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**Article**

## The Emergence of La Decroissance

CES Working Papers

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*Suggested Citation:* Gheorghica, Anca Elena (2012) : The Emergence of La Decroissance, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 4, Iss. 1, pp. 60-75

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/198156>

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# THE EMERGENCE OF *LA DECROISSANCE*\*

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**Abstract:** *The paper aims to provide an overview of the emergence of degrowth – the notion designates a grass root, political and academic movement which is progressively spreading since the previous decade across Europe as a reaction to the drawbacks associated with the imperatives of economic growth. The intellectual founder of the new paradigm of degrowth is the Romanian born economist – Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen. The translation of his scientific works and the publication in French was to become the first milestone of degrowth discourse France becoming the cradle of the movement. While degrowth encompasses many dimensions such as equity, ecology, democracy or enjoyment of life, the overarching theme of the movement is the escaping of the economy as a central societal value. Degrowth gained an increasing audience in the beginning of the years 2000', spreading progressively mostly in other Francophone, Francophile or Latin language speaking countries such as Italy and Spain, but in other European nations as well.*

**Keywords:** degrowth, sustainable development, crisis, paradigmatic change  
**JEL Classification:** B59, Y20

## INTRODUCTION

Starting from the beginning of the previous decade, the new notion of *degrowth* - for many years known only by experts in the field - has penetrated the academic, public and political spheres, rapidly gaining notoriety particularly in Europe.

Only recently being used in economic and social debates, the degrowth perspectives are founded as a reaction to the unsustainable trend of the current global development, coming from intellectual sources that cover a relatively old history such as ecology and bioeconomy-and from the critiques of development and globalization from the 60's.

Degrowth narrative echoes as the new emergent paradigm that holistically approaches the crisis, encapsulating its multidimensional aspects and criticizing the sustainable development-paradigm seen by many reference authors as part of the problem and not the solution. The degrowth narrative deals with crises not tackled by sustainable development such as: the loss of cultural diversity, the crisis of political representation, the crisis of meaning, the multidimensional movement of degrowth being successful in regenerating some debates that were stuck in the previous decades.

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\* ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This work was supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectorial Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646].

The beginning of its success is due partly to the failures of the twentieth century critiques in addressing the limits to growth. This has become today both a practical necessity and a moral imperative. The degrowth promoters add to this drawback a critique that is central in their discourse: the natural social order. They are denying the contemporary order, insisting on people's liberation from the socio-economic imagery generated by the imperative of growth that reduces people to simple production tools or to consumption units.

Thus degrowth movement implies a synthesis of social objectives (a development that benefits all, that serves people and it is not served by people, qualitative and not quantitative) and of ecological concerns (the sustainability of this development).

The paper's aim is to conceptualize degrowth and to provide an overview of the chronological landmarks that have brought to the fore the watchword of degrowth. The first section provides an interpretation of the definitions of degrowth, drawing its main features. Section two and section three emphasize the development of degrowth movement in France and its increasing audience in several European countries, focusing on the tools and actors that served for its divulgation. The final part provides conclusions summarizing the main points of the paper and suggestions for further research.

## **1. DEFINING DEGROWTH**

Key advocates of degrowth state clearly that degrowth it is not a concept per se but “a political slogan with theoretical implications” (Bayon, Fabrice and Smith, 2011, p. 14; Latouche, 2010a, p. 17, 2010b, p. 519, 2007, p. 20), “a missile word for pulverizing the ideology in which both the right and the left are swimming”(Ariès, 2010, p. 81; 2007, p. 159; 2005, p. 75), a “political weapon to decolonize the collective imaginary and free it from the tyranny of growth” (Latouche, 2005a). Thus degrowth is not presented as a doctrine, a program, an ideology or another economic theory (Martinez Allier et al., 2010, p. 1742; Flipo, 2008, p.26), but as “a symbolic challenge” (Latouche, 2006b) to policies that herald economic growth as an end in itself. Degrowth is not to be turned into a blueprint or an end in itself, but to remain a means for fostering a spirit of critique (Ariès, 2005), for questioning the priority accorded to economic values and principles.

Due to the variety of sources, its complexity and multidimensional forms of expression, it is a challenge to agree on a clear cut definition for degrowth. Another fellow degrowth advocate, aware of the dangers entitled by abstract ideas, Kallis (2010b), stated that degrowth is not meant to be a complete theory or a new type of “religion”. In this sense he uttered that “if one is looking for a

single definition with a measuring unit, we are not giving one, because this is precisely what we are fighting against”. Indeed, the lack of clear delimitation allows new forms of expressions of the degrowth movement to move along the dynamic it entails. But at the same time, while having positive implications by allowing freedom of interpretation, the lack of a common language for foregrounding degrowth has negative outcomes such as the fact that it might create confusion. As we will see below, Kallis (2010, p. 874) gives himself a definition in an attempt of defending degrowth.

There is not a single referential text about sustainable degrowth that has yet found its way to the wider academic and political arena, it was the case of the Brundtland Report or the Rio Declaration for Sustainable Development in 1992 (Martinez Allier et al., 2010, p. 1742). Commonly, degrowth appears as a potential emergent paradigm that can give a substantial contribution in reversing the unsustainable path we are in. If this path is to be followed, its promoters have to be able to describe clearly what degrowth is about.

In the French dictionary *Larousse Illustré* of 2010 degrowth is defined as *policies promoting a slowdown of the growth rate in a sustainable development perspective* (Lavignotte, 2009, p.12). The editors from The Institute of Economic and Social Studies for a Sustainable Degrowth stress that this definition is totally flawed as its advocates (Ariès, 2010, 2008; Latouche, 2011a, 2011b, 2010) make clear that degrowth is not “*negative growth*” – but “an absurd and oxymoronical expression that translates to a large extent the domination of the growth imagery” Latouche (2007, p.21). Moreover the literature on degrowth issues provides an important body of virulent critiques to sustainable development (Latouche, 2011b, 2010a, 2006, p. 30, 2004b, p. 51; Bayon et al., 2010, pp.81-102; Bonaiuti, 2010, p. 2; Ariès, 2010, p. 258, 2009, p. 13; Pallante, 2009, p. 20; Fournier, 2008, p. 539; Wallenborn, 2008, pp. 228-229;)

Thus, according to IESSSD “degrowth reflects policies for promoting degrowth of the rich countries, mostly, and aiming at escaping the economism (invasion of all the human and social dimensions by the economy) (...) Sustainable degrowth is opposing the supporters of sustainable development who believe that economic growth can be conjugated with the environmental protection” (Lavignotte, 2009, p. 12).

One of the first attempts to give a comprehensive definition of **degrowth** comes from the Conference on Economic De-growth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity held in Paris (2008). Several academicians that approached the subject provided definitions based on their consideration on degrowth. The table below presents a selection of definitions of degrowth from the

Degrowth Declaration and it is also presenting representative ideas on degrowth narrative expressed by authors from France, Spain and Italy.

**Table 1 – Selected Definitions of *Degrowth***

Definitions of degrowth	Authors and sources
“a voluntary transition towards a just, participatory, and ecologically sustainable society. The objectives of degrowth are to meet basic human needs and ensure a high quality of life, while reducing the ecological impact of the global economy to a sustainable level, equitably distributed between nations”.	Research and Degrowth, 2010, p. 524;
“(A society of degrowth) should be understood as a society built on quality rather than on quantity, on cooperation rather than on competition [...] humanity liberated from economism for which social justice is the objective”.	Latouche, 2003, p. 18;
„Sustainable degrowth is both a banner associated with social and environmental movements and an emergent concept in academic and intellectual circles, they are interdependent and affect each other”.	Martinez Allier et al., 2010, p. 1742;
“Sustainable degrowth can be defined from an ecological-economic perspective as a socially sustainable and equitable reduction (and eventually stabilization) of society's throughput”.	Kallis, 2010, p. 874;
“Degrowth proposes the promotion of the most ample substitution possible of the goods industrially produced and purchased in the commercial route with the autoproduction of goods. In this choice, that implies a decrease of the GDP, we identify the possibility of an extraordinary improvement of the individual and collective life, of the environmental conditions and of the relations between peoples, states and culture”.	Pallante, 2009, pp. 19-20;
“Sustainable degrowth may be defined as an 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;

We distinguish from these definitions the key features that describe the notion of degrowth:

First, degrowth appears as *a transition* that requires *a transformation* of the global economic system. As important advocates of degrowth clearly explain (Latouche, 2010, p. 521), the movement does not advocate for degrowth for the sake of degrowth, an approach that would describe the same symmetry of the imperative for chrematistic growth and would be absurd, but degrowth is a process that aims at reversing the unsustainable path of our development. This feature of escaping from the economy is seen by many authors as a critical one. Latouche (2010, p. 519, 2008; 2007, p. 22) states that it would be best to speak about “agrowth” instead of degrowth, as one speaks as atheism: “It actually means quite precisely, the abandonment of a religion: the religion of the economy, growth, progress and development”. In this sense, as Valerie Fournier clearly emphasized as well (2008, p. 528), the degrowth movement's over-arching theme is escaping from the economy as system of representation. In accordance with a humanist approach - this Cultural Revolution is indispensable in order to achieve a life style change that is not only accepted and unconstrained, but translated into development of the “enjoyment of life” (Lavignotte, 2009, p. 13).

Changing the production and consumption patterns go together and are undoubtedly an important dimension of degrowth. But more than a decrease of consumption and production what is also needed is the decolonization of the so called *economic imagery*. The “logic of economy” requires a new approach, the myth of “limitless growth” needs to be abandoned because after colonizing all territories of material goods and most part of the territories of services, “the commodification has sent its vanguard on the mental territories” (Pallante, 2009, p. 12). Therefore there is a need of an ecology of mind for decolonization of the mental environment.

Second, the obvious objective of degrowth is the *reduction of the ecological impact* through the downscaling of production and consumption. Degrowth goes beyond decoupling material and energy use from growth (dematerialization or green growth), postulating that efficiency improvements alone are not sufficient and might be counterproductive (Schneider, 2010, p. 512) because it would consist in a reduction of environmental impact through more efficient or cleaner technologies, while keeping production and consumption growing, as indicated by the Jevons Paradox (Polimeni et al., 2008; Polimeni & Polimeni, 2006). In this sense, degrowth advocates are very firm concerning the distinction between sustainable development and sustainable degrowth (Ariès, 2010, p. 13; Bonaiuti, 2010; Fournier, 2008, p. 539; Latouche, 2004b, p. 51; Levallois, 2010; Pallante, 2009, p. 20).

A third feature is that this transition is *voluntary* and *participatory*, therefore the process of degrowth is democratic. It is widely accepted within the reference literature, that a definition of degrowth based only on the reduction of metabolism in terms of material and energy flows translates in a limited understanding of degrowth. For the degrowth scholars degrowth appears as the result of a collective choice for a better living, not an imperative imposed by an external authority. Therefore, degrowth is not defended as a necessity but as a choice, one that has to be made democratically and openly (Latouche and Harpages, 2010, p. 38; Fournier, 2008; Flippe, 2008; Schneider, 2010b; Latouche, 2010; Ariès, 2010; Mylondo, 2008, p. 175). Valerie Fournier clearly emphasized this feature in a widely cited article: “Degrowth is offered as a way of avoiding “ecocracy” in the future, a path we could chose today to remain in a position to collectively and democratically shape our future in the face of ecological degradation. The more we wait, the more the shock imposed by the earth natural limits might be brutal and the risk of emerging “ecototalitarian” responses high. But whilst recognizing the threat of environmental degradation, proponents of degrowth are not prepared to sacrifice democracy to some *ecological imperative* any more than to economic or political imperatives” (Fournier, 2008, p. 236). Or as Latouche and Harpages claimed (2010, p. 38), “the suffered degrowth has nothing to do with the chosen

degrowth. The project of a degrowth society is radically different than a negative growth”. Echoing the same message, Ariès (2010) insisted that degrowth is a choice that defenders would make without the oncoming ecological crisis, “simply to be human”.

We find relevant to quote here Daly as well: “A condition of nongrowth can come about in two ways: as a failure of a growth economy, or as the success of a steady-state economy. These two cases are as different as night and day. No one denies that a failure of a growth economy to grow brings unemployment and suffering. It is precisely to avoid the suffering of a failed growth economy (we know growth cannot continue) that we advocate SSE” (1992, p. 126). Daly is the disciple of Georgescu-Roegen and founder of the steady-state economy concept. Most of the degrowth scholars admit that the transition of degrowth will lead to the stabilization of a stationary state economy.

Fourth, the complex phenomenon of degrowth has a strong dimension of equity. Growth is “intrinsically inequitable” (Lavignotte, 2009, p. 71) because it generated in the former four decades an increase in disparities both internationally and intranationally, creating a mechanism that allowed rich people to get richer and poor people to be poorer. Abundant official statistics and papers portray the co evolution of unprecedented growth and unparalleled disparities and this evidence is one of the traditional critiques of growth. All degrowth partisans share the view that the transition entailed by the degrowth process has to allow a redistribution of the global wealth so that a degrowth society will be an equitable one - built on social justice. For Illich - maybe the most important precursor of degrowth - equity is the fundamental value of a convivial society (1973, p. 37). Indeed, degrowth of the poor would be a “countersense” as Pallante (2009, p. 49) stressed. The allowance for Southern countries or societies, where ecological impacts are low relative to their biocapacity, to increase their material consumption and thus their ecological footprint, is an idea explicitly favoured by Georgescu- Roegen as well (1975, p. 378).

A fifth characteristic of the degrowth perspective is the quest for a high quality of life that moves the focus from *more* to *better*, addressing the dichotomy of *having* and *being*, and challenging the significant distinction between the qualitative and the quantitative assets in one’s life. Therefore, degrowth does not equal a contraction but *the enjoyment of life*, a notion commonly attributed to Georgescu-Roegen (1975, p. 18). He describes it as the true product of the economic process. The paradigmatic proposition of degrowth that human progress without economic growth is possible (Schneider et al., 2010, p. 512). Latouche (2010, p. 521) refers to it as a decrease of “well-having” in order to improve “well-being”. The slogan *moins des biens, plus des liens* (less goods, more links) (Ariès, 2010; Latouche and Harpages, 2010; Latouche, 2010 etc.) appears



frequently in the degrowth literature pointing to the life improvement that can be generated by going beyond the humans – things related to the humans – humans relation, in the very same sense Karl Polanyi indicated in *The Great Transformation* (2001).

## 2. CHRONOLOGICAL LANDMARKS OF THE EMERGENCE OF *LA DECROISSANCE* IN FRANCE

France is deemed on many grounds to be the cradle of the degrowth movement: first, in this country several milestones took place in the previous decade setting the stage for what promises to become a new paradigm; second, while the degrowth narrative is increasingly percolating new territories, the main degrowth ambassadors are mostly French scholars and activists; third, even though degrowth comes from multiple sources, important precursors of this emergent paradigm are either French, coming from French speaking countries, or/and writing and publishing in French.

The notion of *decroissance* does not appear as such in any French dictionary of social sciences before 2006 (Latouche, 2010a, p. 519, 2010b, p. 14). This indicates that in France as well the use of the term in the field of economics is of very recent date.

While Lavignotte (2009, p. 11) stated that André Gorz was the first to use the term *decroissance* in 1977, The Institute for Social and Economic Studies for Sustainable De growth – hereafter ISESSD\*, shows that the French philosopher André Amar used the term already in 1976 in the magazine *Les cahiers de la Nef*. The following year (after the presence of Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen in France) André Gorz advocated already for degrowth in *Ecology and Liberty* (1977).

Several reference authors that analyzed the subject of degrowth stated that the term originates from the French word “*decroissance*; the same term was used for the translation of a collection of essays written by the Romanian born economist – Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen (Latouche and Harpages, 2010, p. 20, Martinez-Alier et al., 2010, p. 1741; Flipo, 2008; Schneider, 2010) – the intellectual founder of degrowth. The translation of these scientific works by Jacques Grinevald and Ivo Rens in 1979 into: *Demain la Decroissance: Entropie, Ecologie, Economie* was to become a milestone in the degrowth movement.

In 1993, the French ecological magazine *Silence*, with the headquarters in Lyon, dedicated a special issue to degrowth and to Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, edited by Jacques Grinevald. But during the two decades from 1979 to 1999, the word did not raise but very little attention.

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\* <http://www.decroissance.org/index.php?chemin=textes/historique>



Only in the years 2000 the audience on the concept has increased considerably when, in the same French city, in 2001, Bruno Clémentin and Vincent Cheynet, founded the magazine *Casseurs de pub*, driving inspiration probably from the Canadian periodical *Adbusters – the Journal of the Mental Environment*. They imagined the concept of *sustainable degrowth* (Lavingotte, 2009) and opposed this concept to *sustainable development*. As mentioned on the webpage of ISESSD, they were inspired by the works of Georgescu-Roegen. In 2002, Vincent Cheynet realized a dossier on degrowth for the magazine *Silence*. Published initially in 5000 copies, the dossier had two additionally prints. Next year, together with his colleagues Bruno Clémentin from *Casseurs de pub* and Michel Bernard from *Silence* published the book *Objectif décroissance* sold in 8000 copies and republished 3 times.

In 2002 ISESSD was founded and in September 2003 the institute organized the international colloquium on *Sustainable Degrowth* in the city hall of Lyon with the participation of about 600 persons. In 2005, following the suggestion of Serge Latouche and the Economic Commission of Greens a new colloquium on degrowth was organized.

In 2004 degrowth entered the public debate with the first issue of the periodical “*La Décroissance: Le Journal de la Joie de Vivre*”. Initially published on a trimestrial basis, it is now printed monthly in 45 000 to 60 000 copies. The journal is distributed in France, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Belgium and Canada.

Many other French publications had popularized the years ‘2000, including large circulation media. For instance, since 2006 *Le Monde* has published many articles on *degrowth* and contributed to a large extent to the promotion of the movement. As well, several web pages are devoted to degrowth in France: [www.decroissance.net](http://www.decroissance.net) - the online version of the journal *La décroissance*, [www.decroissance.info](http://www.decroissance.info) – an independent website managed by local groups, [www.decroissance.org](http://www.decroissance.org) – the webpage of ISESSD.

The scientific journal *Entropia* was launched in 2006 at the French National Assembly by a group of French academicians, including Serge Latouche, with the aim of giving theoretical substance to the idea of degrowth.

Several so called “marches for degrowth” took place in various places in France in the recent years and Degrowth even has its own party in France: the Party for Degrowth (le Parti pour la Décroissance - PPLD), founded on April 8, 2006 in Dijon. As stated on the webpage<sup>\*</sup>, it calls for a “degrowth based on equity, sustainability and values that are humanist, democratic, republican, non-violent, defending human rights and fighting all forms of discrimination and totalitarianism”.

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<sup>\*</sup> [www.partipourladecroissance.net](http://www.partipourladecroissance.net)

The activity of the party and its success remained marginal, but in 2007 degrowth entered French political debates during the presidential election campaigns, when all the candidates were interpellated on this subject (Latouche, 2007).

In 2008, *The First International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity* took place in Paris and witnessed the gathering of 140 multidisciplinary scientists. The event was successful: “for the first time, scientists got together in an interdisciplinary and international academic setting with representatives of the civil society on the topic of economic degrowth as a possible path for more ecology, more equality and more wellbeing” (Schneider et al., 2010). The conference proved to be a milestone that developed academic credibility of the subject of degrowth, idea mainly supported before by civil society coalitions. Today the fertile ideas behind degrowth are progressively forming an established field of research.

### 3. AN INCREASING AUDIENCE

Nowadays, the degrowth movement is “a rather loose and open network including a variety of forums for circulating, sharing and debating ideas and experiences” (Fournier, 2008, p. 532). While originating in France, the movement is increasingly gaining international audience and scope. First in other Latin countries such as Italy and Spain and in francophone regions (such as the ones in Belgium, Switzerland and Canada), degrowth is spreading to several other countries in Europe and across the ocean in both its theoretical and practical dimensions.

Italy appears to be the second cradle of the movement in Europe, where both initiatives for theoritization and divulgation of degrowth took place almost in parallel with the ones in France, starting in 2004. *La Rete per la decrescita*\* (Network for Degrowth) was founded by a group of activists and intellectuals coming from experiences of solidarity economy, criticism to development, anti-utilitarianism and bioeconomics. Today, the *Association for Degrowth* has permanent courses on degrowth issues. In September 2011 they organized as well a summer school on the subject of degrowth. Moreover, together with the City Hall of Venice, Udine University, IUAV University, Research and Degrowth Network and other promoters, the association is responsible for organizing in September 2012 *The Third International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity* in Venice. One of the central figures on the degrowth movement in Italy is Maurizio Pallante, who published since 2005 many books on

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\* [www.decrescita.it](http://www.decrescita.it)

degrowth and initiated in January 2007 the Movement for Happy Degrowth\* with the aim of networking the experiences of individuals, associations and committees of people in order to work together for putting in practice the principles of degrowth.

A Party for Degrowth is active in Italy since July 2007, but degrowth entered the political debate a year earlier, during the national presidential campaign. Pallante became councilor of the new Green Minister of the Environment and Paolo Cacciari was elected deputy of Venice after advocating for degrowth in “Thinking degrowth. Sustainability and Equity”, published in 2006 (Latouche, 2007, p. 18).

In Spain, the Catalan Network for Degrowth, that today gathers over 1500 members, has its origins back in 2006. Since that year they organised marches for degrowth, several discussion sessions, workshops, presentations and other public events for promoting the idea. They even developed a radio station on degrowth and initiated several projects in various fields such as permaculture, cooperatives of autoproduction, cohousing. Other eight networks were created in other regions of Spain. Between March 26<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> 2010 the Second International Conference on Economic Degrowth for Ecological Sustainability and Social Equity was organized. More than 500 scientists, civil society members and practitioners from more than 40 countries joined the event hosted at the historic building of Universidad de Barcelona.

In Belgium, The Political Movement of Growth Objectors - *Le Mouvement politique des objecteurs de croissance*<sup>†</sup> was founded in 2009 on the 18<sup>th</sup> October at Brussels. In April 2009, at the European Parliament building in Brussels, the Club of Rome together with other partners organized the Workshop on Socially Sustainable Economic Degrowth<sup>‡</sup>.

In Switzerland in November 2008 the first group for promoting degrowth was founded – The Swiss Network for Growth Objection (Reseau Objection de Croissance Suisse) that developed first on the canton of Genève and later on in Vaud and Neuchâtel. New groups were recently created in Basel<sup>§</sup> and in Bern<sup>\*\*</sup>. The platform [www.decroissance.ch](http://www.decroissance.ch) is an independent initiative promoting all the activities directly or indirectly linked with degrowth in Switzerland.

In United Kingdom, The New Economic Foundation - NEF organized on January 12<sup>th</sup> 2010 the conference *Rethinking economic growth, Towards an international degrowth network*. The term *degrowth* became accepted as the English translation for *decroissance* in 2008, at the international conference on degrowth from Paris, so only very recently compared with the other countries listed

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\* <http://decrescitafelice.it>

† <http://www.objecteursdecroissance.be>

‡ [http://www.clubofrome.at/archive/degrowth\\_brussels.html](http://www.clubofrome.at/archive/degrowth_brussels.html)

§ <http://decroissance-basel.org>

\*\* [www.decroissance-bern.ch](http://www.decroissance-bern.ch)

before. But while the term *degrowth* in Anglo-Saxon speaking countries is not as popular as *decroissance* in French, numerous initiatives take place already in UK for promoting a transition towards a future not based on economic growth. The pioneering work of NEF in advancing a new economy for people and planet and not for profit is representative. NEF published several books and articles directly linked with the economic degrowth (2010; 2009; 2006). Tim Jackson's book, *Prosperity without growth* (2009) has gained a considerable attention in the degrowth debate for its relevance for the transition towards a socio-economic system beyond growth. Transition Towns Network\* in United Kingdom and Ireland that has gradually developed since 2005, is by far one of the most significant examples of how degrowth can lead to socially and economically sustainable communities.

Amongst the Scandinavian countries, Finland appears as the initiator of the degrowth debate. The website [www.degrowth.fi](http://www.degrowth.fi) represents the online interface of a project that studies degrowth and takes it into practice in the Finnish context. According to the editors of the webpage, the project, runned by a couple of researchers that are affiliated with the Aalto University School of Economics in Helsinki, focuses on the cultural dimensions of degrowth and particularly on the contemporary practices of citizens, firms, and other organizations that may either encourage or resist the spirit of growth. In September 24<sup>th</sup> 2010 the *Growth in Transition* Conference was organized by The Finnish Association for Nature Conservation in co-operation with Aalto University School of Economics, Corporate Environmental and Social Responsibility Research Group and other partners. The conference brought together over 550 participants including academics, politicians, NGOs, businesses, the media, and the general public to explore limits to growth as well as possibilities for ecologically and socially responsible economic models. In addition, more than 400 people watched the conference on-line on the conference webpage<sup>†</sup>.

In Eastern Europe, in Hungary, in March 2011 the word *degrowth* made its way into the public and academic debates as *nemnövekedés*, when the degrowth ambassador, Serge Latouche launched the translation of his book *Treaty for Degrowth*, in Hungarian (Liegey, 2011).

In Romania, in 2010 the author of this article has contributed together with the French Cultural Centre of Iasi and the Faculty of Economy and Business Administration from the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, to the organization of a scientific colloquium on the aftermaths of the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 that gathered speakers from 7 countries. Following the suggestion of the author, a session of this colloquium was devoted to degrowth. The session on

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\* <http://www.transitionnetwork.org>

† [www.degrowthfinland.fi](http://www.degrowthfinland.fi)

degrowth received the highest audience within the colloquium and represented a significant step in the advancement of the growth critiques and the degrowth alternatives locally.

From Europe, across the Atlantic, degrowth movement made its way in 2010 in Canada when in April 2010 a first conference on Degrowth was organized in Vancouver and following its grand success, a second one took place in the same city in June 2011<sup>\*</sup>. Out of a co-operative effort of four Montreal Universities, a new international conference is scheduled between 14<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of May 2012 in Montreal<sup>†</sup>, focusing on the particular situations and dynamics of the Americas related to degrowth.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Romanian economist Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, considered the intellectual founder of degrowth, predicted that bioeconomy will be the language that will be spoken by all in the third millennium. His prophecy seems to become true. Degrowth, on which the economist has insisted as the only option for a sustainable socio-economic development, has an increasing resonance starting with the years 2000.

The word *decroissance*, used for the first time in the '70 in some French publications for designating an alternative to the unsustainability of the economic growth, became an activist slogan in the former decade – in France in 2001, in Italy in 2004 and in Catalunya in 2006, spreading afterwards in other francophone and Latin regions and countries, including outside Europe. The English *degrowth* was accepted at the first international conference on degrowth from 2008;- that marks as well the extension of the movement in the academic sphere and in the international debates of civil society.

The contemporary multidimensional crisis (undoubtedly more pronounced on its socio-human dimension than on the financial and economic ones) offers an opportunity for the advancement of degrowth: shows the limits of economics, allows the exposure of the growth fetishism as root of the crisis and generates alternative discourses.

Economic degrowth does not appear as a new doctrine, a programme, an ideology or yet as another economic theory. Because of the dynamic and complexity of its forms of expression a comprehensive definition of degrowth is considered to be a difficult task. Nonetheless, from the reference literature we distinguish some major features of degrowth: it appears as a transition that

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<sup>\*</sup> [www.de-growth.com](http://www.de-growth.com)

<sup>†</sup> <http://montreal.degrowth.org>

entails the transformation of the global economic system with the obvious objective of reducing the ecological impact through reduction of production and consumption. This transition that goes far beyond decoupling is voluntary and participatory, the degrowth process being a democratic one. As well degrowth implies equity. Central in the movement is the quest for a high life standard where the dichotomy quality and quantity is being stressed. Escaping of the economy and the decolonization of the economic imagery represents the overarching theme of the movement.

The degrowth discourse has echo. As a discourse dominated by the quest for better world alternatives, it is often interpreted as a new utopia. But it is natural to prefer the utopian discourse in the place of the dystopian one. Because if we were to refer to the future world where *business as usual* types of activities engendered by the imperative of growth will lead finally to a crisis that will make degrowth inescapable, the scenery will be one of fear and authority and not one in which the *enjoyment of life* prevails.

Degrowth is part of a social movement developed on the basis that the economy can degrow in a democratic and equitable manner. Besides the academic, intellectual and political dimension of the movement, the civil and the grass roots type of actions form the substantive weight of the movement. (The various innovative experiences that bring degrowth in practice is the subject of a subsequent paper with the doctoral research project.)

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