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Degrowth and the global South: the twin problem of global dependencies

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Degrowth and the Global South: the twin problem of global dependencies

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Abstract

We conduct a systematic literature review comprising both a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the academic degrowth literature considering the Global South, and delineate substantive and methodological implications for future research. We find two main narratives: one stressing synergies, i.e. commonalities among Global South and Global North perspectives on degrowth, and another highlighting challenges, i.e. a constructive discussion of a range of challenges that emerge in this context. Our review reveals, *inter alia*, that the existing literature focuses mainly on the synergy narrative, and that there is a strong focus on theoretical and qualitative methodology. We argue that future research might want to put more emphasis on the investigation of structural dependencies between the North and South, using a broader methodological toolkit than so far. Only then one can effectively address the twin problem of global dependencies: the fact that within the current institutional framework, these dependencies are a motivation for and a potential obstacle to degrowth at the same time.

Keywords: Degrowth, Global South, structural dependencies, decolonization

1. Introduction

Degrowth, as an academic discourse and activist movement developed in the Global North, has received increased attention in light of the deepening climate crisis. It is not primarily an economic concept, but first and foremost a wake-up call to radically question a growth obsession that, as degrowth proponents contend, hurts both people and planet. While one may distinguish at least two main origins of the contemporary degrowth discourse— a culturalist critique of modernity and an ecological critique of growth (Muraca, 2013) it has been especially the ecological stream of degrowth that accounts for degrowth slowly finding its way into more mainstream policy debates. A key argument of the ecological critique concerns the injustice that people in poorer countries are both least responsible for, and most vulnerable to environmental crises. To address this sinister state of affairs, degrowth in the Global North is regularly put forth as a necessary step.

One question that is discussed in this context is to what extent degrowth, then, ‘can be applied to the Global South’ as well. The economic dimension of degrowth does demand a sort of aggregate economic ‘degrowing’ of rich countries in terms of an “equitable downscaling of production and consumption” (Schneider et al., 2010, p. 512) with the goal of decreasing societies’ social metabolisms (Fischer-Kowalski & Haberl, 2015), i.e. their energy and material flows.¹ But what does this imply for the South? Should ‘the South’ continue to grow to reach a certain level of minimal material well-being? Is the very reason the North has to degrow to give the South ‘space’ to grow? Or is aggregate economic growth as a societal goal so inherently flawed that it should not be pursued in the South either?

Over the years, degrowth has formulated a variety of responses to these questions. They range from critical questioning the presumably homogenous category of ‘the South’, over pointing out that even though degrowth is developed by and for the North, its intellectual origins lay in Southern thought and movements, to the response that with degrowth, the North grants ‘conceptual space’ to the South to find their own trajectories of societal provisioning beyond growth (e.g. Kallis et al., 2015; Latouche, 2009). However, as degrowth has received more attention in recent years and found its way into policy spaces, a number of new questions arose as well (Chiengkul, 2018; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019). For example: What if degrowth were to become mainstream policy, and Northern trade and consumption patterns would indeed change significantly? What effects would that have on countries in the South in the short, medium, and long term?

¹ As degrowth proponents have to continuously point out against those with only a shallow reading of the concept, this does not mean degrowth across the board. Certain sectors and regions surely have to grow (e.g. Kallis, 2017, p. 8; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 512), most notably renewable energy and public infrastructures, e.g. for transportation.

The contributions of degrowth scholarship on the question ‘How does degrowth relate to the Global South?’ are, therefore, spread far and wide. In this paper, we set out to structure this discourse and delineate implications for the future engagement with this topic. We do so by conducting a systematic literature review, by analyzing data from the Web of Science both qualitatively and quantitatively. While this approach allows for a high level of transparency and reproducibility of our analysis, it comes at the cost of covering only the academic discourse of mainly peer-reviewed and ranked journals. This necessarily neglects relevant contributions from other fields, including debates that come from the activist part of the degrowth movement or from outside of the hegemonial academic discourse. The following analysis therefore cannot arrogate to delineate conclusions on the overall degrowth movement. As White scholars from the Global North analyzing Web of Science data, we intend this article to be read as a supplement (rather than a critique or substitute) to studies calling for more ‘research from the margins’, such as Hanaček et al (2020).

We proceed as follows: section 2 describes our data and methodology. Section 3 presents a qualitative content analysis, in which we identify two main narratives in the core literature: one stressing synergies, and another stressing challenges in the relation of degrowth with the South. We find that the majority of contributions stresses synergies rather than challenges, and mainly makes use of theoretical or qualitative research methodologies. Notably, however, we find that the complications implied by global interdependencies, and, specifically, structural dependencies between the South and the North, are increasingly recognized. Yet, current contributions raise this issue rather than presenting a full analysis of it. Based on these findings, section 4 delineates methodological and substantial implications for the future degrowth discourse regarding the Global South. Section 5 concludes. In all, the aim of this article is two-fold: firstly, to provide a structured overview of the discourse in question, and secondly, to pinpoint areas that we see as fruitful for future research.

2. Data collection, methodology, and sample characteristics

To get a systematic overview over the current consideration of the Global South and South-North relations in the academic degrowth discourse we conducted a systematic literature review that follows the guidelines by the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses* (PRISMA) statement (Havránek et al., 2020; Page et al., 2021). The vantage point was a search of the Web of Science database using the search strings depicted in Table 1 in English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. This resulted in a sample of 501 papers (corresponding to set #7 in Table 1), which was then refined over several steps, as summarized in Figure 1.²

² A list of all publications is provided in the online appendix to this paper.

Set	Search string (English) ³	Rationale	Keywords				
			EN	FR	DE	IT	ES
#1	Degrowth OR de-growth OR post-growth OR postgrowth OR decroissance	The overall reference to degrowth	4.591	530	901	54	59
#2	“Global North” OR “Global South”	Direct topical reference	8.184	10	0	0	22
#3	decolonial OR “post- colonial” OR “postcolonial” OR “unequal exchange” OR extractivism	Indirect topical reference	16.671	16.558	0	18	15.693
#4	global OR international	Direct reference to rel. adjectives	2.234.972	922.106	2.234.972	441	1.401.716
#5	“dependency theor*” OR “structuralis*” OR “post development*” OR “post- development*”	Reference to related fields of research	5.474	3.257.836	6	13	126
#6	#1 AND [#2 OR #3 OR #4 OR #5]	Merge criteria 1-5	289	17	216 ⁴	0	4
#7	#7 AND [Article types: Articles OR Review Article OR Early Access (Document types)]	Only consider actual research articles	264	16	216 ⁴	0	4

Note: The keywords for sets 1-5 were searched for in the article title, abstract, author keywords, and the field KeyWords Plus®, which is the product of a special algorithm from Clarivate Analytics that identifies words and phrases that occur frequently in the cited references of a paper. Note that the language of the keywords is not indicative of the language of the article full texts: for instance, many publications that were identified with German search terms had full texts written in English.

Table 1: The search strings used in the initial literature search on Web of Science.

³ The translated search strings are provided in the appendix.

⁴ This number comprises many duplicates with the search using English keywords: only 15 of these articles were not part of the English sample.

Screening process

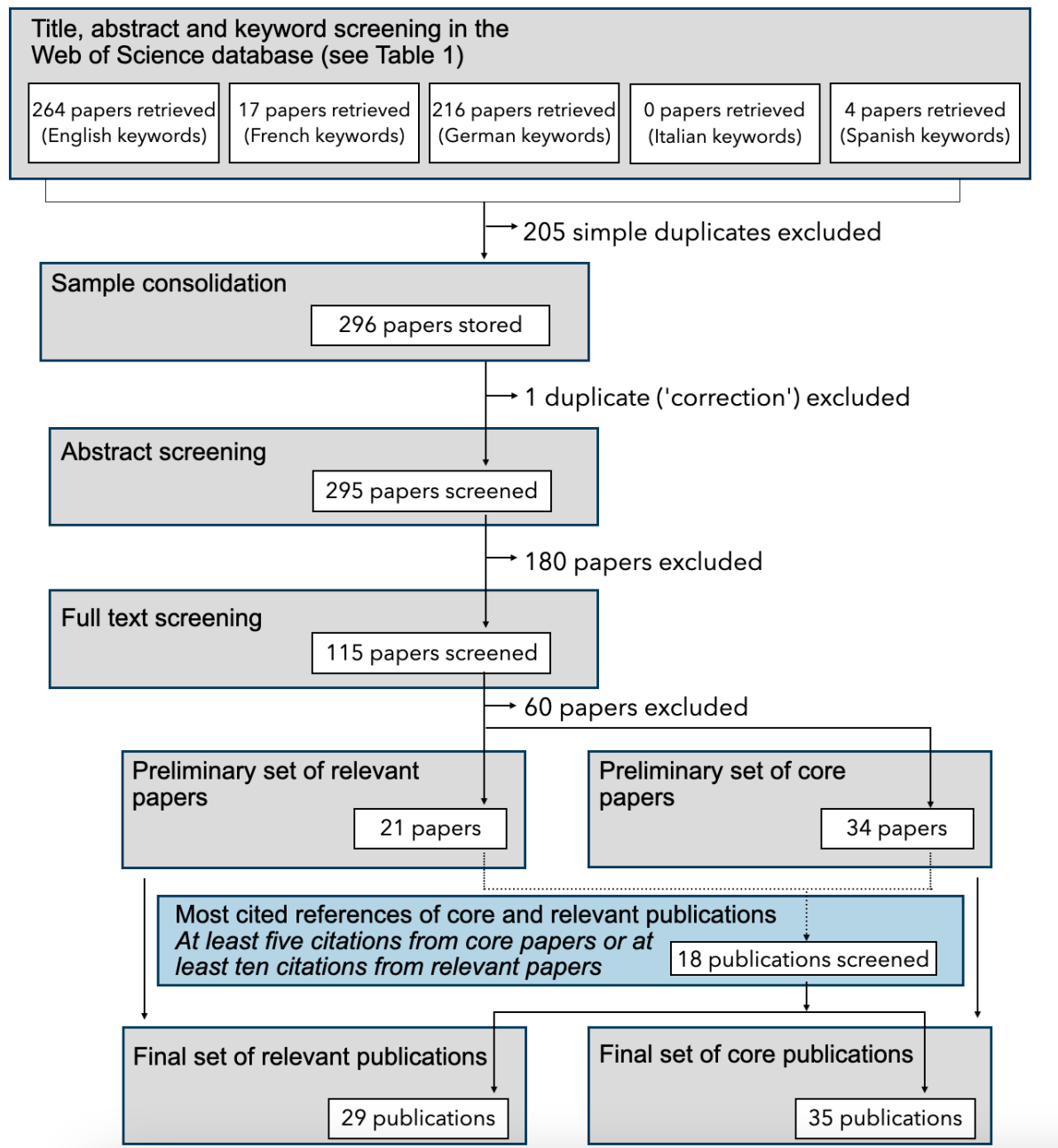


Figure 1: The PRISMA graph representing the construction of the final literature sample.

In a first step, the titles and abstracts of the papers were screened to remove publications that were obviously not related to our main topic. The selection was very permissive at this stage: all papers that were concerned with the topic of degrowth and seemed to either consider the South explicitly or seemed to consider implications for the South even though the focus was on the North were kept in the sample. In this process, a first subsample of 10% of all articles was scrutinized by all authors. The inter-rater reliability of this first screening was measured using Cohen's kappa. The very high value of 0.849 pointed to a strong agreement among raters, so the remaining

publications were allocated to only one author for screening. If, however, one author was not 100% sure of how to classify an article, the case was discussed among all authors before a final decision was made. In all, this first step resulted in 180 papers being excluded.

The next step was a first full text screening in which the remaining articles were classified as (1) being *core contributions* to the subject considered, (2) being *relevant* to the subject considered, or (3) being *irrelevant*. A paper was classified as a core contribution if (a) the paper was clearly part of the degrowth discourse, as evidenced by referencing the central concepts and contributions of this discourse, *and* (b) the consideration of the South or of the relationship between the South and North was of central relevance. If papers merely considered the South and/or the South-North relationship in the context of degrowth but did not place this discussion at the core of the argument, they were classified as *relevant* but not core papers. This resulted in a preliminary set of 21 relevant papers and 34 core papers. 60 papers were excluded after the full text screening.

One limitation of choosing Web of Science as the vantage point was that several academic publication avenues – such as books or important conference proclamations – could not initially be considered since Web of Science only covers ranked peer-reviewed journals. To avoid the neglect of important contributions outside of the Web of Science, the reference lists of all papers classified as core or relevant publications were extracted and analyzed computationally. If any publication not priorly considered received at least five citations from core papers (19 publications) or at least ten citations from relevant papers (7 publications), it was subjected to a full-text screening. This resulted in a set of 18 (non-overlapping) publications, which we then classified as *core*, *relevant*, or *irrelevant*, using the same rules as described above. As shown in Figure 1, the overall result was a set of 29 publications classified as relevant (but not core), and 35 core publications (for the publication dates see Figure 2).

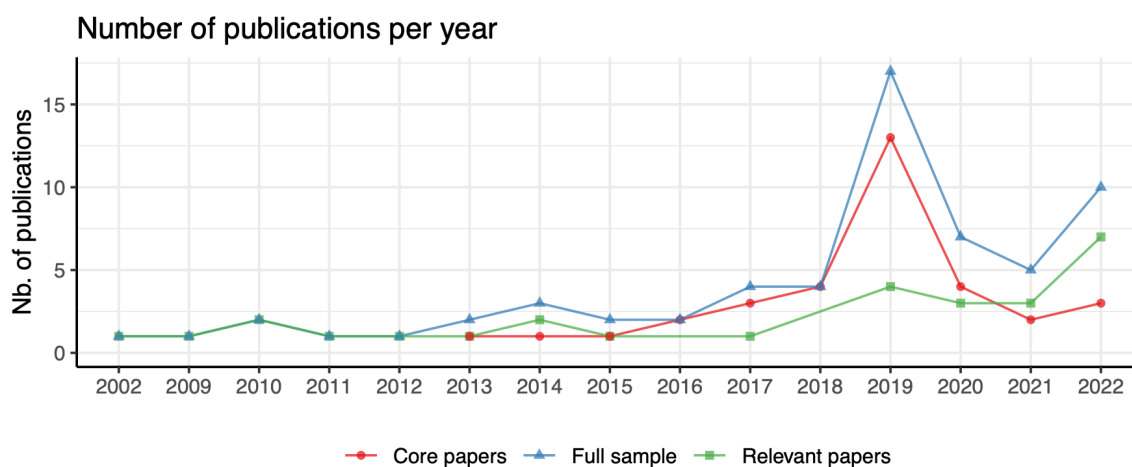


Figure 2: Years of publication for the papers in the final sample.

Before studying the core publications in depth, we first provide some basic descriptive information about our core sample: the main publications' outlets as well as the geographical locations of the authors, which might be relevant for interpreting the results of the review below.

Outlet	Articles
Ecological Economics	11
Sustainability Science	5
Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	3
Third World Quarterly	3
Alternatives	2
Globalizations	2

Table 2: The most common outlets for the publications in the core sample.

First, we identified the journal *Ecological Economics* as the by far most prominent outlet for the core publications (see Table 2). This is partly due to their 2019 Special Section on 'Theoretical and political journeys between environmental justice and degrowth: what potential for an alliance?', in which seven articles of our core sample appeared. Aside from this journal no other outlet stood out. Notably, the analysis of the reference lists added three books to the sample of relevant publications, yet the only addition from reference lists to the core sample was a journal article.

Second, it becomes immediately evident that most publications come from scholars affiliated with institutions from the North (see panels A and B of Figure 3), a fact that should be taken into account when interpreting the main topics covered by the literature considered.⁵

⁵ This does not mean that scholars were not self-aware of their positionality. In fact, the problem of positionality implicit normative orientation was considered in a majority of the publications.



Figure 3: Descriptive information about the publications in our core sample.

3. Qualitative content analysis: two narratives

For the qualitative content analysis, all authors did a close reading of the papers in the core sample. Our goal was to identify core arguments on the question “How does Degrowth relate to the Global South?”. In this process, we inductively identified two main narratives: one on *synergies* and one on *challenges*. Each paper was classified as primarily promoting either a ‘synergies’ or a ‘challenges’ narrative. We identified a paper’s narrative as ‘synergies’ if it stresses commonalities among South and North perspectives on degrowth, and ‘challenges’ if the main purpose of a paper, while mostly sympathetic to degrowth, was to highlight and constructively discuss a range of challenges that emerge in this context. For each of these categories, we then analyzed what type of arguments were used⁶, and found three sub-arguments for both categories, as summarized in table 3 below.

⁶ Where applicable, we also referred to literature in the relevant category if they contributed to one of the argumentative streams identified in the core literature.

Synergies	Challenges
Southern thought and movements as inspiration and allies	Degrowth as an unsuitable concept in terms of its framing and theoretical focus
Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South	The danger of degrowth as neocolonial agenda-setting
Growth dependence as problematic not only in the North but also in the South	Global dependencies lead to material challenges for the South as a consequence of degrowth in the North

Table 3: Summary of the qualitative reconstruction of arguments in the literature.

In the following, we describe the two categories in more detail (Sections 3.1 – 3.2). Then we take a more quantitative approach to illustrate the relative prevalence and methodological orientations of the narratives (section 3.3).

3.1 Synergies

We found three main (often overlapping) arguments on synergies: One that frames the South as an inspiration to degrowth in the North, one that frames degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South, and one stressing that degrowth also applies to the South in the sense that the South should not follow Western development paths and resist (or continue its resistance to) growth-based capitalist development.

Firstly, scholars often stress that the intellectual roots of degrowth lay in Southern post-development discourses (e.g. Gerber & Raina, 2018; Latouche, 2009; Muraca, 2013). Especially Latouche (2009, p. 65f), one of the founding fathers of degrowth, early on framed degrowth as a project that was first and foremost inspired by a culturalist critique that drew substantially from voices from the South. While nowadays the justification for degrowth is often framed in the context of the climate crisis, in the early days the culturalist critique was seen as a distinct, for some even primary, justification for degrowth, which was only eventually complemented by the ecological critique (Latouche, 2009, p. 23; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 512). This culturalist critique was also stressed early on by Martínez-Alier, whose 2002 book ‘Environmentalism of the Poor’ was a core reference for the development of degrowth ideas. Martínez-Alier et al. (2010, p. 1743) point out that for degrowth proponents, “the main problem with the idea of sustainable development is not with the idea of sustainability but with that of development itself”. Alternatives to the Western development model, it is argued, can be found in Southern philosophies and practices such as *Buen Vivir* from the Andean region in Latin America or *Ubuntu* from Bantu speaking peoples in Africa (D’Alisa et al., 2015).

In line with this narrative, degrowth scholars thus frame the South not only as an *intellectual* inspiration, but see certain Southern *practices* as a concrete inspiration of “degrowth in practice” (Kallis, 2018, p. 140). In the literature we reviewed, degrowth in practice was often presented in terms of Southern case studies, such as Andean struggles against extractivism (Pérez-Rincón et al., 2019), community-fisheries in Turkey (Ertör-Akyazi, 2020), or the practice of community-owned tourism in the indigenous community of Kichwa Añangu in Ecuador (Renkert, 2019). This research reflects on the relation between these Southern case studies and degrowth, noting that even though they are not framed as ‘degrowth’ by the actors themselves, they are often aligned with degrowth goals (Kallis, 2018, p. 140; cited in Pérez-Rincón et al., 2019, p. 90; see also Frost, 2019, p. 140).

In terms of case studies, especially environmental justice (EJ) struggles in the South have received ample attention. Degrowth scholars speak of an “obvious alliance” (Martínez-Alier, 2012, p. 64) or “ontological continuities” (Singh, 2019, p. 138) between degrowth and EJ movements in the South (see also, e.g., Demaria et al., 2013, p. 201; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 516). This is also echoed by Southern scholars reflection on degrowth: Escobar (2015, p. 456), for instance, sees post-development and degrowth as “fellow travelers”, and Gudynas (2011, p. 446) sees degrowth as a “consequence” of *Buen Vivir*. Note, however, that when Martínez-Alier (2012) spoke of an “obvious alliance”, the degrowth movement was a small and radical social movement mainly in France and Italy, which stressed bottom-up, subversive action on the ground. It is this feature of the degrowth movement, where scholars see particular synergies with post-development and EJ struggles in the South. As Escobar (2015, p. 458) points out, the ground for such synergies is “the emphasis on local autonomy, which reveals a certain predilection for anarchism as political imaginary”. As degrowth has found a larger following and focuses more on the ecological rather than the culturalist critique, its focus has arguably shifted somewhat from exclusive bottom-up community building to (also) top-down policy-making. To what extent that facet of degrowth is compatible with Southern thought and action is not widely discussed in the literature so far, but certainly not self-evident (see section 3.2 below for some initial discussions, and also Nirmal & Rocheleau, 2019).

The second argumentative stream stresses that degrowth in the North would be part and parcel of decolonization processes. Many scholars talking about degrowth and the South mention the concepts of *ecological debt* and *ecologically unequal exchange*. The demand that the North “pays for past and present colonial exploitation in the Global South” (Demaria et al., 2013, p. 201) is central in this framing.

A scholar who stresses this feature particularly is Jason Hickel (Hickel, 2019, 2020). Hickel (2020, p. 5) notes that “some worry that degrowth in the North might have a negative impact on economies in the South” since Southern economies heavily rely on raw material exports to the North. However, Hickel points out that using this as a definitive argument *against* degrowth is problematic: the dependency itself is part

of neo-colonial relations, and arguing that continued growth must be upheld for the sake of the South, even though the North benefits disproportionately from it, resembles colonial arguments where exploitation would ultimately be good for the colonized. In Hickel's framing, degrowth in the North would create space for the South to shift away from current dynamics and build self-sufficient, sovereign economies. In his argument, then, "degrowth in the North represents decolonization in the South" (2020, p. 6). This is also echoed by Bendix (2017, p. 2617), who sees the North as a 'development problem' and degrowth as an internal critique towards Northern *overdevelopment*. This is, somewhat polemically, expressed by Hickel (2019, p. 30), when he writes that "poor nations are the 'easy' part. It is rich nations that present the real challenge". In this framing, thus, degrowth is specifically seen as a concept *for* the North, but its justification strongly refers to the South.

In the third stream, scholars grapple with the question to what extent degrowth might be a concept 'for' the Global South as well. So far, it is often framed as a concept 'inspired by' Southern thought and practice, as well as occasionally as a concept 'for the sake of' the South. But to what extent should the South follow 'degrowth' as well? Note here that, in the context of this question, the term 'degrowth' is not usually referring to local autonomy or bottom-up action, but rather to its more material reference of decreasing material and energy throughput – a core goal of degrowth in the Global North. The consensus among contributions in the literature we reviewed seems to be that reducing growth in the North would provide for space for the South to grow in terms of social metabolism wherever necessary (Kallis et al., 2015, p. 5; Martínez-Alier et al., 2010, p. 1743), but that the South should not blindly follow the same development pathway as the North. For Latouche (2009, p. 57), degrowth can "prevent [Southern countries] from being trapped in the blind alley" into which growth economies would lead.

Even though redistribution is a core issue elsewhere in the degrowth literature, it did not feature prominently in the literature on the South, although some scholars did address the need for redistributive policies: Singh (2019, p. 138) argues degrowth should be seen and used "as a tool for redistribution of wealth and opportunities (largely aligned with, but also transgressing the global North and South divide)" and Demaria et al. (2013, p. 201) state the degrowth implies a "redistribution both within and between North and South economies". Hickel (2019, p. 30f) also argues that to increase living standards in the South, in some cases this could be largely accomplished via redistributing existing domestic resources. Overall, the framing of degrowth as "a global redistribution program to allow the world to remain within ecological limits" (as used by Althouse et al., 2020, p. 8) is not as prevalent as the post-development framing outlined above, and there might arguably be certain narrative tensions between (1) seeing ecological space for economic growth as a good that needs to be evenly shared, versus (2), seeing a growth- and progress-based view of development as a bad that needs to be avoided. Such tensions, however, are not

explored explicitly in the literature we reviewed, and rather emerge when taking a meta-perspective on the discourse as a whole.

To sum up, most of the literature sees synergies between degrowth and concerns by and for the Global South: the South is seen as an inspiration and ally for the North, degrowth is seen as a necessary precondition for decolonization and repaying of ecological debt, and while it would grant some ecological space for the South to grow in material terms, the hope would be that the South would make use of the supposed increased sovereignty by following their own ‘development’ trajectories that are distinct from the Western development model.

3.2 Challenges

The core papers that we classified as contributing to the ‘challenges’ narrative implicitly or explicitly started from an assumption that degrowth can, in principle, benefit the South⁷, but certainly needs to do more to live up to this potential, as exemplified by Bendix (2017, p. 2618) who argues that the German post-growth lacks sensitivity to global interconnectedness and hierarchies, that its rejection of the Western development path is only partial, and that it does not sufficiently take into account the function of colonial difference for legitimising inequalities and exploitation. While some of the papers following the ‘challenges’ narratives end on a positive note, showing how degrowth already addresses some of these challenges or at least pointing out pathways to do so (e.g. Bendix, 2017; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019), others end rather on open questions regarding how to deal with these challenges (e.g. Althouse et al., 2020; Fritz & Koch, 2016). In all, we find three core challenges that are discussed in the degrowth discourse, which we outline in turn.

The first challenge is a response to the notion that there is an ‘obvious alliance’ between degrowth and Southern EJ movements. From the perspective of this critique, even though the aims of degrowth and Southern EJ movements might be generally aligned, the language and framing of ‘degrowth’ might be inappropriate in the South (Domazet & Ančić, 2019; Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019). Domazet and Ančić (2019), for instance, conducted semi-structured interviews among activists in Croatia, a part of the European semi-periphery. They find that while the attitude to degrowth was generally positive among respondents, concerns were voiced about the applicability of theoretical degrowth ideas to struggles on the ground. Rodríguez-Labajos et al. (2019, p. 177) find similar and partly even harsher critiques among EJ activists in various Southern countries, who not only point out that the term ‘degrowth’ is not appealing in the South and that degrowth ideas are too detached to connect to concrete struggles (see also Muradian, 2019), but also criticize Eurocentric thinking and

⁷ Which is why some of the articles that were classified as ‘challenges’ were cited in section 3.1.

degrowth not being radical enough. In all, while the literature generally argues in favor of a *potential* alliance and aims at “strengthening potential synergies, through an assertive recognition of the barriers” (Rodríguez-Labajos et al., 2019, p. 175), this challenge criticizes the idea of a ‘natural alliance’ and urges degrowth to pay greater attention to differences on the ground.

A second challenge discussed is the danger of neocolonial agenda-setting. Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019), for instance, aim to offer a constructive critique of degrowth highlighting the “continuing dominance of Western/Northern economic and political theory at the intellectual heart of this academic movement” (p. 466), which includes a “rationalist current of ‘reasonable’ degrowth solutions” (p. 469). As Bendix (2017) also points out, the “rejection of the Western development path is only partial” (p. 2618), and certain streams within degrowth (e.g. the social-reformist approach) do not pay enough attention to the colonial roots of ‘development’ (see also Abazeri, 2022). Degrowth would then be quick to fall back into an Eurocentric and managerial approach that would go against a decolonial degrowth project that Nirmal and Rocheleau (2019) advocate for. Dengler and Seebacher (2019), similarly, note that degrowth has been accused of neocolonial agenda setting, whereby countries in the South are deprived of the very road to prosperity that Western countries took, and continue to take, on the backs of poorer countries.

As Dengler and Seebacher (2019) argue, however, most degrowth scholars would see themselves as aligned with subversive movements that, as pointed out above, have their origin and allies precisely in Southern thought and action. Moreover, degrowth proponents would generally argue that with degrowth, the North sets an agenda *for itself*, rather than for the rest of the world. Such questions, however, might become more relevant if degrowth increasingly moved from the margins and the streets into more mainstream policy spheres. In such spheres, it might be difficult to avoid framings of ‘reasonable solutions’ or of ‘managing environmental limits’, and the question to what extent this forecloses the radical solutions some degrowth advocates would like to see is up to debate.

Moreover, if degrowth were to become ‘successful’ to a degree that trade and consumption patterns actually change, this surely would have effects on the South that cannot be neglected by degrowth scholars. This aspect is picked up in what we found as the third challenge in the literature: the recognition that there are material obstacles to be considered that take their shape in structural dependencies in the world system, and which might become particularly relevant once Northern countries implement degrowth policies. One example is that of decreased consumption in the North leading to loss of human livelihoods, at least in the short-term, in export-dependent countries in the South. Arguably, such issues are difficult to address solely within a localized bottom-up approach, but might need policy coordination on the supra-local, national or international level. As Dengler and Seebacher (2019, p. 249) point out, the potential unintended adverse effects of degrowth in the North on the

South are not adequately addressed in much of the current degrowth literature (see also Beling et al., 2018, p. 312). In fact, our sample included only two papers, which provided in-depth discussions of these material challenges arising from global interdependencies, namely Chiengkul (2018) and Althouse et al. (2020), which we briefly outline in the following.

Chiengkul (2018), a Southern scholar herself, recognizes synergies between degrowth and Southern concerns, but simultaneously discusses a range of obstacles that need to be paid greater attention to: unfair global trade practices and concentrated control over advanced technologies, the internationalization of mainstream development paradigms, as well as differences in local political, socio-economic and financial constraints. Rather than *assuming* that degrowth will be a solution to these matters – since, to pick one example, degrowth values would promote ‘fair trade practices’ – a constructive engagement would be needed with the question of what fair trade practices would look like in a degrowth world, and how degrowth policies can be implemented in the North while accounting for the continued presence of such obstacles in the international system. Althouse et al. (2020) provide the first contribution that models such challenges by approaching them through the lens of a Keynesian coordination game model in a center-periphery setting. They point out that while much of growth in the center can be traced to socially and ecologically harmful production in the periphery, this Northern growth nonetheless “presents a major source of economic demand and supports socioeconomic stability [in the South] under existing institutional frameworks” (Althouse et al., 2020, p. 8). In the case of a “sudden and significant” demand drop, caused presumably by Northern degrowth policies, the periphery would indeed suffer from declining welfare, higher unemployment and inequality. Althouse et al. (2020) do not make this case in order to foreclose the possibility of degrowth in the North, but to constructively point to the importance of regional policy coordination and a greater research focus of which effects degrowth in the center would have on the periphery.

As an intermediate conclusion from the qualitative content analysis of our core sample, we thus find an in-depth engagement with potential synergies between Southern environmental justice movements as well as Southern post-development critiques and degrowth. When it comes to considerations of degrowth as a policy-program in the North and potentially detrimental effects on the South, the current literature is rather scant. Existing research so far focuses rather on arguing why such potentially adverse effects should not be used as an argument against degrowth (e.g. Dengler & Seebacher, 2019; Hickel, 2020). As of yet, however, there is not much literature from within the degrowth discourse that constructively deals with the challenge of global dependencies.

3.3 Quantitative reconstruction of the sample along the qualitative categories

Against the background of the qualitative reconstruction of the discourse, we present some further quantitative details about the composition of our sample. Firstly, about two thirds (24 publications) follow the synergies narrative, while roughly a third (11 publications) the challenge narrative (see Figure 4). Both narratives, however, show a close relation to the literature on post-development and decolonialism: one third of the papers referred to post-development or decolonialism already in their abstract and 43% of the papers in their full text.⁸

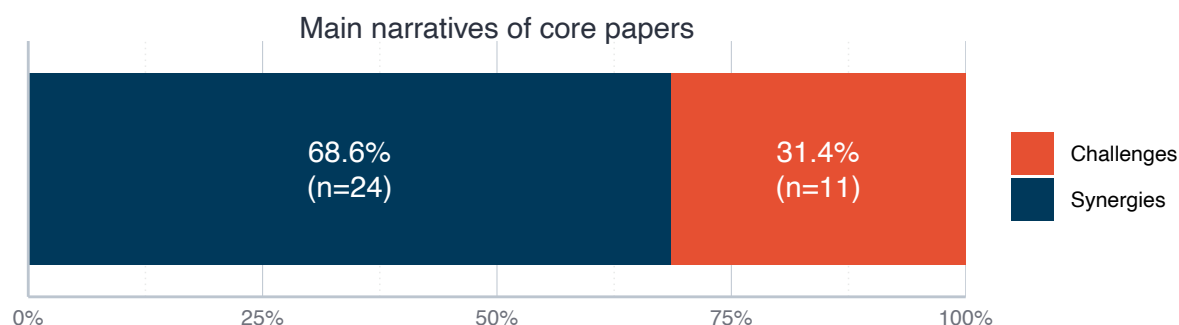


Figure 4: The main narratives of the publications in our core sample

Secondly, when analyzing the extent to which the three arguments from Table 3 in both sub-samples were overlapping or exclusive, we found that contributions stressing synergies show a greater overlap in arguments, i.e. most papers argue in favor of the synergies by referring to two or even all three of the sub-arguments outlined in Table 3 (a table showing which paper deals with which sub-argument can be found in appendix D). Of those in the synergy group, most focus on the argument relating to the South as an ally (20 papers), especially in the form of case studies.⁹ Publications dealing with ‘challenges’ show much less overlap and tend to focus on one of the three challenges (with the exception of Dengler & Seebacher, 2019, who discuss two).¹⁰ Overall, this analysis showed that the six sub-arguments outlined above in Table 3 do not receive equal attention in the literature, but that most attention

⁸ We searched all full texts for the terms ‘post-development*’, ‘postdevelopment*’, and ‘decolonial*’ and computed the share of papers with at least one match (excluding the bibliography).

⁹ In total, there were 23 publications in total referring to this argument of the South being an ally of the North. Five of them were in the sub-sample that focused on the ‘challenges’ The idea that the South is an inspiration and an (actual or potential) ally is, thus, frequently used as a starting point regardless of whether the subsequent argument is one strengthening this perspective or one critically reflecting on it.

¹⁰ Material challenges of implementing degrowth in the North due to dependencies of the South were also at times marginally mentioned (but not discussed or taken up in depth) by papers we classified in the sub-sample ‘synergies’ (Beling et al., 2018; Hanaček, 2020; Hickel, 2020), especially via a brief reference to the unequal exchange literature.

is paid to the argument stressing complementarities between degrowth and Southern thought and action; the challenges generally receive less attention with only a handful of papers dealing with each of the challenges.

Lastly, we coded the core sample according to the methodology used. As shown in panel A of Figure 6, most of the papers were of a theoretical nature. This means that they did not apply any empirical method to extract information from data (even though most of them referred to empirical studies in some way). Among the remaining, empirical publications, the vast majority applied either qualitative research methods (7 publications), or comprised a case study (6 publications), usually with a qualitative focus. Only one paper used both qualitative and quantitative methods, and two papers conducted a purely quantitative analysis. Thus, there is a strong qualitative focus in the current literature. When comparing the distribution of methodologies among the two groups, we see that the case studies were especially used in the sub-sample stressing synergies, but that in both groups theoretical approaches were the most common methodology (Panel B in Figure 6).

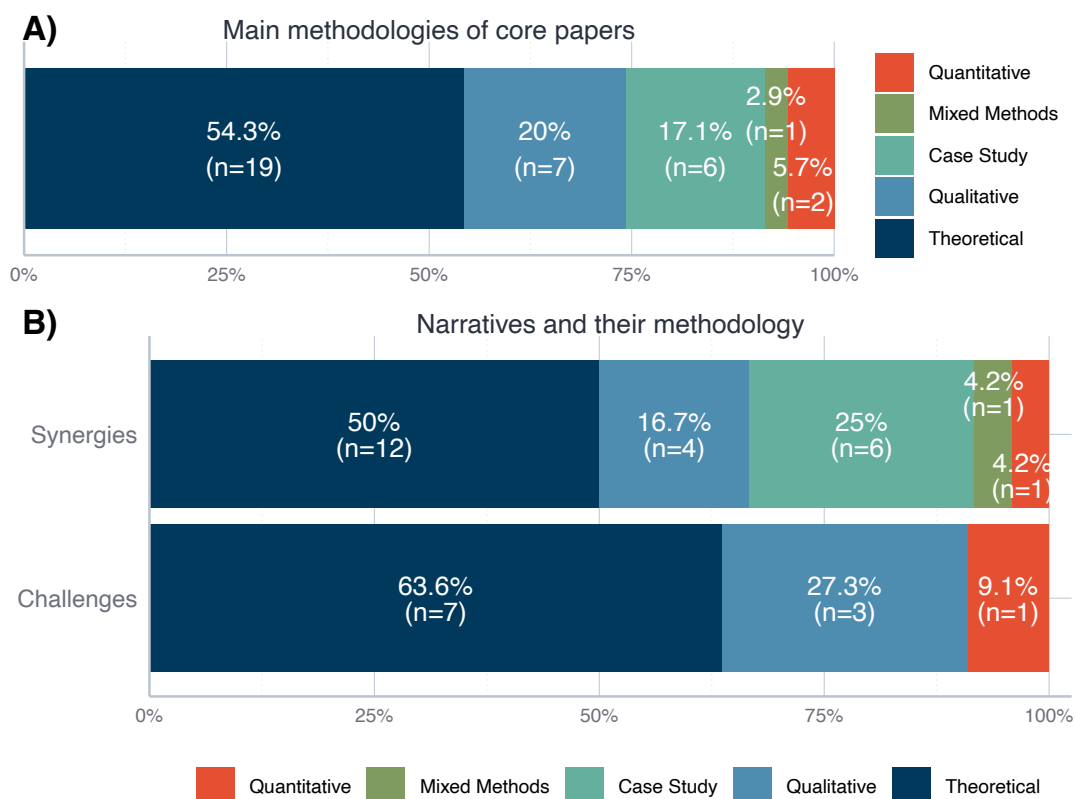


Figure 6: The main methodologies and narratives of the publications in our core sample.

4. Where to go from here? Topics and Tools

While the previous sections outlined the status quo of the academic degrowth discourse regarding its consideration of the Global South, the main goal of the present

section is to delineate implications for future work. In all, the qualitative content analysis pointed to two kinds of concentrations in the existing literature:

- In the *substantive* dimension, contributions focused mainly on commonalities and synergies between the degrowth and Southern positions, less so on potential challenges; an explicit and constructive engagement with these challenges, especially those of structural interdependencies, is at times mentioned but has not been a main concern of analysis so far.
- In the *methodological* dimension, the majority of the publications was shown to be theoretical, and among the empirical papers the vast majority used qualitative methods or comprised a case study. There are very few mixed-methods or quantitative papers.

Both foci make sense if one considers the historical origins and main topics of the degrowth discourse. Starting with a strong current of culturalist critique, most contributions today continue to address two main framing topics. First, they center discursive problems such as an implicit equalization of 'GDP' and 'quality of life', 'development' and 'growth', or a Western interpretation of 'development' in the first place. Second, they discuss how different modes of living – especially those that exist in the Global South and that are organized in a bottom-up manner – might point to an alternative to Western consumerism or capitalism. Qualitative research methods and case studies are predestined to address both kind of issues, which explains their contemporary prevalence.

Moreover, as our analysis has shown, degrowth has in recent years also increasingly formulated self-critical reflections on a range of challenges stemming from its global aspirations. We find that the challenges of degrowth potentially being an unsuitable concept for agents in the South as well as the danger of neocolonial agenda setting are starting to be discussed in greater depth, with detailed theoretical and qualitative empirical studies publications reflecting on such matters. It seems to us that the intervention by Hanaček et al (2020), who propose a future degrowth research agenda from the margins – i.e. “from the point of view of those marginalized in the global economy” still holds and is particularly relevant to those challenges.

Yet, as degrowth increasingly moves into more mainstream policy spaces, it sees itself confronted with a new set of questions that relate to the political feasibility of degrowth's emancipatory claims (especially those claiming degrowth in the North would help the South) in the context of a deeply unequal global economy. This begs the question of whether a broadening of the topics considered, including an engagement with or design of top-down policies on an international level, has become more relevant. Below we will, therefore, outline topics and tools that we consider particularly fruitful for future degrowth research on the challenge of global structural dependencies.

4.1. Topics

The qualitative content analysis above has pointed out that a consideration of challenges relating to the material obstacles in the form of structural dependencies in the world system have received relatively little attention in the past: while being mentioned or acknowledged several times, they were not studied explicitly, with the few exceptions mentioned above. Such obstacles might not only become important once Northern countries implement degrowth policies (e.g., Dengler & Seebacher, 2019, p. 249; Beling et al., 2018, p. 8; Chiengkul, 2018, p. 8ff), but also call for taking into account institutional and structural specificities and constraints of countries in the Global South when delineating degrowth reforms (MacKay, 2021). Our content analysis has shown that this is currently still an emerging field within the discourse that warrants more attention in the future.

The reason we believe so is the following: achieving the ecological and distributive goals advocated by degrowth scholars requires institutional changes (or ‘transformations’) that go beyond the local level, and presuppose changes in regional, national, and international institutions. The capacity to effectuate these changes, however, lies with actors located on governance levels well above the local level and require coordination among different parties. This implies a new array of collective action problems that are not straightforward to address with the theories and practices developed by many of the (often grassroots-like) degrowth movements so far. The most straightforward example is given by the contemporary trade system (as also discussed by Chiengkul, 2018). In its current institutional form, it facilitates a distribution of economic production activities that are often re-enforcing existing inequalities, and allows countries in the North to externalize social and ecological costs to countries in the South. Many publications in our core literature are aware of such structural dependencies and included them as a justification of degrowth. However, there is a flipside: many people in the South are now dependent on the monetary flows that come from the North as payment for these products, just as they are often dependent on the provision of credit and transfers, or the import of products and services for which countries in the South lack either the technological capabilities or patents. This dependency comes with a very reduced policy space on the national, but also on the local level when countries in the South themselves want to implement “degrowth”-type policies (as for example Hanaček, 2020 propose).

This leads to an inconvenient dilemma: on the one hand, the current distribution of economic activities is often to the disadvantage of countries in the South, yet removing their (unequal) exchange relations to the North might well lead to calamities of an even greater extent, at least in the short run and without structural reforms of these global dependencies.¹¹ This dilemma is what we call the *twin problem*

¹¹ This is, however, not necessarily so in all cases, as the case study of Martínez-Alier (2002, p. 79ff) indicates. Yet, the danger of, and the scale of the possible social costs demand a thorough analysis of such potential effects (and the design of policies that avoid them, if necessary).

of structural dependency: structural dependencies are, at the same time, a motivation for and a potential obstacles to implementing degrowth policies.

This flipside to structural dependency carries important ramifications for the degrowth discourse on this question. For instance, one frequent argument in the literature we surveyed was the need for local autonomy. However, it cannot be the sole solution to rely on the sovereignty of people on the local level (as in Transition Towns or similar alternatives), since people on the local level generally lack the capacities to address root problems of international colonial relations, capitalist exploitation, and damaging behavior by international corporations. On the one hand, one has to recognize that globally, bottom-up environmental mobilizations, which occur across all income groups, are a relevant force in resisting environmental destruction (Scheidel et al., 2020). On the other hand, among those cases documented by the Environmental Justice Atlas, only 11% are successful in defending local environmental livelihoods, and mobilizations often occur at the cost of high criminalization rates, physical violence or even assassinations, especially if Indigenous people are involved in the mobilization (Scheidel et al., 2020). In the presence of global power structures and structural dependencies, local autonomy is necessarily restricted. To address such issues, higher-level policy-making of some sort is necessary. For example, local communities cannot introduce and conduct cross-border controls for carbon pricing, or prevent the export of forbidden products. Local agreements also cannot replace global contracts that help countries coordinating their efforts to fight ecological crises.

The question should, therefore, not be whether climate policy needs international coordination, but rather how to deal with the fact that often states (or other supra-national organizations) themselves are highly complicit in the above-described root problems of international colonial relations, capitalist exploitation, and damaging behavior by international corporations. The core question of such high-level policy making in the presence of global structural dependencies, then, would be how a policy agenda might look like, if it was informed by degrowth principles. We have the impression that the avoidance of such a question is at times due to the fact it bears an uncomfortable degree of pragmatism, e.g. the quest for the most effective way to provide incentives to powerful elites to agree to radical institutional changes – something that is necessary if no immediate avenue to level the power asymmetries is available. Uncomfortable as they are, we do argue that these are important topics to be studied from a degrowth perspective, and want to point to some concepts that degrowth scholars might find useful exploring further.

Concretely, a number of general ideas to decrease Southern dependency via high-level policy have already been formulated in the broader area of development studies and heterodox economics, including a substitution of North-South with South-South trade relations (e.g., Bloomfield, 2020), technology transfer to the South together with an infant-industry protection (e.g., Chang, 2002), or the implementation of

‘civilized trade institutions’ on a global scale (e.g., Gerdes et al., 2022; Kapeller et al., 2016). All of them involve a more fundamental transformation of international trade institutions, as well as more or less fundamental changes in the policies, production, and consumption activities in *both* the North and the South. They need to be designed very carefully in order to bring about the desired changes, and for each proposal some fundamental challenges exist. Thus, an investigation of their functioning and conditions is one important precondition, and the degrowth community must not neglect this responsibility, especially since many of these proposals were developed outside the degrowth program and it is, therefore, necessary to think about the extent they are in fact consistent with a degrowth perspective in the first place, or how the proposals need to be adjusted to work also outside a growth-based context.

4.2. Tools

As shown above, most contemporary empirical studies in the degrowth community employ qualitative methods or comprise of case studies, both of which are well-suited to address the problems currently at the centre of the discourse. However, the challenges outlined in Section 4.1. are of a quite different nature, which begs the question of whether the current methodological toolkit of degrowth scholars must be broadened. Formal models, for instance, could be useful to delineate concrete scenarios for degrowth transformations by estimating quantitatively the implications of such transformations on different stakeholders.¹² Of course, the kind of formal model matters: some (especially general equilibrium style) models have been used as rhetorically powerful obstacles against important climate policies. Models such as the very prominent DICE models (Nordhaus, 2018) not only drastically underestimate the costs from climate change and neglect potentials for progressive change (Stern et al., 2022), but they also rely on a range of problematic assumptions regarding capital-labor substitution induced by price changes, as well as regarding technological change and the damage function. It would be wrong, however, to condemn the use of formal models only because of these negative examples. The successful use of models within the degrowth community, especially in the field of ecological macroeconomics, illustrates this (e.g., Cieplinski et al., 2021; D’Alessandro et al., 2020; Hardt & O’Neill, 2017; Victor, 2012). Such ‘degrowth-centered models’ are, however, still rare in the subject area considered here - in our core sample, only Althouse et al (2020) and Fritz and Koch (2016), made use of them.

Modeling approaches that we would consider to be particularly fruitful are those using system dynamic (SDM) or agent-based models (ABM), both of which are very different to the general equilibrium models dominating the field of mainstream

¹² Two clarifications are essential: first, we see quantitative methods as a *complement*, not a substitute for qualitative and/or case studies; second, we do not argue to use quantitative methods for the sake of using quantitative methods (as it is often the case in many social sciences, most notably economics), but because these methods are well suited to address certain blank spots in the current discourse when it comes to structural dependencies and top-down policies.

economics today. While SDMs allow for enduring disequilibrium dynamics, feedback loops, and a comprehensive but still rather tractable depiction of socio-ecological systems, ABMs strive for a more explicit representation of the micro, meso, and macro level of a society, allowing for a more detailed depiction of mechanisms operating on, and between these levels (Gräbner, 2016).

One concrete example of a starting point is the work of Gerdes et al. (2022), who use an ABM to study how alternative world market institutions in the sense of Tamesberger et al. (2016) could reduce global exploitation relationships. Based on their scenarios, a more comprehensive discussion of which institutional changes on which levels are necessary gets facilitated. Another example for the kind of ABM that could enrich the degrowth discourse is the work of Rengs et al. (2020), who assess the innovation and employment effects of ecological reforms, an approach that could be extended rather naturally to the effects of degrowth policies on various actors of interest. An example of a SDM that already contributes to the present topic is Althouse et al. (2020), who conduct simulations to delineate scenarios for what could happen if one introduced global carbon emission constraints, and what kind of institutions are required to limit carbon disclosure in such a case. Another prominent example is the predecessor or the model underlying the *Limits to Growth* study of the Club of Rome: the model called Earth4All aims for a comprehensive depiction of the world economy, and can already be used to assess the socio-ecological implications of a number of policies currently debated policy instruments (Dixson-Declève et al., 2022). A third example is the well-known degrowth model for Canada developed by Jackson and Victor (2020). Again, an extension to the global context could facilitate the progress on both challenges outlined above.¹³

When it comes to empirical work, quantitative methods could facilitate a closer depiction of the structural dependencies between the South and North, and, thereby, the delineation of policy measures that can address them. For instance, when discussing the problem of unequal exchange between countries of the South and North, the qualitative case studies in the spirit of Pérez-Rincón et al. (2019) could be complemented with studies quantifying the amount of ecological stressors externalized into the South. Input-output models are usually a good approach to do this, at least for the status quo. Such models could also be used for estimating the effect that degrowth policies in the North would have on the South, even if such ‘radical’ policy changes are particularly hard to assess. Here, degrowth scholars could build on, e.g., the rich work on developing and using environmentally-augmented input-output tables (EIOT), such as EXIOBASE3 (Stadler et al., 2018). A number of more general publications already described the existing patterns of unequal ecological exchange (e.g., Dorninger et al., 2021) but not only do these studies have not yet covered all different kinds of stressors considered in the EIOT, nor do they contain

¹³ Moreover, both ABM and SD models can be aligned with empirical results and, thereby, be a useful device for a closer integration of theoretical and empirical work in the present subject area.

specific policy experiments on the effects of reducing demand in the North. Moreover, the results have not yet been integrated into the degrowth discourse to the desirable extent, at least not with respect to the global level.

Finally, the investigation of avenues for successful technology transfer to the South (in order to make it less dependent on the import of complex products and services from the North) could benefit considerably from the concepts developed by evolutionary economists, especially in the context of the technology gap literature (e.g., Dosi et al., 2015, 2020), and the work of evolutionary economic geographers on regional development, innovation, and complexity (e.g., Gala et al., 2018; Hidalgo et al., 2018). This literature could be helpful in delineating strategies to address the unequal distribution of technological capabilities, which not only leads to structural dependencies of the South from the North, but also is at the root of dangerous polarization processes on the international level (Aistleitner et al., 2021; Gräbner et al., 2020). At the same time, many of these contributions are much more techno-optimistic than most degrowth studies, and they pay less attention to social instead of technical innovations, making it necessary to embed them explicitly within a degrowth-theoretical framework, or, rather, use them as inspirations for genuine contributions from within the degrowth program.

5. Conclusion

This paper has provided a structured literature review of the discourse on degrowth and the Global South, presenting both a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the arguments within the discourse. In terms of the qualitative reconstruction, we classified the articles in our core sample as promoting one of two broad narratives, either one of *synergies* between degrowth and the South or one that, while being sympathetic to degrowth, focused more on *challenges*. Both narratives comprise three sub-arguments, all of which are summarized in Table 3 and the appendix.

In terms of the quantitative analysis, we found that the discourse on degrowth and the South has increased in size, but is still rather small, with only 35 publications in our core sample. Two thirds of these papers focus on synergies, rather than challenges. A reason for the synergies arguments being more widely represented is that many papers in this sub-sample discussed several of the three synergies sub-arguments, unlike in the challenges sub-sample, where the focus was usually on just one of the challenges. Moreover, synergy papers often served as starting points for the papers in the challenges narrative, which agree with the premise of *potential* synergies, but focused more on a critical reflection of their conditions. The challenges, in turn, received less attention in the discourse so far, with only a handful of papers dealing with each of the challenges.

Looking ahead, we found what we framed as a twin challenge of structural dependency: while degrowth recognizes structural dependencies and proposes them as an argument in favor of degrowth in the North, it has not yet paid much attention

to the flipside of these dependencies, namely the danger of potential short-term adverse effects of degrowth in the North on the South. Even though these challenges have been raised (Chiengkul, 2018; Dengler & Seebacher, 2019), the main response of the literature so far been to argue (rightly, we think) that potential short-term adverse effects should not be used as an argument *against* degrowth. As of yet, however, there is not much constructive engagement with the question of how to deal with the obstacles that do emerge for the South if degrowth was to become widespread policy in the North (although Althouse et al., 2020; and Fritz & Koch, 2016, make a start).

Part of the reason for the lack of such engagement might be that for a long time degrowth scholars have been paying much greater attention to bottom-up, local action, which not necessarily has immediate ramifications for global dependencies. However, with degrowth gaining greater attention in public discourses in the North, and complementary top-down policy being discussed increasingly in Northern discourses, questions of global dependencies should also be studied from an explicitly degrowth-centered view. We, therefore, suggested a range of topics and tools for the degrowth literature that might be useful in tackling these challenges: for example, drawing more extensively from dependency theory and unequal ecological exchange literature, extending existing ecological macroeconomic SDM to include a global dimension, as well as using ABM and EIOT modeling to formalize thinking about degrowth and the South. We hope that by integrating these topics and tools, the degrowth discourse will arrive at narrative that is better equipped to analyze *both* sides of the twin problem of structural dependency.

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Appendix

A: Translation of the search strings

English	French	Italian	Spanish	German
Degrowth OR de-growth OR post-growth OR postgrowth OR décroissance	Décroissance OR "Dé-croissance" OR "post-croissance"	Decrescita OR "De-crescita" OR "post-crescita" OR "postcrescita" OR decroissance	Decrecimiento OR Descrecimiento OR postcrecimiento OR post-crecimiento OR decroissance	Degrowth OR Post-Wachstum OR Postwachstum OR décroissance
"Global North" OR "Global South"	"Nord global" OR "Sud global" OR "limite Nord" OR "limite Sud"	"Nord globale" OR "Sud globale"	"Norte global" OR "Sur global"	"Globaler Norden" OR "Globaler Süden" (auch: „Globaler Sueden“)
decolonial OR "post-colonial" OR "postcolonial" OR "unequal exchange" OR extractivism	décolonial* OR postcolonial OR «Post-colonial » OR « échange inégal » OR « extractivis*»	Decoloniale OR postcoloniale OR post-coloniale OR "scambio ineguale" OR "scambio diseguale" OR estrattivismo	Decolonial OR postcolonial OR post-colonial OR "intercambio desigual" OR "Extractivismo"	Dekolonial OR Postkolonial OR Post-kolonial OR „Ungleicher Tausch" OR "Extraktivis*"
global OR international)	Mondial OR international	Globale OR Internazionale	Global OR Internacional	Global OR International
"dependency theor*" OR structuralis* OR "post development" OR post-development	Dépendance OR Dépendant OR Structuralist* OR postdéveloppement OR post-développement »	Dipendenza OR Dipendente OR Strutturalist* OR "Post-sviluppo" OR "Postsviluppo"	Dependencia OR Dependiente OR postdesarrollo OR "post-desarrollo"	Dependenz* OR Strukturalis* OR Post-Entwicklung* OR Postentwicklung*

B: List of papers in the core sample

Authors	Year	Title	Outlet	Source
Adityanandana, M; Gerber, JF	2019	Post-growth in the Tropics? Contestations over Tri Hita Karana and a tourism megaproject in Bali	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	Web of Science
Althouse, J; Guarini, G; Porcile, JG	2020	Ecological macroeconomics in the open economy: Sustainability, unequal exchange and policy coordination in a center-periphery model	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Beling, AE; Vanhulst, J; Demaria, F; Rabi, V; Carballo, AE; Pelenc, J	2018	Discursive Synergies for a 'Great Transformation' Towards Sustainability: Pragmatic Contributions to a Necessary Dialogue Between Human Development, Degrowth, and Buen Vivir	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Bendix, D	2017	Reflecting the Post-Development gaze: the degrowth debate in Germany	Third World Quarterly	Web of Science
Brand, U; Boos, T; Brad, A	2017	Degrowth and post-extractivism: two debates with suggestions for the inclusive development framework	Current Opinion In Environmental Sustainability	Web of Science

Chassagne, N; Everingham, P	2019	Buen Vivir: Degrowing extractivism and growing wellbeing through tourism	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	Web of Science
Chiengkul, P	2018	The Degrowth Movement: Alternative Economic Practices and Relevance to Developing Countries	Alternatives	Web of Science
Demaria, F; Kothari, A	2017	The Post-Development Dictionary agenda: paths to the pluriverse	Third World Quarterly	Web of Science
Dengler, C; Seebacher, LM	2019	What About the Global South? Towards a Feminist Decolonial Degrowth Approach	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Domazet, M; Ancic, B	2019	Complementarity between the EJ movement and degrowth on the European semiperiphery: An empirical study	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Ertor-Akyazi, P	2020	Contesting growth in marine capture fisheries: the case of small-scale fishing cooperatives in Istanbul	Sustainability Science	Web of Science
Escobar, A	2015	Degrowth, postdevelopment, and transitions: a preliminary conversation	Sustainability Science	Web of Science
Fritz, M; Koch, M	2016	Economic development and prosperity patterns around the world: Structural challenges for a global steady-state economy	Global Environmental Change-Human And Policy Dimensions	Web of Science
Frost, K	2019	First Nations sovereignty, Environmental Justice, and Degrowth in Northwest BC, Canada	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Gabriel, CA; Nazar, S; Zhu, DF; Kirkwood, J	2019	Performance Beyond Economic Growth: Alternatives from Growth-Averse Enterprises in the Global South	Alternatives	Web of Science
Gerber J-F; Raina, R	2018	Post-Growth in the Global South? Some Reflections from India and Bhutan	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Hanacek, K; Roy, B; Avila, S; Kallis, G	2020	Ecological economics and degrowth: Proposing a future research agenda from the margins	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Hickel, J	2021	What does degrowth mean? A few points of clarification	Globalizations	Web of Science
Hickel, J	2019	Is it possible to achieve a good life for all within planetary boundaries?	Third World Quarterly	Web of Science
Kothari, A; Demaria, F; Acosta, A	2014	Buen Vivir, Degrowth and Ecological Swaraj: Alternatives to sustainable development and the Green Economy	Development	Referenced literature
MacKay, S	2021	The global south, degrowth and The Simpler Way movement: the need for structural solutions at the global level	Globalizations	Web of Science
McAfee, K	2016	Green economy and carbon markets for conservation and development: a critical view	International Environmental Agreements-Politics Law And Economics	Web of Science
Menton, M; Larrea, C; Latorre, S; Martinez-Alier, J; Peck, M; Temper, L; Walter, M	2020	Environmental justice and the SDGs: from synergies to gaps and contradictions	Sustainability Science	Web of Science

Muradian, R.	2019	Frugality as a choice vs. Frugality as a social condition. Is de-growth doomed to be a Eurocentric project?	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Nirmal, P; Rocheleau, D	2019	Decolonizing degrowth in the post-development convergence: Questions, experiences, and proposals from two Indigenous territories	Environment And Planning E-Nature And Space	Web of Science
Pansera, M; Owen, R	2018	Innovation for de-growth: A case study of counter-hegemonic practices from Kerala, India	Journal Of Cleaner Production	Web of Science
Pérez-Rincon, M; Vargas-Morales, J; Martinez-Alier, J	2019	Mapping and Analyzing Ecological Distribution Conflicts in Andean Countries	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Piccardi, EG; Barca, S	2022	Jin-jiyan-azadi. Matristic culture and Democratic Confederalism in Rojava	Sustainability Science	Web of Science
Ramcilovic-Suominen, S	2022	Envisioning just transformations in and beyond the EU bioeconomy: inspirations from decolonial environmental justice and degrowth	Sustainability Science	Web of Science
Rammelt, CF; Gupta, J	2021	Inclusive is not an adjective, it transforms development: A post-growth interpretation of Inclusive Development	Environmental Science & Policy	Web of Science
Renkert, SR	2019	Community-owned tourism and degrowth: a case study in the Kichwa Anangu community	Journal Of Sustainable Tourism	Web of Science
Rodríguez-Labajos, B; Yanez, I; Bond, P; Grey, L; Munguti, S; Ojo, GU; Overbeek, W	2019	Not So Natural an Alliance? Degrowth and Environmental Justice Movements in the Global South	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Singh, NM	2019	Environmental justice, degrowth and post-capitalist futures	Ecological Economics	Web of Science

C: List of papers in the relevant sample

Authors	Year	Title	Outlet	Source
Albert, MJ	2021	The global politics of the renewable energy transition and the non-substitutability hypothesis: towards a 'great transformation'?	Review Of International Political Economy	Web of Science
Anguelovski, I; Alier, JM	2014	The 'Environmentalism of the Poor' revisited: Territory and place in disconnected global struggles	Ecological Economics	Web of Science
Burton, M; Somerville, P	2019	Degrowth: A Defence	New Left Review	Web of Science
Cosme, I; Santos, R; O'Neill, DW	2017	Assessing the degrowth discourse: A review and analysis of academic degrowth policy proposals	Journal Of Cleaner Production	Web of Science
Crownshaw, T; et al.	2019	Over the horizon: Exploring the conditions of a post-growth world	Anthropocene Review	Web of Science
D'Alisa, G; Demaria, F; Kallis, G	2014	Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era	Routledge (Edited Volume)	Referenced literature
Demaria F; Schneider, F;	2013	What is Degrowth? From an Activist Slogan to a Social Movement?	Environmental Values	Referenced literature

Sekulova, F; Martinez-Alier, J				
Dengler, C; Lang, MR	2022	Commoning Care: Feminist Degrowth Visions for a Socio-Ecological Transformation	Feminist Economics	Web of Science
Friant, MC; Vermeulen, WJV; Salomone, R	2020	A typology of circular economy discourses: Navigating the diverse visions of a contested paradigm	Resources Conservation And Recycling	Web of Science
Gudynas, E	2011	Buen Vivir: Today, Æs tomorrow	Development	Referenced literature
Hoehn, D; Laso, J; et al.	2021	Introducing a Degrowth Approach to the Circular Economy Policies of Food Production, and Food Loss and Waste Management: Towards a Circular Bioeconomy	Sustainability	Web of Science
Kreinin, H; Aigner, E	2021	From Decent work and economic growth to Sustainable work and economic degrowth: a new framework for SDG 8	Empirica	Web of Science
Latouche, S	2009	Farewell to growth	Polity Press (Monograph)	Referenced literature
Martinez-Alier J; Pascual, U; Vivien, F-D; Zaccai, E	2010	Sustainable de-growth: Mapping the context, criticisms and future prospects of an emergent paradigm	Ecological Economics	Referenced literature
Martinez-Alier, J	2012	Environmental Justice and Economic Degrowth: An Alliance between Two Movements	Capitalism Nature Socialism	Referenced literature
Martinez-Alier, J	2002	The Environmentalism of the Poor	Edward Elgar (Monograph)	Referenced literature
Mathai, MV; et al.	2021	The Political Economy of (Un)Sustainable Production and Consumption: A Multidisciplinary Synthesis for Research and Action	Resources Conservation And Recycling	Web of Science
Mocca, E	2020	The local dimension in the degrowth literature. A critical discussion	Journal Of Political Ideologies	Web of Science
Nicoson, C	2021	Towards climate resilient peace: an intersectional and degrowth approach	Sustainability Science	Web of Science
Otero, I; et al.	2020	Biodiversity policy beyond economic growth	Conservation Letters	Web of Science
Rinaldi, PN	2022	The Age of Transition: Postdevelopment and North-South Synergies	Latin American Perspectives	Web of Science
Schneider F; Kallis, G; Martinez-Alier, J	2010	Crisis or opportunity? Economic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue	Journal Of Cleaner Production	Referenced literature
Schor, JB; Jorgenson, AK	2019	Is it Too Late for Growth?	Review Of Radical Political Economics	Web of Science
Stevenson, H	2019	Contemporary Discourses of Green Political Economy: A Q Method Analysis	Journal Of Environmental Policy & Planning	Web of Science

D: Distribution of the sub-arguments made in the core sample

Narrative of the argument	Narrative of the paper	Paper	Argument
Synergies	Challenges	Abazeri (2022)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Challenges	Dengler & Seebacher (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Challenges	Rodríguez-Labajos et al (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Challenges	Escobar (2015)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Challenges	Chiengkul (2018)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Challenges	Domazet & Ančić (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Demaria & Kothari (2017)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Singh (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Gabriel et al (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Hanaček et al (2020)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Pérez-Rincón et al (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Pansera & Owen (2016)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Adityanandana & Gerber (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Beling et al. (2017)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Brand et al. (2017)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Chassagne & Everingham (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Frost (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	McAfee (2015)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Ertör-Akyazi (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Renkert (2019)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Piccardi & Barca (2022)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Ramcilovic-Suominen (2022)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Gerber & Raina (2018)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Kothari et al (2014)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Synergies	Unceta Satrustegui (2013)	South as inspiration, origin and ally
Synergies	Challenges	Dengler & Seebacher (2019)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Challenges	Chiengkul (2018)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Synergies	Rammelt & Gupta (2021)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Synergies	Hickel (2020)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Synergies	Menton et al (2020)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Synergies	Hickel (2019)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South

Synergies	Synergies	Ramcilovic-Suominen (2022)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Synergies	Gerber & Raina (2018)	Degrowth in the North as decolonization of the South
Synergies	Challenges	Escobar (2015)	Growth dependence is problematic everywhere
Synergies	Challenges	Demaria & Kothari (2017)	Growth dependence is problematic everywhere
Synergies	Challenges	Hanaček et al (2020)	Growth dependence is problematic everywhere
Synergies	Challenges	Gerber & Raina (2018)	Growth dependence is problematic everywhere
Synergies	Challenges	Kothari et al (2014)	Growth dependence is problematic everywhere
Challenges	Challenges	Muradian (2019)	Unsuitable concept
Challenges	Challenges	Rodríguez-Labajos et al (2019)	Unsuitable concept
Challenges	Challenges	Escobar (2015)	Unsuitable concept
Challenges	Challenges	Domazet & Ančić (2019)	Unsuitable concept
Challenges	Challenges	Abazeri (2022)	Neocolonial agenda-setting
Challenges	Challenges	Bendix (2017)	Neocolonial agenda-setting
Challenges	Challenges	Dengler & Seebacher (2019)	Neocolonial agenda-setting
Challenges	Challenges	Nirmal & Rocheleau (2019)	Neocolonial agenda-setting
Challenges	Challenges	Dengler & Seebacher (2019)	Material obstacles due to dependencies
Challenges	Challenges	MacKay (2021)	Material obstacles due to dependencies
Challenges	Challenges	Chiengkul (2018)	Material obstacles due to dependencies
Challenges	Challenges	Althouse et al (2020)	Material obstacles due to dependencies
Challenges	Challenges	Fritz & Koch (2016)	Material obstacles due to dependencies