

Long abstract for degrowth conference in Leipzig

The big sticks against degrowth - on the necessity of reembedding in order to make degrowth attainable

"The apartments in the house where I live are turned into individual private property. In the private school a lower proportion of the kids drop out. And the labour market forces me to become a self-employed businessman.

Shall I then sacrifice myself? My son? My home? Of course not. And thus we all become parts of a system which we have not chosen ourselves - into which we have been forced.

Kristian Lundberg: This isn't my country
(2013)

I

It has become extremely demanding to opt out of 'the growth society' - tGS - in which neither the author Kristian Lundberg nor I feel at home anymore. Sweden is a good place to study the mechanisms which forces people to stay in tGS. When I stayed in the US for a year in the early 1970s I got the impression that it took much more courage to opt out there than in my home country. At home I could expect to find a good school for my future kids even if I didn't 'arrange' a career for myself. Since then Sweden has been 'normalised'. In Polanyian terms Swedes have been disembedded. With the terminology of Esping-Andersen the decommodification led by Social Democracy until the 1970s has been reversed.

The whip which forces individuals to be parts of tGS applies mutatis mutandis also to nation states. For states the whip can be symbolised by capital flight. A scholar who analysed this for the contemporary period is Eric Helleiner (for instance in 'the reemergence of international finance').

II

I tried to address the whip which forces nation states at a degrowth conference in Helsingør, Denmark in 2013. Among the key-notes there were Jan-Otto Andersson and Christer Sanne with whom I have had ongoing life-long dialogues.

My aim in Helsingør was to illustrate in what ways the present arrangements for the international flows of finance and trade constrain the possibilities for degrowth. Central to my argument was that a global super-disembedding has taken place since the 1970s.

In financial flow terms the super-disembedding was mirrored i.a. in a rising ratio of global debt to global monetary through-put (World GDP). A reasonable starting year for the 'pumping up' of the global bubble is 1980. From then to 2006 the World GDP grew from 10 T dollar to 48 T dollar. Financial assets rose much faster so that the relation of financial assets to World GDP rose from 1,2 to 3,5 (i.a. Hufschmid).

A key concept for analysing the global super-disembedding are - besides disembedding - reciprocity. (also a Polanyian concept). Non monetary - reciprocal - relations have suffered when monetarised market and 'state' relations have grown as proportions of the sum total of the result of human interaction for material well-being. At the same time the 'decommodifying' qualities of 'state monetary relations' have been reversed (an example is equality enhancing redistribution by staes).

I want to point to two effects which the mechanisms mentioned have in a degrowth perspective. One is to push the life strategies of humans in material consumption directions. This was hinted at in part I of this abstract. The other one is that the social sustainability, which is a precondition for ecological sustainability, is weakened.

As an amateur in the degrowth field I would like to find out to what extent the Polanyian Political Economy discourses hinted at above can contribute to the degrowth debate.

A final caveat: This abstract is sent from Grövelsjön at the mountain ridge between Norway and Sweden which explains some of the formal deficiencies of the abstract.

Grövelsjön in mid March 2014

/ Ernst Hollander

(Dr of Tech, former blue-collar union researcher or whatever)