



Degrowth

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Outline

- The meaning of growth
- The imaginary of growth
- Degrowth as a vision
- Dimensions of degrowth
- Degrowth strategies and proposals



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The meaning of growth



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- «the crisis is a result of unsustainable growth. Irresponsible borrowing and the cultivation of fake expectations in the housing market were not accidents, but a systemic failure of a system struggling to keep up with growth rates that could not be sustained by its biophysical base (the “real” economy).



The subprime crisis

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"I THOUGHT WE WERE JUST BUYING A HOUSE!"





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Economic system has 3 levels

Financial

Virtual wealth

Grows at the expense of loans to the private or public sector. It is a loan from the future, based on an expected perpetual economic growth that allows the repayment of interests and debts.

Real economy

Productive economy

generates value through technology, innovation, labour, etc.. Its growth allows the repayment of some or all debt, but when GDP is not growing enough, the situation becomes financially unbearable.

Real-real economy

Bioeconomy, defined by the **materials and energy flows**. The wealth an economy can generate is limited by the principles of thermodynamics. That means, the limits to the extraction of energy and materials of low entropy and the disposal of waste of high entropy.



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Debts

Financial debt

- **A loan contracted by the future generations**
 - Overconsumption
 - Public investment
 - Interest rates
 - Terms of trade
 - Speculation

Ecological debt

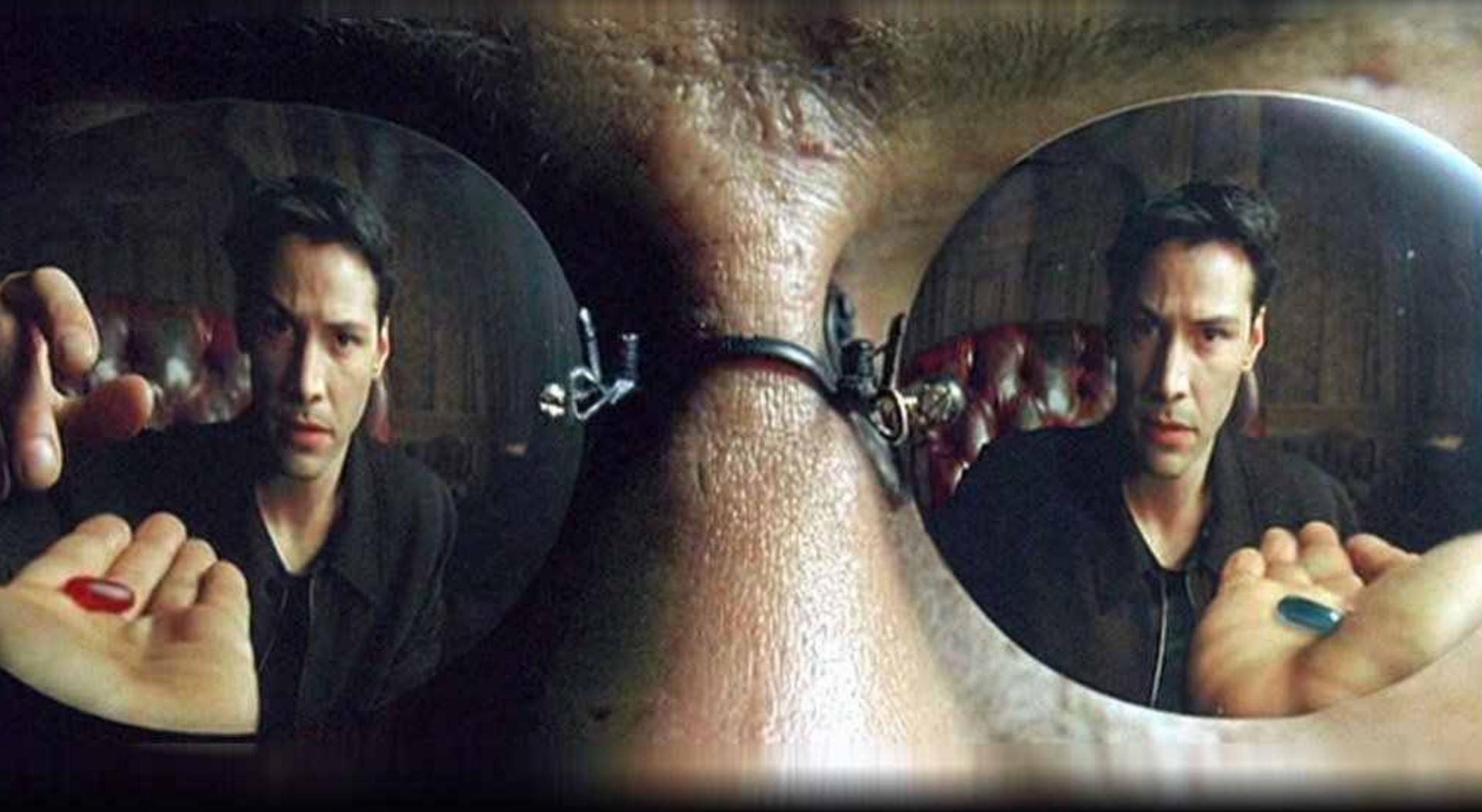
- **A loan from other lands**
 - Oil from Niger Delta
 - Uranium from Mali
 - Eucalyptus in Latin America and Indonesia
 - Soil (nutrients) and soya from Brazil



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- «the crisis is a result of unsustainable growth. Irresponsible borrowing and the cultivation of fake expectations in the housing market were not accidents, but a systemic failure of a system struggling to keep up with growth rates that could not be sustained by its biophysical base (the “real” economy).
- Furthermore, the crisis marks a failure of “economicism”, the doctrine of mainstream, neo-classical economics which refuses to accept any material reality beyond the beliefs of investors and consumers.»

Schneider, Kallis and Martinez-Alier, 2010





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The imaginary of growth



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Growth narrative (cultural)

- *Consume or collapse!*
 - Advertisement as tool to shape our needs
 - Social limits to growth
 - Ferrari example
 - Consumption as defining us in the social structure / identification through consumption
- *Social value of growth*
 - Naturalizing growth
- *Actors that construct this "reality"*
 - Economists
 - Corporations
 - (some) Germans and Yankees



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The global open society...

- Gated communities
- Tightening of borders
- Walls in Melilla, Greece, Bulgaria
- Death toll at borders
- People closing doors
- Loss of hospitality
- Fear, especially fear of foreigners
- Vote for anti-immigrants
- Xenophobia



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Economism

- *The reduction of every dimension of life to the economic dimension*



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Degrowth as a vision



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Degrowth is ..

a slogan, a "missile word",

- meaning to repoliticize social and environmental debates:
 - creating dissidence to the present economic representations,
 - and demystifying growth, sustainable development and progress.
 - An alternative frame for a new social movement.



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No unique definition

Degrowth is a space of dialog where different ideals

- Democracy
- Justice
- Agroecology
- Bioeconomy
- Conviviality
- Good life

meet each other in order to constitute a sort of practical and theoretical utopia.



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Key notions

- Downscaling and relocalization, not just efficiency improvements.
- “Selective” (geographically and sectorally) degrowth.



Measurement

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- Not negative GDP
- Function of well-being, (sectoral) consumption and impact, and distribution



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The exit from economism

- *Multiple dimensions of life*
 - Based on a collective vision, rather than relying exclusively on economic criteria for taking decisions/planning the future



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Degrowth as taking another direction

- *Austerity*

repay the debts to create conditions for strong private investment and demand, for economic growth

- *Keynesian*

state investment to recreate economic growth now

- *Degrowth*

an increase of demand shall not be a goal. We need to create the conditions for a non-dependence on debts and economic growth.

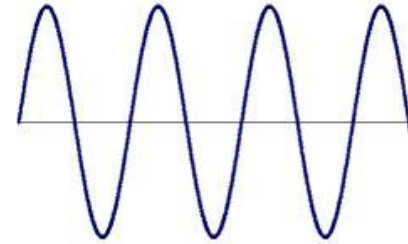


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Three interpretations of the crisis

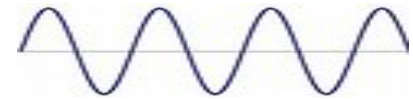
NEOLIBERAL AUSTERITY

The housing crisis is part of the business cycles and need to be lived through



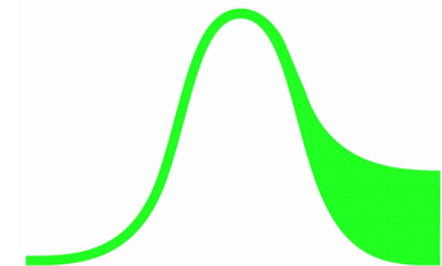
KEYNESIAN STIMULUS

We need to reduce the housing crisis with state intervention



DEGROWTH

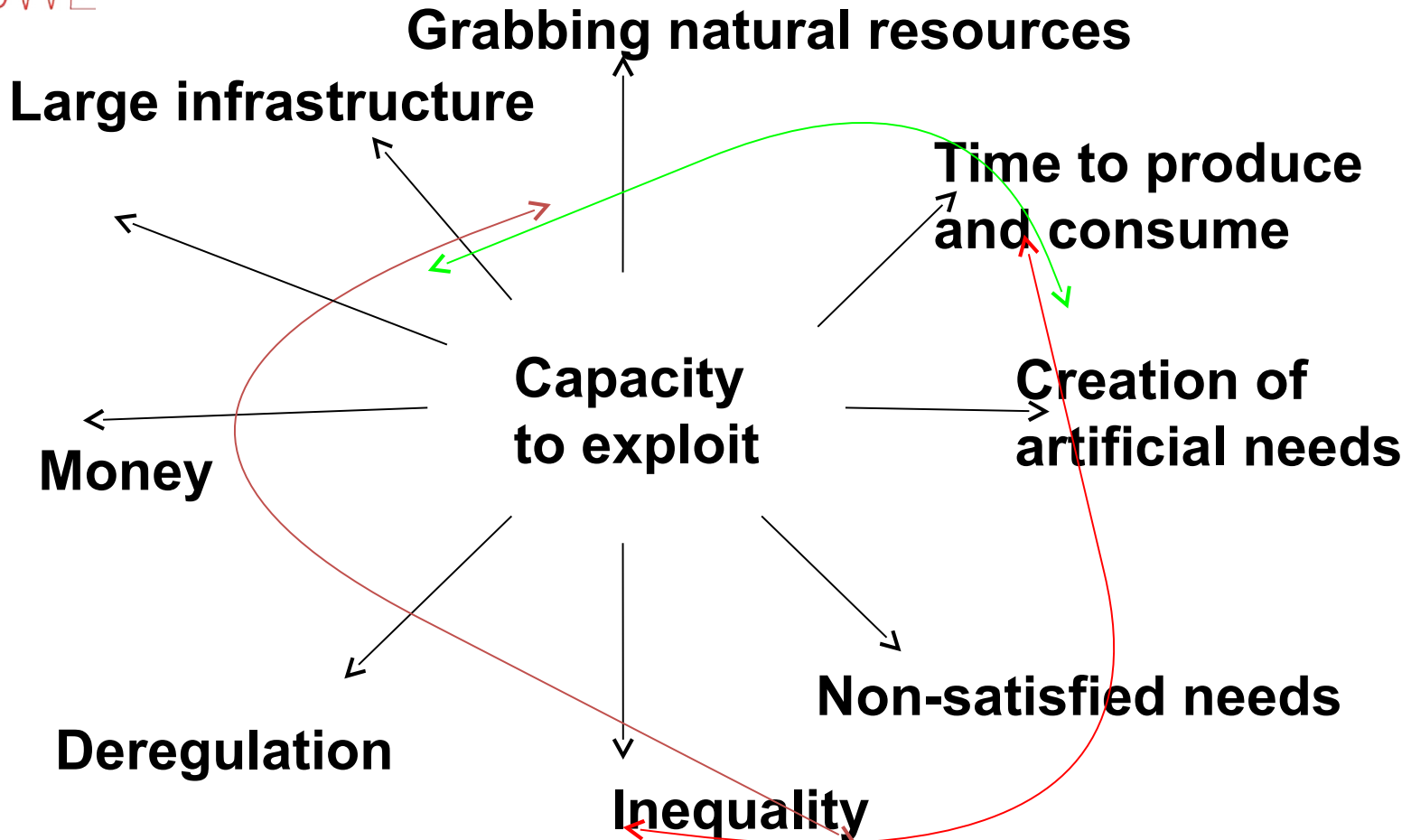
We are at a crossroad: use existing stock and give other values to production and work





Degrowth means acknowledging a combination of limits

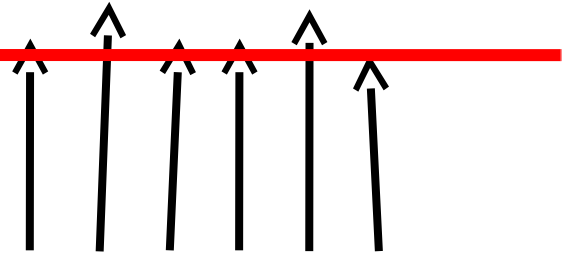
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Ready for sustainable degrowth

Production and
consumption capacity

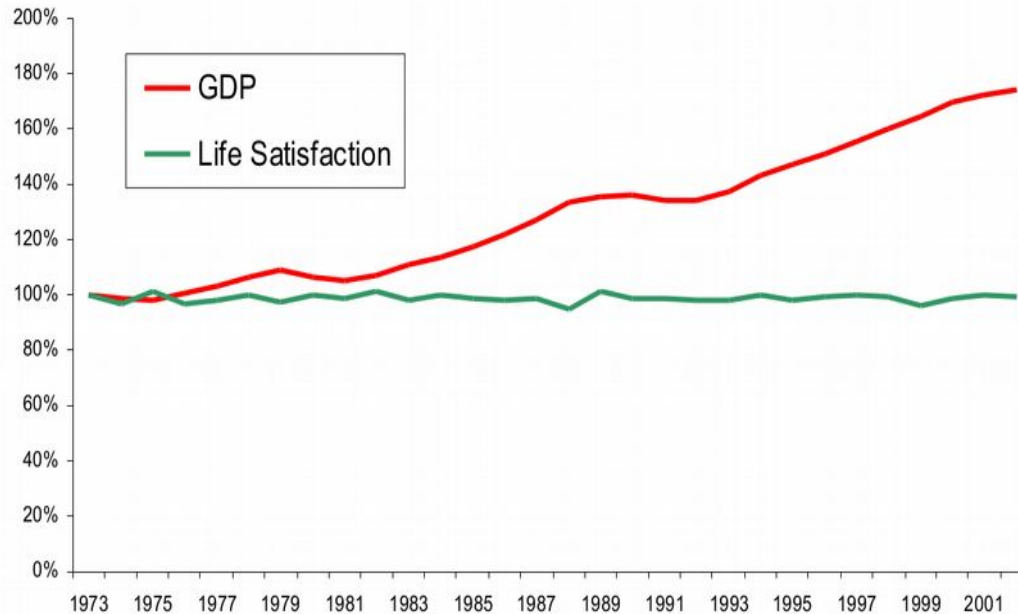




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Was ist das Probleme wenn wir schrumpfen?

Real GDP per capita and subjective Life Satisfaction in the UK



growth has failed to permanently increase satisfaction with life



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From Growth to Degrowth

growth is unsustainable

≠

degrowth is sustainable.

Degrowth can be catastrophic

- how can we turn it into an opportunity?
- how can we make it stable?



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Dimensions of degrowth



**a- Ecological Economics-
Bioeconomy**

Georgescu-Roegen

**Availability of resources
decreases (peak-all) and we have
to adapt**

Degrowth represents an increase of entropy at a slower



Odum, Naess, Charbonneau, Bookchin

Respect to ecosystems and life in general and critics of industrial society

Degrowth is less ecosystem exploitation to allow
for their regeneration

A photograph of a group of people sitting around a dining table in a restaurant. They are engaged in conversation, smiling, and holding glasses. The table is set with plates of food, including bread and vegetables, and several glasses. The atmosphere appears to be warm and convivial.

c- Critics of development and anti-utilitarianism

Latouche, Rist, Escobar, etc.

**For human relations and
conviviality**

**There is another life
outside market relations**

**Degrowth is less maximisation of individual utility
and challenge to the western model of development**

**d-Meaning
of life**

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**Degrowth is
about
enjoying
simplicity**

***Thoreau,
Gandhi,
Rabhi etc.***

**For “coherence and
unity”
Instead of spending
our lives in
contradicting social
roles**



e- democracy For real democracy

Castoriadis, Illic



Degrowth implies making real democracy
less manipulation from advertisers
deliberation on the idea of progress

f- Justice

Kempf, Sachs

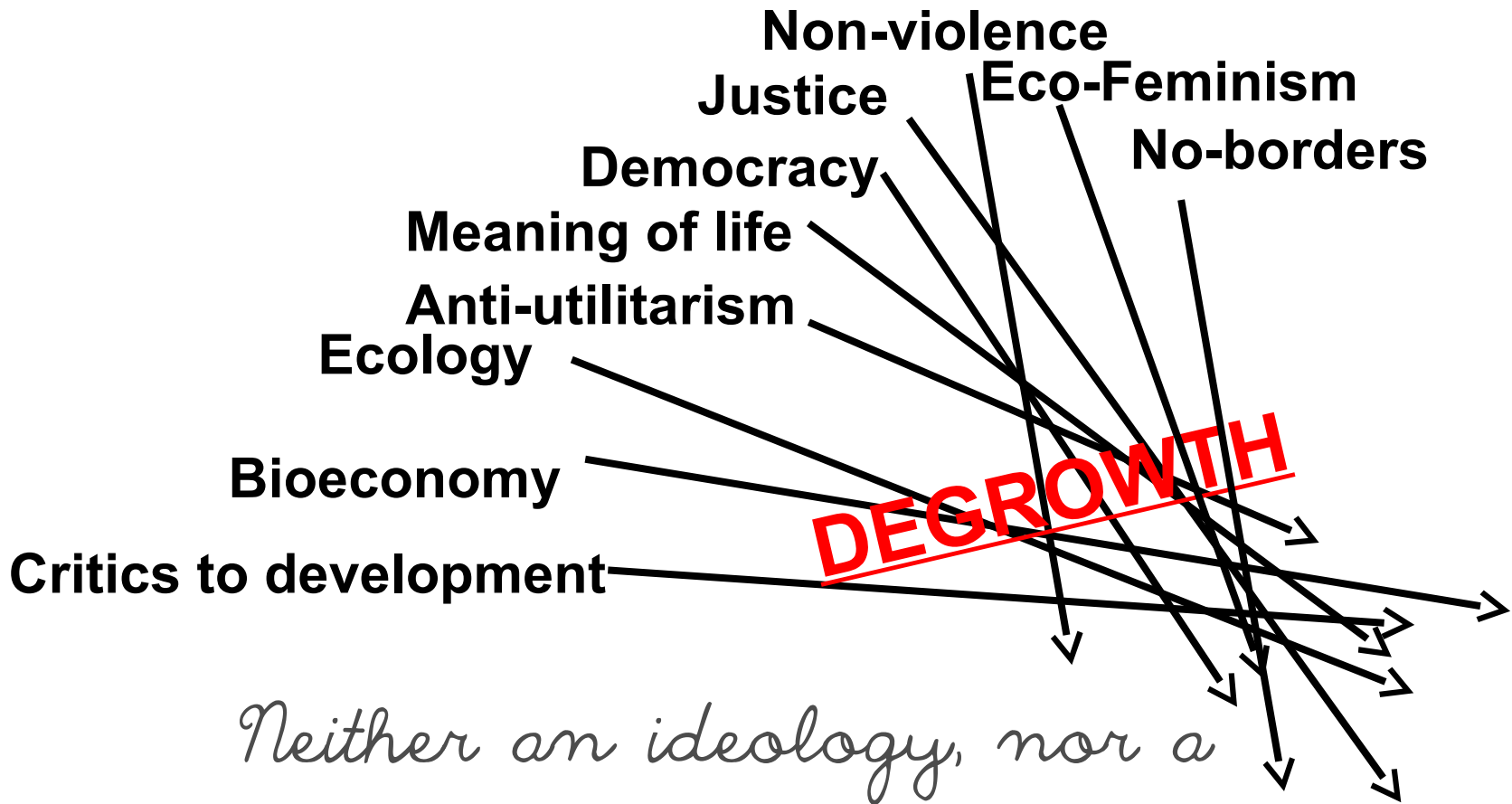
Less competition, large scale redistribution, sharing and reduction of excessive incomes and wealth instead of « trickle down »

Degrowth is about making justice possible



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The concerns to which degrowth responds



Neither an ideology, nor a paradigm



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Interim conclusion on the concerns of degrowth

The degrowth movement is about a combination of concerns. It means exiting reductionist values:

- It is not possible to care about material and energy flows without caring about justice (no drastic population degrowth or closing of borders!),
- It is not possible to care about justice without considering democracy (no authoritarian vision),
- Democracy is not feasible without taking meaning of life into account, or the importance of convivial relations (no technocentred visions) etc.



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Degrowth strategies and proposals



Prognosis I : The multiple level actors

Challenging over-specialisation

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- The degrowth multiple diagnosis relates to
 - local actors (activists and practionners),
 - researchers (inside or outside academia), activist-led science: concept that can be analysed by academia
 - and society-wide politics (activists and policy makers)

Usually “Researchers - Activists – Practionners”

Acting and thinking at local, global and intermediary levels



Prognosis II : Developing Multi-strategies

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Combining strategies of :

Opposition,

anti-growth, anti-capitalism, anti-development

Alternatives

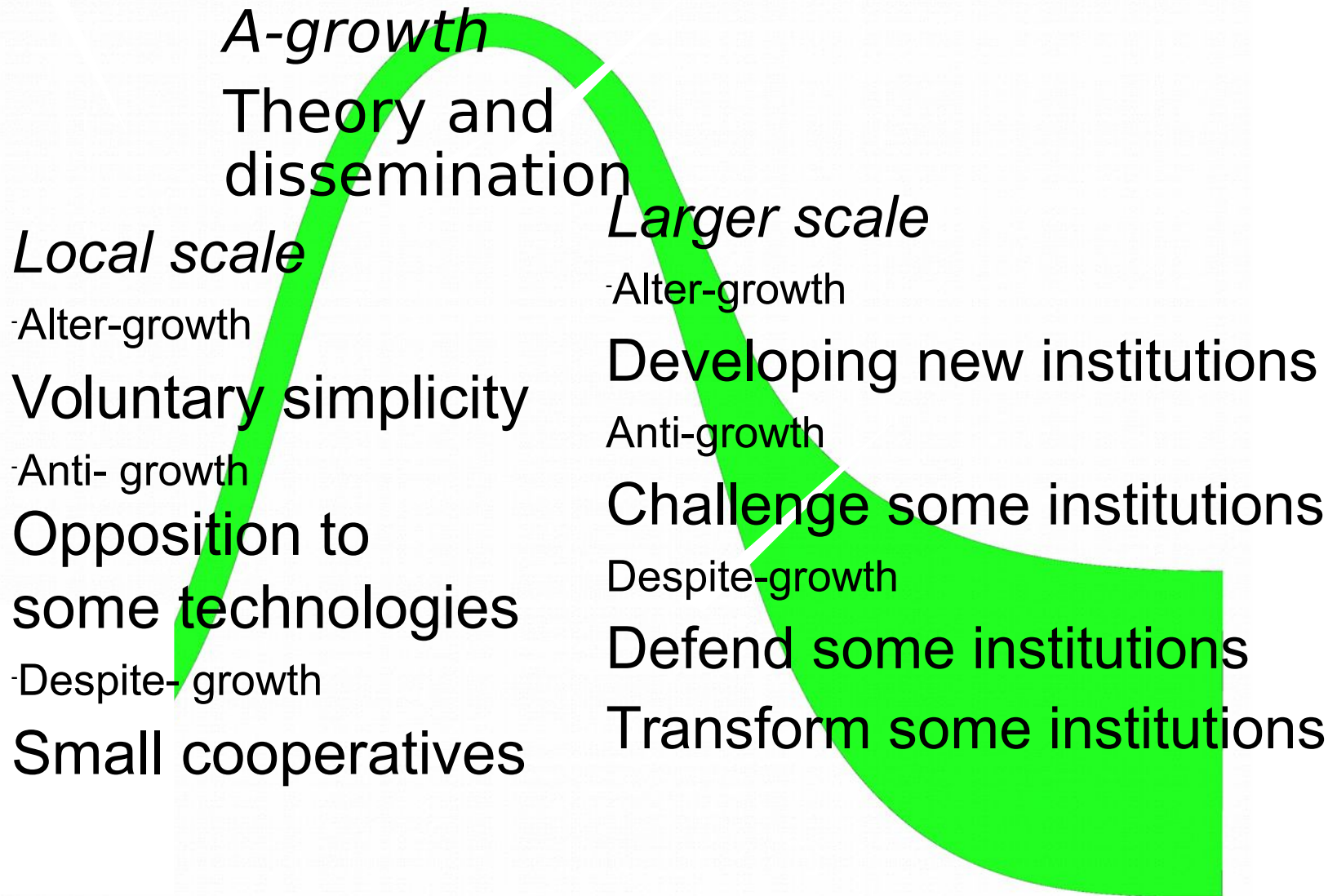
Alter-growth, alter-capitalism, alter-development

Action within existing institutions: “Reformism”

Acting despite-growth, despite-capitalism, despite-development



Convergence of strategies



Facilitation of local currencies; gradual elimination of money creation by banks; not-for-profit banks





Moratoria on
mining
activities

Yasunisation:
leaving resources
In/on the ground

Support for
environmental
justice
movements



Conversion of car-based infrastructure to open common spaces





Work-sharing, rethinking work

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Defense and expansion of local commons





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Promotion of small scale, self-managed not-for-profit companies





Taxation of advertising and banning on public spaces

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Degrowing injustices



- Introduction of a basic income; institutionalization of an income ceiling based on maximum-minimum ratios



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Opposition strategy

- *Adbusting*
- *Ecological movement*
- *Environmental Conflicts*
 - Resisting infrastructures
 - Mining
- ...



Opposition strategy

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Oppositional activism, such as the campaigners working to stop the expansion of developmental infrastructures of transport (i.e. highways, airports, high speed trains), waste management (i.e. incinerators), water management (i.e. big dams and interlinking of rivers) and energy production (i.e. nuclear plants, agrofuels). Opposition takes different forms: demonstrations, boycotts, civil disobedience, direct action and even protest songs.



MARCHÉ POUR LA DÉCROISSANCE

SÉRIOSITÉ DES
DEPENDANCES
TRAVAILONS MOINS



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Bottom-up alternatives

- *Solidarity economies*
- *Nowtopias*
 - Community gardening
 - Exchange networks
 - Ecovillages
 - DIY technologies



Frugal innovations - *Alternatives building*

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Reuse and composting.

Co-housing and sharing

Ecological and dense housing.

Bicycles and public transport.

Open localisation

Face to face relations

Slow travel.

Organic and vegan food

Renewable energy

Appropriate simple tools

Independent and participative information

(...)



Can Decreix is a place to **demonstrate** and **reflect** around the topic of **degrowth**. Can Decreix is a centre for **transformation** (of fruits, vegetables, constructions, societies), for **research**, for **testing** frugal technologies, arts, agroecology. . .





Gardens





Reformism: actions despite-capitalism

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- many actors oppose or challenge some institutions but only propose to reform others.
- some institutions actually need to be defended like social security and public health.
- On one hand we might have to defend the democratic institutions put at risks with the crisis and at the same time support the development of deeper, more participative and direct ones.



Degrowth: why care about the word?

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Sister movements:

- Transition
- Post-development
- Buen vivir
- Agroecology/Permaculture
- Radical ecology
- Inclusive Democracy
- Anticapitalism
- Post-growth



As a means for conclusions: the originality of degrowth

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The originality of degrowth emerges from its **power to articulate** different sources, streams of thought and strategies, bringing together a vast heterogeneous group of actors.

The sources, strategies or political proposals it puts forward are often not new, but their **juxtaposition and combination is innovative and coherent**.

The **diversity maintains a sort of tension which stimulates constructive debates** and exchanges, thus offering an incentive for continuous improvements both at the theoretical and practical levels.



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Degrowth is not an affirmative imaginary that signifies the opposite of growth; it is an imaginary that by confronting growth opens up new imaginaries, spaces, and key words

- D'Alisa, Demaria, and Kallis 2014



Danke!

Great to hear your thoughts on that