

Between revolution and reform: A critical reflection of the degrowth discourse

Degrowth is a conglomerate of several streams of thought offering a variety of sometimes conflicting positions (Demaria et al., 2013). Some of these tensions smoulder inexplicitly below the surface of celebrated diversity. This proposal explicates the tension between conservative and reformist approaches on the one hand and revolutionary approaches driving for fundamental change on the other hand. The author hopes to start a critical reflection within the degrowth movement and strengthen its position within and towards outsiders.

Conservative and reformist thinkers like Miegel (2010), Jackson (2009), and Seidl and Zahrnt (2010) see degrowth as an inevitability resulting from ecological limits and all-encompassing resource scarcity (Heinberg, 2007). Institutions of the status quo, e.g. the welfare state, taxes, and capitalist work and ownership relations, remain unchanged. Instead, downsizing economic activity combined with reformistic fixes in welfare institutions is envisioned.

Revolutionary degrowthers like Trainer (2012), Deriu (2012), or van Griethuysen (2012) question the status quo more fundamentally. According to them degrowth poses a critique of the capitalist order and the “property-based rationale” (van Griethuysen, 2012) as well as re-think democratic representation and decision-making (Deriu, 2012).

In this article the conflicting positions will be confronted and contrasted with one another to explicate tensions and overlaps. The goal is a systematic comparison of demands, visions, and levels of change for a transition towards a degrowth society.

References

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