

Growth, Degrowth and Ecology*

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Abstract: *Dilemma between growth and ecology seems to reach a dead end. Decision makers still trust to growth policies and ecological deterioration continues. Degrowth is a new concept under this uncertainty. This work reviews literature and tries to clarify the meaning of degrowth.*

Keywords: Degrowth, ecological economics, growth, development

1. Introduction

'Degrowth' is an approach that has political, economic and social aspects, usually built on ecological economics and has been born out of practice and popular movements rather than theory. Its theoretical roots are based on Meadows & Randers & Meadows' Limits to Growth (1972) and some other works inspired by it in the 1970s. The reason why it is discussed in the 2000s is the need for a voice in various societies, especially in developed countries. The possibility of a sustainability approach that is completely contrary to the "sustainable development" approach used by international organizations such as the World Bank is being discussed [1].

The reason why it is argued that an unlimited economic growth is not possible in a limited environment as Herman Daly explained in his "theory of improbability". Daly states that the level of consumption of human population exceeding 9 billion people is an impossibility of increasing to US standards [2]. In another work, Daly uses the concept of "sustainable macroeconomic scale". Because of the existence of entropy, he uses this concept to indicate the limits of growth, within the meaning of "a country or a world should consume as much as it can produce" [3].

One of the questions that needs to be answered to understand what 'Degrowth' is 'Should the requirements be reduced or could it continue to increase as it is now?'. Different opinions are expressed in this regard. If the requirements are reduced, can an environmental improvement be achieved? Or is it possible to maintain the natural cycle while the requirements are increasing? 'Which environment' is the question to answer to illuminate the subject and it will be easy to follow a path by answering this question.

According to Marx, nature has become a social concept since it has been dominated by human, that is after billions of years of its own history; because human has undeniable effects on nature for thousands of years and nature has continued to shape human ever since [4].

2. Resources, Needs and Development

It can be necessary to reduce human needs since this interaction has become a threat to lives of both. However, the solution of the problem may not only be the reduction of

requirements. It may also be necessary to establish new relations and new relations of production between human and nature, allowing the reduction of requirements as a result.

According to Schumacher, the development and expansion of requirements is definitely a process that needs to be stopped. Schumacher sees an increase in requirements as a counter-argument to freedom and peace. He argues that the increase in the requirements is to increase the dependence of the individual on the powers outside of her [5]. While this approach is an explanatory aspect, it ignores some phenomena and the relationships between these phenomena, since it focuses only functionally on its purpose to be explanatory.

Throughout history, it is one of the impulses that enable people to develop, produce technology and develop tools to facilitate their actions, and perhaps most importantly, to increase their needs; as a result of these productions, the social connection of people to each other and their need for each other has also ensured its liberation against natural processes. Technology is the tool that provides interaction between nature and people [6].

Schumacher's statement could be considered as a good warning, given the fact that the combination of population growth with the increase in needs could bring about the rapid liquidation of natural resources. However, it is not possible to stop the expansion of requirements as a solution; even if it is preferable, it cannot explain the reasons for the technology development drive in the existing production structure, nor does it value the contribution of technological development to the historical development of human.

3. Degrowth and Ecology

Latouche underlines the difference between the 'degrowth' approach and the socialist critique of capitalism, underlining the following divisions:

- The acceptability of a capitalism compatible with ecology is valid, at least in theory.
- Keynesian and Fordist approaches can be regulated to soften capitalism and open the way to eco-capitalism.

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- Degrowth does not aim to change the relationship between capital and labor and also the relationship between those and the private ownership of the means of production.

In short, Latouche argues that the 'degrowth' approach can help preserve nature. He states that there is a need for local economies and localization of overly dependent economic structures for the implementation of the approach. Because the localized economic structures will protect the environment and reduce costs in many areas such as energy consumption, water scarcity and carbon emissions [7].

In addition, according to Latouche, the South countries, which should stay away from the growth economies, should come out of this growth system in order to create their own history, and they should even create their own development method. Herman Daly adds to Latouche, stating that the countries that need to stop growing are first of all, the countries he defines as overdeveloped.

Foster proposes that both ideas cannot be very valid in the Southern countries because they have very low income per capita. He advises policies that facilitate access to water, food, health care and education to create a kind of sustainable development; as a condition of it, he underlines the need for a radical break with the world system in line with Latouche [8]. He also agrees with Latouche that change can be found in the Southern countries because the greatest environmental damages and social inequalities are experienced in these regions [9]. Because, he argues that the exploitation of the South was not only caused by unfair economic trade, but also by unjust ecological trade [10].

Yuen, on the contrary, shows that the environmentalist movements in the Nordic countries are not based on radicalization, but on fear. So there is a disconnection between ecological understanding and taking measures, that is to say, what is supposed to be prevention does not go beyond protecting themselves [11].

Perelman argues that instead of "growth and anti-growth" (or development and anti-development) which are shown by media as opposite poles, the separation is between environmentalists and developmentalists. He claims that the paradigm of the developmentalism is old and the paradigm of environmentalism is the new paradigm of science [12].

In the opposite of this approach, there are eco-tech cities where high-level technology is used and ecological designs are made. The idea of an eco-tech city brings together urban and regional planners, and aims to harmonize the concept of ecological village, including natural life and minimal energy-material use, with the latest technology-equipped technocity concept [13].

Douglas Dowd draws attention to the dynamics of three major developments while examining why growth is so prominent: Consumerism, globalization policy, dependence on export for the sake of health of the developing economy. He says that these three developments facilitate the destruction caused by growth [14]. In the same work he points out that, while US exports between 5% and 7% of its

GDP even in the 1950s and 1960s, the best periods of US exports; the growth based on export were imposed on developing countries after 1980, it has increased exports in these countries up to 35% of their GDP [14]. According to the data of the World Bank, export / GDP ratio is just under 30%, while many developing countries are below 20% and the USA is below the average with 12%. This is, of course, due to the size of the US economy. For example, a developed country such as Belgium has a high rate of 84%. However, In general, the top countries in the list are developing countries, except for the Low Countries and Austria [15].

Tanuro argues that the accumulation and profit phenomena of capitalism are independent of each other. He says that even if profits fall, accumulation can continue and the capitalist system can give up profits to sustain the accumulation by allowing the state to save the economy for temporary periods. [16]. However, since Marx it is known that the way to accumulate depends on the capitalist's making a profit and seizing the economic surplus. There is no accumulation method other than this.

But it is important that Tanuro notes that crises have reduced the pressure on nature by creating temporary shrinkages, as well as increasing poverty and inequalities [16]. In the capitalist production-distribution system, only when the system is in crisis and not working, when production and the level of employment decreases, environmental damage decreases but it does not disappear totally. A degrowth that cannot ensure the welfare of all societies, of course, will not be an answer to the problems of development.

According to Tanuro, the replacement of fossil fuels by renewable energy depends largely on the reduction of production and transport quantities of developed capitalist countries [16]. This seems to mean that if the production and transportation amounts are reduced, the use of fossil fuels will be reduced automatically. However, what Tanuro wants to say is that the energy production and consumption systems are shaped according to the economic production-distribution system.

4. Discussion

In general, the idea of 'degrowth' is aimed at reducing the socio-economic system in accordance with the world's biophysical limits [17]. This shrinkage does not only include the reduction of growth in units, but also seeks to place the well-being of the human at the center of the economic system [18]. The concept of 'degrowth' should therefore not be perceived as growing or shrinking. Degrowth could be understood better as; to give up the point of view and the concept of 'growth' and to ensure the harmony of social metabolism and ecology.

In fact, GDP can be measured separately with money, with technological capability or with total production capacity. However, while GDP is growing as a monetary account, the total production capacity may decrease or viceversa. While both measurements may be the subject of mainstream economics, the aim of the capitalist production-distribution system by the growth is the growth of the capital [19].

However, capital is very difficult to measure because capital does not cling to anything and it is going through everything. Growth of capital in the capitalist production-distribution system is therefore considered unlimited. It is a matter of discussion the relevance of human needs with the capital phenomenon which has such a characteristic [20].

5. Conclusion

The economy is becoming more open to economic crises in a biologically unsustainable world, not when it lacks profitability. Thus, in economic statements, the phenomenon of nature should be considered as an important phenomenon. This may start with the study of how does economy dependent on the boundaries and functioning of biology.

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