‘Mes enllà de la societat tecnològica, la aposta pel decreixement’

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Deacreixement
Vocabulari per a una nova era
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Recerca & Decreixement
www.degrowth.org

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1) Diagnosis

2) Prognosis

The example of climate change.
1. Diagnosis

- What are the social problems?
- Who is responsible for them?

e.g. Climate change
Theoretical framework

- Ecological economics:
Is the study of the relations between the economy and the environment;

- Political ecology:
is the study of the relationships between political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes.
Social metabolism

Fuente: “Recursos i política a la Catalunya del segle XXI” de Sergio Sastre, ENT.
Ecological limits to growth

- **Inputs**: e.g. Peak oil;
- **Outputs**: e.g. Climate change.

+ Keep in mind: Energy cannot be recycled, and materials only up to a certain extent.
Environmental conflicts

Source: Environmental Justice Atlas (ejatlas.org)
Climate change

- It is the evidence of the limited assimilative capacity of ecosystems.

- It is arguably the most important environmental conflicts, related to 'waste'.
Carbon budget (IPCC, 2013)

Source: Carbon Tracker and Grantham Institute (Imperial College – LSE; 2013; carbonbubble.info)
See also: Meinshausen et al, 2009; IPCC, 2013; Le Quere et al, 2013.
“Unburnable fuels”
(The Economist, 4\textsuperscript{th} may 2013)

Most of the world’s fossil fuel reserves must be left in the ground, unburned, to keep global temperature rise to no more than 2°C.

Slogan: “Leave oil in the soil, coal in the hole, tar sands in the land, gas under the grass” (EJOLT, 2013)

Estimation: 88% of global coal reserves, 52% of gas reserves and 35% of oil reserves are unburnable and must be left in the ground (McGlade and Ekins, 2015).
Global environmental impacts are directly related to the scale of the economy.
Renewable energies?

Figure from Murphy, D. J., & Hall, C. A. (2010). Year in review—EROI or energy return on (energy) invested. Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences
Efficiency?

Rebound effect (or Jevons' Paradox):
is the reduction in expected gains from new
technologies that increase the efficiency of
resource use, because of behavioral or other
systemic responses.

e.g. Low-consumption bulbs (LCB)

The importance of systemic effects!
Technological solutions?

- Carbon capture and storage;
- Agro-fuels;
- Hydrogen;
- Electric cars;
- Geo-Engineering (carbon dioxide removal and solar radiation management);
- ...
Beyond the 'technological society'!

Technology:
- Instead of it being subservient to humanity, "human beings have to adapt to it, and accept total change."
- It creates an artificial system which "eliminates or subordinates the natural world."
- It is a self-referential system that discovers what can be discovered for the sake of itself.

→ Technological society: a threat to human freedom (Ellul, 1964)

- Degrowth calls for the politicization of science and technology, against the increasing technocratization of politics.

“Reducing emissions in line with 2°C does remain a viable goal [...]. But it begs immediate and profound political, economic and social questions; questions that undermine a decade of mathematically nebulous green-growth and win-win rhetoric.”

“Avoiding dangerous climate change demands de-growth strategies from wealthier nations”

Kevin Anderson
Climatologist, Deputy Director of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research (UK).
Geometric growth is a recent phenomenon, an unreasonable goal that cannot be sustained forever.

With 2% annual growth rate, an economy has to double in size every 35 years – the most ‘lethal’ of capitalism’s contradictions? (David Harvey)
So what?

How do we move beyond the 'technological society'?
Limits to growth

- Ecology;
- Happiness;
- Inequality;
- Poverty;
- GDP (Gross Domestic Product);
- Secular stagnation (low growth potential).
The Degrowth alternative

- Question the hegemony of growth, a magic bullet.

- Green, dematerialized growth is implausible.

- Sustainable development is an oxymoron.
The Degrowth alternative

Imagining and enacting alternative visions to modern growth-based development.

DEFINITION:

“Calls for a democratically led redistributive downscaling of production and consumption in industrialized countries as a means to achieve environmental sustainability, social justice and well being”
Degrowth

Both a critique and alternative political project.

It is the hypothesis that we can live better with less.

It is possible to prosper without growth.
Degrowth, simply different

More of the same
Growth

Same of the same
Stationary state

Less of the same
Recession
“Degrowth: A vocabulary for a new era”

More than 10 foreign editions:

See: vocabulary.degrowth.org
2. Prognosis

What can be done?
How?
Who is going to do it?
For whom?
Multiple strategies and actors

- Research;
- Activism;
- Building alternatives;
- Education and dissemination;
- Policy making.

Supporters: from the Pope to David Harvey! :-(
10 'Degrowth' policy proposals

1. Citizen debt audit
2. Work-sharing
3. Basic and maximum income
4. Green tax reform
5. Stop subsidizing and investing in polluting activities
6. Support the alternative, solidarity society
7. Optimise the use of buildings
8. Reduce advertising
9. Establish environmental limits
10. Abolish the use of GDP as indicator of economic progress

→ A coherent package of mutually supportive measures
Conclusions

1) Sustainable development and its more recent reincarnation “green growth” depoliticize genuine political antagonisms between alternative visions for the future. They render environmental problems technical, promising win-win solutions and the impossible goal of perpetuating economic growth without harming the environment.
Conclusions
Merci!

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Gracias!

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THE END