduction and consumption leads us to ignore the conditions under which what we eat or wear, or work with, have been produced, their social and environmental cost, and the fate of the population on whom the waste we produce is unloaded.

In other words, we need to overcome the state of constant denial and irresponsibility, concerning the consequences of our actions, resulting from the destructive ways in which the social division of labor is organized in capitalism; short of that, the production of our life inevitably becomes a production of death for others. As Mies points out, globalization has worsened this crisis, widening the distances between what is produced and what is consumed, thereby intensifying, despite the appearance of an increased global interconnectedness, our blindness to the blood in the food we eat, the petroleum we use, the clothes we wear, the computers with which we communicate. Overcoming this oblivion is where a feminist perspective teaches us to start in our reconstruction of the commons. No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life, our reproduction on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them. Indeed if "commoning" has any meaning, it must be the production of ourselves as a common subject. This is how we must understand the slogan "no commons without community." But "community" not intended as a gated reality, a grouping of people joined by exclusive interests separating them from others, as with community formed on the basis of religion or ethnicity. Community as a quality of relations, a principle of cooperation and responsibility: to each other, the earth, the forests, the seas, the animals. Certainly, the achievement of such community, like the collectivizing our everyday work of reproduction, can only be a beginning. It is no substitute for broader antiprivatization campaigns and the reconstitution of our commonwealth. But it is an essential part of the process of our education for collective governance and the recognition of history as a collective project—the main casualty of the neoliberal era of capitalism. On this account, we must include in our political agenda the communalization/collectivization of housework, reviving that rich feminist tradition that we have in the United States, that stretches from the utopian socialist experiments of the mid-nineteenth century to the attempts that the "materialist feminists" made, from the late nineteenth century to the early

twentieth century, to reorganize and socialize domestic work and thereby the home, and the neighborhood, through collective house-keeping—efforts that continued until the 1920s, when the “Red Scare” put an end to them. These practices, and the ability that past feminists have had to look at reproductive labor as an important sphere of human activity, not to be negated but to be revolutionized, must be revisited and revalorized. One crucial reason for creating collective forms of living is that the reproduction of human beings is the most labor-intensive work on earth, and to a large extent it is work that is irreducible to mechanization. We cannot mechanize childcare or the care of the ill, or the psychological work necessary to reintegrate our physical and emotional balance. Despite the efforts that futuristic industrialists are making, we cannot robotize “care” except at a terrible cost for the people involved. No one will accept “nursebots” as care givers, especially for children and the ill. Shared responsibility and cooperative work, not given at the cost of the health of the providers, are the only guarantees of proper care. For centuries the reproduction of human beings has been a collective process. It has been the work of extended families and communities, on which people could rely, especially in proletarian neighborhoods, even when they lived alone, so that old age was not accompanied by the desolate loneliness and dependence that so many of our elderly experience. It is only with the advent of capitalism that reproduction has been completely privatized, a process that is now carried to a degree that it destroys our lives. This we need to change if we are put an end to the steady devaluation and fragmentation of our lives. The times are propitious for such a start. As the capitalist crisis is destroying the basic element of reproduction for millions of people across the world, including the United States, the reconstruction of our everyday life is a possibility and a necessity. Like strikes, social/economic crises break the discipline of the wage-work, forcing upon us new forms of sociality. This is what occurred during the Great Depression, which produced a movement of hobomen who turned the freight trains into their commons seeking freedom in mobility and nomadism. At the intersections of railroad lines, they organized “hobo jungles,” prefigurations, with their self-governance rules and solidarity, of the communist world in which many of their residents believed. However, but for a few “box-car Berthas,” this was predominantly a masculine world, a fraternity of men, and in the long term it could not be sustained. Once the economic crisis and the war came to an end, the hobo men were domesticated by the two grand engines of labor-power fixation: the family and the house. Mindful of the threat of working class recomposition in the Depression, American capital excelled in its application of the principle that has characterized the organization of economic life: cooperation at the point of production, separation and atomization at the point of reproduction. The atomized, serialized family-house Levittown provided, compounded by its umbilical appendix, the car, not only sedentarized the worker, but put an end to the type of autonomous workers’ commons the hobo jungles had represented. Today, as millions of Americans’ houses and cars have been repossessed, as foreclosures, evictions, the massive loss of employment are again breaking down the pillars of the capitalist discipline of work, new common grounds are again taking shape, like the tent cities that are sprawling from coast to coast. This time, however, it is women who must build the new commons, so



that they do not remain transient spaces or temporary autonomous zones, but become the foundation of new forms of social reproduction. If the house is the oikos on which the economy is built, then it is women, historically the house-workers and house-prisoners, who must take the initiative to reclaim the house as a center of collective life, one traversed by multiple people and forms of cooperation, providing safety without isolation and fixation, allowing for the sharing and circulation of community possessions, and above all providing the foundation for collective forms of reproduction. As already suggested, we can draw inspiration for this project from the programs of the nineteenth century “materialist feminists” who, convinced that the home was a important “spatial component of the oppression of women” organized communal kitchens, cooperative households, calling for workers’ control of reproduction. These objectives are crucial at present: breaking down the isolation of life in a private home is not only a precondition for meeting our most basic needs and increasing our power with regard to employers and the state. As Massimo de Angelis has reminded us, it is also a protection from ecological disaster. For there can be no doubt about the destructive consequences of the “uneconomic” multiplication of reproductive assets and self-enclosed dwellings, dissipating, in the winter, warmth into the atmosphere, exposing us to unmitigated heat in the summer, which we now call our homes. Most important, we cannot build an alternative society and a strong self-reproducing movement unless we redefine in more cooperative ways our reproduction and put an end to the separation between the personal and the political, political activism and the reproduction of everyday life. It remains to clarify that assigning women this task of commoning/collectivizing reproduction is not to concede to a naturalistic conception of “femininity.” Understandably, many feminists would view this possibility as “a fate worse than death.” It is deeply sculpted in our collective consciousness that women have been designated as men’s common, a natural source of wealth and services to be as freely appropriated by them as the capitalists have appropriated the wealth of nature. But, quoting Dolores Hayden, the reorganization of reproductive work, and therefore the reorganization of the structure of housing and public space is not a question of identity; it is a labor question and, we can add, a power and safety question. I am reminded here of the experience of the women members of the Landless People’s Movement of Brazil (MST), who when their communities won the right to maintain the land which they had occupied, insisted that the new houses should be built to form one compound, so they that they could continue to share their house-work, wash together, cook together, taking turns with men, as they had done in the course of the struggle, and be ready to run to give each other support if abused by men. Arguing that women should take the lead in the collectivization of reproductive work and housing is not to naturalize housework as a female vocation. It is refusing to obliterate the collective experiences, knowledge, and struggles that women have accumulated concerning reproductive work, whose history has been an essential part of our resistance to capitalism. Reconnecting with this history is today for women and men a crucial step, both for undoing the gendered architecture of our lives and reconstructing our homes and lives as commons.



# Session 4

## Degrowth in Scotland: Ideas and Practice

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### Themes

- Opportunities for degrowth economics in Scotland
  - Reclaiming the commons and the story of community land
  - Influences on an emerging degrowth discourse
  - A radical heritage of grassroots resistance and activism
  - Critical, cultural & intellectual wells
  - Challenges: urban and rural
  - Degrowth in practice - developments in Scotland
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## A. Introduction

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**A**s we discussed last week, the degrowth imaginary centres around the reproductive economy of care: non-commodified spaces of social reproduction that include relationships, networks, practices and struggles that are accessible to all and not mediated by the state or market. Caring in common is embodied in new forms of living – such as cooperatives or community land trusts. This week, in relation to the theme of ‘degrowth in practice’, we will pick up on the language, idea and imaginary ‘the commons’ as a way of naming a vision and practice that describes the kinds of relationships between people, resources and power that foster community resilience, ecological stewardship and democratised decision making.

While degrowth discourse is only really emerging in a Scottish context, there are rich critical, cultural and intellectual wells to draw upon, alongside a rich radical heritage of resistance and activism in both urban and rural contexts. In this session, we will explore various resonances with and influences on this budding discourse, with a particular focus on the community land movement (which had its beginnings in the Highlands and Islands). We will also reflect on the legacy of devolution and the independence movement, a growing climate activism and current discussions on race, decolonisation and social justice in the wake of the Black Lives Matters movement here in Scotland and across the globe. Our group discussions will focus on an idea central and vital to commoning in practice, ‘conviviality’, seeking out those places and spaces where the impulse and catalyst to strike and kindle sparks of change, creativity and transformation are to be found.

## B. Reclaiming the Commons

The ‘commons’ is a social form that has long lived in the shadows of our market-driven culture. It expresses a very old idea: that some forms of wealth belong to all of us, and that these community resources must be actively protected and managed for the good of all. The commons is both material and symbolic; it includes natural resources – land, water, air, forests, food, minerals, energy – but also encompasses our cultural inheritance in the form of the traditions, practices and shared knowledge that make society possible and life meaningful. Put most simply, perhaps, the commons is that which we all share that should be nurtured in the present and passed on, undiminished, to future generations.

The language and idea of the commons, of course, starts with the land. It comes from the struggle of English commoners against the ‘enclosures’ of the 15th, 16th & 17th centuries, where a rising class of gentry expropriated common land for their private use. Resources that had historically been stewarded by communities were privatised into commodities to be bought and sold in the marketplace. This process of enclosure severed a deep connection to the land and destroyed local cultures, paving the way for industrialisation, colonisation, and empire in a modern world. Modernity saw the start of resource extraction for a new global market, and with that, the emergence of an economy of plantation (sugar, tobacco, cotton) that fuelled the slave trade and the commodification of wage labour. Scholars such as Mignolo (2011) have argued that modernity is inherently colonial, inextricable from the oppressive practices used to dominate and exploit indigenous and marginalised people across the globe. By the end of the 18th century, the process of enclosure had catalysed the capitalist relations of dispossession, displacement and the concentration of land ownership.

### **B1. The ‘New Enclosures’**

In the 21st century, it is not just common land and resources that have been enclosed by capitalism. In the UK, most recently we have witnessed this enclosure of the commons in terms of both privatisation and neglect, through budget cuts under the name of ‘austerity’. What Christophers (2019) and others call the ‘new enclosures’ can be seen in the ongoing privatisation of land and intellectual property; in the ideology of ‘new managerialism’ (the organisational arm of neoliberalism, a mode of governance driven by a market logic of efficiency, productivity and competition) where a class of ‘professional managers’ wield

control – over local government, health and education; in the patenting of genes, lifeforms, medicines and seed crops; in attempts to transform the open internet into a closed, proprietary marketplace and shrinking the public domain of ideas; with academic knowledge locked up behind paywalls and in the use of copyright to lock up creativity and culture, among many other examples.

One strong current in degrowth literature is the criticism of commodification, i.e. the process of conversion of social products, services and relations into commodities with a monetary value. This modern tendency towards enclosure, commodification and the financialisation of almost all aspects of life has been described by commons scholar Bollier as ‘the great invisible tragedy of our time’. The endgame of this process is the enclosure of the mind. We are up against the formidable capacity of global capitalist and colonial systems of power to enclose our very sense of the possible. The absolute triumph of this system is demonstrated by the fact that so many of us have lost the ability to even imagine our way out. As Klein (2014) has written, we are ‘locked in, politically, physically and culturally’ to the world that capital has made. Bollier & Helfrich (2019) reflect,

“Conventional minds always rely on proven things and have no courage for experiments, even though the supposedly winning formulas of economic growth, market fundamentalism, and national bureaucracies have become blatantly dysfunctional.”

This idea of ‘reclaiming the commons’, then, is about reclaiming what has been lost through the hegemony of ongoing capitalist appropriation and accumulation and the exploitation and commodification of our lives.

Across the globe, a growing commons movement is prefiguring cooperative, egalitarian and participatory alternatives to growth economics. In practice, as a verb, the idea of ‘commoning’ involves finding those cultural practices – those that exist in present, those that have always been there (and are now only being rediscovered) and those that are being created now for the future – which restore life and community. It is important to emphasise here that this is not about a nostalgic return to a romantic past, but rather about reclaiming radical, rooted and life affirming practices in a contemporary context. We will pick up on this idea of ‘degrowth in practice’ in section D.

## **B2. Ceist an Fhearainn / The Land Question**

In Scotland, documentation from the middle ages (Wightman 2011) shows that, at one time, one-half of the entire area of Scotland was common land of one kind or another (in Scots, this was known as ‘the commonty’) (Wightman 2011). The process of enclosure took place first in Lowland Scotland and then, much later, into the 18th and 19th centuries in the Highlands and Islands with the Clearances, or Fuadaichean nan Gàidheal. Following Culloden in 1745 and the destruction of the old clan system, a new breed of commercially-minded landowners claimed the common land, replacing its settled communities first with sheep, and then deer. This violent displacement perpetuated coloniality elsewhere: many who emigrated to the ‘New World’ reproduced the violence that was meted out to them under the protection of the British Empire. This speaks to the psychology of

colonialism: the coloniser is internally colonised, and this damage to the fullness of their humanity is what enables the reproduction of oppression on others. McIntosh (2020) draws a direct line through the historical and collective trauma of clearance and colonisation with the psychology of modern consumerism and destruction, suggesting an answer to the crises of our time being the ‘rekindling of community’.

In the Highland and rural context, the historical injustices of the clearances are still felt, with very visible reminders of this process in the landscape alongside huge cultural loss. Today, after years of sheep and deer farming – together with the most inequitable patterns of land ownership in Europe – many of these landscapes are in a state of degradation. To give one example, as the Revive campaign has shown, almost a fifth of Scotland’s land is now used for grouse shooting as part of a carefully maintained economic and political ideology, with devastating environmental and social impacts. Red deer – now a hundred year problem – represent a major obstacle to any attempts at reforestation, with overgrazing

making natural regeneration all but impossible (deer population is currently concentrated at 15 – 16 deer per km<sup>2</sup>, when 1 – 3 per km<sup>2</sup> would be natural and sustainable). With the reform of ownership patterns it is possible to imagine a different future beyond such monocultural regimes, with ecological restoration, reforestation, repopulation and rural regeneration.

## *In recent decades, the movement towards local and community buy-outs has revitalised many communities, both urban and rural.*

enclosure are less visible, but housing, streets and land are acutely affected by economic policies and ideological forces. In cities, history gets buried under concrete, rubble and new foundations – a kind of social violence that breaks the ties that connect people through generations to a place. While the effects may be less visible, the scale of injustice and rate of turnover of land, from social housing estates to luxury developments, is much faster. For example, the rentier economy is driven by profits, which have increased in real terms as the poor have been denied social housing and instead compelled to pay increased rates for ageing private stock. When it comes to urban regeneration and renewal – and when laws of the market are the rule – creative strategies such as ‘placemaking’ or ‘community engagement’ offer ideological cover for market-driven or state-assisted gentrification, whilst continuing to oppress and displace communities of place.

There is a positive side to this story. In recent decades, the movement towards local and community buy-outs has revitalised many communities, both urban and rural. With the Highland and Island buy-outs of the 1990s leading the way – Assynt, Eigg, Gigha – to the urban take-back of civic buildings and spaces in more recent years, the community land movement shows how people – working collectively – can and are disrupting the prevailing forms of neoliberal practices

by reworking practices of property, nature and economics in search of more socially just and sustainable futures (See Mackenzie 2012; Hunter 2012 ). Many examples can be found on the Community Land Scotland website, a charity founded as an umbrella to represent the interests of community land owning groups in 2010. In an urban context, the legacy of Scotland's industrial past means that almost a third of the Scottish population currently lives within 500 meters of an urban derelict site. As research from the Scottish Land Commission has shown, bringing abandoned and unloved urban places back into productive use could help us tackle climate change, improve health and wellbeing, create more resilient communities and rebuild our economy in a way that helps everyone achieve their full potential.

The first wave of community land buy-outs took place in the 1990s at a time which also saw a popular grassroots empowerment movement with the campaign for Scottish devolution and the establishment of a Scottish Parliament. As McIntosh (2018) recalls, popular education and the ideas of South American educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) were vital to this push for democratic engagement. New methodologies for consciousness-raising and community engagement aimed to help people understand and analyse the circumstances of their lives, and to review their options for change in accordance with 'what gives life.' In relation to community land, McIntosh (2018) writes,

"A typical process might involve a group remembering their history, re-visioning their future, and reclaiming what might be needed to bring about the transformation of their situation. All of these techniques involve iterations of action and reflection around power, and around what it takes to get a life worth living."

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The final stage in the process of taking collective ownership is the strengthening of local democratic processes. In other words, this is the stage of learning (or re-learning) what it really means to live in community. Community empowerment matters in its own right as a matter of human dignity. While common ownership of land and resources does not necessarily mean it will be managed or stewarded well, it is a vital step towards breaking up systems of power and re-engaging people with collective local responsibility. Each story of community ownership is a microcosm of possibility, a story of resilience in the face of seemingly impossible barriers, of transformation and self-determination, opening up channels for others to follow. In the context of degrowth, this process becomes a

social, cultural and ecological imperative.

In the new millennium, there have been some major developments when it comes to land reform. The first Land Reform (Scotland) Act was passed in 2003 - a major milestone. A new Scottish Government came to power in 2007, and in 2014 the country experienced another huge grassroots movement with the campaign for Scottish independence. The diversity of this campaign catalysed activists, artists and citizens into a large scale participatory democratic process, opening up new grassroots spaces where land was once again very much a part of the debate. In 2015, the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act was passed in Parliament, followed by a second Land Reform (Scotland) Act in 2016, opening up new possibilities for both urban and rural renewal. Despite these positive developments, there are still significant institutional and other barriers to enabling policy to fully contribute to renewal in practice. In a sense, the need for such legislation emphasises a huge gap or missing layer in terms of local democracy and civil society in Scotland, partly a consequence of such large local government authority areas.

## **Decentralisation and Decolonisation**

It is important to briefly reflect on the fragile socio-economic situation of the largely rural Highlands and Islands and the Gàidhealtachd in relation to contemporary discussions on decolonisation and degrowth. Of course, the genealogies of coloniality are long and entangled in Scotland; any process of decolonisation must reconcile the (ongoing) effects of the historical injustices of the Clearances with the colonial framework of Empire, acknowledge the implicit and direct involvement in transatlantic enslavement at home and abroad, confront the genesis of the Scottish diaspora and acknowledge the inequities based on the ideology of racialisation that persist in our society, social structures and institutions today.

As Ferguson (2020) writes, the twin forces of colonialism and capitalism and their effects are strongly implicated in the socio-economic challenges faced (such as housing, the impacts of tourism etc.) as well as the worrying decline of the minority Gaelic language. In the context of recent discussions and in the light of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) movement, Ferguson reflects on the commonalities (without drawing false equivalences) with other marginalised communities across the globe:

“Whilst differing intersecting forms of discrimination distinguish these particular situations, the commonality between these populations is an existence characterised, in many cases, by marginalisation and peripherisation...and now, under the neoliberal project, a subsistence often predicated on state programmes of socioeconomic support, rather than true redistributive and restorative justice in a putatively post-colonial world.”

The centralisation of contemporary society, by its very definition, places decentralised areas and issues on the periphery. In recent years, attempts have been made by the Scottish Government to support regional development through increased packages of investment for businesses and enterprises and community schemes of assistance, but very much within a neoliberal framework and following a growth-based agenda.

In a similar way to those BLM activists across the globe demanding enhanced political and social control, Ferguson asks, ‘might there be potential for communities of Gaelic heritage to assert similar claims to autonomy (e.g. increased community governance, land and asset

ownership) over their own socio-economic, cultural and linguistic domains?’ As a largely ethnically homogenous population, she writes, ‘the Gaelic community... does not escape criticism vis-a-vis diversity and inclusivity, or lack therefore, despite the historical imbalances wrought by colonialism, and despite their minority status ( see Gessesse, 2019)’. At the same time, the experience of the Gaelic community in its heartlands resonates with the struggle for economic, cultural and political justice for some of the most precarious and marginalised communities in Scotland and across the globe. Similar arguments have been made by campaign group Misneachd with their Plana Radaigeach Airson Na Gàidhlig / Radical Plan for Gaelic.

Degrowth has the potential to be a connecting point to the myriad struggles and economic crises facing these fragile communities. While not writing explicitly from a degrowth perspective in this case, Rennie (2019) expresses the vital importance of the local ecology of people and place:

“The Community Land Trusts of the Highlands and Islands are not a panacea for all land-based ills, nor is the concept restricted to the Highlands and Islands. Nor, as the resilience of grassroots democracy

*“In our collective efforts to give shape to the imagination of alternatives to the current order of things, there is much inspiration we can find in place-based cultural and ecological practices.”*

begins to take effect, are the development actions of the Trusts necessarily restricted to land-based matters. The importance of the links between development and place, however, is fundamental and self-reinforcing to the principle of the ownership and management of land by the community that lives in that place...

From a wide range of perspectives, whether it is providing a token measure of restorative justice for the clearances, the incubation of new local employment, or simply having a voice in what the land outside your window looks like and is used for, community land trusts are proving to be an effective vehicle. The movement is in its early days, but has had a promising start, and as a level of community democracy or as an “embedded intermediary” – a point of mutual trust by the top-down and bottom-up of governance – it shows great potential. Perhaps, in a circuitous way, the broader appreciation of the values of place, the acknowledgement that humans are a fundamental part of the ecology of a place, and the understanding that development, in its strict sense, must mean the improvement of the whole place.”

In our collective efforts to give shape to the imagination of alternatives to the current order of things, there is much inspiration we can find in place-based cultural and ecological practices. In the context of the Gàidhealtachd and the imaginary of the commons, we can evoke the Gaelic notion of dùthchas, a word that does not easily translate into English. It takes in both a sense of belonging and responsibility to each other and to the ‘stewardship’ rather than ‘ownership’ of the land or dùthaich, reflecting the idea of the reciprocity of mutual dwelling (MacInnes 2010). Dùthchas is also connected to the word dualchas, often translated to mean ‘heritage,’ our cultural inheritance or our collective memory. Together, these words form a matrix in which land and culture are inseparable – a lens or way of being in the world which very much resonates with a commons and degrowth perspective.

It is perhaps important to touch on the importance of the Gaelic language in a degrowth context in



terms of arguments for environmental and cultural sustainability (something we will revisit in section C2). There can be a tension between Gaelic activists who believe that culture is vital to renewal and regeneration and those who prioritise landscape conservation (and who may even find arguments for language revitalisation alienating or exclusivist). This tension is sensitively discussed in historian James Hunter's book *On The Other Side of Sorrow: Nature and People in the Scottish Highlands* (2014, 1995). For example, ideas around 'rewilding' have become popular in recent decades, but the use of this language and discourses of 'wildness' can strike a discord with those communities who have experienced the effects of clearance. From a degrowth perspective, rewilding and 'repeople-ing' must go hand in hand; these aims are not mutually exclusive. Moreover, any plans for regeneration and renewal must avoid approaches that perpetuate existing and paternalistic patterns of land ownership.

Hunter (2014) invites us to imagine a way into the future when the Highlands and Islands have been put right, ecologically, socially and culturally – restoring life and community. This doesn't require everyone to learn and speak Gaelic. It does, however, require people to recognise and respect the local culture of this place. In order to do this, we need a culture of deep listening and dialogue.

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## C. Ideas: Furrows in the Field

This section looks to the past and to the rich creative, cultural and intellectual wells that we can draw upon to inspire and inform a degrowth discourse in Scotland. Of course, there are many more examples that we could highlight! Alongside this intellectual and cultural heritage, there is a rich radical heritage of grassroots resistance and activism to draw upon in Scotland, from Mairi Mhòr nan Òran (1824 – 1828), songwriter, poet and an icon of the struggle over land rights in Skye, to Mary Barbour (1875 - 1958), Glasgow rent strikes and the Red Clydeside movement, to the anti-Polaris campaign and Peace Movement in the 1960s, Pollok Free State in the 1990s, the campaigns for devolution (1997) and Scottish independence (2014) as well as the growing climate movement. There is much to be learned from what has come before.

### C1. Think Global, Act Local: Patrick Geddes, Bioregionalism & the Ecological Imagination

The first of these influences is the thinking of Victorian polymath and Scottish generalist Patrick Geddes (1854 - 1932). Often described as an ecologist, biologist and sociologist, and by some as the ‘father of the Green political movement’, Geddes is probably best remembered for his pioneering work in planning cities. His ideas are only in the last decade finding their way into wider social consciousness, perhaps because the problems he addressed are more valid and current than ever. Indeed, he is credited with gifting the world the often-used epithet ‘Think Global; Act Local.’ Almost a century ago, he wrote:

*“Our greatest need today is to see life as whole, to see its many sides in their proper relations; but we must have a practical as well as a philosophical interest in such an integrated view of life”*

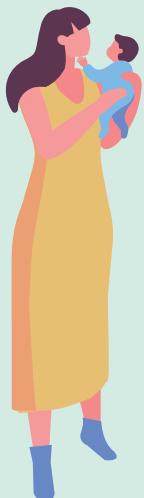
"Our greatest need today is to see life as whole, to see its many sides in their proper relations; but we must have a practical as well as a philosophical interest in such an integrated view of life" (quoted in Wall 2017).

Geddes created a new way of thinking centred on the flourishing people and places. His vision was to transform the 19th century ideal of progress from an individual 'Race for Wealth' into a 'Social Crusade of Culture,' underpinned by a vision of mutual cooperation as opposed to competition.

Inspired by the French sociologist Frederic Le Play's (1802–1886) triad of Lieu, Travail, Famille – which Geddes translated to 'Work, Place, Folk' – his approach to regional and town planning was based on the integration of people, their livelihood and the particular environment of the place or region they inhabit. This was based on a detailed survey which established an inventory of a region's hydrology, geology, flora, fauna, climate and natural topography, as well as its social and economic opportunities and challenges. In many ways, this approach prefigured and pioneered a school of thought now called 'bioregionalism' – the belief that human activity, including environmental and social policies, should be based on ecological or geographical boundaries rather than economic or political boundaries. Along with localisation, bioregionalism shares many values and principles with degrowth thought.

Geddes' concept of 'civics' had a double objective: reclaiming human individual creativity on one hand, and the improvement of the environment, through informed action, on the other. His many regeneration projects were achieved not through sweeping governmental legislation and measures, but by encouraging involvement by local people in local places through beauty, art and life-long education. Such an approach differs radically from today's neoliberal and statist attitudes to regeneration, which often employ a top-down attitude by putting either the state or private property speculators at the heart of developments, regenerating areas but often destroying the communities living there in the process.

The dynamic of Geddes' plan for a 'cultural revival' or 'Scottish renaissance' was about learning from the past to inform the future. His belief was that, as a modern cosmopolitan nation, Scotland could only be creative when it was actively seeking to implement its own vision of a 'commonweal,' with collectivity, rootedness in place and community involvement at its heart. This revival was 'radical' in the true sense of the word. Radicalis means 'to form the root.' The key point here is that this process was not seen as a 'break' from history: it was a future reality-vision developed with, not against the past, always emerging from the local context. This process of reawakening history and making it active in the present is all part of nurturing a reconnecting to the collective right to the land and reclaiming the commons.



## **C2. Poetry Becomes People: Hamish Henderson, Internationalism, Culture & Conviviality**

This idea of cultural cultural revival was also at the heart of the vision of Hamish Henderson (1919 - 2002), alongside ideas of cultural equity, diversity and sustainability. Henderson was a poet, folklorist and folk revivalist, songwriter, translator and activist. Like Geddes, he was very much an internationalist, with strong connections with Europe and beyond. His activism was a fusion of cultural politics and social justice – campaigning with CND and with the Peace movement, against apartheid in South Africa and championing the causes of equality and gay rights.

Henderson is perhaps best known for his involvement with the Folk Revival, which began with the Edinburgh 'People's Festival Ceilidhs' in the early 1950s. He saw folk art as a manifestation of a rebel underground, a subaltern view of history and society as opposed to the official or establishment view. Bringing together traditional singers and musicians from Scots speaking and Gaelic Scotland, these ceilidhs were a radical challenge to the Rudolph Bing's Edinburgh Festival and the elite 20th century ideals of cultural democracy from which it emerged: the idea that the masses could be civilised by giving them access to culture that was not their own. The 'heelster-gowdie' force of Henderson in upending the establishment through his challenge to dominant orthodoxies – in politics, education, culture and broadcasting – led to many hostile reactions and attempts to sideline him in his own time.

His most famous work, the song 'Freedom Come All Ye' is a song of liberation and international reconciliation. Out of a past riddled with imperial injustices, Henderson conjures a world of global solidarity, ecological harmony, radical love, dignity, humanity and the flourishing of life in all its forms – a vision that resonates very powerfully with a degrowth future:

Roch the wind in the clear day's dawin  
 Blaws the clouds heelster-gowdie ow'r the bay,  
 But there's mair nor a roch wind blawin  
 Through the great glen o' the warld the day.  
 It's a thocht that will gar oor rottans  
 - A' they rogues that gang gallus, fresh and gay -  
 Tak the road, and seek ither loanins  
 For their ill ploys, tae sport and play

Nae mair will the bonnie callants  
 Mairch tae war when oor braggarts crouesly craw,  
 Nor wee weans frae pit-heid and clachan  
 Mourn the ships sailin' doon the Broomielaw.  
 Broken faimlies in lands we've herriet,  
 Will curse Scotland the Brave nae mair, nae mair;  
 Black and white, ane til ither mairriet,  
 Mak the vile barracks o' their maisters bare.

So come all ye at hame wi' Freedom,  
 Never heed whit the hoodies croak for doom.  
 In your hoose a' the bairns o' Adam  
 Can find breid, barley-bree and painted room.  
 When MacLean meets wi's freens in Springburn  
 A' the roses and geans will turn tae bloom,  
 And a black boy frae yont Nyanga  
 Dings the fell gallows o' the burghers doon.

For Henderson, when it came to the folk tradition, it was not so much about the songs themselves – although these were of course important – it was the singing of them that was vital; for in the sharing of the song, it is given new life. He championed the ‘lived moment’ of the cèilidh or gathering, when people gather together in the joy, liveness and conviviality of shared experience. For Henderson, such moments of conviviality embody an ineffable creative power, an organic energy, a life force. They are moments of ‘resolve, transformation and insurrection’ and the ‘proving ground for emotional and political truths’ where the impulse and catalyst for resistance and change are to be found. We will pick up on this idea in Section D1, ‘Conviviality and the Commons’.

### Cultural Equity & Sustainability

As a folklorist, Henderson understood very well the significance of local culture and creativity for nourishing and sustaining communities. The idea that cultural diversity is essential for human survival was perhaps first popularised by folklorist Alan Lomax (1915-2002) in his ‘Appeal for Cultural Equity’ in 1972, a guiding principle for Henderson’s own fieldwork and folklore collecting. At this time, there was a growing concern that local languages and expressive traditions across the globe were being lost as a casualty of the economies of scale, the processes of standardisation, centralised education, powerful entertainment industries and global mass communications. Lomax wrote,

“The human species not only loses a way of viewing, thinking, and feeling but also a way of adjusting to some zone on the planet which fits it and makes it liveable; not only that, but we throw away a system of interaction, of fantasy and symbolizing which, in the future, the human race may sorely need.”

Research has shown that there is a causal link between the damage to cultural and biological diversity. In many cases, damage to cultural and linguistic diversity comes first, followed by a disregard and abandonment of indigenous knowledge. This severance leads to a profound human-ecological disconnect, alienation and loss of meaning, with desperate environmental consequences. As Love (2019) remind us,

“As we face a potential emergency in biodiversity loss from human activity and human-caused climate change, these complex interactions of language and biodiversity are a reminder that our cultural lives are wrapped up in the natural world too. Just like an animal species, our languages evolved in the context of the environments that surrounded them. When we change those environments, we threaten much more than just the physical living things that thrive there.”

Globally, the call for ‘culture’ is becoming ever more powerful along with the increasing ecological, economic and social challenges to meet the aims of ‘sustainability.’ The UNESCO Hangzhou Declaration in 2013 puts culture at the very heart of ‘sustainable development.’ This very much includes approaches to safeguarding and facilitating engagement with what is called ‘intangible cultural heritage.’ The treaty asserts:

*“Culture is precisely what enables sustainability – as a source of strength, of values and social cohesion, self esteem and participation. Culture is our most powerful force for creativity and renewal.”*

In the context of degrowth, recovering ways of viewing the world, ways of thinking and feeling become not just a matter of cultural democracy, but an ecological and existential imperative.

It is not just creative cultural expression that fieldworkers like Henderson collected, but cultural heritage in the sense of ways of life, including examples of living sustainably from the land. Working alongside Henderson was anthropologist Eric R. Cregeen (1921 - 1983). Cregeen undertook his fieldwork among people who lived off the land and sea, and whose knowledge, skills and wisdom sustained their lifestyle and their culture. He documented the lives and traditions of crofters, fishermen, shepherds, cattle-dealers, drovers, blacksmiths, horse-dealers, carpenters, tradespeople, weavers, craftspeople, children, healers, whisky-makers, teachers – ‘those sections of society which are unlikely to leave behind them any quantity of memoirs, diaries, or correspondence from which history can subsequently be written.’ In 1978 he wrote, ‘the recordings we make now will be a powerful aid to future generations living in a much-changed society’.

Archives are a repository of this lost wisdom and local knowledge. In Scotland, thanks to the efforts of figures such as Henderson and Cregeen (and many others), we are lucky to have such extensive collections; few other countries in the world possess such an exceptional store of audio field recordings. You can listen to many of these recordings on the Tobar an Dualchais / Kist O Riches online archive website. In the following clip, listen to a discussion describing the practice of sharing seaweed as fertiliser and the thatching the croft houses, a wonderful expression of ‘mutual aid’ in practice recorded on North Uist in 1973:

<http://tobarandualchais.co.uk/en/fullrecord/19182>

From a degrowth perspective, advocating for local culture is not about reifying places and forms of non-capitalism as untouched or outside of history as part of some sort of romantic hankering for paradise lost, it is to stand up against the destructive and homogenising forces of capitalist modernity. In many rural and island communities, this knowledge of living sustainably off the land is still there in living memory, wisdom we need to value, learn from and share. At the same time, it is important not to fall into the trap of romanticising such ways of life (the

reality today is that, as a consequence largely of economics, for many people, crofting is a hobby for those who can afford it rather than any kind of sustainable way of living).

A recent blog published by the Scottish Land Commission 'Whose Space, Whose Heritage' reflects,

"The uneven impact of COVID-19 has been stark. It is interesting that our recovery out of COVID-19 increasingly looks as if it will depend on very local knowledge, understanding and respect for who lives there, what their living and social habits are and what will work within that community.

Similarly, if we are to get real about building back a better, healthier, more inclusive society – in which access to outdoor space and nature is more equal, and wellbeing is genuinely pursued as a social goal – we will have to invest location by location, and community by community. We have to put an equal value on accessing space and nature everywhere. And we cannot do that without thinking about how privilege and power over land and public space has influenced the past, and how it will continue to influence the future without a different kind of participation that reflects the diversity of people and their interests."

A re-engagement with the 'local' – in all its multiplicity and contradictions – is part of a radical degrowth agenda: the revitalisation of ecology and democracy, working towards a shared vision of a thriving, equitable and convivial society.

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Further readings in section E.

## D. Degrowth in Practice

This final section turns to a reflection on degrowth in practice in a Scottish context. A different kind of world is not just possible; it is a crucial and urgent necessity. But where do we start when it comes to envisaging the shape it should take and working out how to bring it about?

A growth economy demands economies of scale. From a degrowth perspective, locally-owned provision of social and community services based on the idea of the commons and peer-to-peer models feels imminently more human, practical and economically sound. While many alternatives to growth capitalism already exist, they struggle in our current system. As Gallagher & Small (2020) reflect, 'this is not an indictment of the credibility of alternatives, but of an economic system which depends on excess production, consumption and accumulation to survive.' Localised need and localised production, they write, would value the creativity and contribution we can all make in practice, with meaningful work for all, a working life freed from the relentless pursuit of GDP and life lived at a slower pace.

Degrowth thinking proposes a larger vision of the human being than conventional property laws or economics would allow. Such a vision invites people to be more than economic agents but active participants in their own life – in making history themselves, as opposed to just voting or expecting politicians or bureaucrats to solve our problems.

"If capitalism predicated on endless growth means globalisation filtered through nation states and corporate power, its antithesis is an anti-capitalist economy based on degrowth with increased localisation and decentralised power. If growth-based capitalism means we are defined as one-dimensional consumers, a degrowth society means we can become multi-dimensional citizens in charge of a viable future" (Gallagher & Small, 2020)

### D1. Conviviality and the Commons

The practice 'commoning' can be understood as the lived expression of conviviality: the 'art of living together' (con-vivere). It involves finding those cultural practices – those that exist in present, those that have always been there (and are now only being rediscovered) and those that are being created now, for the future – which restore life and community

"There is no commons without commoning". This means that shared resources by themselves do not constitute a commons; these must be activated by community action and governance in practice. The imaginary of the commons, then, embodies the whole process – the dynamic interaction between a resource, the community that gathers around it, and the protocols for its stewardship. As

outlined in the French Convivialist Manifesto(2014), commoning is a relational dynamic through which people freely collaborate with one another, a way of being that would allow humans to take care of each other and environment ‘without denying the legitimacy of conflict, yet by using it as a dynamising and creativity-sparking force.’

Discussion of the concepts of conviviality and convivialism often refer to the works of Ivan Illich (1926–2002), a critic of technology and growth – ideas which he explored in his book Tools for Conviviality (1973). Illich’s argument is to restore the primacy of ‘being’ over ‘having’ by exposing the flaws in technology and capitalism. The argument of his book Shadow Work (1981) is that wage labour created another kind of labour: unpaid activities that make wage labour possible in the first place, or the ‘shadow work’ of capitalism.

We often use the word ‘conviviality’ to simply mean the joy of coming together socially – the kind of unconstrained friendly relations and dealings which people can have with one another. As humans, much of what we value in terms of quality of life is still created outside the spaces of economic exchange, through the voluntary association of friends, neighbours and citizens – in the home, the park, the library, local clubs or the village hall céilidh. Far from being frivolous, however, creating non-commodified spaces outside of economic exchange is vital to a degrowth future. As Bollier and Helfrich (2020) remind us:

“The commons is not just about small-scale projects for improving everyday life. It is a germinal vision for reimagining our future together and reinventing social organisation, economics, infrastructure, politics and state power itself.”

In degrowth economist Latouche’s view (2009), in a convivial society, new forms of economic relations are required. What Latouche means by degrowth is not some monolithic alternative to the existing capitalist set-up – and above all not some kind of economy without markets – but rather ‘a matrix of alternatives which reopens a space for creativity.’ As long as the legitimacy of basic social entities (such as work, social security, democracy) depend on growth, the introduction of degrowth is extremely difficult. Latouche’s argument is that degrowth is thus possible only in a ‘society of degrowth’ which we must create ourselves. Similarly, any movement for localism or localisation is not about looking for one alternative system; it’s about seeking out the principles of reconnection and decentralisation

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infrastructure,  
politics and state  
power itself.”*



to create many systems that renew and strengthen local communities.

We need to find ways of freeing our life, work, making, doing, being from enclosure – figurative, physical, economical, colonial – and ask, what nourishes and sustains life?

There are countless initiatives here in Scotland seeking alternative ways of living and being that might make up such a society of degrowth; indeed, there are (and have been for decades) many existing projects, organisations and communities living by degrowth principles even if they don't recognise or describe themselves in such terms. We can see this in practice in the form of community land trusts, community gardens and urban growing projects, community woodlands, community energy initiatives, cooperatives of all kinds, fair trade, alternative currencies, not-for-profit community and social enterprises, swap shops and systems of local exchange, solidarity syndicates, repair cafés, tool libraries, food sovereignty and food justice groups, mutual aid groups, community climate and environmental groups, voluntary arts groups, community heritage groups and community campaigns of all kinds. The question is how to cultivate that degrowth potential, opening up opportunities and possibilities for individuals and groups to connect, organise and create lasting change.

## **D2. Enough! A Scottish Degrowth Network?**

Enough! – a collective working towards social, economic and climate justice in Scotland – do see their work in explicitly degrowth terms (See: Enough's Call to Embrace Degrowth Thinking in Scotland; Enough's Open Letter on Economic Recovery - listed in section E Further Readings). They are also committed to the work of decolonisation, recognising that there is much to be done on anti-racism in Scotland and that a decolonised global climate justice is vital. Carrying forth an economic logic that maintains and increases exploitative race and class structures is not an option.

As part of their programme work, Enough! is building a living archive of degrowth case studies across Scotland with projects and organisations which challenge growth mindsets. These projects and practices emphasise sufficiency, redistribution and the idea of 'enough for all.' This living archive will also include projects that focus on decolonisation, or those that actively challenge dominant oppressive political and social narratives that ultimately fuel an economic mindset based on extractivism and unlimited growth. Part of the aim of this is to make visible the 'matrix of alternatives' which Latouche describes.

In addition, Enough! has been seeking to inspire and energise the forming of a Scottish-specific 'network of alternatives' opening up a space for creativity. This will connect and bring together those who are actively interested and committed to shared principles, ideas and practices related to both degrowth and decolonisation. In the context of COVID-19, several virtual meetings have taken place, with participants co-creating a shared and evolving purpose statement (see below). An interesting development that the virtual environment in the context



of COVID-19 has created is a shift of perceptions of the centre and the peripheral, with rural and island voices playing a central role in emerging conversations.

**A Scottish Degrowth Network exists to:**

- bridge + connect academics, activists, practitioners, rural communities, city streets and all those who are degrowth-minded so that we can imagine, rediscover + build together our vision for a degrowth society in Scotland
- connect across struggles, share + learn from each other's experience + develop our collective practices
- spread, share + promote ideas, demystify language + shift discourse so that we can bring others with us in building a degrowth future
- make visible, nurture, connect + amplify the seeds of a degrowth society that are already here, building our readiness to collectively respond to crises with viable alternatives
- intentionally align degrowth discussions with an understanding of colonialism and climate justice in Scotland
- develop together an emerging praxis which nourishes + sustains, with a focus on joy, care, equity + stewarding a shared commons

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## References

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# E. Degrowth Possibilities in Scotland

## E1. A Scottish Degrowth Movement?

(excerpt from an unpublished essay written by Svenja Meyerricks)

In Scotland, the Degrowth movement is in its relative infancy, although in the past year or two, there has been an increasing interest – for example, through the formation of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance which brings the conversation about different markers of economic success to policymakers, at Enough! Scotland who seek to foster a grassroots network of degrowth activists and in some academic circles researching new economic frameworks and practices. While the Scottish Government still advocates the oxymoronic “sustainable economic growth” as a guiding principle for its policies, an increased emphasis on health and wellbeing as economic purposes, even as being on a par with GDP, opens up a window for critical discussions around what that might mean in practice.

However, the discourse, analysis and practical steps would not only need to be embedded within a wide range of sectors and walks of society in order to build a truly inclusive and intersectional degrowth movement in Scotland. As the term ‘degrowth’ often invokes impressions of a total downscaling of all parts of the economy, in a highly unequal society such as Scotland we need to grapple with difficult questions around lack of access to land and housing alongside other inequities as part of any degrowth strategies. A Scottish degrowth focus must be on equity, led by those who are currently most excluded from reaping the fruits of growth, while at the same time critically acknowledging and reckoning with its colonial legacy of extractivism, whether of people or of resources, as well as being a historically high carbon emitter.

Scotland has a wealth of indigenous traditional knowledge to draw upon and build on in the Gàidhealtachd. Landownership and local authority areas that are very large compared to many of their European counterparts pose peculiar challenges. On the other hand, a vibrant land reform movement advocating for asset transfer to communities has highlighted the potential of strengthening the commons in Scotland.

Ideas around degrowth and postgrowth can help shape Scotland’s priorities as the country faces a No Deal Brexit the Scottish population did not vote for. The possibility of a new independence referendum is only one of the political

maelstroms that require a robust analysis of the kind of economy that is socially just and ecologically possible. The hostile environment surrounding Brexit calls for a critical cultural inquiry into Scotland's own colonial past as part of ongoing efforts to reframe attitudes towards migrants and migration through a lens of historical and global justice. As the degrowth movement addresses similar issues, engaging with degrowth thinkers and activists presents an opportunity to contribute to and learn from European grassroots movements at a time when nourishing and maintaining continental European connections is particularly precious.

The COP26 summit is to take place in Glasgow in 2021, postponed from 2020 due to the covid-19 pandemic. The gravitational pull of such large international events like these galvanise the energy of climate and social justice movements, temporarily diverting struggles away from long-standing causes. However, this mass concentration of efforts also presents a precious opportunity for communities in hosting nations to reflect on how to effectively encounter and engage with the show in town. This may include honest and in-depth dialogue around the root causes of the climate emergency, and forging new alliances around the need to rethink economic priorities.

As well as theoretical and political conversations, this needs to include engagement with those groups and individuals who already lead by example, developing solutions on the ground to bring about a systemic shift. We need to hear from care and health workers, community organisers, plumbers, local food growers, electricians, accountants, permaculture wizards, medicine workers, storytellers, those who care for children and adults, bicycle-powered gadget builders, free software and open source programmers, teachers, economists, writers, domestic workers, engineers, artists, architects and all kinds of workers about what degrowth in Scotland might look like. Only when the core ideas are co-owned by as wide a range of people as possible and bring in previously under-represented or unheard voices, they might capture the wider cultural imagination."



## **E2. Breaking with Growth - Creating an Economy of Life**

(excerpt from an essay written by Bronagh Gallagher & Mike Small, to be published in a forthcoming collection 'Scotland After the Virus' (2020) (eds. Gerry Hassan & Simon Barrow)

Scotland sits at a unique and pivotal juncture. The tracks laid while leaving lockdown will chart a course that it will be hard to move away from once set. Given the reality of climate breakdown, the significance of this moment is only magnified.

Nothing happens overnight. As radical as these ideas may seem, it is important to acknowledge that a world beyond growth is a direction of travel, not a defined destination. Getting there will be a process of discovery and adjustment, needing both consistent small choices on the part of each of us to do differently, as well as struggle and sweeping changes. The positive is that this is a future that is already here in many small ways. Scotland hums with alternatives. Stretching the length and breadth of this country are initiatives which speak to community energy, community ownership, alternative work models, alternative housing options. The scale of change might seem daunting, maybe even unimaginable, but we already have much we can build from.

We seek to inspire and imagine different yet credible futures and to outline the contours of a future Scotland which is fair, just, sustainable and balanced - a future which makes you want to live there, and, more importantly makes you want to be part of building it.

Too often alternatives and activists are painted as utopian as a way of dismissing ideas, as if trying to imagine the best world possible and then figuring out how to get there isn't what the work of the best governance should be. We have lived a reality shaped by logic of economic growth for 40 years. It has simply not delivered. Imagining a world beyond growth can no longer be dismissed as utopian; it is the most pragmatic response we have to a planet teetering on the edge.

## **F. Additional Resources & Further Reading (available online):**

**N.B. These are all optional readings. Please follow your own interests!**

Bollier, D & S. Helfrich (2019) Free, Fair and Alive: The Insurgent Power of the Commons. New Society Publishers, available online

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### Websites

Commons Transition - Key Concepts <https://primer.commonstransition.org/4-more/5-elements/key-concepts>

Community Land Scotland website <https://www.communitylandscotland.org.uk/> Timeline of

Community Land, Fearann / Land website <https://www.fearann.land/resources>

Evergreen: Patrick Geddes and the Environment in Equilibrium <http://libraryblogs.is.ed.ac.uk/patrickgeddes/>

Revive Coalition for Grouse Moor Reform <https://revive.scot/>

Scottish Land Commission <https://landcommission.gov.scot/>

Tobar an Dualchais - Kist O Riches <http://tobaranualchais.co.uk/>

### Suggested Books:

Henderson, H. (2004) Alias MacAlias: Writings on Songs, Folk and Literature. Edinburgh: Polygon

Hunter, J. (2018, 2010) The Making of the Crofting Community. Edinburgh: Birlinn

Hunter, J. (2012) From the Low Tide of the Sea to the Highest Mountain Tops: Community Ownership of Land in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. The Islands Book Trust

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# Session 5

## Living Degrowth: Human Flourishing

### Themes

- Understanding our predicament and our agency
  - The impact of technology on our lives
  - What is human flourishing and how can we implement degrowth
  - Suggestions for tools, approaches and useful ideas
- 



## A. Introduction

In previous sessions we have examined the macro-economics of the growth model, and explored the critiques of it. We have gained an understanding of the principles of degrowth, and its reasoning. We have looked at rhythms of time and work, and encountered imaginaries of the commons and community. In this session, we'll explore some of the ways we can encounter, embody and live out some of these ideas in practice, as individuals, families, communities and collectives.

### A1 At Home in the Wrong House

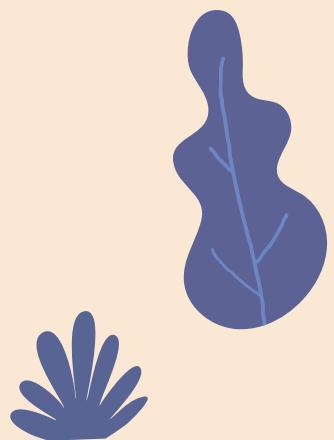
*Quantify suffering? My guilt at least is open,  
I stand convicted by all my convictions--  
you, too*

from Hunger - for Audre Lorde

by Adrienne Rich

We are in a predicament. Embedded within a capitalist growth economy, we are aware of its impact, negative externalities and inequalities, and we attempt to envision alternatives that will ensure our mutual survival. At the same time, we benefit from it: almost everything we possess is manufactured by it, our social relations are mediated through it, and the services we rely on are contingent on it: many good things are produced by it. Extricating ourselves from this presents a significant challenge.

Additionally, our desires, needs and impulses are vulnerable to strategies intended to influence our behaviour and habits, entrenching our positionality as consumers and adding additional challenges to attempts to build alternative lifeways.

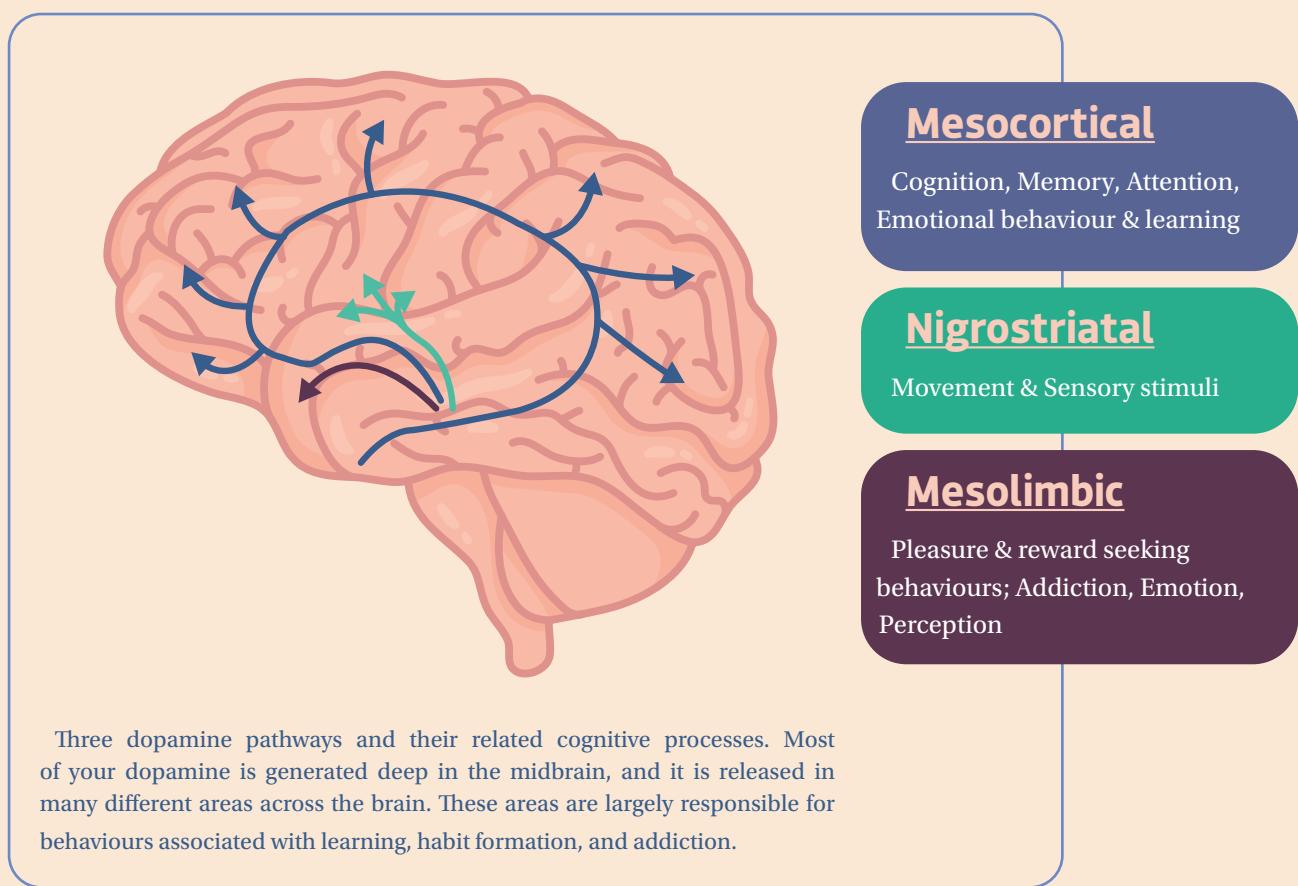


## A2 Evolution & Attention

Our body-minds evolved in relationship with our ecology – gathering food, avoiding predators and threats, learning and adapting. Our brains, including the mesolimbic system responsible for ‘reward’ processing, became a finely tuned mechanism. Surviving the challenges of nature required us to be fully-integrated with our senses. Capitalism seeks to tap into this well-balanced system in order to turn us from creators into consumers – first with advertising and ideology, and now also with an advanced set of techniques in order to ‘biohack’ us: to tap into our senses, neural responses and unconscious drives in order to get us hooked and reliant on a system of exponential growth and ever-increasing novelty. Our distraction behaviours are degrading our mental processes in ways that are leading to more depression and anxiety – and a loss of our sense of real connection to other people and our environment.

Some understanding of brain chemistry is necessary. This is not to reduce human consciousness in all its complexity and mystery to just matter: rather, it’s to empower us to understand the ways in which we are vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.

Let’s look at a key neurotransmitter that is involved in this. Dopamine sends us a ‘reward message’. When we do something that feels good to us, dopamine sends a signal in our brain to keep seeking that reward, enabling the behaviour to become a habit. It’s easy to see the important role this has played in our evolution: it helps us to make decisions necessary for our survival, such as seeking out food, sex and social acceptance. However, the rewards encouraged by dopamine are short-term. This can deprive the cortex – the ‘thinking brain’ – of the ability to make good long-term decisions in line with our values, as it primes us to seek out temporary rewards. This is why dopamine is known as the ‘sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll’ molecule, the power of which is very familiar to addicts.



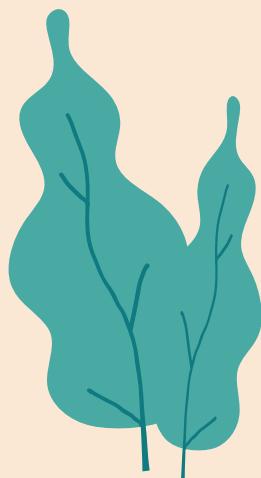
Capitalist technologists understand enough about how neurotransmitters affect us to design persuasive technology to hijack our awareness into ‘compulsion loops’ and further the sense of lack we have examined. This is done in several ways:

- Encouraging constant attention to check what social validation you receive in the form of ‘likes’, notifications and responses
- Irregularly timed rewards that require constant checking of your device
- ‘Endlessly’ scrolling newsfeeds that discourage disengagement
- Algorithms based on tracking your online behaviour that presents you with content and advertisements designed to most likely capture your attention and influence your consumer behaviour (including politically)

We know this is happening, and that it is deliberate. Whistleblowers from the tech industry have come forward and said so – just as whistleblowers came forward from the tobacco industry a generation earlier. Tristan Harris, a former Google engineer, put it this way in his appearance on a current affairs TV show:

“Every time I check my phone, I’m playing the slot machine to see “What did I get?” There’s a whole playbook of techniques that get used by [technology companies] to get you using the technology for as long as possible... It’s not neutral. They want you to use it in particular ways and for long periods of time. Because that’s how they make their money”. (Newport 2019:23)

Theologian René Girard spoke of ‘mimetic desire’: we desire what others want, because they desire it. He wrote, “all desire is a desire for being”. Capitalist technology captures this desire and monetises it. When we are scrolling on our social media feed, seeing the carefully curated and flattering photographs of the lives of others, we both desire to connect with them, desire what they have, and negatively compare our own circumstance to theirs. They, of course, are doing the same when they look at our carefully curated profile. We attend events and buy products because the algorithm brought them to our attention, through data analysis of what we, and others in our network have ‘liked’.



## A3 Degrowth and Desire

The ideology of perpetual growth that underpins these interventions in our collective psyche - a kind of mass social experiment - is often seen as simple fulfilment of desire: natural, normal, and just the way it is. To challenge it is to risk marking oneself as eccentric, maladjusted or idealistic. But an understanding of the ways in which assumptions of perpetual growth have been socially constructed can allow us to challenge this.

McGowan (2016:17) points out:

"Defenders of the system claim that capitalism is a function of human nature—that there is a perfect overlap between capitalism and human nature—and thus that there exists no space from which one might criticise it. From this perspective, any foundational critique is inherently fanciful and utopian. But much more than other socioeconomic systems, capitalism necessarily relies on its incompleteness and on its opening to the outside in order to function. One can psychoanalyse capitalism through the very gaps the system itself produces and through its reliance on what exceeds it."

"The fundamental gesture of capitalism is the promise, and the promise functions as the basis for capitalist ideology. One invests money with the promise of future returns; one starts a job with the promise of a higher salary; one takes a cruise with the promise of untold pleasure in the tropics; one buys the newest piece of electronics with the promise of easier access to what one wants. In every case the future embodies a type of satisfaction foreclosed to the present and dependent on one's investment in the capitalist system. The promise ensures a sense of dissatisfaction with the present in relation to the future."

Here we begin to see cracks in the veneer of the growth paradigm. It is based on a sense of lack in what we have: in being socially educated and policed to be insufficient- for there to be a gap between the lives we have now, and a promised life in the future.

In 1899, the American sociologist Thorsten Veblen coined the phrase "conspicuous consumption" in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. The phrase was double-edged: Veblen was critical of the wealthy flaunting their wealth, but he recognised that more ordinary people used goods and services to

establish “the reputability of the household and its head”.

In the first decades of the 20th century, an understanding developed of human psychology which allowed the rise of new forms of public relations and consumer marketing. One pioneer was Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud's nephew, who used his uncle's insights into the subconscious to develop new advertising techniques. As described by Jeremy Lent (2017:75):

“We must shift America from a needs to a desires culture,” declared Bernays’ business partner, Paul Mazur. “People must be trained to desire, to want new things, even before the old have been entirely consumed. We must shape a new mentality. Man’s desires must overshadow his needs.”

“In 1928, Bernays proudly described how his techniques for mental manipulation had permitted a small elite to control the minds of the American population:

“[T]he conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government that is the true ruling power of this country.

“We are governed, our minds molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of... In almost every act of our daily lives... we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons ... who pull the wires which control the public mind.”

The following year, a Presidential report gave credit to the mind control espoused by Bernays for helping to create a limitless future of American consumption, explaining it had “proved conclusively... that wants are almost insatiable; that one want satisfied makes way for another. The conclusion is that economically, we have a boundless field before us; that there are new wants that will make way endlessly for newer wants, as fast as they are satisfied ... by advertising and other promotional devices.”

The coming of the digital age supercharged these methods and brought them, via technology, into our lives and awareness in a more intimate and entrenched way than ever before.



## A4 Technology and Discontent

For the context of our current inquiry, we'll narrow the definition of technology to mean the tools, machinery and systems devised by humans to further particular ends. The consideration of the moral and philosophical dimensions of technology and its use goes back at least to the classical concepts of 'techne' (craft, art, skill) and 'episteme' (theory, knowledge). We know that technology was and is used in the more-than-human world: other primates, and birds such as corvids and many other species are known to use tools for obtaining food, building shelter or for recreation. But humanity has uniquely created a society in which technology – and for the purpose of our reflection, consumer electronics in particular – not only plays a central role in meeting our fundamental human needs, but has come to shape our society and culture in unprecedented ways.

We often use the term 'Luddite' in a disparaging way to mean a reactionary anti-technologist. In truth, the Luddites were 19th century textile workers who saw that the use of machinery to replace their traditional heritage craft was not to the benefit of the people, but to the capitalist owners of the machinery alone. Social critic Ivan Illich, writing in 1983 at the dawn of the computer age, wrote that 'computers are doing to communication what fences did to pastures and cars did to streets': in other words, he saw the idea of the commons as being threatened by individualist enclosure which redefines community. He advocated a new politics of self-limitation with regards to technology, viewing it as necessary for people to maintain autonomy – and that decisions on technical changes in the human environment should not be left to 'experts' and the marketplace alone. There is good evidence that what Illich warned about has come to pass. The promise of technology as liberation – instant global communication and access to information – has become mediated by a handful of global corporations. We use Facebook Messenger to communicate, yet this is subject to our acceptance of terms of service we clicked 'accept' on, probably without reading. The terms of service mean allowing Facebook access to personal data, and direct control over our device. This unprecedented access to our data has emerged faster than the civic and political structures needed to control it – with direct consequences in our politics (via the use of personal data to tailor targeted advertisements during referenda and elections) and many other ways.

## A5 Turning things around: Human Flourishing and Regrowth

Informed by an understanding of how social and technological forces have shaped our collective landscape, we can now turn our attention to how we build new ways of being in the world within a degrowth paradigm.

Revisiting technology, it's possible to reframe its use in ways that give life and genuine power and utility to the users. Early technologists of digital communication were often advocates for user freedom. Take email, the most important and widely used communications medium on the internet. The technical standards for email were finalised in 1977 and have remained essentially unchanged. Anyone can set up an email address with any provider they choose (or host it themselves), which can communicate with any other email address. It just works, and everyone benefits (spam notwithstanding!).

Capitalist technologists do not want their products to have open standards like this now, as it means they cannot form monopolies. In the time of coronavirus, many of us are having to adjust our working practices to include increased use of technology for communications and meetings online. Much of the software we use for this is proprietary – our use of it is subject to conditions. We do not personally own it to use and modify as we wish. We are so accustomed to this that the strangeness of the arrangement is often concealed. Consider another technology we may use for our work – a pencil, for example. Once we acquire ownership of the pencil from the retailer and manufacturer, it is ours. We can draw or write what we want, sharpen it if necessary, lend it or give it to a friend if we want. Freedoms like this should be available to us with regard to the digital technology we use.

There is a strong movement of folk creating, using and sharing software under 'free' or 'open source' licences. This includes both the programs we use, and the operating system itself. Exploring ways that we can use these kinds of tools instead of proprietary software is a concrete step we can make towards a digital commons, outside of the silos and walled gardens of the capitalist technologists. We encourage you to explore the ways in which you can make use of this technology and offer suggestions in Section D: Additional Resources.

A just framework for degrowth takes historical relationships around dominance and exploitation from colonialism and imperialism into account. It follows that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to degrowth, and historical and geographical dimensions must be approached through non-oppressive frameworks and sensitivities. In the Minority World, degrowth would take the shape of decreasing production and consumption, and the discourse tends to revolve around critiques of affluent lifestyles that cannot be afforded or aspired to. This does not mean that everything has to de-grow. Rather, a downscaling of particular industries (such as the military-industrial complex, publicity, consumer electronics and other toys) would be accompanied by a growth in industries that support public welfare (the care sector, hospitals, repair shops, slow food, slow fashion, upcycled items and

so on). In the Majority World, there will be some overlap with the Minority World among wealthy elites. Degrowth takes the shape of post-development discourses, arguing that even new 'softer' forms of development constitute a form of cultural imperialism. Degrowth alternatives may involve indigenous ways of organising social life and livelihoods according to the good of the community, for example through Buen Vivir ('the good life'), a concept emerging from Ecuador, the inclusive community planning toolkit Plan de Vida (Life plan) of the Colombian Misak people discussed in a previous session. It might also take the shape of feminist, anti-corporate activism, such as Vandana Shiva's farming and seed saving project Navdanya in Uttarakhand, North India.

Across the Minority and Majority worlds, new technologies for Degrowth will involve appropriate technologies are small in scale, affordable, localised, decentralised, labour-intensive, repairable and energy-efficient. E.F. Schumacher's motto 'small is beautiful' became the guiding slogan of the appropriate technology movement from the 1970s. Such technologies often operate according to open source principles, critiquing copyright law and aiming to ensure replicability and fair usage rights – as in the Appropedia project.

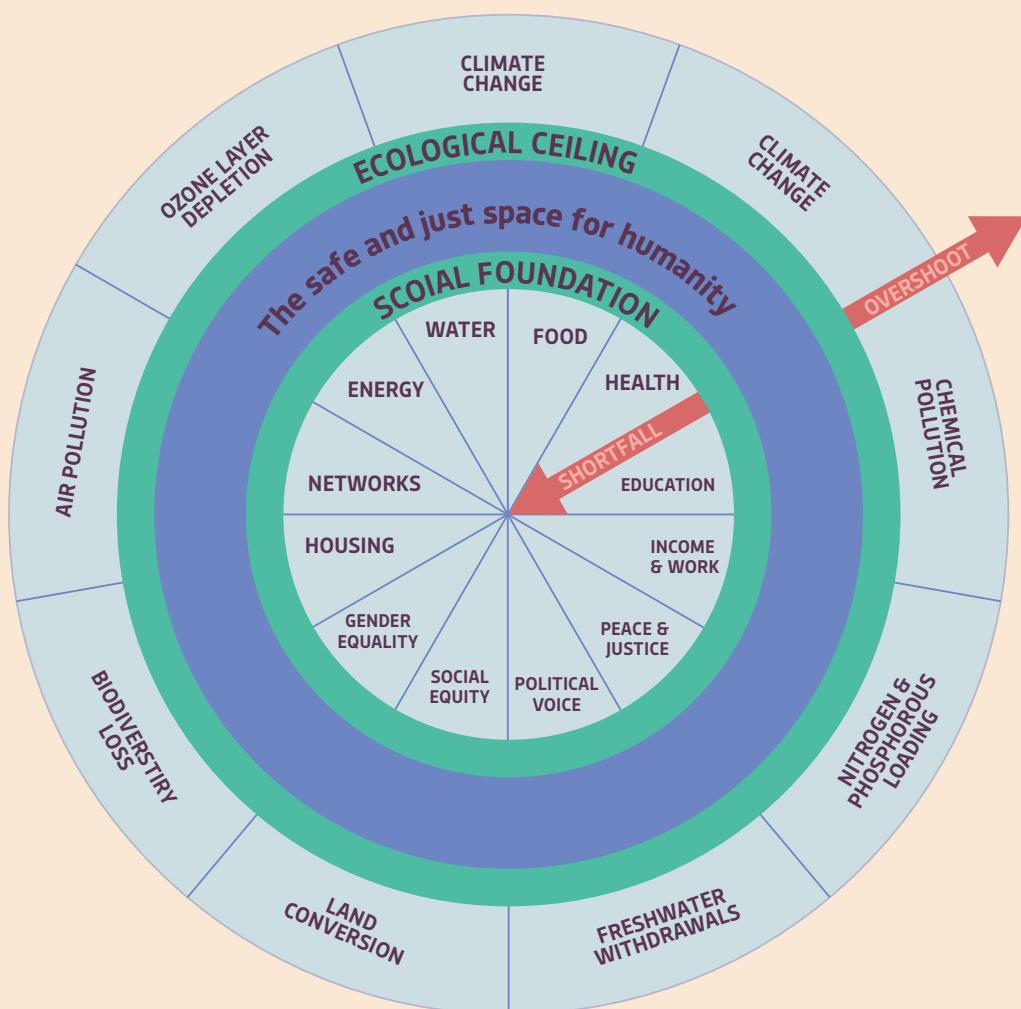


Diagram: Doughnut Economics (Raworth 2017)

## A6 Reframing and Renaming: New Stories, Coming Home

*"For magic consists in this, the true naming of a thing."*

**Ursula K. LeGuin, A Wizard of Earthsea**

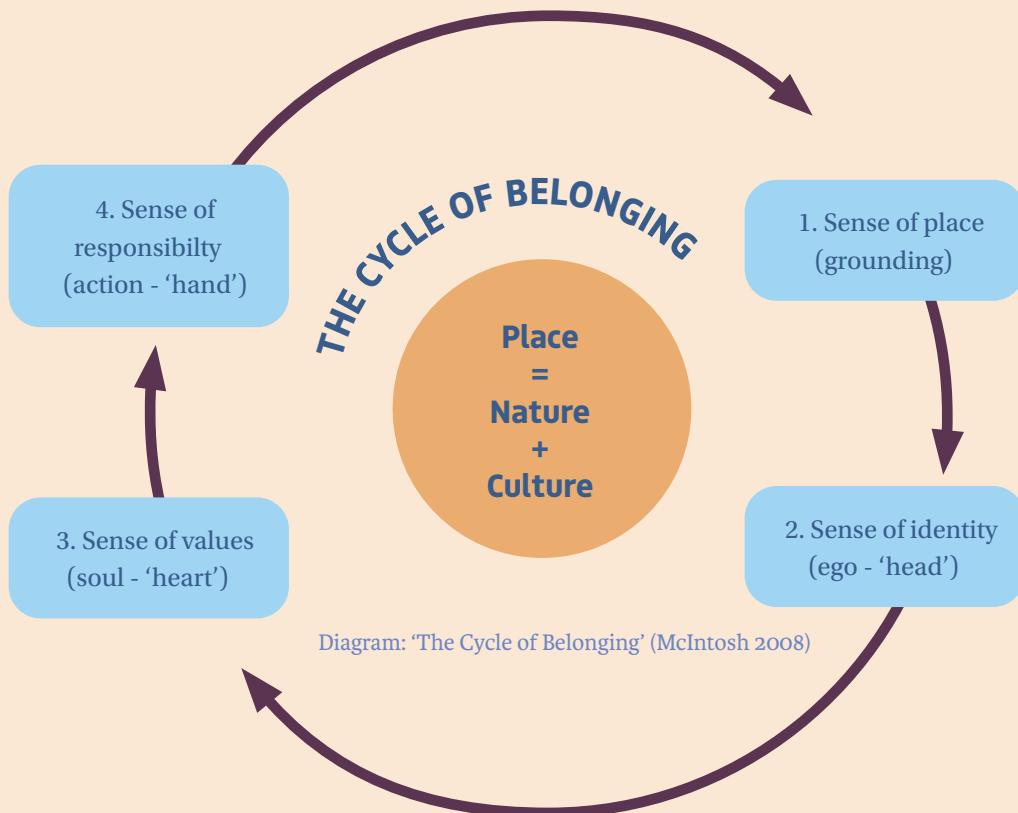
Perhaps more challenging than assimilating the technical and theoretical models available to us is the task of actually embedding ourselves into new lifeways in a contemporary context and landscape that can seem hostile to human flourishing and mutual survival. How can we increase capacity, meet our fundamental human needs, and co-create cultures of care and regeneration?

An opening up of opportunities for this new imaginary has emerged in the mutual aid networks, spontaneous inter-connectedness, and acknowledgement of the unsustainability and brittleness of the system as it stands in the context of the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic has revealed massive health inequalities, the extent of precarious insecure work, and the failure of just-in-time food systems, but it's also revealed the extent to which the 'real economy' is based on material needs which were only barely being adequately met by the market economy.

Oikos, the ancient Greek word relating to the family unit, the family's property, and the household/home, is the root of both the modern words 'economy' and 'ecology'. The integration between actual goods and services and economic systems- broadly known as the real economy- was challenged by the rise of purely financial markets in which monetary activities became dominant, a key factor in the 2008 financial crisis. The consequences of this crisis, and the subsequent great recession led to renewed debate as to the sustainability of a paradigm based on economic growth, sustained by consumer credit and resource extraction.

As we saw in session one, 'growth' is synonymous with 'good' or 'healthy' with regards to the economy in media discourse, and contesting this is part of the degrowth project. This also applies to other ways we discuss the ways we live, work and come together. Recent trends in community development have emphasised terms such as 'resilience', 'social capital' and 'assets', but these concepts can be blind to social class, inequalities and the extent to which "celebrating the 'self-reliance' of the poor raised a red flag to the degree that it echoed ideologies that justified the dismantling of the redistributive functions of the state" (Derickson 2016:2).

The task of creating new stories and counter-cultural ways of making sense of how we should collectively proceed in the context of the current 'great humbling' reveals a number of possibilities based on mutuality, co-operation and meaningful relationship. A few suggested perspectives follow, but part of the degrowth work is to create, innovate and collaborate together, so this is not prescriptive or exhaustive (and the other sessions contain many other tools in the toolbox).



Derickson (*ibid*:3) offers resourcefulness to “describe a normative vision for the relationship between the broader social formation and the community itself in which they were properly and fairly resourced to collectively arrive at and work to realize their own visions for the future.”

In the Majority World and in areas of multiple deprivation in the Minority World, leapfrogging (New Internationalist 1996:online) describes communities and countries who are passing over the stages in standard development which require a typical extractivist, high-carbon industrialisation process, going instead directly to a high-wellbeing, low-impact sustainable way of life without needing to get ‘rich’ first.

Contraction and convergence (Stott 2012) describes a mechanism (primarily internationally, but potentially within societies) to ensure that resources are equitably distributed to those whose ecological impact and living standards are low, along with an approach to development that gives financial power to individuals and local communities, and provides the incentive to make low carbon choices.

Rushkoff (2019:199) invites us to join Team Human, resistant to the forces that would conquer us, using our social connections to orient ourselves, ensure mutual survival, and derive meaning and purpose as our biological legacy.

Cahn (2000:10) developed models of time-banking in which members agree to give and receive services based on time equivalents, not money, and co-production: ” Assets became: no more throw-away people; Redefining work became: no more free rides for the market economy through discrimination and exploitation; Reciprocity became: Stop creating dependencies while profiting from their troubles; Social capital became: no more dis-investing in families, neighbourhoods, and communities.”

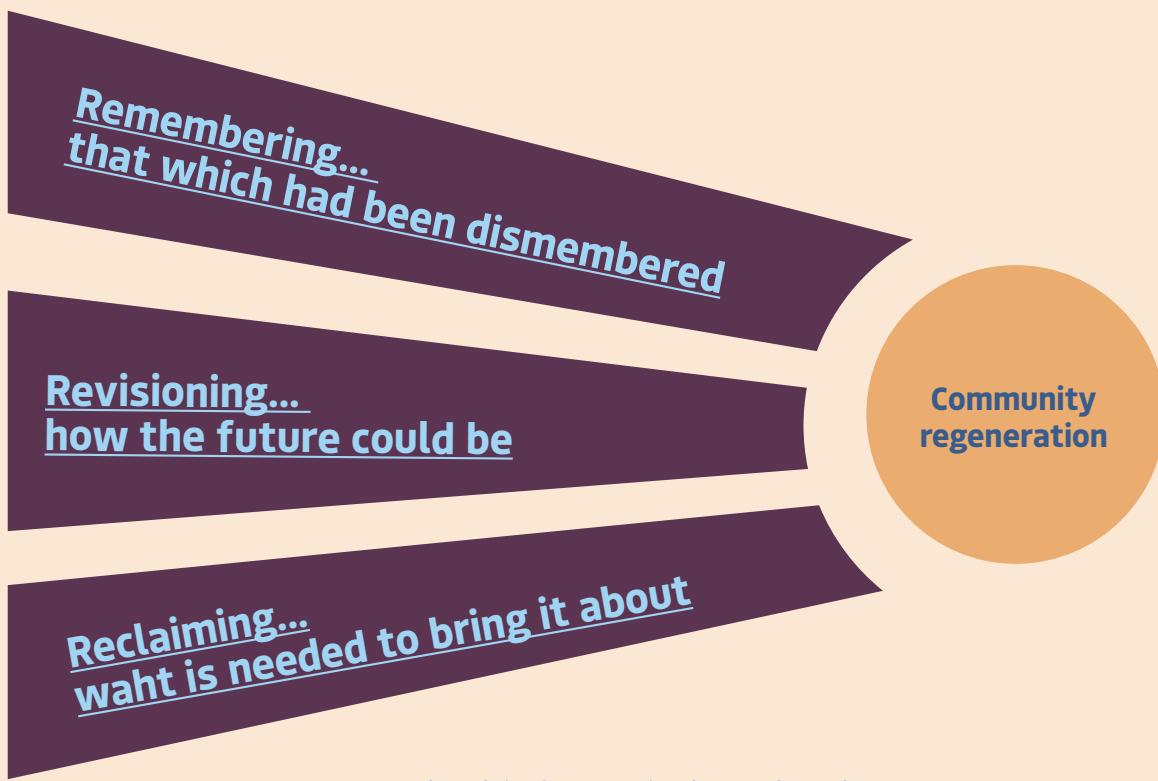
The Cycle of Belonging and The Rubric of Regeneration (McIntosh 2008) provide tools in which we can orient ourselves within our contexts and communities and collectively ensure dignified sufficiency.



Max-Neef (1991:22) proposed that fundamental human needs must be understood as a system; that is, all human needs are interrelated and interactive. True satisfaction of human needs cannot be obtained by consuming economic goods. When this consumption is made an end in itself, rather than being seen as just one means to satisfy needs, it places life at the service of consumer goods, rather than the goods at the service of life.

The end of this section is necessarily contingent and provisional, because it requires our collective participation to revision, restore and regenerate. The future is diffuse, unpredictable and unstable, and there is much work to do. Degrowth as a frame provides a setting for work, play, exploration and organising into this future and allows us to not just wait and see what happens, but to make something happen. Where we go with it is up to us.

FUNDAMENTAL HUMAN NEEDS	Being (Qualities)	Having (Things)	Doing (Actions)	Interacting (Settings)
Susbsistence	Physical and mental health	Food, shelter, work	Feed, clothe, rest, work	living environment, social setting
Protection	Care, adaptability, autonomy	Social security, health systems, work	Co-operate, plan, take care of, help	Social environment, dwelling
Affection	Respect, sense of humour, generosity, sensuality	Friendships, family, relationships with nature	Share, take care of, make love, express emotions	Privacy, intimate spaces of togetherness
Understanding	Critical capacity	Literature, teachers, education	Analyse, study, investigate, meditate	Schools, families, universities, communities
Participation	Receptiveness, dedication, sense of humour	Responsibilities, duties, work, rights	Co-operate, dissent, express opinions	Association, parties, place of worship, neighbourhoods
Leisure	Imagination, tranquility, spontaneity	Games, parties, peace of mind	Daydream, remember, relax, have fun	Nature, intimate spaces, places to be alone
Creation	Imagination, boldness, inventiveness, curiosity	Abilities, skills, work, techniques	Invent, build, design, work, compose, interpret	Spaces for expression, workshops, audiences
Identity	Sense of belonging, self-esteem, consistency	Language, religions, work, customs, values, norms	Get to know oneself, grow, commit oneself	Places one belongs to, everyday settings
Freedom	Autonomy, passion, self-esteem, open-mindedness	Equal rights, choice	Dissent, choose, run risks, develop awareness	Anywhere



'The Rubric of Regeneration' (McIntosh 2008)

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# B1. Radical Ecological Democracy

## Some More Reflections from the South on Degrowth

Kothari, Ashish, 2016.

**Beyond Development - Snapshot from India**

**K**othari describes a range of crucial elements or pillars of transformation that have been co-developed by several hundred practitioners and thinkers from across India as an alternative to a development framework:

- “Ecological sustainability and wisdom, including the conservation of nature (ecosystems, species, functions, cycles) and its resilience, ensuring that human activities are based on environmental ethics and are within planetary limits.
- Social well-being and justice, including lives that are physically, socially, culturally, and spiritually fulfilling, where there is equity (including gender equity) in socio-economic and political entitlements, benefits, rights and responsibilities, and where cultural diversity is celebrated and promoted. Attempts to bring back ancient Indian beliefs in ‘enoughness’, voluntary simplicity or austerity, without falling into the trap of bigoted religiosity, are part of this.
- Direct democracy, where decision-making starts at the smallest unit of human settlement, in which every human has the right, capacity and opportunity to take part; envisaging larger levels of representative or delegated governance that are downwardly accountable, defined on the basis of ecological and cultural contiguity and linkages ('ecoregions' or 'biocultural' regions).
- Economic democracy, in which local communities have control over the means of production, distribution, exchange, and markets; where localization is a key principle and larger trade and exchange are built on it. This is the basis of several initiatives at producer companies and cooperatives, and producer-consumer linkages in fields such as food and crafts. The re-invention of non-monetised exchanges (barter and other forms) and local bazaars, infused with equity principles that may have been weak in the past, has to be part of this process.
- Knowledge commons, where the generation, conservation, transmission and use of knowledge (including traditional and modern forms) are collective processes, not confined to formal sector ‘experts’ or to state or corporate run institutions.”



# C1 Culture shift

## Redirecting humanity's path to a flourishing future

Jeremy Lent, 2018

**W**hat do all these ideas have in common—a tax on carbon, big investments in renewable energy, a livable minimum wage, and freely accessible healthcare? The answer is that we need all of them, but even taken together they're utterly insufficient to redirect humanity away from impending catastrophe and toward a truly flourishing future.

That's because the problems these ideas are designed to solve, critical as they are, are symptoms of an even more profound problem: the implicit values of a global economic and political system that is driving civilization toward a precipice.

Even with the best of intentions, those actively working to reform the current system are a bit like software engineers valiantly trying to fix multiple bugs in a faulty software program: each fix complicates the code, leading inevitably to a new set of bugs that require even more heroic workarounds. Ultimately, it becomes clear that the problem isn't just the software: an entirely new operating system is required to get where we need to go.

This realization dawned on me gradually over the years I spent researching my book, *The Patterning Instinct: A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning*. My research began as a personal search for meaning. I'd been through a personal crisis when the certainties on which I'd built my early life came crashing down around me. I wanted my life going forward to be truly meaningful—but based on what foundation? I was determined to sort through the received narratives of meaning until I came across a foundation I could really believe in.

My drive to answer these questions led me to explore the patterns of meaning that different cultures throughout history have constructed. Just like peeling an onion, I realized that one layer of meaning frequently covered deeper layers that structure the daily thoughts and values that most people take for granted. It was a journey of nearly ten years, during which I dedicated myself to deep research in disciplines such as neuroscience, history and anthropology.

Finally, I discovered that what makes humans unique is that we—to a greater extent than any other species—have what I call a ‘patterning instinct’: we are driven to pattern meaning into our world. That drive is what led humans to develop language, myth, and culture. It enabled us to invent tools and develop science, giving us tremendous benefits but also putting us on a collision course with the natural world.

Each culture tends to construct its worldview on a root metaphor of the universe, which in turn defines people's relationship to nature and each other, ultimately leading to a set of

values that directs how that culture behaves. It's those culturally derived values that have shaped history.

Early hunter-gatherers, for example, understood nature as a 'giving parent,' seeing themselves as part of a large extended family, intrinsically connected with the spirits of the natural world around them. When agriculture first emerged about twelve thousand years ago, new values such as property, hierarchy and wealth appeared, leading early civilizations to view the universe as dominated by a hierarchy of gods who required propitiation through worship, ritual and sacrifice.

Beginning with the ancient Greeks, a radically new, dualistic way of thinking about the universe emerged, conceiving a split cosmos divided between a heavenly domain of eternal abstraction and a worldly domain polluted with imperfection. This cosmological split was paralleled by the conception of a split human being composed of an eternal soul temporarily imprisoned in a physical body that is destined to die. Christianity, the world's first systematic dualistic cosmology, built on the Greek model by placing the source of meaning in an external God in the heavens, while the natural world became merely a desacralized theater for the human drama to be enacted.

The Christian cosmos set the stage for the modern worldview that emerged in seventeenth century Europe with the Scientific Revolution. The belief in the divinity of reason, inherited from the ancient Greeks, served as an inspiration for the scientific discoveries of pioneers such as Galileo, Kepler, and Newton, who all believed that they were glimpsing 'the mind of God.'

But the worldview that inspired these breakthroughs had a darker side. The Scientific Revolution was built on metaphors such as 'nature as a machine' and 'conquering nature' which have shaped the values and behaviors of the modern age. The entailments of a dualistic cosmos inherited from the Greeks have defined our received beliefs, many of which we accept implicitly even though they are based on flawed assumptions.

We are told that humans are fundamentally selfish—indeed even our genes are selfish—and that an efficiently functioning society is one where everyone rationally pursues their own self-interest. We accept technocratic fixes to problems that require more integrated, systemic solutions on the premise that nature is just a very complicated machine—one that is entirely separate from humanity.

Continued growth in Gross Domestic Product is seen as the basis for economic and political success, even though GDP measures nothing more than the rate at which we are transforming nature and human activities into the monetary economy, no matter how beneficial or harmful it may be. And the world's financial markets are based on the belief that the global economy will keep growing indefinitely even though that is impossible on a finite planet. 'No problem,' we are told, since technology will always find a new solution.

These underlying flaws in our global operating system stem ultimately from a sense of disconnection. Our minds and bodies, reason and emotion are seen as split parts within ourselves. Human beings are understood as individuals separated from each other, and humanity as a whole is perceived as separate from nature. At the deepest level, it is this sense of separation that is inexorably leading human civilization to potential disaster.

However, the same human patterning instinct that has brought us to this precipice is also capable of turning us around and onto a path of sustainable flourishing. We have the capacity to build an alternative worldview around a sense of connectedness within the web of life—a sense shared by indigenous cultures around the world from the earliest times.

I've seen this idea disparaged as a New Agey, kumbaya-style mentality even by otherwise progressive thinkers. However, modern scientific findings validate the underlying connectedness of all living beings. Insights from complexity theory and systems biology show that the connections between things are frequently more important than the things themselves. Life itself is now understood as a self-organizing, self-regenerating complex that extends like a fractal at ever-increasing scale, from a single cell to the global system of life on Earth.

Human beings, too, are best understood not by their selfish drives for power but by cooperation, group identity, and a sense of fair play. In contrast to chimpanzees, who are obsessed with competing against each other, human beings evolved to become the most cooperative of primates, working collaboratively on complex tasks and creating communities with shared values and practices that became the basis for culture and civilization. In the view of prominent evolutionary psychologists, it was our intrinsic sense of fairness that led to the evolutionary success of our species and created the cognitive foundation for crucial values of the modern world such as freedom, equality and representative government.

Just as the values of previous generations shaped history, so the values we collectively choose to live by today will shape our future. The cognitive patterns instilled in us by the dominant culture are the results of a particular worldview that arose at a specific time and place in human history. This worldview has now passed its expiration date. It is causing enormous unnecessary suffering throughout the globe and driving our civilization toward collapse.

Rather than trying to transcend what we are, our most important task is to peel away this received worldview, reach within ourselves to feel our deepest motivations as living beings embedded in the web of life, and act on them.



## C2 Tim Kasser, 2012 Values and the Next Generation

Psychologists have collected data from thousands of people in dozens of nations around the world to understand what humans value and how they prioritize different aims in life. These studies consistently show that the human value system is composed of about a dozen basic types of values, including aims such as having caring relationships, having fun, pursuing spiritual understanding, and feeling safe. Thus far, the evidence suggests that people in every corner of the globe appear to care about and be motivated by each of these basic values, at least to some extent.

Not only do people have the same fundamental types of values, but these values are also organized in similar ways in people's minds.<sup>1,2</sup> Specifically, the evidence strongly suggests that the human value system is organized such that some values tend to be relatively consistent with each other, and thus easy to pursue simultaneously, whereas other values tend to be in relative conflict, and thus difficult to pursue at the same time. The extent of compatibility or conflict between values can be statistically represented in circumplex models (for an example, see Figure 1). Values are placed near each other in the circumplex when the pursuit of one value facilitates success at another value; for example, most people experience the values of image and status as compatible, as buying an in-fashion handbag or automobile not only enhances one's image, but also conveys greater status. Values are placed on opposite sides of the circumplex when the pursuit of one value interferes with another; for example, most people find it relatively difficult to pursue spiritual goals while focused on hedonistic pleasures (it is difficult, for example, to party late on Saturday night and then pray early on Sunday morning).

Other studies offer additional support for the idea that the human value system is organized in this fashion by showing that thinking about one set of values has predictable ripple effects on others.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, thinking about one value both bleeds over into compatible values and suppresses conflicting values. For example, if a person thinks about the importance of financial success, then image and popularity will usually rise in priority (as such pursuits are compatible with the desire for financial success), whereas giving back to the community will decline in importance (as that aim generally conflicts with the desire to make more money).

Because people's aims in life influence their attitudes and behaviors,<sup>4</sup> numerous studies show that prioritization of two particular sets of values affects outcomes relevant to many of the challenges humans currently face. The first set of values includes the extrinsic aims of financial success, image, and popularity. These values are called extrinsic because they are focused on rewards and other people's opinions, and usually are not satisfying in and of themselves. The second set of values involves the intrinsic aims of self-acceptance, affiliation, and community feeling. These values are called intrinsic because they tend to satisfy people's inherent psychological needs.<sup>5</sup> Many studies show that the relative prioritization of intrinsic versus extrinsic values bears consistent associations with people's personal well-being, their relationships with other people, and their treatment of the environment.

For instance, dozens of studies have documented that the more people prioritize values such as money, image, and status, the lower their well-being and the greater their reported distress. As such extrinsic values rise in importance, people experience less happiness and life satisfaction, fewer pleasant emotions (like joy and contentment), and more unpleasant emotions (like anger and anxiety) in their day-to-day lives. They also tend to be more depressed and anxious, and are more likely to use substances like cigarettes and alcohol. Even physical problems like headaches, stomachaches, and backaches are associated with a strong focus on extrinsic values. In contrast, placing higher importance on intrinsic values (and successfully pursuing these values) is associated with being happier and healthier.

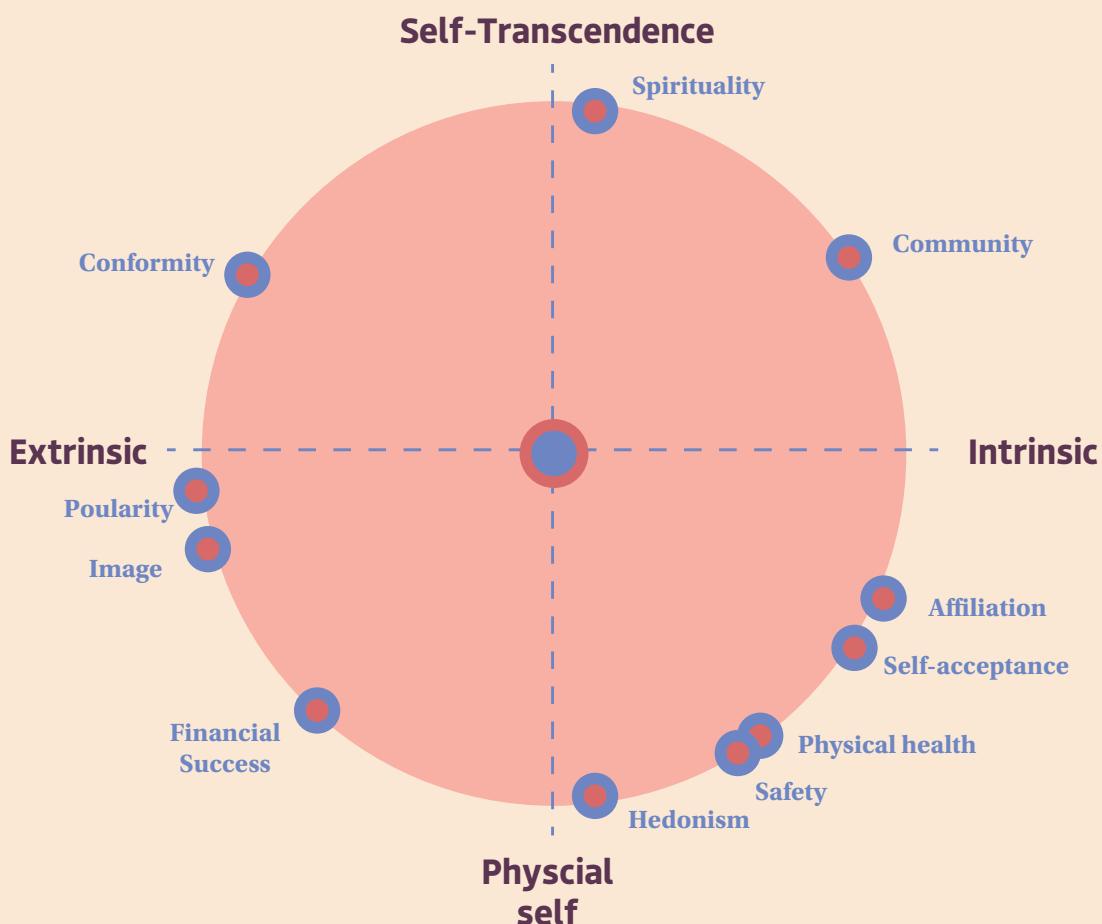


Figure 1: This circumplex model is based on circular stochastic modeling procedures applied to the goal-importance ratings of approximately 1800 college students in 15 cultures. Values adjacent to each other on the circumplex are experienced as relatively compatible whereas values on opposite sides of the circumplex are experienced as in relative conflict.)

Richard Morin/Solutions (Source: Grouzet et al., 2005)

Social behavior also relates to people's relative focus on extrinsic versus intrinsic values. People tend to be more empathic, cooperative, and caring when they prioritize intrinsic values, whereas a stronger emphasis on extrinsic concerns like money and image is associated with more manipulative and competitive behaviors. Unethical business and antisocial behaviors have also been shown to be more common among those who prioritize extrinsic values.<sup>7</sup> What's more, when they consider material belongings and image to be relatively important, people express more prejudicial attitudes toward other ethnicities and a stronger belief that downtrodden groups deserve what they have (or don't have).<sup>8</sup> Even brief reminders of extrinsic values can affect people's social behavior: one set of studies showed that subtly reminding people of money (by having them unscramble phrases with money-relevant words or view a computer screen-saver with a dollar sign on it) leads to less generous and helpful behaviors moments later.<sup>9</sup> This is a good example of the "suppression" effect, as the activation of the extrinsic value of financial success leads people to orient away from more intrinsic values such as generosity and caring for others.

Ecological behaviors and attitudes are also consistently associated with people's values. Studies have found that people who prioritize extrinsic values care less about the environment and other species, whereas intrinsic values promote more ecologically sustainable attitudes and behaviors.<sup>10</sup> And once again, even brief reminders of these values can affect ecological behaviors and attitudes. For instance, U.S. college students led to think about times when their nation has acted to support freedom, to build family values, and to be generous to others (i.e., intrinsic values) later endorsed more sustainable ecological policies, such as support for public transportation and smaller homes.<sup>11</sup> And another study found that among people who tend to care a great deal about material possessions and social status, thinking for a few minutes about the intrinsic values of affiliation and being broadminded caused them to express stronger care for the environment and greater desire to help poor people in developing nations.<sup>12</sup> These results show that activating intrinsic values can cause a beneficial "bleed-over" in people's value systems, leading them to want to support the larger community of people, other species, and future generations.

These value dynamics are also relevant at the national level. Nations ranked as having citizens who especially endorse intrinsic over extrinsic values also have children with greater overall well-being, provide new parents with more generous leave after a baby is born, and emit less CO<sub>2</sub> per capita (even after controlling for national wealth).<sup>13</sup>

To summarize, three hopeful messages emerge from this body of empirical research:

- Intrinsic values are basic to the human value system, and thus can be encouraged and activated in all people.
- Intrinsic values can be an antidote to extrinsic values, as encouraging the former suppresses the latter.
- Intrinsic values hold promise not only for solving social and ecological problems, but also for helping people be happier and healthier.





## Some Possibilities for Action

This values-based perspective suggests an empirically-supported strategy for addressing humanity's greatest challenges: Discourage extrinsic values and encourage intrinsic values in people's lives and in society. Indeed, if one uses this perspective to look at seemingly disparate efforts to promote human well-being, social cohesion, or ecological sustainability, many such efforts, at base, critique the extrinsic values of status and possessions and instead promote intrinsic values such as self-acceptance and connection to others. Space limitations do not allow for a full exposition of this idea,<sup>14</sup> but consider the following six examples.

### Voluntary Simplicity

A not-insignificant minority of individuals in Western nations choose to drop out of the work-spend-work-some-more lifestyle and instead pursue the "inner riches" of personal growth, family, and volunteering. Examined through a values lens, such voluntary simplifiers have rejected extrinsic values in order to focus on intrinsic values. This suggestion is supported by empirical analyses showing that voluntary simplifiers prioritize intrinsic over extrinsic values more highly than do mainstream Americans. What's more, these differences in value prioritization explain, in large part, why voluntary simplifiers are both happier and living more sustainably than mainstream Americans.<sup>15</sup>

### Mindfulness Meditation

For at least the last couple thousand years, millions of humans have engaged in practices designed to enhance their awareness of their present state. Contemporary scientific studies document that cultivating this experience of mindfulness not only yields psychological and physical health benefits, but also helps people care less about material possessions and jockeying for social position and more about their own inner lives and their connection to the community. What's more, mindfulness also helps people live more sustainably and resist the endless pursuit of acquiring more material stuff.<sup>15,16</sup>

### Time Affluence

In many economically developed nations, work hours have been increasing over the last few decades. Consequently, people have less time to pursue their own interests, to be with their families, and to be involved in their communities. To counter these trends, the time-affluence movement has proposed policies to provide new parents with more generous paid leave, to extend paid vacations, and to decrease overall work hours.<sup>17</sup> Looked at through a values lens, each of these policies changes the focus from working and earning (i.e., extrinsic values) to family, opportunities for rejuvenation, and more equitable distribution of labor among citizens (i.e., intrinsic values).

### Advertising

Citizens in contemporary consumer cultures are bombarded each day with thousands of commercial messages designed to stimulate their desire to consume. Viewed through a values lens, such messages activate and encourage the extrinsic portion of people's value systems. As such, efforts to remove advertising from public spaces (e.g., in subways, on highways, and in schools) and to ban advertising to children, who are particularly susceptible to such value messages, can be understood as attempts to discourage extrinsic values. This values-based approach would also be consistent with proposals to revoke government subsidies that allow businesses to deduct advertising expenditures from their tax returns and to instead tax such expenditures as a form of "value pollution."<sup>18</sup>

### Alternative Indicators of Progress

Policymakers, business people, and the media typically use economic indicators, such as Gross National Product, consumer confidence, and stock market trends, to express the health and prosperity of a nation, despite the facts that these indicators were never designed for this purpose and that increases in these indicators have been associated with stagnation in citizens' well-being and with greater ecological degradation over time.<sup>19</sup> Many individuals and organizations have suggested developing alternative indicators, with proposals including Lord Layard's happiness measures, the Kingdom of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness approach, the Happy Planet Index developed by the new economics foundation, and the recent recommendations of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Development and Social Progress, created by French president Nicolas Sarkozy. While each alternative indicator has its own particular features, all of them de-privilege extrinsic values (by taking the focus off profit-making and economic growth at any cost) and incorporate data reflecting a nation's success on measures relevant to intrinsic values (e.g., equal distribution of wealth, environmental health, opportunities for free time, and mental health).

### Challenging Corporations

Publicly-traded corporations are frequently blamed for social and ecological ills.<sup>20</sup> These organizations' mandate to maximize financial profit for shareholders (i.e., extrinsic values) can lead boards and CEOs to make decisions that harm overall environmental or societal well-being. Proposals to replace this dominant business model with cooperatives, benefit corporations, and stakeholder-based organizations all hold promise because each involves tempering the concern for profit with more intrinsic concerns, such as the democratic participation of workers and the good of the community.<sup>21</sup>

### Conclusion

Despite the fact that these six existing efforts all share a common value base, it is relatively rare that people who practice mindfulness meditation sit down with those trying to create benefit corporations, that voluntary simplifiers converse with people promoting policies for more generous parental-leave laws, or that organizations developing alternative indicators of national progress combine forces with those trying to ban advertising to children. But there is good reason for these diverse groups (as well as others not mentioned here) to recognize that they all are, at base, trying to discourage a focus on extrinsic values and to encourage the successful pursuit of intrinsic values. For if individuals and organizations were to acknowledge these shared goals, perhaps the compartmentalization and competition that seem so prevalent in today's civil society can be avoided. Instead, perhaps the next generation will work to coordinate and jointly design interventions, communications, and campaigns that discourage values such as money, image, and status and that instead provide many opportunities to pursue values such as personal growth, close connections to other people, and contributions to the larger world.<sup>22</sup> As I hope to have shown here, a solid empirical base suggests that if such broad coalitions were to use the values-based approach articulated in this article, substantial progress could be made toward solving society's most pressing problems.

# D Additional Resources

Max-Neef: Human Scale Development

Time-banking and Co-production- Edgar Cahn Resources - online and in print

William Morris: Useful Work Vs Useless Toil

Beyond Growth Resources

Adam Curtis BBC documentary discussing Edward Bernays- The Century of the Self -  
Part 1: "Happiness Machines"

How to Destroy Surveillance Capitalism- Online book by Cory Doctorow

Kate Raworth Doughnut Economics TED talk

Resources on technology

F-Droid - Free and Open Source Android App Repository- free software for your phone

Ubuntu Linux - free software alternative to Windows

Free Software Directory searchable directory of over 15k free software packages

A crowdsourced set of tech, tools and data relating to the Coronavirus Pandemic

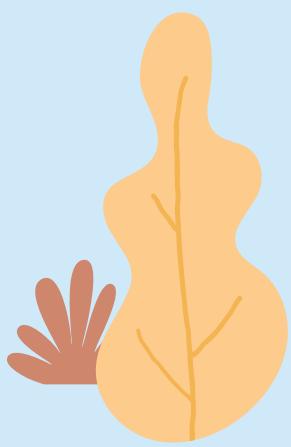
Self-Repair Manifesto Repair Manifesto

'Tools for Conviviality' Ivan Illich

Technology as if people mattered- Dinyar Godrej

Tim Kasser Video: The High Price of Materialism













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