

Sustainable DeGrowth: Prospects for an emerging paradigm

Ideas on DeGrowth

As might have been

presented by Joan Martinez Alier,

presented by Gjalt Huppes

Egmond aan Zee, 9 June 2010

Cultural background

- Dissatisfaction with promethean growth paradigm:
market dominated; private; consumerism; commodification; public goods erosion; globalisation; ...
- Georgescu-Roegen as scientific precursor: even Daly's steady state economy not viable
- Social movements, from romantic back to nature, to anarchist local communities, to austerity
- Deviating from Sustainable Development, which has growth as a key element

French/Latin and Anglo-Saxon roots

- Degrowth as anti-growth
- Latouche: Degrowth as political slogan: narrative, imaginary higher level driving force
- Growth as our problem, not the solution
- French roots: against modernity
- Illich: for human autonomy, against commodifying relations
- English Schumacher' Small is beautiful
- Georgescu-Roegen: Enjoyment of life; the good life
- Odum & Odom: against descent capitalism, no steady state
- Voluntary simplicity; search for happiness
- ➔ Economic degrowth required and resulting

Broader linkages:

Steady State Economy; Sustainability; Environment

- Kerschner: Degrowth for the richests, population decline after 2050, then globally equitable *quasi* steady state economy
- Sustainability as not based on continued economic growth, against sustainable development
- Decolonizing minds from economism, also in emerging countries; avoid consumerism trap
- Needs: food, health, education and housing, simple and good; the rest is culture, not requiring material products so much

Intermezzo:

- Rawls Theory of Justice; Third-Road Socio-Democrats (GB): richest richer, if this is helping the poor. Extravagant richness of an extremely small upper stratum

Broader linkages: Steady State Economy; Sustainability; ***Environment***

- Climate stability; and other environmental issues: new reasoning required now dead-end.
- How to reduce material consumption while industrializing?
- Social disruption: how to avoid? Also technically, commuter based transport systems.
- Rising labor productivity with constant production: unemployment.

What to do?

How to drive change towards DeGrowth?

- Grass roots movements
- Political background; ideology not well developed; coalitions, but which? At least North-South, with conservationists.
- How to build up counter power against growth adepts?
- Rethinking economic growth, and degrowth, before fetishising also degrowth.
- Narrative build-up

Practicalities

- **How to measure growth / degrowth**

Growth trap real but at least partially reversible:

- ***Work less: per day, per week, per year, per life***
if you are rich already: degrow consumption
- ***Consume differently:***
de-commodify; be environment friendly
- ***Make technology environment saving***
→ Overall eco-efficiency of production and consumption improve
- ***Result: People happier, environment better***