



# The degrowth proposition(s) and research questions

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# My thesis

Economic degrowth is inevitable and necessary. The issue is how to make it smooth and stable.

(“sustainable degrowth”)



# This presentation

1. Foundations: “inevitable and necessary”.
2. Tentative definition.
3. How to? Policies of transition.
4. Criticisms and Responses
5. Future research questions.

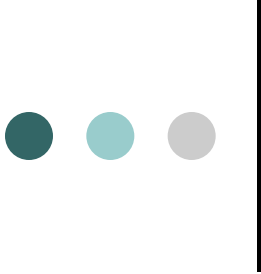


# 1. Foundations



*“A political slogan with  
theoretical implications”*  
(Serge Latouche)

...and theoretical foundations



# A tree with deep roots

- Ecological bio-economics (Georgescu-Roegen).
- French political ecology (Gorz, Kastoriadis).
- Simplicity economics (Sahlins, Illich) and bioregionalism (Bookchin).
- Critics of “development” (Sachs, Rist, Latouche).
- Sustainable consumption and industrial ecology.



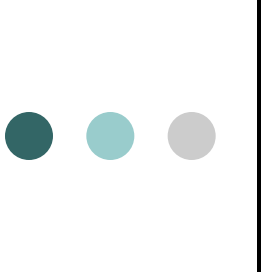
# Proposition 1: Resource limits to growth

1. Entropy and the economic process (Georgescu-Roegen) - from stock to flow resources.
2. Peak oil, peak raw materials (uranium?).
3. High EROI of renewable alternatives.



## Proposition 2: Efficiency improvements are not enough to avert climate change

1. Limited relative decoupling, no absolute decoupling.
2. 130-times lower carbon intensity by 2050 to achieve IPCC goal of 450 ppm (Jackson) .
3. Rebound effects and Jevon's paradox.
4. No technological miracle waiting around the corner.



Proposition 3: Any viable future economy will be by necessity of a lower scale.

1. “The solar economy”
2. The “weightless economy”.



## Proposition 4: Social limits to growth

1. Diminishing returns to income – Growth does not increase well-being after basic needs are satisfied.
2. Eternal scarcity of positional goods (Hirsh).
3. Equality and voluntary downshifting may increase well-being.



## 2. Definition



# Sustainable degrowth

- 1. Degrowth of environmental impact (physical degrowth).**
- 2. By selective degrowth of economic production and consumption.**
3. Through transition policies (e.g. taxes, working hours) and grassroots initiatives.
4. And radical changes in economic institutions.
5. Resulting in a “double dividend” (environmental and well-being).



# Two more points:

1. Sustainable degrowth is not equivalent to negative growth in a growth economy (recession or depression).
2. “Ignore GDP” (van den Bergh), though accept that more than likely it will decrease.



# 3. How to? Policies



# Some policies debated

- Reduction of working hours.
- Basic income.
- Extraction or Impact Caps.
- Resource or Infrastructure Moratoria.
- Environmental taxes (carbon tax).
- Income ceiling taxes.



## 4. Criticisms



# Frequent criticisms and my responses

- What about the Poor?
- “China and India”.
- Risky.
- Just get the prices right.
- Politically infeasible.
- Totalitarian or too idealistic of human nature.



## 5. Research questions



# Classes of questions

1. Ecological-economic.
2. Psychology of transition.
3. Anthropological – Historical.
4. Politics and political change.
5. Ecological macroeconomics.



# 1. Ecological-economic

- Renewable investments under a declining economy.
- Work under declining energy and economy.
- Food sufficiency under local, organic produce.
- Population dynamics under a changing economic structure.
- Investments in social infrastructures and social security under diminishing surpluses.



## 2. Psychology of transition

- The influence of aspirations.
- Positional effects – the “equality hypothesis”.



### 3. Anthropology - historical

- Learning from societies which did not accumulate.
- Alternative forms of exchange and social positioning.



## 4. Politics and political change

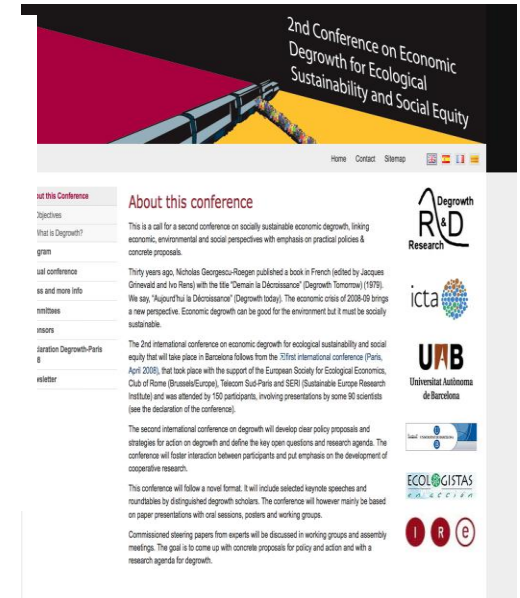
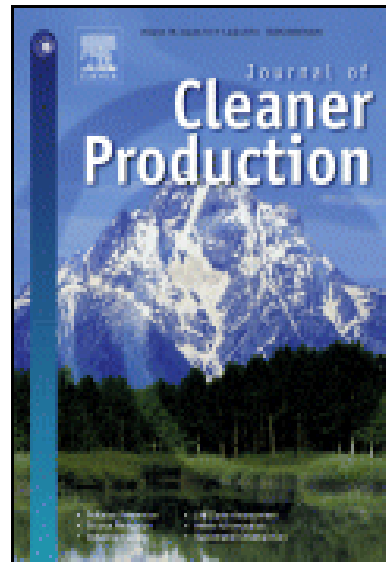
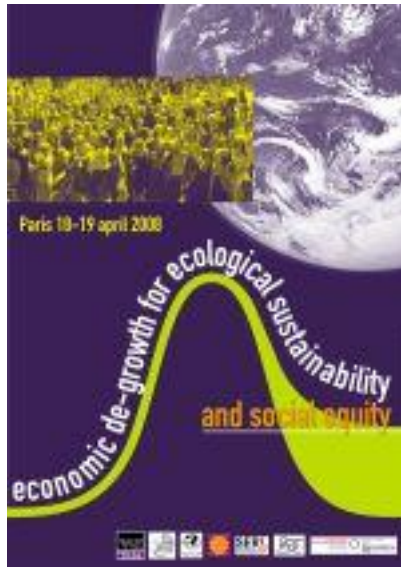
- Do not “appeal to” the State, but analyze its dynamics.
- Social movement-revolutionary dynamics.
- Alternative scenarios: “exit”, “voice”, “reform”.



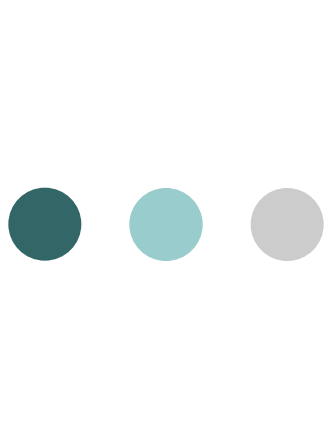
## 5. Ecological macroeconomics

- Relaunch EE debates about money, credit, debt, property.
- Are there fundamental incompatibilities between de/non-growth and basic institutions of capitalism (private property and credit, wage labour, etc)?

# Two international conferences and two new publications



[www.degrowth.eu](http://www.degrowth.eu)



Thank you!

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