Degrowth and sufficientarianism: finding the balance between too little and too much.

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Abstract

With the constant threat of climate change looming over the world, there is a need for a proposal that can adequately deal with climate change. Current measures seem inadequate to deal with climate change. Therefore, a radical change is needed and this can be achieved through degrowth and sufficientarianism. This thesis finds that implementing degrowth in combination with sufficientarianism is better equipped to deal with climate change and the distributional issues it raises, than other proposals such as green growth. Degrowth makes sure that we abide by the earth's ecological ceiling, while sufficientarianism ensures that everyone has enough and that current resources will be justly distributed.

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Introduction

Climate change is currently one of the most crucial challenges, and it brings many questions of how these challenges can be justly addressed. To be able to reduce the risks of climate change, it is of utmost importance that we limit greenhouse emissions (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2022). An obstacle in contemporary politics however, is that of the status quo, neoliberalism and capitalism. In order for these systems to be able to survive and properly function they require constant economic growth. The problem is that constant economic growth requires an increase in consumption and/or production, which means resources have to be extracted and consumed and this harms the environment (Foster, 1992, p. 79). While it seems like constant economic growth has been a paramount goal of states, only since the 1930s has GDP been measured, and it was only from the 1950s that states started to strive for growth (Kallis et al., 2018, pp, 309-310). Logically, it seems that this economic ideology of growth-based development is incompatible with adapting to climate change. As it incentivises an increase in (over)production and (over)consumption. However, to be able to adapt to climate change, there is a need for a decrease in production and consumption.

In recent years, one key proposal to counteract the demand for growth made by capitalism has been to 'degrow' economies. Degrowth has been an upcoming proposal in academic literature, gaining more recognition as people are looking for alternative proposals for the climate change crisis. According to some scholars, degrowth might be politically unlikely to be feasible because it would have to challenge the current status-quo and leading economic ideologies (Kallis et al., 2018, pp. 309-310), we should still seriously consider degrowth as a valid concept. This is because degrowth in its simplest form is a political and social radical reform, that will curb economic growth with less produced and less consumed, leading to lower emissions and a better and cleaner relationship with the environment (Kallis et al., 2018, p. 292; Singh, 2019, p. 138). We need to radically act to strive forwards to a cleaner environment, with climate change haunting us, to avoid more harm.

With degrowth also comes the question of limits. How far should we degrow? How far should those in need be allowed to grow? In order to explore these issues, I will make use of sufficientarianism, the believe that everyone should have enough (Shields, 2020, p. 2). There has however, been a lack of academic writing on the intersection of degrowth and distributive justice. There is a need for a radical approach, the current system seems unable to deal with climate change, therefore it is important to look at other proposals that can deal with it. While

degrowth establishes an upper-limit of what can be consumed, it is important to have a lower boundary. This makes sure that people can consume enough to live a sufficient life, which means that a person has their basic needs met. Therefore, degrowth together with sufficientarianism can establish a framework in which we find a safe lower- and upper-limit of what can be consumed and how costs and benefits should be distributed. The benefits of degrowth will be enjoyed by all, due to a healthier environment, and a focus on well-being as opposed to economic growth. Some aspects will benefit the poor more than the elite due to a distribution which will cause the elite to have 'less' and the poor to have 'more' than currently. The costs of degrowth will fall on the elite, as this group has consumed and polluted beyond their fair share. Degrowth will lead to a different way of dealing with climate change, with strong justifications for adaption and mitigation.

Degrowth and sufficientarianism can slow down and adapt to climate change, and make sure that the costs and benefits are fairly and justly distributed. Out of this follows the research question of this thesis: *How should the benefits and costs of degrowth be distributed within states?* I believe that degrowth is a valid approach and it can be used to help with many distributive issues, such as what number of resources can ecologically safe be consumed, as well as that it pays attention to why we consume and if certain consumptions are necessary at all.

The following chapter of this thesis will begin by defining the concepts that are central to this debate before delving into the existing literature of degrowth and green growth. The main debate will be highlighted, compared and evaluated. Chapter 2 will be on the critique of degrowth on consumption and the costs and benefits. Chapter 3 will be on the lower boundary of sufficientarianism and counterarguments.

Chapter 1: Literature review

There are many different conceptualisations of what degrowth is and also alternative proposals such as green growth or a-growth. This literature review will lay out the debate of degrowth and contrast and compare it to the alternative proposals.

Definitions

For this literature review it is necessary to lay out some baseline definitions that will be used. Firstly, the definition of degrowth needs to be addressed. Degrowth, as the word implies, means that the economy has to degrow. While degrowth sounds like a scary word and has been villainised as something we would absolutely not want, it rightly points out that how states currently produce and consume is not sustainable. Degrowth means that states will intentionally not pursue growth and curb their production and consumption in favour of environmental protection (Kallis et al., 2018, p. 292; Singh, 2019, p. 138). The consumption of the wealthy exceeds the ecological ceiling and by doing that hurt the environment, future generations and present less fortunate peoples (Kallis, et al., 2018, pp. 309-310). Because of the unsustainable current status quo of imperative economic growth, degrowth could be an alternative proposal that is equipped with dealing with questions of consumption and production.

Having established the working definition of degrowth it is important to assess what distributive justice actually entails. Here I will give the definitions of distributive justice and in chapter 3 I will expand on sufficientarianism. Although there are many different classifications of distributive justice, the most established classification is that it seeks to find out what the fairest way of sharing burdens and benefits are. The main views are; egalitarianism, sufficientarianism and prioritarianism (Timmer, 2021, p. 423). Egalitarians think that everyone should have an equal amount of resources, it does not necessarily occupy itself with the absolute benefits of people but it focusses more on how much they have relative to each other (Meyer & Roser, 2006, pp. 233-234). On the contrary, sufficientarianism does not look at the relational properties between agents, but it concerns itself with a threshold that no one should fall under (Meyer & Roser, 2006, p. 235). And lastly, prioritarianism states that those who are worst-off should be given the highest priority for the distribution of resources (Meyer & Roser, 2006, pp. 237-238). In this thesis I will be focussing on sufficientarianism because degrowth wants to replace the strive for economic

growth with a strive for well-being. Well-being means different things to people and thus it is important for people to have enough.

Degrowth

Turning the attention to degrowth again, the current status-quo with its industrialisation and development in the near history of the world have had devastating consequences for the environment. As Martínez-Alier (2012) rightly points out, the social metabolism, the flows of energy and materials, has increased to the point that it shapes and damages societal and environmental spheres (p. 65). Indicating a flaw in the current system. Further, Martínez-Alier (2012) argues that this has not only impacted future generations, but also current generations are feeling the disastrous impacts of the unattainable social metabolism, causing inequalities to exacerbate, in the Global North, the Global South and between the socio-geographical regions (p. 65). The wealthy and powerful have access to resources and carbon sinks at such an unequal and unjust level, that they are able to use through power ingrained in capitalistic economics, unjust property rights and free market fetishisation, rendering those in this system without those unjust privileges, rather powerless (Martínez-Alier, 2012, p. 65).

While degrowth might seem like a concept that does not happen under capitalist neoliberal market ideology, we are ironically fairly often, confronted by it in the form of economic recessions. There is a distinction between sustainable degrowth and unsustainable degrowth. According to Kallis, Martínez-Alier & Schneider (2010), unsustainable degrowth is an unintended (but rather expected) recession or depression of the economy, this leads to the undesirable deterioration of societal features such as unemployment and an increase in poverty (p. 512). Sustainable degrowth is what scholars mean when referring to degrowth. Sustainable degrowth reduces our social metabolism, leading to a decline in production and consumption, as a result of this Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will shrink (Kallis et al., 2010, p. 512). To sustainable degrowth scholars, GDP is not the holy grail, but a secondary factor, what is important to instead focus on is: ecological sustainability, social equity and to achieve a standard of well-being suited for all (Kallis et al., 2010, p. 512). Degrowth scholars such as Martínez-Alier (2012), criticise using GDP as a measure of paramount importance, the socio-psychological Easterling Paradox shows that happiness correlates with increase in income, but only to a certain threshold (p. 62). Furthermore, he states that replacing GDP with other additional measures such as the Human Development Index (HDI) will not solve this

problem since HDI is tied to GDP per capita (Martínez-Alier, 2012, p. 63). So why are we so obsessed in our contemporary society with everlasting, unlimited economic growth? Who does it benefit? Certainly not the working class.

Degrowth variants and critique

Degrowth can be further divided into subcategories. These subcategories focus on different aspects of degrowth. Van den Bergh (2011) provides an overview: (1) GDP degrowth, (2) consumption degrowth, (3) work-time degrowth, (4) radical degrowth, (5) physical degrowth, (6) GDP a-growth, and briefly touches upon other types such as market degrowth, selective or differential degrowth, degrowth in rich countries and population degrowth (p. 887). The ground on which these are differentiated is that they focus on different aspects that can be 'degrown'. For example, work-time degrowth focusses on cutting down hours worked and therefore a reduction in emissions, while GDP degrowth focusses on the reduction of consumption, production and income leading a reduction in resource use (Van den Bergh, 2011, p. 887). According to Van den Bergh (2011) (GDP) a-growth has the most potential to have a viable political future, a-growth entails that we are 'agnostic' or indifferent to growth (p. 890).

Van den Bergh (2011) criticises degrowth on the notions that the voluntary bottom-up strategy of degrowth does not take contemporary insights from behavioural economics and psychology which indicate that humans are more self-interested, have an urge to compare to each other, find status important and imitate others (p. 899). Thus Van den Bergh (2011) thinks that degrowth will be in conflict with this notion because it inherently puts a limit on consumption, leading to them not being able to reach a 'higher status' that comes with a high consumption pattern (p. 899). Van den Bergh (2011) however, confuses capitalist culture of consumption with the nature of human beings (Assadourian, 2010, p. 187). Van den Bergh (2011) claims that degrowth is unlikely to receive widespread societal and political support and thus render the degrowth strategy unfeasible (p. 889). This is slightly convincing because in the current system, degrowth would indeed require more political and institutional changes than a-growth would, but this does not make degrowth an inviable proposal. Van den Bergh (2011) comes to the conclusion that instead of degrowth, a-growth is more convincing because it is less ambiguous, more socially and politically viable strategy to pursue, and a good policy package with environmental regulations, measures and institutional changes is a

better alternative to degrowth (p. 889). A-growth is different from degrowth in the sense that a-growth does not seek active change in consumption while degrowth does. A-growth watches from the sidelines as opposed to actively curbing emissions. Other degrowth scholars have responded to some of Van den Bergh's (2011) criticisms about degrowth. He is incorrect with looking at degrowth in economic terms especially GDP, degrowth scholars instead see degrowth as multidimensional as opposed to only looking as economic growth as a measure of well-being (Kallis, Rodríguez-Labajos, Schneider & Sekulova, 2013, p. 2). I will return to this later in the thesis.

Van den Bergh (2011) is not the only scholar criticising degrowth. Schwartzman (2012) takes his critique of degrowth even further. Schwartzman (2012) argues that degrowth does not recognise the difference between quantitative and qualitative aspects of degrowth, does not provide material requirements of a high quality of life and points out that degrowth is only available to a small group in the Global North that can afford to degrow (p. 122). Interestingly Schwartzman (2012) does not explain what he means with quantitative and qualitative aspects of degrowth, however this argument does not make sense since degrowth scholars want a focus on well-being as opposed to growth, so in that sense there is an intensive focus on the quality of consumption. Secondly, degrowth scholars do not have a fixed material requirement for what a 'high quality of life' is because these are location and person specific. One person might need to consume more to be able to live a minimally decent life than someone else. Thirdly, degrowth scholars agree that degrowth should first happen in the Global North, especially among the wealthy elite (Dengler & Seebacher, 2019, p. 247).

Green growth

Green growth is an alternative to degrowth. Green growth holds that economic progress, measured in the form of a rising GDP, can work together with policies that preserve the environment (Bowen & Hepburn, 2014, p. 407). These policies can be, for example, putting in a limit of what companies can emit or banning certain materials that are harmful for the environment. This is in contrast with degrowth, as green growth still finds economic growth at its centre stage, and that is exactly what degrowth is starkly against. Green growth has found itself already a place in the main economic forums such as in the World Bank (World Bank, 2012), and many other international organisations. In short, green growth aims

to make growth resource-efficient and better for the environment, and thus work with growth (Fay, Hallegatte, Heal, & Treguer, 2012, p. 3)

But, why is it exactly that green growth has been able to become more important for policy-makers? Bowen and Hepburn (2014) provide us with several reasons as to why green growth is growing in popularity and making its way to the mainstream. First of all, economic growth is still seen as the most important notion to strive for in our current global economic system, according to them especially important during times with recessions or 'unsustainable degrowth' and growth rates are below average. Second of all, economic growth is seen as something positive for the poor, because more money means more consumption and thus create a better life. And lastly, anthropogenic climate change and the threats to the environment, have brought this issue to the centre stage and making it from the media headlines to the policy-makers agendas (p. 408). The problem with green growth is that it primarily focusses on the production side of economics and does not give as much attention to the consumption side, just because the economy gets 'greened' resources will still get extracted, energy will still be consumed and thus does not incentivise states or people to consume less because (Kallis et al., 2010, p. 516). Green consumption is not enough because it does not tackle the problem at its root, which is that people over-consume.

Green growth scholars do believe that endangering the environment for the sake of growing the economy does not promote overall welfare, affecting consumption and production of economic activity which leads to a lowered output, but at the same time they do recognise that economic growth is imperative for the poor and still emerging economies (Bowen & Hepburn, 2014, p. 409). Furthermore, green growth scholars realise that there is a need for changes in our current system. Albeit, as opposed to with degrowth which requires more radical changes, green growth requires a small number of changes that have big impact. For green growth scholars there is a need for greater innovation, policy experimentation, evaluation of policies and if necessary, with an important role for the government to intervene (Bowen & Hepburn, 2014, pp. 419-420).

Interestingly, green growth scholars seem to want to improve the environment in order to be able to increase the output. According to their logic, exploiting the environment is a results of market failures such as ill-defined property rights, and by correcting the market failures, these environmental assets can be used to increase output (Fay et al., 2012, p. 3). Green growth still strives for growth, which is degrowth's critique on green growth. You cannot decouple emissions from growth, making consumption green will still make us

consume resources to be able to use “green” products and might incentivise more consumption, to degrowth scholars, green growth is just a band aid on the wound as opposed to tackling the problem at its root (Kallis et al., 2010, p. 516).

Research aims and knowledge gap

This literature review has looked at the debate on degrowth and analysed other proposals related to growth. Out of this literature, degrowth has come forward as the principle that will be used for the rest of the thesis. It is better equipped to deal with climate change mitigation and adaptation because it does not prioritise the economy over the environment. Although degrowth might require more radical institutional and ideological change than green growth, it would be more viable to deal with questions of distributional climate justice, which will be further examined in the next chapters. This is due to the fact that degrowth actively challenges the status quo.

Having analysed the literature, there is still a knowledge gap in the literature regarding on how we should address the problem of distribution of costs and benefits, if degrowth would be implemented. What would the costs of degrowth be, and what would the benefits be that come out of implementing degrowth? The benefits range from less environmental harm, but also less unnecessary waste and more efficient production. As well as brining the poor in society up to sufficient standards and bringing the wealthiest down to sufficient standards. The costs of degrowth are all that comes with a system change that will have to deal with trial and error, less options to choose from due to less production and consumption. This thesis will bridge the gap between degrowth and distributive justice that has been not adequately addressed in the literature and will provide a framework in which these can help create a fairer and more environmentally sustainable world.

In order to do this, the following research question has been devised that will guide this thesis: *How should the costs and benefits of degrowth be distributed within states?* And this will lead me to look at the benefits and costs of degrowth and how these can be distributed, in the most just and fair way.

Chapter 2: The distribution of consumption

There are many different ways we could adapt to climate change, so why should we look at how much we are consuming? Data shows that we are already overshooting our planet's biocapacity by 1.75 times, which means that we need 1.75 earths worth of resources in order to sustain the worlds metabolism (Earth Overshoot Day, 2022). Overconsuming the planet will lead to deteriorating outcomes. As we are already overshooting the earth's biocapacity, by taking more resources than the earth can generate, it is important to address the centrality of consumerism and the way it leads to overconsumption as it exacerbates climate change massively. However, it should also be noted that there are stark differences between countries. If everyone on earth would live like the average person in The United States, we would need 5.1 earths; 2.6 earths for The United Kingdom; 1.6 for Brazil and 0.8 earths for India (Earth Overshoot Day, 2022). Furthermore, there is a striking contrast between resource use of the world's richest and the world's poorest. The world's richest 20% consume as much as 76.6% of the world's private consumption (World Bank, 2008). In fact, the nineth and tenth percentile, 17.6% and 59.0% resource consumption respectively, consume beyond their fair share, while all the percentiles below the bottom 80% consume far below their fair share of 10% (World Bank, 2008).

The mannerisms of consumerism

These numbers show that the upper-class consumes too much. But how can they consume so much, and why is consumerism even a thing? Consumerism has meant many different things over the course of history. The origin on the word 'consume' comes from *consumere* in Latin, and it means 'to eat, devour, waste or destroy' (Graeber, 2011, p. 492). In the 1920's consumerism began to mean something else: 'the protection of consumer interests' and from the 1950's consumerism synonymised with capitalism in order to distinguish the West's consumer-oriented economy from the planned economy of communist countries (Slijepcevic, 2023, p. 583). Consumerism nowadays can be referred to as a cultural pattern that sees consuming as rewarding and a social aspiration (Assadourian, 2010, p. 187). This culture of consumerism is further amplified through the use of media and marketing of businesses, the government also stimulates consumerism through subsidies, growth policies and through the education system (Assadourian, 2010, pp. 187-188). These are the hegemonic

institutions of capitalism that ingrain the need to consume by presenting it as integral to the good life and an enactment of freedom.

However, GDP growth and a high level of consumption do not correlate directly with an increase in well-being of people (Drapińska, 2017, p. 107). This raises important contradictions about our culture of consumerism; it does not improve well-being, while it is also bad for the environment. A prime example of the rich's consumption is that of The Rolling Stones. In 2022 The Rolling Stones used a Boeing 767 wide-body airplane that emitted 5046 tonnes of CO2, to put this into perspective, you could fly to New York from London and back 1763 times in economy before you matched those levels of emissions (Goodier & de Hoog, 2023). To further illustrate why emitting 5046 tonnes of CO2 is shocking, the average person in the world only emits about 4 tonnes of CO2, with the highest emissions per capita in The United States at about 16 tonnes of CO2 per person (University Corporation for Atmospheric Research [UCAR], n.d.).

The current capitalist, neoliberal, consumerist status-quo allows the elite to have a broken relationship with the environment, and this cannot be improved while continue trying to work in a system that is clearly broken. It is imperative when implementing degrowth that the culture of consumerism will be dismantled, because consumerism promotes overconsuming resources that inevitably produce greenhouse gasses. This is why green growth is also not the solution, green growth scholars do not problematise consumption per se. As to them, consumption can be greened and thus does not need to be reduced. This relates back to the fact that degrowth scholars' critique of consumption called the 'rebound effect' (Binswanger, 2001, p. 120). The rebound effect entails that when a technology becomes more energy efficient, it is usually cancelled out by the increase of consumption (Binswanger, 2001, p. 120). Therefore, greening is not the solution, because even if the products are green, they are still products that require significant resources and thus we must lower consumption levels to lower resource extraction.

Benefits of degrowth

The benefits of degrowth are numerous and will be shown with in this section. Putting less strain on the environment is first and foremost benefit of degrowth. This is because degrowth incentivises and enforces people to consume less. Rethinking society and introducing people to degrowth also helps create awareness about consumption and its

consequences on the environment and other spheres (Brossmann & Islar, 2019, pp. 923-924). As currently, for a consumption based economy it is essential for people to continue to consume because it leads to more products bought, which generates more profit, which in turn generates GDP growth. This pattern of continued overconsumption, as it is in the interest of the wealthy to accumulate more capital through as much consumption as possible, is not sustainable and must be addressed at a structural level.

Degrowth is a culture and structural shift towards more sustainable practises, as the goal of degrowth is to improve the quality of life and the environment as opposed to maximising profit and growth. Degrowth aims to improve the quality of life by limiting consumption which in turn leads to a decrease in production (Hobson, 2013, p. 1083), this necessitates a reduction in working hours. Of course in the current economic system a reduction in working hours would not be beneficial since this would mean a reduction in salary. With degrowth and its overhaul of capitalism, we could take the step away from monetising work and instead using hours spent doing something as the unit of measure. This critique originates from critical feminist scholars who believe that unpaid housework cannot be monetised in the same sense as wage labour is (D'Alisa & Cattaneo, 2012, p. 6). Instead, the amount of time spend on any type of work should be valued as opposed to valuing paid wage labour more than other types of labour (D'Alisa & Cattaneo, 2012, p. 6). This is beneficial as this allows current unpaid work to be seen as valuable, as it is of utmost importance that housework is completed to live a good quality life. An unclean environment, both ecologically speaking but also domestically speaking, is not conducive to the good life.

Furthermore, this allows women and other marginalised groups to be more independent and less reliant on someone who receives a monetised salary. This also ensures that providing care would not be undervalued as it is now provided for 'free'. Thus care will continue to be provided as paid and unpaid work are equally important for a good quality of life (D'Alisa & Cattaneo, 2012, p. 7). The valuing of unpaid labour also ties into the discussion of a universal basic income (UBI). UBI scholars believe that if we were to supply people with a basic income that satisfies basic needs, it would lead to; more free time, more time for activities that they value, and it increases freedom and autonomy by not being dependent on paid work or another person (Büchs, 2021, p. 4). UBI can aid the transition to degrowth, because it makes sure that people would still have enough to spend to be able to live a satisfactory life while degrowing consumption.

For these reasons, there must be a development of the welfare state including some sort of base income for people regardless if they work a 'job' or if they do work a current unpaid job. This will allow people to have their basic needs met while also being able to spend time in areas that that are important for their quality of life and to help relieve strain on the environment by shifting away from consuming to try to satisfy needs. This also gives people the option to spend time on things that are important to them and the community. By working less (unnecessary) hours at a job, they are able to spend more time on volunteering or helping out members in their community, or taking time off to relax. Just to get enough money to scrape by for the month, as over 60% of Americans live pay check to pay check (Picchi, 2023).

Costs of degrowth

While degrowth has many benefits for the environment and well-being of people, there are also costs of degrowth hat could deter some people from degrowth, as currently everything in our daily life and economy is focused on getting as much growth as possible. Growth is seen as synonymous with a better, more fulfilling life because if you have more of something it is inherently better. But when you take nature and look at how nature involves growth, the urge to constantly grow seems to not make so much sense. Plants grow, animals grow, humans grow, but they stop growing. They stop growing because they have reached their maximum growth, like how humans tend to grow in size until they have surpassed adolescence and then over the years actually start to degrow. Plants stop growing because of the seasonal change or because they are harvested. What this analogy on physical growth tells us is that there is a limit on growth, when something grows there will be a point reached where more growth is not beneficial anymore. And that point of economic growth we have long reached relating to the environment (Kallis, Kostakis, Lange, Muraca, Paulson & Schmelzer, 2018, pp. 309-310). Arguably you could say there are species such as bacteria and other microorganisms that do not stop growing until they are stopped. But you would not hear someone say that we should let bacteria and other microorganism constantly and unstoppably grow, because too much of something is not good. Too much growth of one thing, causes other things to stop growing, or deny them the opportunity to grow. Interestingly, you can take this analogy and apply it to the economy. Too much economic growth stops other essential needs to be able to flourish. When we produce and consume too much, this comes at the cost of the environment. The majority of the means of production is in the hands of a very small

number of people, because these people take up so much space, they cause other people to lose out on this space.

There has to be a change in culture for us to be able to give degrowth a try. Neoliberal market capitalism has been ingrained to where the lines between culture and nature are so blurred, the connections are sometimes hard to see. It is ingrained in the media that consuming more is good. People are incentivised to consume more because a high consumption reflects a "well off" lifestyle (Assadourian, 2010, pp. 187-188). Essentially the more that a person consumes, the more money they must have and thus they must have a higher status which leads to that a high consuming lifestyle that is valued and promoted in capitalist societies. This also ties into the fact that a lot of the western world is disconnected with the environment and follow an anthropocentric worldview in which humans are placed above the environment, and the environment is seen as something that can be used to extract resources (Kallis, 2011, pp. 873-874). As opposed to an ecocentric worldview in which humans are seen as being part of the environment and see the value of nature for what it is, and not how it is beneficial to humans (Kortenkamp & Moore, 2001, p. 262). If we want degrowth to succeed it is of utmost importance that we inherently see humans as connected with the world see the intrinsic value of nature as opposed to just the extractive instrumental view of nature. This is important because following anthropocentrism would allow us to continue exploiting the environment, because it is beneficial for growth and GDP to produce more and to ultimately consume more.

Fair bounds

While degrowth establishes an upper limit to what can be consumed, sufficientarianism provides us with a lower limit of what people should at least have to live a decent life. When considering the upper limit of what can be consumed, we should make sure that it does not exceed our environmental boundaries. This would mean that we would need 1 earth worth of resources, distributed in a way where everyone can live an equally sufficient life. This way we would only use the resources that can be regenerated back within a certain timeframe that would allow us to engage in a sustainable eco-cycle. What this means for the upper class is that they would have to cut back their consumption by a significant amount since they are the ones that are consuming way above their fair share (World Bank, 2008). Limitarianism provides the theory for this. Limitarianism establishes a 'limitarian'

threshold that no one should be situated above, any additional wealth above this threshold would not contribute to someone's flourishing, and if someone does exceed this threshold, this additional wealth should be redistributed (Robeyns, 2022, pp. 252-253).

Having established an upper limit to what can be consumed, we should now turn our focus on what is the lower limit of what should people should at least be allowed to consume. These include, but are not limited to: adequate food intake, adequate housing, adequate modes of transportation, adequate amount of so called luxury consumption (e.g. hobbies and holidays). Of course these look different for different people since everyone has particular needs. There are people that live in places where it is necessary for them to travel by car to work because there is not an adequate public transportation service. However, there would also be less people that would need to travel by car because degrowth incentivises a more productive, connected public transport system. Some people with chronic illnesses need to have the heating on at all times in order to live an adequate life and therefore are forced to consume more gas. Therefore it is be important that on broader geographical regions we reserve a pool of "excess consumption" so that when people are in need of consuming more than the average individual, there is a reserve for these people that ensures they are able to live an adequate life. This would go hand in hand with universal basic income, while the universal basic income makes sure that everyone has a source of income, the reserve pool of excess consumption would make sure that the people that need extra resources to life a satisfactory life are able to consume these.

Luxury vs. subsistence emissions

To aid for specifying what the sufficient lower-bound should be, it is important to be able to divide emissions in subsistence and luxury emissions. For degrowth, subsistence and luxury emissions is a useful distinction to see which emissions can be reduced.

Following Duus-Otterström's (2014) definition of so called inessential over-emissions, which will be synonymised to luxury emissions, have to meet two criteria: (1) they are emissions that have exceeded an agent's fair share and (2) are inessential to a decent life (p. 28). If an agent's emissions do not meet one or either of the two criteria, then these are subsistence emissions. This way it ensures that people who need to emit more than their fair share in order to live a sufficient life are also able and allowed to do so. The first criteria of having to emit more than their fair share also allows people to fill in their emissions to what

fits their needs. Even if these emissions might look like luxury emissions and therefore able to be reduced, it is also essential for people to be able to spend some luxury emissions. Luxury emissions may be spent on activities that increase the well-being of an individual. If it were the case that people were only to just emit subsistence emissions, this would be difficult to achieve and might decrease well-being and happiness. It might also put pressure and disincentive people to curb their emissions.

Chapter 3: Degrowth in practise

Covid-19

This chapter will start with examples where the need for degrowth and sufficientarianism is shown and after that I will rebut counter arguments of degrowth and sufficientarianism. I will first start with exploring the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic had on the environment. The pandemic caused a lot of death and destruction to the social lives of people, and forced governments to increase their social welfare spending in order to keep hospitals and important sectors running. The Covid-19 pandemic also showed what happens when economies are forced to shut down, and focus on what essential and non-essential production and consumption is. The pandemic had its effects on every aspect, the environment, health, education, the economy and daily lives.

As addressed earlier in this thesis, degrowth is already seen with recessions in the economy. Some form of degrowth was unintentionally put into practice during the Covid-19 pandemic. Non-essential businesses were forced to shut their doors, travelling was heavily restricted and generally everything that was seen as non-essential was closed (Rume & Didar-Ul Islam, 2020, p. 3). Of course, the governments that put these restrictions in place did not do this for the intention of benefitting the environment, but somewhat tragically it had a beneficial consequence for the environment. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that we can degrow, it shows that we can consume less and still survive, at least in the short term. It showed that people do not have to go to work in person every day and thus are able to live with a better work/life balance. It made us rethink how we see the economy. Now imagine the potential this degrowing would have had if it was done consciously and carefully in a controlled way.

Another thing the Covid-19 pandemic caused is an increase in inequality. Due to the current capitalist system, it allowed businesses to hike prices and make record profits off of the pandemic (Warkentin, 2022, pp. 78-79). In a society with degrowth implemented this would not have happen because of its focus on the quality of life and does not put growth first, therefore making it unlikely that sellers would hike their prices to gain a profit.

Political feasibility

One of the main criticisms of degrowth is that it is unlikely to be politically feasible (Van den Bergh, 2011, p. 889). Degrowth requires a big shift in our economic and social systems and institutions. In order to implement degrowth we would have to shift away from the growth-led economy. Growth nowadays is synonymous with prosperity and it is assumed that when there is more growth there is more welfare. So in the current system it seems illogical to people that degrowth would be something that is desired even though it would benefit the environment. Unfortunately, due to the climate crisis the world has to act and make difficult decisions. But it is known that capitalistic growth led economies are incompatible with the environment as it sees the environment as a means to an end instrumentally instead of viewing the environment as intrinsically valuable. There is a need for an approach to the climate crisis which is not just more of the same but in a green package. You cannot put out a fire by throwing fewer flammable materials on top, the only way to put out the fire is to restrict it from burning. Therefore, it is also again important that there is enough education on what capitalism actually is and does and how other systems might be able to deal with issues that capitalism cannot.

Regarding sufficientarianism, this part is more likely to be politically feasible. It is generally regarded by most people that at least everyone should have enough. One of the modern day examples of this is benefits for people regardless of their circumstances. It is believed that people deserve a basic income in a modern state that makes sure they are at least able to enjoy basic needs. As sufficientarianism is not very radical and it already in other ways accepted in society, I expect that adding sufficientarianism with degrowth will aid in the political feasibility of this proposal.

Poverty reduction without growth

It is usually argued in regards with the climate crisis that when people are living in poverty, they should be permitted to still develop to reduce poverty. This is because these countries may have many people still living under the poverty line and therefore need to use more resources than may be environmentally acceptable. At first glance this seems to contradict with degrowth, because how can we develop when we want a degrowth of consumption? According and in line with other degrowth scholars, I agree that degrowth needs to first happen in the Global North, with states that are beyond the fair bounds in what

they consume and emit (Avila, Hanaček, Kallis, & Roy 2020, p. 5). The Global North has profited from the Global South for centuries by colonialisation and more recent neo-colonial practises, which caused the Global South to not be able to develop in the same way that the Global North has been able to develop and deplete the Global South's resources. The South is rich in resources, but the Global North controls them. Control of natural resources should be returned to local governing authorities who have a higher vested interest in preserving the sanctity of the space. Therefore, developing countries have a larger time frame to reach the sufficientarian level of consumption and only then they can start dealing with questions of degrowth. Because of implementing degrowth, the Global North recourse consumption and strain on the environment will be less severe.

There is also a problem with development under degrowth itself. Within the field of development economics there is a distinction between macro-development economics and micro-development economics. Macro-development economists occupy themselves with for example, international trade and economic growth, while micro-development economists focus for example on microfinance and other social programs (Rodrik, 2008, pp. 1-2). Since economic growth is one of the core tenants of development it cannot be compatible with degrowth. Therefore, there must be a different measure that replaces economic growth development under degrowth. This could be achieved through redistribution. By more equally and equitably distributing the resources we have it is possible for people to improve their well-being, without necessarily having to increase the total consumption. By redistributing the resources we currently have in the world it is possible to make sure people come above the sufficiency line, while also making sure that the people that are beyond the upper limit of consumption, are the ones degrowing. It seems inherently contradictory to hoard resources beyond appropriate levels, but the amount of resources that are hoarded and consumed by the upper classes of the world while the rest of the world does not even have enough resources to sufficiently sustain themselves, shows greed and capitalist, classist normativity. This is unfair and therefore, we need to shift away from this paradigm.

The good life

In order to know what a sufficient life is it is important to look at the concept of the (minimally) good life. The 'minimally good life' entails that a person needs have a range of options for fundamental conditions to be able to secure relationships and other valued aspects

of life, so that a person, who is not influenced by outside factors, is able to live a minimally good life (Hassoun, 2021, p. 322). This means that the minimally good life does not have to be perfect, but there should be a reasonably acceptable array of fundamental conditions which contribute to a good life, such as resources, which allow people to acquire things that make a minimally good life, such as relationships (Hassoun, 2021, p. 323). It is important to consider the notion of the good life to find the balance of what is allowed to be consumed and how much. The good life can be understood as consisting of both objective and subjective elements (Huesby, 2020, p. 209), such as access to housing and meaningful relationships. In order for a person to live a good life, they must also be able to evaluate the goodness of their life with good reason (Huesby, 2020, p. 209).

This concept of the good life is related to the positive sufficiency-thesis, which states that morally, people should at the very least have enough (Huesby, 2020, p. 207). The negative sufficiency-thesis, means that there is no need for distribution once every person has enough (Huesby, 2020, p. 207), I do not agree with the negative sufficiency-thesis, as in the context of degrowth it is imperative that there is an ecological ceiling and its critique on consumption would not allow for unequal distribution beyond these limits. Some sufficientarian scholars also put forward the shift-thesis, which is a less narrow version of the negative sufficiency-thesis (Shields, 2020, p. 2). The shift-thesis entails that once everyone has secured enough, there is a change in non-instrumental reasons to distribute (Shields, 2020, p. 2). A criticism sufficientarianism often gets is about the indifference objection, which is raised against upper-limit sufficientarians that follow the negative sufficiency-thesis. The indifference objection raises questions about how just stark inequalities are when technically everyone has enough (Shields, 2020, p. 3). I think that this is a valid criticism, especially when considered in a degrowth context. Due to the ecological ceiling, there has to be a hard limit on how much everyone can have, and thus consume. And as said earlier, the world's richest 20% consume as much as 76.6% of the world's private consumption (World Bank, 2008), since there is so much inequality in consumption between the ultrarich and the rest, there is an inherent need for redistribution even after everyone would have enough.

Conclusion

This thesis showed how degrowth and sufficientarianism can be used together as a framework and establish bounds in which we define the minimum and the maximum someone is allowed to consume. It looked at the shortcomings the current system has in regards with environmental protection, and proposed that degrowth is a fairer and more efficient way of dealing with the climate crisis. Furthermore, this thesis showed examples related to degrowth and dealt with possible counterarguments and rebutted these. While degrowth makes sure that no one consumes too much, sufficientarianism makes sure that no one consumes too little.

Some limitations of this thesis are that it is sometimes hard to envision what degrowth would actually look like in reality, as it has only been unintentionally applied in circumstances, such as economic recessions or the Covid-19 pandemic. Implementing degrowth could not and should not happen overnight, but it is a lengthy process in which many aspects on the current system have to be changed or abolished. As well as that degrowth currently is mostly active in the academic setting and has yet to reach the average person. The strengths of this thesis include linking sufficientarianism with degrowth as there has not been nearly enough academic literature been written on the topic. As degrowth only establishes and upper limit and does therefore not necessarily deal with concerning that people have a lower limit no one should fall under. And at the same time, degrowth aids sufficientarianism which does not inherently deal with people that have too much as it only focusses on people who have too little and once, they are beyond that, it does not matter than other people have too much.

For future research, it is important that there is more research done on degrowth itself and the link it has with distributional issues, as there has not been written nearly enough literature on the subject. One could dive deeper in how degrowth works in practise, and find out limitations that have not yet been found by other academics. As well as establishing categorisation of what emissions can be categorised as luxury or subsistence emissions. Another limitation of this that it did not deal with intergenerational justice, this can be explored in future research. It is of utmost importance that degrowth gets linked to practical use, this will increase the amount of people that are aware of degrowth and can help with the political feasibility. The development and subsequent degrowth trajectory of underdeveloped states should be more extensively explored as it is of key importance in the global concentrated effort to mitigate climate change.

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