

BETWEEN REVOLUTION AND REFORM: A CRITICAL REFLECTION OF THE DEGROWTH DISCOURSE

Jan C. Zoellick
Goethe-University Frankfurt a.M.

CONTENTS

- Post-growth vs. degrowth
 - Revolution and reform
 - Towards an ideology?
-

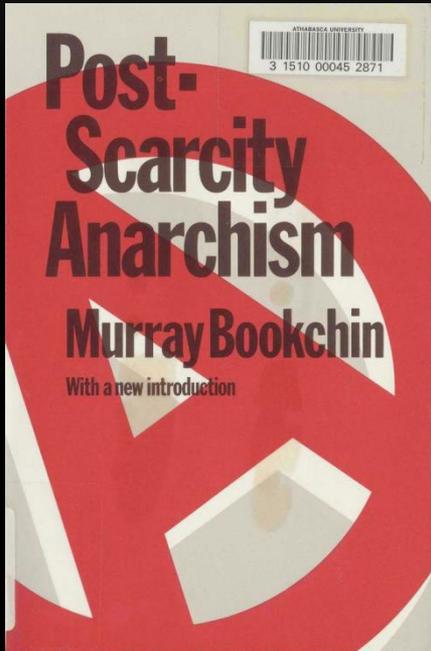
POST-GROWTH VS. DEGROWTH

- Post-growth as a time after a period of growth
 - Post-growth as an ecological inevitability and lack of differentiation (“we”, “our”, and “us”)
 - All-encompassing scarcity
 - New and different values
-

POST-GROWTH VS. DEGROWTH

- Degrowth as “equitable downscaling of production and consumption that increases human wellbeing and enhances ecological conditions at the local and global level, in the short and long term”
(Schneider et al., 2010, p. 512)
 - Critique of technology and industrialised development
 - Scarcity and a change of values
-

POST-GROWTH VS. DEGROWTH



Today, however, capitalism is a parasite on the future, a vampire that survives on the technology and resources of freedom. The industrial capitalism of Marx's time organized its commodity relations around a prevailing system of material scarcity; the state capitalism of our time organizes its commodity relations around a prevailing system of material abundance.

A century ago, scarcity had to be endured; today, it has to be enforced [...].

(Bookchin, 1986 [1971], p. 59)

POST-GROWTH VS. DEGROWTH

The Accursed Share
An Essay on General Economy

Georges Bataille.

Volume I
Consumption

ZONE BOOKS · NEW YORK

1988

I will begin with a basic fact: The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.

(Bataille, 1988 [1967], p. 21)

REVOLUTION AND REFORM

- Private property
 - Utilitarianism
 - Democracy
 - Work relations
-

PRIVATE PROPERTY

“Money and capital are necessary means to keep the globalised labour-divided markets functional. [...] Banking and financial services which immediately serve the real economy are to be deregulated where possible; [...]”

(Jorberg, 2010, p. 150)

“[The degrowth project] corresponds to a complete *reversal in the normative hierarchy of social choices*, from a property-based capitalist economic rationality that subordinates eco-social considerations to capitalist requirements, to an *eco-social economic rationale* that explicitly subordinates economic decisions to ecological and social considerations.”

(van Griethuysen, 2012, p. 264)

UTILITARIANISM

“The more equitable and permeable a society is the more the goal of ‘greatest happiness for all’ is served.”

(Ax, 2010, p. 79)

”Due to Serge Latouche [...] the anti-utilitarian movement also produced one of the main strands of degrowth.”

(Romano, 2015, p. 23)

DEMOCRACY

“The next source for the degrowth movement springs from the calls for deeper democracy [...]. In particular, degrowth is a response to the lack of democratic debates on economic development, growth, technological innovation and advancement.”

(Demaria et al., 2013, p. 199)

“I conclude therefore that degrowth cannot foster a democratic order; if something, it threatens democracy. And vice versa, within a democratic framework it cannot be taken for granted that degrowth will become a value to be pursued.”

(Romano, 2012, p. 584)

WORK RELATIONS

“An important key consists in the reduction and redistribution of the average wage labour time.”

(Paech, 2011, p. 131)

“Some advocates of de-growth believe we could still have a capitalist economy, again revealing a failure to grasp how radical and enormous the implications of de-growth are.”

(Trainer, 2012, p. 593)

“[T]he future of work - paid or unpaid, productive or reproductive, waged or voluntary, outside the home or domestic - under energy limits is an extremely complicated research question.”

(Kallis, 2013, p. 96)

TOWARDS AN IDEOLOGY?

- Consensus on
rebound effects,
scarcity,
scepticism of technical solutions,
critique of development as industrialisation,
focus on immaterial values rather than material ones
-

TOWARDS AN IDEOLOGY?

- Degrowth proponents are building an ideological sphere based on a certain consensus while refraining from a debate on conflicting positions.
 - This is done to protect the own discourse and demonstrate unity towards out-groups and the hegemonic growth discourse.
-

Thank you for your attention



SOURCES

- Ax, C. (2010). Bildung fürs Leben. In I. Seidl & A. Zahrt (Eds.), *Postwachstumsgesellschaft: Konzepte für die Zukunft* (pp. 77-84). Marburg: Metropolis.
- Bataille, G. (1988 [1967]). *An accursed share. An essay on general economy*. New York: Zone Books.
- Bookchin, M. (1986 [1971]). *Post-scarcity anarchism* (2nd ed.). Montreal: Black Rose Books.
- Demaria, F., Schneider, F., Sekulova, F., & Martínez-Alier, J. (2013). What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement. *Environmental Values*, 22, 191-215.
- Jorberg, T. (2010). Finanzmärkte und Aufgabe der Banken. In I. Seidl & A. Zahrt (Eds.), *Postwachstumsgesellschaft: Konzepte für die Zukunft* (pp. 145-153). Marburg: Metropolis.
- Kallis, G. (2013). Societal metabolism, working hours and degrowth: A comment on Sorman and Giampietro. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 38, 94-98.
- Paech, N. (2011). Vom grünen Wachstumsmythos zur Postwachstumsökonomie. In H. Welzer & K. Wiegandt (Eds.), *Perspektiven einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung: Wie sieht die Welt im Jahr 2050 aus?* (pp. 131-151). Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag.
- Romano, O. (2012). How to rebuild democracy, re-thinking degrowth. *Futures*, 44(6), 582-589.
- Romano, O. (2015). Anti-utilitarianism. In G. D'Alisa, F. Demaria & G. Kallis (Eds.), *Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era* (pp. 21-24). Oxon, UK & New York, USA: Routledge.
- Schneider, F., Kallis, G., & Martínez-Alier, J. (2010). Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 18, 511-518.